

BARE

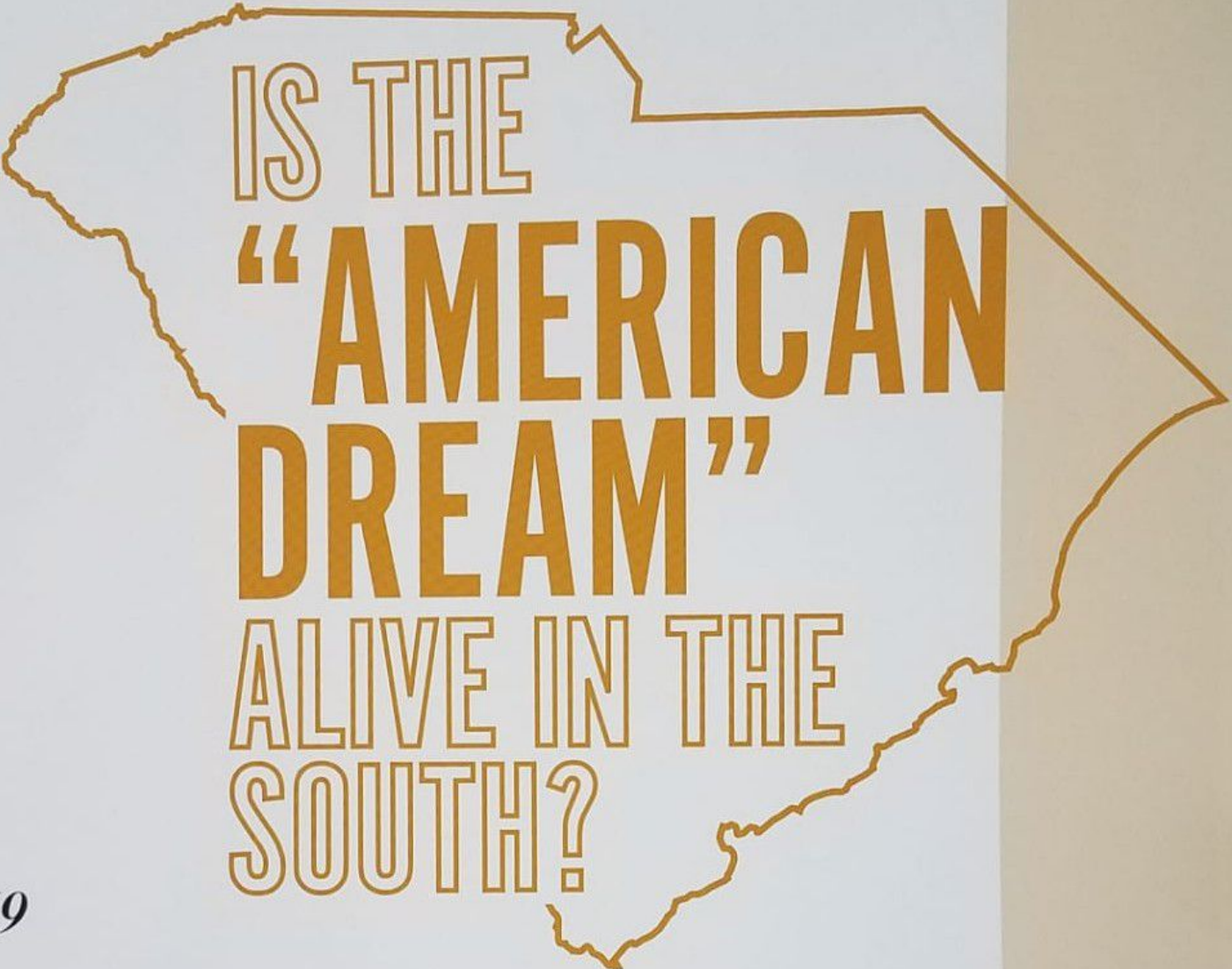
Magazine

BECOMING
**DOUG
TA'A**

IS IT ART?
Artists speak on their
struggles with self-doubt

**IS THE "AMERICAN
DREAM" ALIVE IN
THE SOUTH?**
A look through the lens of
immigrants living in the South

"Lion's Run"
A view into how the one
percent live



IS THE “AMERICAN DREAM” ALIVE IN THE SOUTH?

19

A GLANCE THROUGH AN IMMIGRANT LENS

Story Vianessa Castanos

Before “Make America Great Again” was emblazoned on to red bargain-bin hats, there was the American Dream; the unofficial slogan that declared to people the world over that this was the land of opportunity. This was the place where anyone from anywhere could settle in pursuit of happiness. Given the current political climate it can be hard to remember that the United States was once a symbol of endless possibility.

Now, in the era of President Donald Trump, it would seem that choosing to come to the U.S. for a fresh start offers more risk than reward. More than ever anti-immigrant sentiment has seeped through the very fabric of American life.

But if you look closer you can still find remnants of that American dream in the most unexpected of places — Charlotte, North Carolina has rebranded itself The New South, a moniker intended to highlight its transition into one of America’s fastest-growing and most progressive cities. But just how welcoming has Charlotte been? We spoke with a few immigrant business owners about their lives in the New South.

