

NEXO

The Official Newsletter of The Julian Samora Research Institute
The Midwest's Premier Latino Research Center

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JSRI's mission is to generate, disseminate, and apply knowledge to serve the needs of Latino communities in the Midwest and across the nation.

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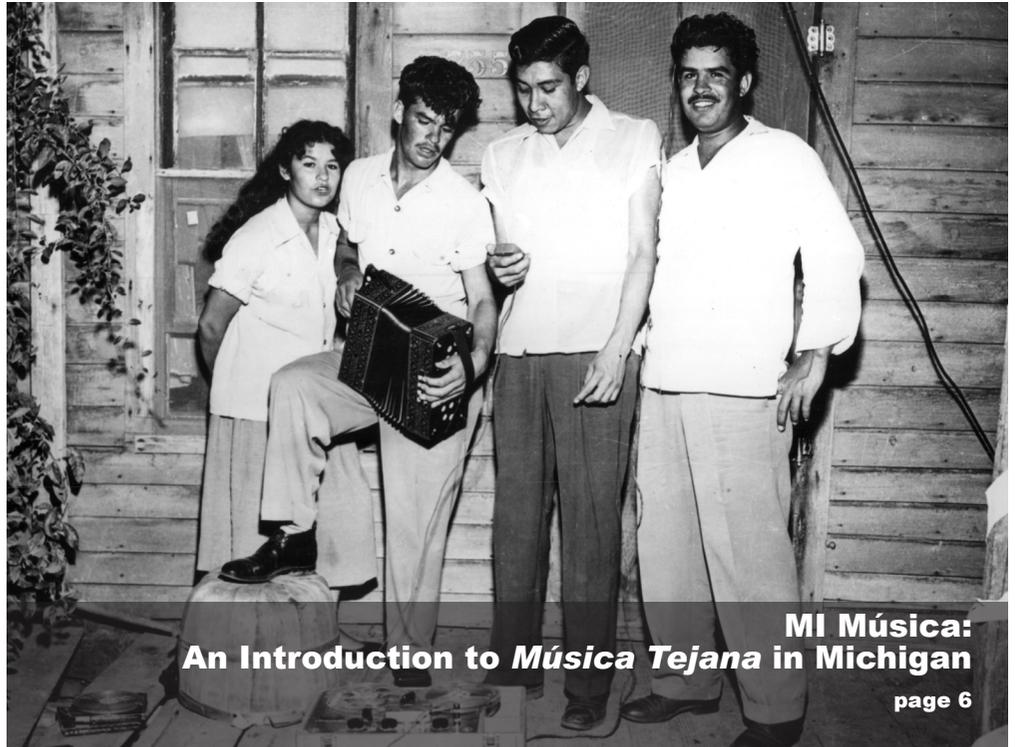
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NEXO

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Rubén Martínez

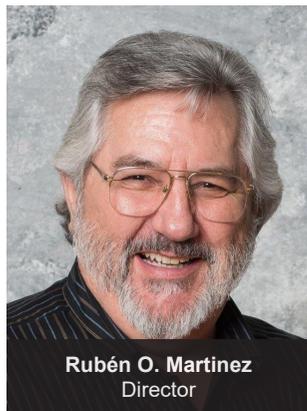
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Universities are not Corporations



Rubén O. Martínez
Director

For more than a decade there has been increasing public concern about the corporatization of the American public university, a process that has been going on for several decades. Articles and public opinion pieces decrying the transformation of public colleges and universities into corporations have appeared in many publications. Many attribute the process to the economic crisis of the 1970s, but it is important to understand that the process is driven throughout society by the proponents of neoliberal ideology. Those proponents set in motion the transformation of American public universities into corporate-like institutions, embedding their political beliefs in institutional practices.

Neoliberal ideology holds that the market model is the best way for all organizations, including public institutions, to operate. In a sense, the market model is presented not only as the most effective and efficient model, but as the panacea for all societal ills. Beyond this emphasis, the principal elements of the ideology are: 1) radical individualism, 2) limited government, and 3) flexible labor. I discussed these elements in relation to society in general in the Fall 2017 issue of *NEXO*, 21(1).

Radical individualism has contributed to reframing higher education as a private good rather than a public good. As such, government should not fund higher education as it is the student who benefits from the educational experience, and it is the student who should pay for it. Fifty years ago, governments covered 75% of the costs of a college education; today it covers 25%, meaning students and their families now cover 75% of the costs. Limited government emphasizes reduced regulation of the economy as well as limited social support for individuals and their families. Tax cuts ensure that governments do not have the revenues to support public higher education as they did in the past.

Finally, flexible labor means eliminating fixed costs such as faculty tenure. This alters the traditional employment relationship between the employing university and faculty by increasing control of the terms and conditions of employment among university administrators. Consider, for instance, the proportion of today's faculty who are on the tenure system and those who are not. A recent report by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) on contingent faculty set their percentage of instructional positions in 2016 at 73 percent. This shift raises critical questions about academic freedom, which is what tenure protects, and shared governance.

It is important to keep in mind that corporations and public universities are distinct entities. They differ in terms of status, mission and values, and how they carry out their operations. In business, a corporation is a legal organizational entity granted a charter by a state and exists apart from its owners, the shareholders, while serving their interests. It limits their liability while paying them dividends. Its central aim is to generate profits. As such, both corporations and their shareholders are driven by private interests, and both have to pay taxes.

Public universities, on the other hand, are institutions established by a state constitution or statute as educational entities that are tax exempt. They are governed by state constitutions and statutes and cannot discriminate or deny individuals their constitutional rights. Their mission is social: to serve the public good by providing a higher education that fosters societal development and builds democracy by educating members of society.

Education is seen as a human right and a public good. The missions of private sector corporations and public universities are distinct, one serving private interests and the other the public good.

These missions are grounded in different values. Corporations value individual freedom in the market and stand against government regulation. Universities value individual growth and development as a way of promoting societal progress. By competing on the market, corporations withhold knowledge from others so that they can stay ahead of their competitors. Universities value academic freedom, ensuring that all aspects of society can be studied, and the knowledge that is produced is shared for the good of humanity.

Corporations and public universities also differ in terms of their operations. Day-to-day operations in corporations are organized along hierarchical structures in which the scope of authority increases as one moves up the hierarchy. Moreover, there is an emphasis in corporations which calls for strict obedience on the part of employees, who are to carry out directives without questioning them, although during periods of crisis the tacit knowledge of employees is sought as organizational adaptation is pursued. Once stabilized, however, the organization returns to its previous structure of authority and communications.

Public universities are different. Shared governance is the principal tenet in the operation of public universities. According to the Association of Governing Boards of Colleges and Universities, in its 2017 white paper titled *Shared Governance: Changing with the Times*, “Shared governance is the process by which various constituents (traditionally governing boards, senior administration, and faculty; possibly also staff, students, or others) contribute to decision making related to college or university policy and procedure” (p. 3). This parallels the view of the AAUP, which holds that an interdependence exists among governing board, administration, faculty, students, and others that calls for appropriate communication and full opportunity among these core stakeholders to engage in joint planning and effort in the operation of a college or university.

What this looks like in practice is a function of several factors at micro, meso and macro levels. Which level is primary depends on the point in time in which one is interested. Today, it is the macro movement of neoliberalism which is primary, as that is the ideology that has pushed and succeeded to a large extent in corporatizing universities. This has had several consequences for the governance of universities: 1) the role of shared governance has receded in importance in the day-to-day governance of universities; 2) the balance of power and authority has shifted toward administrators; and 3) faculty have been subjected to a series of performance measures that disproportionately values productivity over shared governance participation. Corporatization has also had consequences for students, whose role has been reframed from one in which they are co-learners

to one in which they are customers.

I first learned of the notion of “students as customers” in 1984, when I heard senior faculty critiquing the idea. Since then the reconstitution of students as customers has not only grown, it is now fully institutionalized in universities, especially in how they are recruited. It also has had implications for the relationship between students and faculty. Given that universities must rely on tuition and fees for their operations, they must actively compete for students, and the way they do this is by utilizing “customer recruitment” practices employed by businesses—branding and investing in “infrastructure incentives” (amenities such as leisure facilities, stadiums, luxury dorms, recreation centers) that will attract potential students.

