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## Performing Multicultural Futures on Atlanta's Buford Highway

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**In lieu of** an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

### Performing Multicultural Futures on Atlanta's Buford Highway

*Lily Kelting (bio)*

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*We learn time and time again from the southern past and the history of others that to change is not necessarily to disappear . . . that to change is not necessarily to lose one's identity; to change, sometimes, is to find it.*

—George Brown Tindall, *Natives and Newcomers* (vii)

I am not sure what leads to such vociferous insistence on the “newness” of the South, its unburdening from history as it moves forward into the twenty-first century.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the tension in the Old South-New South dipole requires that another “new” be piled on to tip the balance into the contemporary: the New New South, the Nuevo New South.<sup>2</sup> The concern with history, nostalgia, and a sense of the past in Southern studies (and in Southern culture more broadly) is matched only by a clamoring for futurity, for the insertion of the New. *The Mind of the South* (Cash & Wyatt-Brown) becomes the *New Mind of the South* (Thompson). And *A Turn in the South* (Naipaul), *A New Turn in the South: Southern Flavors Reinvented for your Kitchen* (Acheson). Everything old is new again! New Southern food appends this label to distinguish it from the Old Southern food, even while what I call the New Southern Food movement of the last ten years actively engages tropes—even foods—from the antebellum South. In this paper, I examine the relationship of this New Southern food—which, as I’ll demonstrate, ideologically fluctuates between the past and future—to immigration. I question the role of immigrant foodways in what I call the New Southern food project to more carefully nuance the claims about the future of the South made in the name of New Southern food on behalf of immigrants. **[End Page 41]**

### *Is New Southern food really about the past?*

Marcie Cohen Ferris titles the last chapter of her recent book on Southern foodways, *The Edible South*, “New Southern Food.” Like many writing about changes in Southern food in the last ten years, Ferris describes a renaissance of interest in traditional Southern foodways that might be called, most broadly, “farm to table.” Ferris calls New Southern

food “the renaissance of small-scale farming and local food economies in the contemporary South” (5). Examples abound: to take one, scholar David Shields’s work with Anson Mills and the restaurant Husk to research and revive lost cultivars of Southern crops like rice, corn, and watermelon. This “reboot” (Shields 2) is as passionate about the past of Southern food as it is insistent on bringing this past into the future. Ferris describes, “an evolutionary South, a place continually pulled back by the past and at the same time wrenched forward into a changing present” (Ferris 5). This “New Southern” food—nationally recognized, chef-and-cookbook-author driven—materializes an interest in the past through seed-saving and reintroducing lost cultivars and points, as above, to its own newness. But this legitimate desire for social change—a reversal towards sustainable foodways and delicious flavors—too easily slips into marketing strategy based on precarious and naïve notions of authenticity. Ferris continues:

Strongly aspirational, this longing for a well-crafted, handmade and homemade South, including its foodways, suggests the contours of the region’s most recent culinary brand. Its palate is earth tones and natural hues, depicted in spare, highly produced photography of southern food and its environs. Social and cultural capital lies in the reconnection to a “real” yet carefully distanced, “postracial” South of old-time hog killings, canning, preserving, and distilled whiskey.

(Ferris 331)

I approach this insistence on “authenticity” in the South, particularly its discursive formation, not by looking at these sites themselves<sup>3</sup> but by looking where these ideologies of “postracial authenticity” confront the actual changing demographics of the South. This “limit case” might more clearly show the ideological contours of the New Southern food’s claims to both newness and to authenticity. I look, in short, to the Buford Highway.

In this article, I examine the ways in which the New Southern food

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