Manolo Betancur, Owner, Manolo's Bakery

Tucked into the corner of a small, nondescript shopping plaza in east Charlotte lies Manolo's Bakery, a favorite breakfast spot among the Latinx and African communities in the city. The street-facing exterior wall of the building is embellished with a mural depicting immigrant children flying kites, a landmark painting by local artist and activist Rosalia Torres-Weiner.

Manolo Betancur, the owner of the bakery, first came to the U.S. to

study political science. He later moved to Charlotte in 2005 to work with his ex-wife's family business. "Charlotte was not as crazy as a big city, but not as boring as a small town...so I moved here and just fell in love," Manolo says, smiling broadly. Since buying out the business from his former in-laws and ex-wife, Manolo has seen the bakery grow from six to 22 employees. They now distribute their goods to 100 stores in two states, 75 of which are in the Charlotte area. However, the most challenging aspect of being a business owner has been Immigration and Customs Enforcement



(ICE). "There are a lot of immigrant kids losing their mothers and fathers. ICE has been very aggressive here on Central Avenue. They have even picked up people from my parking lot, and whenever the community hears 'Hey, [ICE is] at Manolo's,' people stop coming," he adds. One of the people taken into custody during these raids was Manolo's own employee Ramon* who was picked up after a shift at work.

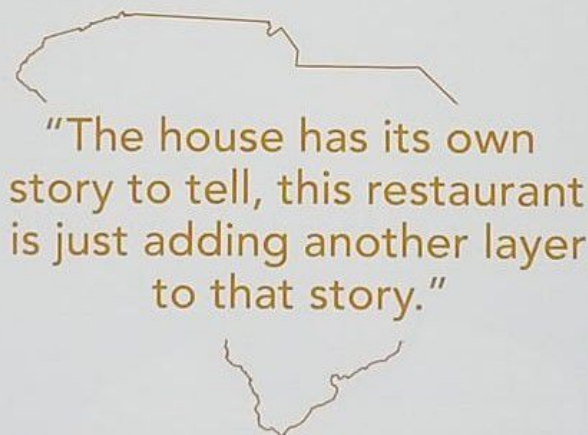
Manolo sprung into action, paying nearly \$50,000 of his own money for legal services to update Ramon's status and secure his release.

Now Manolo is working with a number of local and immigrants rights organizations in support of his community. Ramon remains one of his best employees.

Lucia Zapata Griffith, Owner, Poplar

Before leaving Lima, Peru and relocating to Charlotte, Lucia had already built a career as a successful architect. In 1985 after visiting a friend in Charlotte, she landed a job with a firm that sponsored her visa, and she's remained in Charlotte ever since. Once she opened up her private practice her specialty became designing and building restaurants the evidence

rather than sell the historic landmark, she partnered with Chef Bruno Machiavello and business-woman Yolanda Johnson to turn it into the restaurant that it is today. "The house has its own story to tell, this restaurant is just adding another layer to that story."



of which is easy to spot while strolling through Charlotte's airport. Concessions like Wendy's, Einstein Bagels, and the large bar in Terminal A are just some of the projects that Lucia has left her mark on.

"I did some developments on my own. I'd buy a place, fix it, and sell it. And I found this house. But once I fixed it, I just couldn't sell it because I loved it so much" she beams. So

The white, Victorian-era house on 10th street, with its broad umbrellas that dot the front lawn offer just the right amount of shade for sipping cucumber-infused cocktails. Inside, the beautifully restored stained-glass windows and dark mahogany accents breathe life into what was once a private home turned bookstore. This Poplar Tapas Restaurant & Bar is the upscale casual dining concept Lucia Zapata couldn't bare to sell. Her office occupies the second floor.






Carmen Vazques, Executive Chef & Partner, Yafo Kitchen

At 17-years-old Carmen Vazques and her brother traveled from Mexico to Charlotte to visit family. Now, 23 years later, she has earned the title of partner and Executive Chef at local hotspot Yafo Kitchen.

Carmen knew soon after arriving in Charlotte that her dream was to work in a professional kitchen, so she got an entry-level job working with Frank Scibelli, a local restaurateur who owned nine restaurants in the city. She would quietly watch and learn from others while developing her own skills, until eventually, after many years being the only woman in a male-dominated field and working her way up the ranks, she was offered the opportunity to become a partner and run a kitchen of her own.

Now with three locations across Charlotte, Yafo Kitchen has taken Carmen one step closer to her goal of becoming a published cookbook author and developing her own healthy and authentic Mexican food concept. "Being a woman chef is difficult; they think that because you are a woman you can't do it, but I've proven myself," she tells me. "Frank has nine restaurants and I'm the first woman Executive Chef, so I feel like I've made it. It's the American dream."

You would be surprised to learn that while Charlotte is a conservative city in one of the most conservative states in the country, it is one of the most racially diverse metropolitan areas in the South; that diversity coupled with an attractive cost of living and an abundance of community building initiatives might make it one of the few remaining bastions of a not forgotten promise.



"Frank has nine restaurants and I'm the first woman Executive Chef, so I feel like I've made it. It's the American Dream."