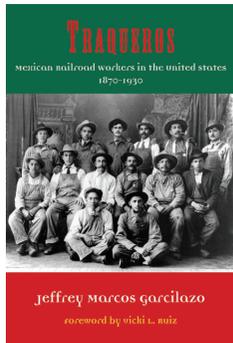
As well, the student/faculty relationship has shifted from one which Peter Wood, President of the National Association of Scholars, in a brief article titled “Students are Not Customers,” describes as:

...a hierarchical relationship between someone who seeks knowledge and others who teach knowledge. It requires some degree of humility and forbearance on both sides. Students have to admit that they don’t yet know; teachers have to admit that those who do not-yet-know-but-would-like-to are in a worthy position that deserves its own respect.”

Treating students as customers can shift the responsibility for learning from students to faculty, can negatively impact teaching evaluations, and can lead to transactional relationships in which students do not feel that faculty care about them. This relationship may have implications for the work lives of students after they leave college. For example, a study by Gallup-Purdue in 2014 found that for “graduates [who] recalled having a professor who cared about them as a person, made them excited about learning, and encouraged them to pursue their dreams, their odds of being engaged at work more than doubled, as did their odds of thriving in all aspects of their well-being” (“Life in College Matters for Life After College,” 2014).

These are some of the ways by which neoliberalism has transformed public higher education. Corporatization must be seen as a totalizing process that transforms the public university as a whole: how it frames and carries out its mission; the role of faculty in shared governance; academic freedom and research; the relationship between students and faculty; and the role of public higher education in society. These are core features that are diminished by market logic. Employees of universities should take time to understand how their institutions are being transformed, and what the implications of that transformation are not only for themselves as employees, but also for society as a whole. Do we really want institutions that feel more like expensive resorts, or shall we get back to the university as an institution that serves the public good? 

Traqueros: Mexican Railroad Workers in the United States, 1870-1930



by Jeffrey Marcos Garcilazo. 2016.
Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press.

Reviewed by
Juan D. Coronado

Through the collective memory of what author Jeffrey Marcos Garcilazo labels the “Immigrant Generation,” *Traqueros* presents the important contributions that Mexicans made in the railroad industry in the United States. By reconstructing the daily lives of Mexican railroad workers (*traqueros*) this study examines the railroad industry from the perspective of Mexican, Mexican American, and Hispano laborers who, despite their contributions to the industry, are absent in the history of the nation’s railroads. Through a social historical perspective, Garcilazo provides a critical account of the arrival of the numerous railroad lines in the West and Southwest that encompassed Indian and former Mexican lands, along with the notions of White supremacy, domination, and exploitation they represented.

Published posthumously, *Traqueros: Mexican Railroad Workers in the United States, 1870-1930*, consists of six chapters based on oral histories, government documents, newspapers, and many other sources, including rich secondary accounts in the form of monographs. Overall, Garcilazo makes important contributions to the historical narrative of these railroad workers in the U.S. His approach in examining the history of the railroad in the US between 1880 and 1930 centers on the important role played by these three Latino subgroups of workers, who constituted almost two-thirds of the track labor force in the Southwest, Central Plains, and Midwest, but whose contributions are not reflected in the historical narrative (p. 34).

Amid the tension, instability, joblessness, and violence generated by the Mexican

Revolution of 1910, Garcilazo shows, workers like Jesús Ramirez left Mexico at the age of fifteen in search of work in the railroad industry in the Midwest. He also focuses attention on the emergence of isolated Mexican boxcar communities from El Paso to Chicago that led to early Mexican immigrant communities. Subsequently, this led to the process of “barrioization,” the development of neighborhoods, which typically has been mostly studied in the Southwest where Mexican communities have been concentrated.

Garcilazo demonstrates how the introduction of multiple railroad lines changed the American West. The coming of the railroad symbolically represented another stage in the conquest of Native American and Hispano lands by Americans. The railroad lines put an end to open range ranching, further encroached on ranching and farming lands belonging to Native Americans and Hispanos, and put an end to the Santa Fe Trail. Hence, from Garcilazo’s perspective, the railroad also demonstrates the expansion of U.S. industrial capitalist society and its incorporation and occupation of the West. American Indians, convinced by job opportunities, gave up significant lands to railroad companies and then became even further dislocated as many Native men never returned to their villages. Furthermore, the U.S. government used the railroad against American Indians as troops were deployed by train during the Indian Wars, thereby facilitating their conquest.

The chapter on *traquero* culture provides insight into the transformation of Hispano and Mexican culture due to the impact of railroad work. Garcilazo argues that as *traquero* families became exposed to American institutions, primarily schools, their culture transitioned from a Mexican culture to a unique *traquero* culture (p. 137). A major contribution this chapter offers stems from the inclusion of the roles Mexican women played in *traquero* society. Even though women’s labor was limited in track employment, they played a significant role in the “informal economy” that served railroad workers, e.g. laundry services, cooking, domestic workers, and entrepreneurs. In focusing on women, Garcilazo demonstrates that men were not the sole

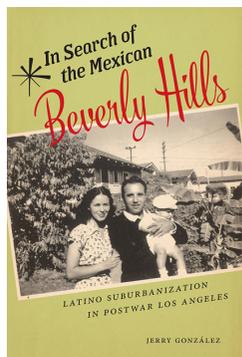
breadwinners and that women indeed were active participants in their homes, communities, and in *traquero* society.

The chapters on labor struggles and boxcar communities shed light on the sacrifices shared by *traqueros* and their families who were amongst the poorest Mexican immigrants in the U.S. (p. 115). Garcilazo points to the racism experienced by Mexicans in the railroad industry that hindered their inclusion into unions that organized and benefitted White railroad workers. In the late 19th century, it was not customary for unions such as the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees to organize immigrant and non-White workers, a discriminatory practice that continued during the 20th century by other unions in many industries in the U.S.

This volume is a remarkable addition to the study of U.S., Mexican American, women’s, and labor history, along with that of the U.S. West. Likewise, this work also contributes to the growing body of knowledge on Mexicans living in the Central Plains and Midwest during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Those interested in these fields of study must read *Traqueros*. Also, anyone interested in the history of Chicanas/os and Latinas/os in the U.S. should read Garcilazo’s work.

Jeffrey Marcos Garcilazo has provided an engaging and incisive study of Mexican railroad workers, one that had been absent for too long from historical studies. Previous scholars excused the absence of Mexican railroad workers from historical accounts by labeling Mexicans as transient and or contracted workers who did not deserve the same attention given to Irish and Irish American railroad workers, or to Chinese and Chinese American railroad workers. Garcilazo also describes the repressive nature of the railroad companies, specifically how the railroad was introduced in Mexico, as tracks were constructed north to south, facilitating the exploitation of Mexico’s natural resources into the United States. *Traqueros* is an absolute gem of a book and survives Jeffrey, who passed along too early in life. This work will be appreciated for generations to come by scholars and students, as it marks a keystone in the history of Mexican railroad workers. 

In Search of the Mexican Beverly Hills: Latino Suburbanization in Postwar Los Angeles



by Jerry González.
2017. New Brunswick,
NJ: Rutgers University
Press.

Reviewed by
Marcelo Siles

Since the end of the Second World War (WWII) American cities have experienced a vast expansion of their suburbs. This trend has been especially strong in Southern California due to many factors that are discussed carefully and extensively in Jerry González' book, *In Search of the Mexican Beverly Hills: Latino Suburbanization in Postwar Los Angeles*. Up to the end of the war, Mexicans were living in the *colonias* of California's past that were on the verge of elimination as large cities were growing toward the periphery. Gonzalez writes, "By 1940 there were more than 200 such communities in metropolitan Los Angeles usually located next to agricultural production areas. These communities performed mainly as racially segregated, working-class suburbs" (pp. 14-15). Among the main causes of the suburbanization process were the lack of housing facilities in the inner cities and rapid population growth due to large waves of migration to California. According to González,

The suburban ideal of a single-family home on a quiet street close to quality schools and free of poverty, crime, and overcrowding was normalized in public policy and popular culture. For everyday Americans who pursued suburban homeownership, becoming suburban signaled particular aspirations as people strove for upward mobility (p. 7).

For Mexican Americans, especially the well-educated and those who came back from WWII, moving to the suburbs was seen as an important step in the integration process into American society.

Due to the negative effects of the Great

Depression, the Federal Government implemented programs aimed at promoting home ownership. These included the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) and the Federal Housing Administration (FHA). Both programs had a positive impact in promoting property wealth, but benefitted mainly White Americans. The low salary levels received by Mexican Americans, their limited knowledge of English, the color of their skin, and the low values of their houses were some of the factors linked to the denial of access to Mexican Americans to these Federal programs, which would have allowed them to buy a house in the suburbs. Racial discrimination became rampant when realtors were given instructions not to show houses in the new developments to Mexican Americans and other minorities because White owners were concerned about declining property values if a minority family moved into their neighborhoods. This practice became known as "redlining."

The growth of new suburban developments over time reached areas where *colonias* were located, creating tensions between Mexican Americans, real estate developers, and White homeowners. Developers and officials viewed the *colonias* as public safety concerns due to dense population, high crime rates, and the lack of basic services and police presence. More tensions surged when the government decided to build highways that passed through parts of the *colonias* and demolished many houses. For years, Mexican Americans struggled to preserve the homes they had built themselves, as well as the communities to which they held a strong sense of attachment.

The developments generated tensions that became highly confrontational and political when those on the far political right who supported housing discrimination were challenged by liberals who promoted open access to the new developments for minorities through federal housing programs. To reduce these tensions, the Federal Government implemented public housing projects to provide low-cost housing to minorities who were displaced from their homes. These projects mainly targeted the Black population, however, with few Mexican Americans participating. Furthermore, these projects did not address the discrimination problem as most were located in areas outside of the suburbs.

Despite rampant segregation, many Mexican American families still pursued their interest to move to the suburbs, where there were better educational opportunities for their children and safe lifestyles where they could develop extended networks that would open job opportunities. By 1950, suburban growth was outpacing growth in central cities by ten-to-one. Manufacturing and industrial jobs emerged across the metropolitan landscape alongside housing tracts, often following established trucking routes and highways. This link among transportation circuits, housing, and jobs proved vital as developers chose locations based on access to industrial development. Access to employment enabled many Mexican Americans to take the first step toward suburban home ownership at a time when such a status was largely limited to Whites. González states:

Mexican Americans saw suburban ownership as a critical link to collective advancement, and they proved relatively successful despite the prevalent discrimination directed to them... The expansion of Mexican communities outside the boundaries of urban barrios into suburban tract developments between 1950 and 1970 was driven by middle-class Mexican Americans who sought justice in housing and through the persistence of former colonia residents who wanted to claim their place in the sun (p. 50).

The increasing numbers of Mexican American children put considerable pressure on the local school districts, straining their budgets and space and forcing new school construction throughout the region.

This book presents the struggles of Mexican American communities in the greater Los Angeles area to achieve better and safer lives for their families through access to new housing developments located in the suburbs during an era of racial segregation. It also describes the efforts of these families and the Chicano community to preserve their cultural identities. Scholars interested in urban development and discrimination in housing markets, Latino leaders who are currently promoting equal access to housing, and students should read this very informative book. 



Farm workers singing with accordion accompaniment. Courtesy Archives of Michigan.

MI Música: An Introduction to *Música Tejana* in Michigan

Richard Cruz Davila & Laurie Kay Sommers

On January 6th, 2018, Martin Solis, a vocalist and *bajo sexto* player in the Texas-Mexican *conjunto* tradition, was inducted into the Tejano R.O.O.T.S. Hall of Fame Museum in Alice, TX. The museum is dedicated to “Remembering Our Own Tejano Stars” through the exhibition of artifacts such as musical instruments, stage costumes, photographs, and other materials related to Texas-Mexican music, as well as through the induction of influential musicians and other figures into the Hall of Fame. With his induction, Solis joined the likes of such Texas-Mexican musical legends as Lydia Mendoza, Narciso Martinez, Santiago Jimenez, El Conjunto Bernal, Beto Villa, Flaco Jimenez, Esteban Jordan, Laura Canales, and Selena Quintanilla-Perez. What separates Solis from all the others, however, is that, while born in Texas, his many years as a performer of Texas-Mexican music have been spent mostly in Michigan. Solis first traveled to Michigan with his family in 1942 to work in the sugar beet fields before settling in Detroit. They were part of a migration wave of Mexican Americans from Texas during the 1940s that brought elements of Texas-Mexican regional culture to Michigan. Solis’s induction into the Tejano R.O.O.T.S Hall of Fame Museum, the first of a musician based in Michigan, acknowledges the

dispersion of Texas-Mexican people and culture throughout Michigan and the Midwest.

Through examples such as that of Martin Solis, this article considers the flows of people, goods, and ideas that contribute to the evolution in Michigan of musical practices with roots in Texas-Mexican musical styles such as *conjunto*, *orquesta*, and, more recently, “Tejano,” referred to collectively as “*música tejana*.” Though inseparable from musical developments in Texas, the performance of Texas-Mexican music in Michigan will be referred to here as “*música michicana*,” which refers back to *música tejana* while also foregrounding the specific experiences of Mexican Americans, or Chicana/os, in Michigan. This article draws from fieldwork conducted by Laurie Kay Sommers between 1988 and 2014 for the Michigan Traditional Arts Program at the Michigan State University Museum,¹ as well as new interviews conducted by Richard Cruz Davila in 2018.²

This work is informed by Marc Simon Rodriguez’s notion of the “Tejano diaspora,” “the permanent dispersion of several hundred thousand Mexican Americans from Texas across the United States” (2011, p. 3). He states,

Thrust into migration by changes in the North

American labor market and agricultural economy..., Tejanos fashioned flexible labor, economic, and social networks that functioned for much of the 20th century. This 'Tejano diaspora' allowed for a near-seamless flow of workers and ideas across the country, linking a variety of people together as 'Tejanos' as they engaged the major upheavals in Mexican American politics and culture nationwide (2011, p. 2).

Though the term "Tejano" has historically described Spanish and Mexican colonial settlers of Texas and their descendants, Rodriguez suggests that use of the term became more expansive as Texas-based workers increasingly entered into migratory circuits. He says,

As they established themselves within broader Latino and Latin American neighborhoods in the North and West, they strengthened their Texas-origin identities – their sense of connection to often recently established Texas hometowns. In an unstable world, migrant workers... remade themselves as Tejanos (2011, p. 4).

Rodriguez uses his conception of the Tejano diaspora to detail flows of political activism that accompanied migration of workers between South Texas and Wisconsin. This article takes up the notion of a Tejano diaspora to consider the influence and importance of Texas-based musical practices on musical performance in Michigan's Mexican American communities. *Música michicana* initially emerged out of the musical practices of Tejana/os who traveled to or settled in Michigan either as migrant farm laborers or as factory workers. The ongoing development of their music remains tied to developments in *música tejana* through continuing patterns of migration, the distribution of sound recordings, and tours by Texas-based musicians. In turn, some Michigan-based musicians travel to Texas to perform or distribute their music through Texas-based labels. This continual musical exchange between Michigan and Texas demonstrates the importance for a large portion of Michigan's Mexican American community of a shared identity rooted in Texas.

Música Tejana

According to Manuel Peña (1999), a leading scholar in the study of Texas-Mexican musical cultures, for much of the 20th century *música Tejana* took two primary forms: the Texas-Mexican *conjunto* and the *orquesta tejana*. Peña argues that both the *conjunto* and the *orquesta tejana* traditions were expressions of interethnic conflict between Texas-Mexicans and the dominant Anglo-American society, but that each form

embodied a different strategy for addressing this conflict. Namely, he positions the *conjunto* form as an expression of a working-class Tejana/o cultural resistance to Anglo domination, whereas he argues that the *orquesta* form represented the more assimilationist stance of an emerging Mexican American middle-class.

Musically, *conjunto* is defined first and foremost by the diatonic button accordion. Peña traces the origins of accordion-based ensembles to the late-19th century, although the emergence of the Texas-Mexican *conjunto* as a distinct regional style would only occur around the time of World War II, when the accordion was paired with the *bajo sexto*, a twelve-string bass guitar. Shortly thereafter, the ensemble was rounded out with drums and the *tololoche* (standing bass), although beginning in the latter half of the 1950s the *tololoche* was often replaced with the electric bass. Early *conjuntos* drew their repertoires primarily from various styles of European salon music, including the waltz, schottische, mazurka, redowa, and especially the polka, though the inclusion of the *huapango tamaulipeco*, a regional northeastern Mexican dance contributed significantly to *conjunto*'s regional identity. Initially performing instrumental music played for dancing, *conjuntos* began to add sung lyrics starting in the late-1940s, creating a new style that Peña labels the *polca-ranchera*. These stylistic developments established the "traditional" *conjunto* sound that many still play to this day. In the 1970s and 1980s, however, some ensembles began to add horns or to replace the accordion with synthesizers, leading to a new designation of "progressive" *conjunto*.

Peña likewise traces the origins of *orquesta tejana* to the late-19th century, at which time Texas-Mexican *orquestas* were influenced by orchestral ensembles from both the United States and Mexico. The earliest *orquesta* recordings were mostly of string ensembles, although a stylistic shift occurred around 1930, as *orquestas* were increasingly modeled after American big bands comprised primarily of wind instruments. However, like *conjunto*, the emergence of a distinctive *orquesta tejana* would only occur around the end of World War II. It was at this time that Beto Villa, whom Peña dubs the "father" of the modern *orquesta tejana* (1999, p. 133), established a bicultural, "bimusical" repertoire incorporating both American and Mexican genres, thereby "inventing a uniquely 'Tex-Mex' ranchero style." Peña argues that the *orquesta tejana* reached its pinnacle with the rise of *la onda chicana* around 1970, during which the emerging Chicana/o Movement inspired a revitalization of Mexican American culture. Groups such as Little Joe y La Familia, Tortilla Factory, and the Latin Breed led a stylistic shift, no longer simply incorporating both American and Mexican musical styles into

their repertoires, but codeswitching between styles within the same song, creating what Peña calls a “compound bimusicality” (1999, p. 163). Peña suggests that this era of innovation came to an end by 1980, as groups became smaller and increasingly built around the synthesizer.

With the stagnation of both the *orquesta tejana* and the *conjunto* traditions, up to this point *música tejana*’s two primary forms, in the 1980s and 1990s a new generation of groups emerged under the generic “Tejano” label. Typified by groups/artists such as El Grupo Mazz, Emilio Navaira, La Mafia, and Selena, Peña argues that while there was significant stylistic variation among Tejano groups, for the most part they drew upon three genres: *polcas-rancheras*, *baladas* (romantic ballads), and pan-Latina/o *cumbias*. With the entrance of major recording labels into the Tejano market during this period, Peña suggests that these groups felt a tension between the ethnic/regional character of *música tejana* and the desire to appeal to larger international markets. Thus, while acknowledging a debt to the *conjunto* and *orquesta tejana* traditions, their repertoires often skewed toward *baladas* and *cumbias*, which had more appeal for the larger Latin American market, or genres with potential crossover appeal in the American market, such as country and pop, rather than the limited regional appeal of the *polca-ranchera*.

Música Michicana

The evolution of *música tejana* in Michigan followed the stylistic trends outlined by Peña. As Texas Mexicans migrated to Michigan and the larger Midwest, they brought their musical culture with them. Julio Guerrero, an organizer who hosted Spanish-language radio programs out of Lansing in the late-1960s and early-1970s, identifies three key factors that helped establish an infrastructure for *música michicana*: 1) temporary Spanish-language radio programs established by migrant workers that were targeted primarily to their own work crews; 2) a network of entrepreneurs who booked groups from Texas to perform in local halls, established long-running radio programs, published local newspapers, or opened stores that sold recordings of Texas-Mexican music; and 3) settled-out migrants and their offspring who formed musical groups that carried on Texas-Mexican musical traditions in Michigan.

Commonly, crew leaders would organize work crews of migrant farm laborers by hiring families in Texas and arranging their travel to Michigan and other Midwestern states during the growing season. To provide entertainment, a crew member would acquire a time slot on a local radio station – typically in the early morning, as these were the only slots available – and



would play records from their own collection. These programs were very much temporary and tied to the growing season; as Guerrero states, “When the season ended, they would move on to another area, another state, and the program ended as well. And then they would take that operation wherever they went.”

Additionally, migrants would travel with instruments such as accordions and guitars to provide entertainment in the camps during their limited downtime. Bobby DeLeon of the Saginaw band, Mas Caliente, heard stories from older relatives of Freddy Fender (who would later achieve stardom as a country crossover artist) working in the fields, and of Texas-based *conjuntos* that would come to Michigan, work, play some dance events, and return home. Recently settled migrants who formed (typically family) bands would also play at migrant camps. Guillermo Martinez, for example – whose family joined the migrant stream from the Rio Grande Valley to southwest Michigan in the 1950s before settling near Fennville – credits music played by his older brothers and other Tejano musicians in the camps as an important part of his early musical training. Perhaps the most vivid memories come from Hilario (Lalo) Perez, who migrated back and forth with his family in 1936-37 to work sugar beets, beans, and cucumbers in the fields near Marlette, Michigan. During the migrant season they would play house dances: “My cousin used to play the fiddle and guitar, and get two or three guitars in the field, and for drums we used to use one of those wash tubs. We used to make people dance. Because it was only house dances, you know, but everybody would go to the dance. We were playing and singing.” Until 1942, when his parents stayed in Michigan permanently, Lalo and his brothers had a guitar trio, performing throughout southeastern Michigan, northern Indiana, and Ohio. Their repertoire was primarily boleros, *huapangos*, and *rancheras* played at restaurants and birthday parties.

This pipeline of musicians from Texas to Michigan was not new. From 1928-1930, the great Texas-Mexican singer, Lydia

Mendoza — along with her family group, El Quarteto Blanco— had worked professionally in Detroit. Audiences at that time were primarily Mexican-born, rather than originating in Texas, but they shared a love for Mendoza’s border *corridos* and songs. The musical exchange became far more frequent after World War II, when Tejana/o migration to Michigan began in earnest. Newly formed Michigan *conjuntos* began to arrange their own dance venues. For instance, Francisco Vasquez – whose nine children were born in Texas, Michigan, and at various points along the migrant route in-between – took the band formed by four of his sons to a local migrant camp and to a little hall he rented in Edmore, Michigan. His son Johnny recalled, “My dad was almost like the manager. He would make the dances and we would play.”

Entrepreneurs such as Francisco Vasquez, located in areas where migrant workers had settled out, played a vital role in establishing an infrastructure for *música tejana* to take root in Michigan. By the late 1960s, a growing network of Michigan-based promoters was bringing bands directly from Texas to perform for local audiences in bars or rented halls. A key player in the Lansing area during this period was San Antonio-born barber Jesse Anguiano. Relying on connections he had in the San Antonio area, he would rent a hall near Lake Lansing and bring bands up from Texas to perform. Anguiano hosted these dances on Fridays, Saturdays, and sometimes Sundays, and Guerrero says the dances were “packed every weekend, because that was the only attraction of that sort.”

Another promoter of Texas-Mexican music in the Lansing area was Juan Beltran (born in Puerto Rico and raised in New York City before moving to Lansing at age 18). Prior to music promotion, Beltran had been screening Mexican films at the Spartan Twin Theater for the Lansing area’s Spanish-speaking community. Beltran then began to organize *caravanas*, in which multiple acts would travel together to perform in multiple locations in Michigan and the Midwest, hitting as many as five cities in a single day. A typical *caravana* might start at noon in Lansing, then travel to Saginaw, down to Flint, on to Detroit, and end the night in Toledo, OH. Other stops on the route might be Luna Pier, as well as Cleveland and Napoleon, OH. On the west side of the state, a *caravana* might hit Grand Rapids or occasionally Kalamazoo, before moving to South Bend and Gary, IN, and then on to Chicago, IL. These events often took place in theaters, rather than dance halls, and might include local acts or Texas-based bands, interspersed with film screenings and performances by *mariachis*, comedians, or Mexican movie stars such as Vicente Fernandez or Antonio Aguilar. Beltran was also involved at various times with dances in Lansing venues

such as Dell’s Lounge, El Cielito Lindo, the C.D. Club, and the L.A. Globe, where he would book local artists as well as artists from Texas.

In the 1960s through the 1980s, a growing number of bars and clubs in various Michigan cities catered to the musical tastes of Michigan’s Tejana/o population. In the Detroit area were venues such as the Blue Diamond, Gutierrez Lounge, and El Chaparral in Detroit, El Rey in Lincoln Park, and Ernie’s Lounge in Ecorse. In the Grand Rapids area were Mi Lugar, Cascade Arena, Clasico, and Club Flores. In Lansing, there were Saturday night dances at El Dance Land on North Washington St., and at the Stardust Club, owned and operated by Daniel and Mario Sanchez, formerly members of a musical group called Epoca Band. El Rancho Club in Charlotte hosted dances on Saturdays and Sundays, as did the Club Latino Americano in Albion. In Saginaw, the Wonder Bar had music and dancing every Friday and Saturday night. In Luna Pier there was the Luna Pier Ballroom, owned by Paul Garza. These and other performance spaces provided the infrastructure for touring bands from Texas to demonstrate stylistic developments in *música tejana* and to support an emerging *música michicana*.

As Guerrero notes, another key factor in the spread of Texas-Mexican music into Michigan was the establishment of local long-running Spanish-language radio programs. An important radio program in Lansing was “Variedades en Español,” a collaboration between Quinto Sol, a Chicana/o communications organization, and WKAR-AM, the public broadcast station at Michigan State University. Launched in 1968, the project was led by Gilberto Martinez, with assistance from Juan Cavazos, Rogelio Guerrero, Lalo Marinez, Justo Trujillo, and Tony “El Chayo” Cervantes. It combined music and news for the Lansing area’s Spanish-speaking community. In addition to the radio program, Quinto Sol also hosted seminars to train others from Michigan and throughout the Midwest to launch Spanish-language radio programs in their own cities. When Quinto Sol dissolved, the radio program was absorbed by WKAR and Guerrero, who had been in charge of Quinto Sol’s training seminars, was hired on as full-time producer and host of the show. In 1974, the program was renamed “Ondas en Español,” and still airs under this name, hosted by Chayo Cervantes, who was hired as host in 1987. Previous hosts also include Rogelio “Roy” Garza and Andres Rivera.

Radio programs playing *música tejana* proliferated in Michigan in the late-1960s and early-1970s, as is evident from browsing issues of *Sol de Aztlan*, a newspaper published by Quinto Sol. For instance, the April, 1970 issue provides a list of “Radio en Español” that includes: “Variedades en Español,”



Martin Huron Solis, Jr. with his award from the Tejano R.O.O.T.S. Hall of Fame and Museum and his bajo sexto. Photo by Richard Cruz Davila.

hosted at this point by Garza; “Fiesta Alegre” on WRBJ-AM, hosted by Juve Aldaco; “Fiesta en el Aire” on WOAP out of Owosso, hosted by Chayo Cervantes; “La Hora Latina” on WVIC, hosted by Juve Aldaco’s brother, Gino “Su Parientito” Aldaco; and “La Chicanita,” hosted by Anguiano and Fred Silva, and “Polkas y Canciones,” hosted by Garza and Frank Gamez, both on WCER. In the July, 1971 issue is an advertisement for “Complacencias Musicales” on WSAM-FM out of Saginaw, hosted by Jimmy Ruiz. Over the next two decades, the number of programs grew until, by the the early 1990s, at least 21 Spanish-format radio stations served listeners across lower Michigan.

Spanish-language radio programs and stations, along with Spanish-language print media, played an important role in supporting the live performance of Texas-Mexican music in Michigan. For instance, when Beltran brought his *caravanas* to Michigan, Guerrero would often go to the events to interview the musicians or bring them into the studio to record interviews. Likewise, he wrote a column for *El Renacimiento*, a Chicano newspaper distributed throughout Michigan, which was largely devoted to music in both Texas and Michigan. Spanish-language radio programs and newspapers were also prime spaces for advertising upcoming dances.

Guerrero argues that the radio programs and dances then created an opening for the emergence of record stores. Roy’s Records on West Vernor Highway in Detroit was one such store that catered to Mexican and Tejana/o listeners, as was the Latin American Record Shop in Saginaw. In Lansing, Anguiano sold records from his barbershop, La Chicanita Record and Barber Shop, housed in the Quinto Sol building on Grand River Avenue (now César E. Chávez Avenue), while Aldaco’s Record Shop was just across the street. Later, Beltran opened a video store that also sold audio cassettes of Texas-Mexican artists, including

those who performed at local dances and were played on the local radio programs – and for a time he also operated a club on the floor above the store. Cassettes were also often sold in grocery stores that catered to Mexican American communities.

Eventually local record labels were also established, although not until the 1980s. Aldaco Records, owned by Juve and Gino, released music from numerous groups throughout the Midwest, as did Valencia Records, founded by Ricky Smith, leader of the band La Movida. Bobby DeLeon, however, believes that Michigan’s Latino musicians were limited by a music business controlled by Anglo and African Americans. This lack of recording infrastructure was a significant issue for the development of *música michicana*. Like Juve Aldaco, several other bands recorded with Texas labels such as Joey Records (often paying them for the privilege), with mixed results; others self-produced 45s, cassettes, or CDs for sale at gigs or record stores. Those who did approach a Midwest recording studio – which the Burciagas, discussed later in this article, tried in the 1960s – ran the risk of recording engineers without knowledge or feel for Texas-Mexican music.

In Guerrero’s formulation, the final phase in the spread of Texas-Mexican music into Michigan was the formation of local groups by settled-out migrants playing in the various traditions of *música tejana*. An early practitioner of the *conjunto* style was Martin Solis, discussed in the introduction to this article, a *bajo sexto* player who began performing with accordionist Manuel Rivera in the mid-1950s. Solis was born in San Antonio in 1929, and moved to Coleman, MI in 1942 when his family was hired to work in the beet fields in the Bay City area, before resettling in Detroit in 1944. Solis’s first instrument was a guitar given to him by his grandfather, who played the violin, and his first foray into music as a profession was as lead voice in a vocal trio modeled after the internationally renowned Trio Los Panchos. Known as Trio Los Primos, the group was hired to perform at weddings, birthday parties, and graduations, most of which were held at people’s homes rather than in rented halls. When WPAG in Ann Arbor hired a Mexican DJ, Solis’s trio was invited to perform on the air. He says that at the time the only other trio in the area, and Trio Los Primos’ primary competition, was the Trio Reyna: “They were superior. They had good voices, they rehearsed a lot, and they played the night clubs and all that. And we [weren’t] there yet.”

In 1951, Solis was drafted into the Army and served for two years at Camp Rucker in Alabama. When he returned to Michigan in 1953, he took an interest in the *conjunto* music coming up from Texas and bought a *bajo sexto*. At this point he began performing with Rivera, hopping from bar to bar playing

for tips. Around 1957, he formed his own *conjunto* with his cousin, Willy Huron, a saxophonist, and named the group Los Primos. Solis and Huron recruited Casimiro Zamora on button accordion and rounded out the group with a rotating cast of drummers, depending on who was available to perform on any given weekend: “They [were] all working at Great Lakes..., and Great Lakes Steel always had them working on weekends. So I had a couple of drummers, one of them couldn’t, the other one would.” Solis cites Santiago Jimenez as a key influence on the group’s sound and source of their repertoire – “we imitated him” – but also points to the influence of Beto Villa, whom Peña calls the “father’ of the modern orquesta tejana,” in order to explain the inclusion of the saxophone, an instrument typically associated with the *orquesta* tradition and mostly absent from *conjuntos*.

Solis built the repertoire for Los Primos by frequenting jukeboxes and listening to the latest songs coming up from Texas. The songs were mostly recorded in San Antonio, he says, “Then the record shops would have it here, and the people would buy it. But most of the time, the music was bought by the people that owned the jukeboxes. They would have it, move it

every time something became famous in Texas, they’d bring it here.” Solis would learn the newest songs by playing them on the jukebox several times in a row and taking notes: “I’d go into the bar and take a quarter and play it three times, and I’d write it down and then bring it home in my head and play it.” One bar he frequented to keep up with the latest music was the One Thousand Bar, a Mexican hangout on Michigan Avenue in Detroit. In this way, he built a large repertoire that made Los Primos a first choice for those looking to hire a band: “There were other groups trying to form, but they just never made it. What was in our favor, was me and my cousin were always together, and he knew all the tunes I knew because I used to sing ’em.”

In 1961, Solis, along with his cousin, moved down to Oklahoma City to work for an uncle who owned a construction company. Solis says that in Oklahoma City at that time, there were no working *conjuntos*, only bars that had *conjunto* records in their jukeboxes. As such, Solis and Huron quickly found themselves performing around the area, and trying to round out the group with accordion and drums. In 1964, Solis moved his family back to Michigan, while his cousin stayed behind in Oklahoma. He quickly found work with other musicians in a market with more opportunities for *conjunto* music.

“As soon as I got here, I had a job. All the *conjuntos* knew I was back. They all wanted me because I was the lead voice and I had a big repertoire... It was a big change from the time we went from here to Oklahoma, there were more bars opened up, and were more catering toward Mexican people, and there [were] more openings for Mexican music.

Around this time, Solis also found a full time job at the airport working for Pacific Freight (later Airborne), but he was often on the road on weekends, playing at dances in Pontiac, Luna Pier, Saginaw, and Lansing, and sometimes in cities in northeast Ohio such as Toledo and Lorain. Working again with Manuel Rivera, Solis would also often perform on radio station WSAM, which on Saturday and Sunday afternoons broadcasted live from the Las Vegas Bar (most recently called El Zocalo) in Detroit’s Mexicantown neighborhood.

Solis continued to perform with Rivera until Rivera’s death in 1980. After a short break from music, Solis joined the *conjunto* of his eldest son, Martin S. Solis, Jr., as vocalist until Solis, Jr., also a *bajo sexto* player, passed away in 1993. In his long career as a *conjunto* musician, Solis never had the opportunity to record. He attributes this partially to his own feeling that he was not skilled enough, but his son Frank also says that he never had the time



A flyer for “Variedades en Español” from the July, 1970 issue of *Sol de Aztlan*.

to record due to his full-time job at Airborne. Solis was offered the opportunity to record by Henry Zimmerle, a prominent figure in the San Antonio *conjunto* scene, but, he says, “I just never did go for that.” However, he did have occasional opportunity to perform with musicians such as Zimmerle and Flaco Jimenez while on vacation in Texas: “I’d go on vacations and all the groups knew me, because I was a good vocalist, not saying anything out of order. But they’d always invite me to sing a song or two... and I was always ready to comply.”

Another musician who first arrived in Michigan in the 1940s was José Burciaga, born in 1906 in San Antonio, TX, and raised on a nearby ranch. As a youngster in Texas he received instruction in violin and performed in various small ensembles on radio and at dance events. From 1936-1943 he picked up *bajo sexto* and other instruments, including accordion, while playing with San Antonio’s Orchestra Tipica, one of the ethnic “specialty units” created by the Federal Music Project of the WPA. In 1946 he made his first trip to Michigan to join a brother-in-law working sugar beets in Bay City. Although he brought his *bajo sexto* with him, Burciaga met no other musicians. He eventually settled in Adrian and formed a band with his sons Jesse on *tololoche*, Rudy on saxophone, and Richard on guitar and *bajo sexto*. Augustine, born in 1946 and one of 20 children, was just five years old when Burciaga discovered the boy “playing” his father’s lunchbox as if it were an accordion. As he graduated to two- and then three-row Horner accordions, Augustine’s skill blossomed.

The initial Burciaga Brothers band – with their father as manager, promoter, and occasional back-up *bajo* player – featured two saxophones, accordion, *bajo sexto*, *tololoche*, and drums. Burciaga joked that audiences were so taken with *los chamacos* (“the boys”) that he – now dubbed “the old guy” (*el viejito*) – eased out of performing in public, and for the rest of his life played only at home. When two of Burciaga’s sons married and left the band, the group morphed into a four-piece *conjunto* that was eventually led by Augustine. They played in parks and for weddings, baptisms, and increasingly for dances. Adrian did not have a regular dance hall catering to Tejana/o audiences, but local bands like the Burciagas traveled to northwest Ohio, Indiana, and elsewhere in Michigan. By 1965, the renamed El Conjunto de Augustine Burciaga was forced to disband while Augustine served four years in the Navy at Kingsville, Texas. The city was one of the great centers for *conjunto* music of the period: Conjunto Bernal and Laura Canales, for example, came out of Kingsville, and many other leading *conjuntos* performed there. Augustine began songwriting. A Texas band recorded two of his compositions, and he also recorded a song himself (never

released) on the de la Rosa label from Kingsville.

When he returned home, Augustine reactivated the band with his brothers Jesse, Richard, and Rudy, along with Gus Trevino, and Joe Faz. They played from 1969 to 1976, as Augustine cemented his reputation as one of the state’s best *conjunto* accordion players. Then Augustine changed directions, channeling his musical talents to gospel music in church. His brother Henry also had a group that played in solely in church. Both brothers followed in the footsteps of groups like the famous Conjunto Bernal who had also transitioned from secular to religious music. After a decade, however, Augustine “got the hunger to go back and do what you love the most, play music,” and invited the original band members to re-form. Augustine Burciaga and Los Originales continued the Burciaga tradition with Augustine on accordion and vocals, brother Richard on *bajo* and vocals, Joe Faz on vocals, and two of Augustine’s sons (who had shifted from rock to *música tejana* styles) on electric bass and drums.

By the late 1980s, Adrian had become a hotbed of *música tejana*. In addition to dance bands and gospel groups, the community was one of the few places in Michigan that continued the Mexican and Tejana/o tradition of Mother’s Day *serenatas* (serenades), often playing the traditional “Las Mañanitas.” Adrian’s real musical strength, however, was in the *conjuntos* and *orquestas* that played for dances, events, and family parties throughout the Tri-State region. When José and Concepción Burciaga held their 63rd wedding anniversary at the Tecumseh Union Hall in May of 1988 (a locale where the Burciaga bands had played many events in the past), two Adrian ensembles played for the event in addition to Augustine’s group: La Supresa (a *conjunto* featuring George and Efraim Atkinson, George Chavez and Oscar Cavasos); and Gilberto Atkinson y su Orquesta Brava (one of the few true *orquestas* in Michigan at the time, with Gilberto Atkinson on bass and vocals, Rudy Burciaga on sax and vocals, Junior Atkinson and Joey Vargas on trumpet, Tom Boyd on bass, Jesse Gallardo on keyboard and Oscar Cavasos on bass). A third Adrian musician, Rufus de la Cruz (a fine lead singer and *bajo sexto* player then fronting another Adrian band, Los Conocidos, but not present at the anniversary event), had been mentored in music as a boy by José Burciaga.

As befitting a musical legacy, the next generations of musicians also participated in the evening’s entertainment. In addition to Augustine’s sons, his nephew Gabe Burciaga — a promising teen accordion player — sat in with Gilberto Atkinson’s band. Gabe and his younger siblings were part of a new band formed by David Burciaga (the youngest of José’s children). David had played with yet another Adrian band, La Fuerza, but

had been working in the family basement with sons Gabe and Isaiah (drum), and daughter Nicole (vocals), in order to pass on the family's musical heritage. The young Burciagas so charmed their audiences that Lansing's veteran band leader, Juve Aldaco, suggested a new name: David Burciaga and Grupo Almiración (a play on the Spanish words for admire or look at with awe). The Burciaga legacy continues in 2018 with Gabe, now in his 40s and a worthy heir to his Uncle Augustine, fronting Gabriel Burciaga and Los Bad Boyz, and Nicolina embarking on a solo career.

Another early practitioner of *conjunto* music in Michigan was accordionist Juvencio "Juve" Aldaco, known to some as "El Orgullo de Michigan" ("the pride of Michigan"). Born in Encinal, TX in 1933, Aldaco initially migrated to Jackson, MI to work in the onion fields and then settled in Lansing after an acquaintance who worked at Fisher Body encouraged him to apply. Aldaco had no musicians in his family and did not become involved with music until around age 21 or 22 when he moved to Lansing. During a layoff from Fisher Body, Aldaco visited the home of a man who played guitar and accordion and started playing music with him. In the early 1960s he joined the *conjunto* Rey Gonzales



Juvencio Aldaco Sr. in performance, Lansing, 1992.

Photo by Laurie Kay Sommers, courtesy of Michigan State University Museum.

y Los Voladores as accordionist. At this time, there were few clubs in the area so the group mostly performed at weddings, *quinceañeras*, and dances in rented halls. Outside of Lansing, the band performed in towns such as Lake Odessa and Capac, MI; that these were very small, rural towns would suggest that the audiences for these events were comprised primarily of migrant laborers working on nearby farms.

In 1964, Aldaco formed his own group, Juve Aldaco y Los Rayos del Norte, after Rey Gonzales moved to California. The arrangement of the group at this time was the standard *conjunto* lineup of accordion, *bajo sexto*, bass, and drums. Over the years, several of Aldaco's children joined the group, beginning with his son, Jr., who joined as drummer at age 13 when, after frequently listening in on practice sessions, he impressed his father by sitting in on drums while the regular drummer was out of town; as Aldaco says, "One day later the drummer came, and [Aldaco Jr.] was better than him." Aldaco's group retained a strong focus on the accordion as lead instrument through the mid-1970s, which made it difficult to accommodate increasing requests for English-language music, particularly at *quinceañeras*, at which they performed often. By 1977, Aldaco's sons Danny and Ernie had also joined the band, and their backgrounds in R&B and pop enabled the group to diversify their repertoire. At the same time, Aldaco's sons, who had grown up primarily speaking English, learned Spanish through playing in the band. The group began performing under the name Juve Aldaco y Grupo Variedad.

By 1989, the lineup had expanded to include saxophone – played by Ricky Levarios, brother of Joe Levarios of the Saginaw band Mas Caliente – and African American vocalist Tina Lewis (stage name Tina Marie). The combination of accordion, saxophone, and keyboard allowed the group to draw from both the *conjunto* and *orquesta* traditions, as well as to incorporate pop and rap influences. This stylistic diversity gave the group broader audience appeal, as they could tailor their set to the specific tastes of any given crowd. Older crowds, for instance, preferred polkas and boleros, whereas for younger crowds the group would play more cumbias and English-language songs, as well as songs in the *onda chicana* style. Thanks to this diversity in their repertoire, the group was awarded the Ritchie Valens Award for Best Cross-Over Band at the first Midwest Hispanic Music Awards in 1988. In 1990, the band was renamed Grupo Aldaco, and under this name shifted back toward *conjunto* and *onda chicana* styles. Professionally, Aldaco largely shifted his attention from music to his restaurant business in the mid-1990s, but his son Danny continued the band under the Grupo Aldaco name.

Aldaco is notable both for the longevity of his musical career

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MSU Latinx Film Festival

February 2018 marked the first Michigan State University Latinx Film Festival, which featured eight films. *As I Walk Through the Valley*, directed by Charlie Vela and Ronnie Garza, was featured at the Robin Theater. Initially intended to be a documentary about the late-1990s and early-2000s punk scene in Texas's Rio Grande Valley, of which Vela and Garza were a part, the film instead presents a larger history of popular music in the Valley from the 1960s through the 2000s, covering rock 'n' roll, Texas-Mexican *conjunto* and *orquesta*, Chicano country, and finally the punk and metal scenes that took hold between the late-1970s and early-2000s. Combining oral history with period film footage and print media to frame the trajectory of popular music within broader social and political contexts, Vela and Garza construct a narrative that highlights the historical continuities and ruptures that connect these seemingly disparate musical genres and scenes.

One factor that unites each of the scenes is that they all developed more-or-less organically, with little interest or support from outside of the Rio Grande Valley. Comprised of Willacy, Cameron, Hidalgo, and Starr Counties and situated on the

southern tip of Texas, Vela and Garza's interviewees contend that the Rio Grande Valley is largely ignored by the rest of Texas, as well as by the rest of the U.S.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2008 the Latino population of the four counties ranged from 86% of the total population of Cameron County to 97% of Starr County. Inevitably then, the music scenes of the Valley were shaped in part by interethnic conflict between Mexican Americans and Anglos, though even in the 1960s there were some integrated bands. However, according to an interviewee, there were intraethnic class differences between Brownsville and McAllen. Additionally, given its proximity to the U.S.-Mexico border, music scenes in the Rio Grande Valley have historically had close ties to scenes in Mexican border cities, as the film aptly demonstrates. Finally, as several interviewees note, ties existed between the music scenes of the Rio Grande Valley and Tejano communities in Michigan and throughout the Midwest, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, as bands often traveled north to perform for migrant laborers as well as those families that had settled out in the Midwest. 

Black Velvet: A Rasquache Aesthetic

Black Velvet: A Rasquache Aesthetic is the first known exhibition of black velvet paintings in Michigan. Co-curated by Elena Herrada, founder of Fronteras Norteñas and co-founder of Museo del Norte, Minerva T. Martinez, co-curator of the Images of the Mexican Revolution photography collection, and Diana Rivera, Chicana/Latinx Subject Specialist and Head of the Michigan State University Libraries Cesar E. Chavez Collection, the exhibit considers black velvet paintings, so-called "bad art," through the lens of *rasquache*, a Mexican Spanish slang word meaning shoddiness or tackiness and that implies a lower-class status or lack of sophistication. Reinterpreting *rasquache* more positively as an "underdog perspective," the exhibit positions black velvet paintings as markers of a Chicana/o aesthetic shaped by social class and personal histories.

The paintings collected in the exhibition document the history of technical and stylistic development in black velvet painting, as well as common themes during black velvet's peak popularity in the mid-20th century. Previously considered one of

the "gentler arts" for young women in 18th century Europe and the American colonies, black velvet paintings experienced a resurgence beginning in the 1930s through the Polynesian nude paintings of Edgar Leeteg. As Leeteg's work gained popularity in Southern California, Mexican painters began producing work on velvet to sell to tourists, and an "industry" developed as the popularity of their paintings spread through the U.S. South and Southwest.



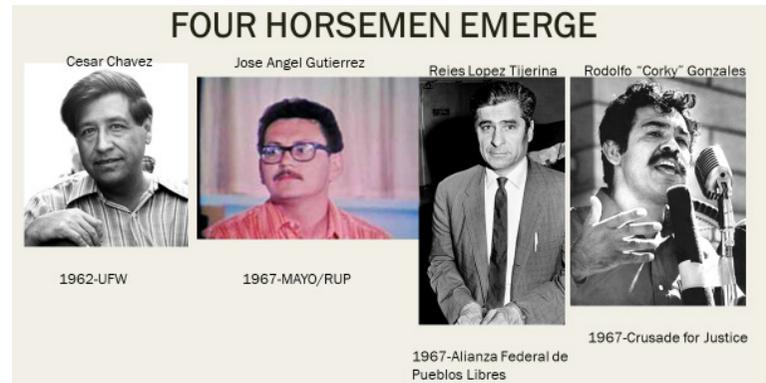
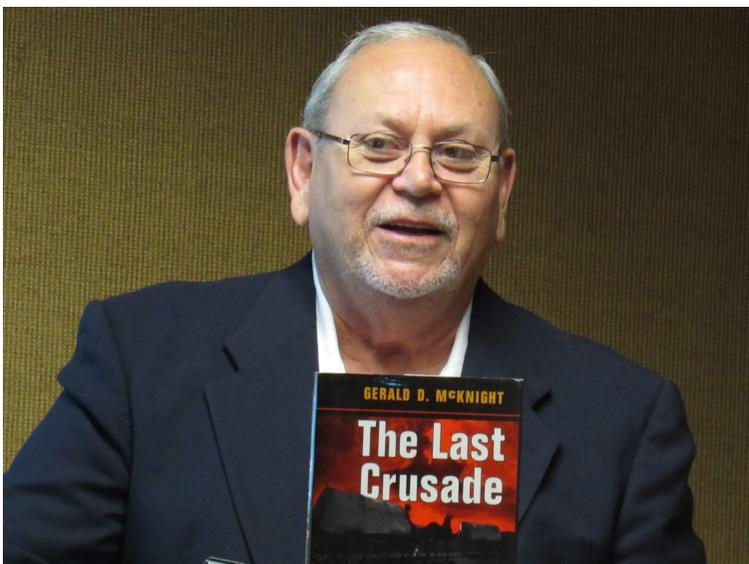
The exhibition contains over 80 vintage paintings. Popular subject matter includes landscapes, children, and animals. Depictions of the Náhua legend of Popocatépetl and Iztaccíhuatl were popular in Mexican and Mexican American stores and restaurants, and the exhibition includes several examples. Mexican and American religious and popular icons were also common subjects. Jesús and La Virgen de Guadalupe are examples of the former on display, while Elvis Presley, Marilyn Monroe, Emiliano Zapata, and Cantinflas are examples of the latter. 

Gutierrez Speaks at MSU

On June 20, 2018, José Ángel Gutiérrez, longtime Chicano activist and co-founder and leader of yesterday's La Raza Unida Party, spoke at MSU on "Chicano Leadership at the Poor People's Campaign: May 12 - June 24, 1968." Gutiérrez, who was a Visiting Summer Scholar at JSRI, highlighted the importance of coalition building in the struggle for social and political change in America. Gutiérrez emphasized the roles Reies López Tijerina, founder of the Alianza Federal de Mercedes Libres, and Rudolfo "Corky" Gonzales, founder of the Crusade for Justice, played in representing Chicanos at the Poor People's Campaign. This year was the 50th anniversary of the Campaign, which included thousands of participants from across the country at Resurrection City near the National Mall's Reflecting Pool. The City consisted of tents and trailers, and existed for approximately six weeks.

Gutiérrez provided a historical overview of the mechanisms used by White Americans to subordinate Mexican Americans. These included anti-miscegenation laws, poll taxes, and other anti-voting practices. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, he argued, opened the door to coalition politics, although they were not sustained. In San Antonio, Texas, Alberto Peña, and G. J. Sutton, minority delegates to the Democratic Convention in Los Angeles in 1960, worked together to integrate the lunch counter at Joske's Department Store. This temporary alliance was one of many that would occur among Mexican Americans and Blacks. Tijerina and Gonzales also had much needed alliances with Native Americans, primarily through the American Indian Movement.

At the national level, Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. made



attempts to broaden a coalition for social justice. He invited Mexican American leaders to join the March on Washington in 1963. Three years later, on September 22, 1966, he communicated to César Chávez by telegram that their "separate struggles are really one—a struggle for freedom, for dignity and for humanity." In 1968, Andrew Young personally invited Chávez to the Minority Group Conference held in March of that year by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Although Chávez did not attend, Tijerina and Gonzales were both present. The Conference was part of King's multi-racial, poor people's strategy to transform America. Reverend King invited a representative to the Committee of 100, which was to lobby for the Poor People's Campaign, and Tijerina was selected to represent Chicanos.

That month, social frustration among Chicanos spread to high schools and college campuses as the L.A. Blowouts took place. This consisted of thousands of Mexican American students walking out of high schools in East Los Angeles to protest the quality of education they were receiving. The walkouts began at seven high schools in East Los Angeles (Garfield, Lincoln, Wilson, Roosevelt, Belmont, Venice and Jefferson) and quickly spread to other local high schools. A key leader was Sal Castro, a teacher at Lincoln High School. Castro rose as a key leader of the walkouts in East Los Angeles which ultimately involved 22,000 students. The Walkouts spread throughout the Southwest, including New Mexico, Colorado, Texas and Arizona.

On April 4, 1968, Reverend King was assassinated, and although other leaders continued to organize the Poor People's Campaign, the event was not as inclusive as it would have been had he lived. Tensions between Black and Chicano leaders and other participants diminished the potential of the event envisioned by Reverend King. Gutiérrez concluded his presentation by speaking to the possibilities of intergroup coalitions in the struggles for social, political, and economic progress for peoples of color. 🌐

New Faces



Alyssa Bedaine began at Michigan State University as a student in August 2014. She joined JSRI in September 2018 as an office assistant. Alyssa recently graduated with a Bachelor's degree in English with a concentration in creative writing. She fancies herself a makeup artist, enjoying the creative aspects of the art. She currently resides in Grand Ledge, MI. Her office

responsibilities include maintaining accurate records, processing travel authorizations and reimbursements, providing general office support, and providing general leadership to student and on-call employees. 🌟



Tammi Cervantes is a junior at Michigan State University studying Political Science with minors in Chicano/Latino Studies and Women and Gender Studies. She grew up in Southwest Detroit, and throughout her childhood saw the injustices that her community faced, as well as the lack of Latino representation in government. This has led her to strive to be that representation for her

community. On campus she serves as the president of Culturas de las Razas Unidas, a student-led activist organization. She has aspirations of going to law school after graduation and later running for public office in Michigan. 🌟



David Figueroa Martin is a senior at Michigan State University majoring in Human Capital and Society and minoring in Organizational Leadership. After graduation, he plans on pursuing a Master's degree in Human Resources and Labor Relations with the goal of focusing his career path in research. David is originally from Cuba and currently resides in Lansing. He

enjoys conducting research and during his time at MSU has been fortunate to participate in different research projects involving community improvements, policy changes, and financial stability through different departments in the city of Lansing. 🌟

JSRI Scholarship Recipients 2018-2019



Jessica Gonzalez is a senior in Social Relations and Policy in James Madison College. She is committed to expanding higher education opportunities for the Latinx community. She has served as the Vice President of Culturas de las Razas Unidas on campus, and supported Latinx students while forming coalitions with other student organizations. She has worked with

first-generation students, had meaningful internships abroad, and was awarded a Campus Compact Newman Civic Fellow. 🌟



Jasmin Guadalupe Ortiz is a Master's student in the Student Affairs Administration graduate program with a certification in Chicano/Latino Studies at Michigan State University. She is a first-generation graduate student from East Los Angeles, California, where she attended California State University, Los Angeles and received her bachelor's degree in Sociology.

She worked in South Central Los Angeles as a Community Coordinator with Uplift Family Services, coordinating programs and workshops in areas community residents identified as needs. She is committed to doing research on the barriers Latinx college students face and on the support they need from faculty and staff to succeed academically and professionally. 🌟

Adios!



Devin Mazur began working at JSRI in March of 2016. After two and a half years, her time with JSRI ended on September 24, 2018 when she accepted a new position with the Michigan State University Police Department as a Law enforcement records coordinator, which she calls her "dream job." Devin enjoyed her time at JSRI as an office assistant and will be

greatly missed. We wish her the best in this new phase of her professional career. 🌟

Black-Brown Dialogues Summit II

On Sept. 7th, 2018, the Julian Samora Research Institute and African American and African Studies at Michigan State University hosted the second in a series of three daylong statewide summits intended to foster dialogue and collaboration between Michigan's Latina/o and African American communities, as well as other communities of color. At the first summit, nearly 90 participants were asked to identify and rank order the most pressing issues facing Michigan's communities of color. At the second summit, approximately 100 participants were engaged in developing a vision for a more equitable and inclusive Michigan.

The summit started with opening remarks by Dr. Rubén Martínez, Director of JSRI, who spoke on expanding community, envisioning a better Michigan, and exploring models for sustainable collaboration. Next, Jerry Tello, co-founder of the National Compadres Network, spoke on the importance of understanding our interconnected histories as communities of color, as well as healing from intergenerational traumas. Angela Reyes, Director of the Detroit Hispanic Development Corporation, led a panel discussion on "Intersecting and Divergent Issues Impacting Women in Communities of Color." Panelists included: Lacy Dawson, Field Director with Michigan Voice; Ashley Tuomi, CEO of American Indian Health and Family Services; Gabriela Santiago-Romero of We the People and Girls Making Change; and Rima Meroueh, Advocacy and Community Engagement Manager with ACCESS. Donald Weatherspoon, PhD, concluded the morning session by emphasizing the need for a social fabric that supports at-risk youth of color. During lunch, Ismael Ahmed, Associate Provost for Integrated Learning and Community Partnerships at the University of Michigan, Dearborn, spoke on the importance of collective efforts by communities of color and other marginalized groups in pushing for societal progress.

Throughout the afternoon, summit attendees participated in a visioning activity in which they were asked what a just, equitable, and inclusive Michigan would look like, how the communities can work together toward creating such a society, and how this work might be facilitated over time. Attendees reported out by table. Some common themes that emerged were: building relationships; identifying commonalities among communities of color; addressing internal prejudices; providing equitable access to educational, political, and economic systems; sharing critical knowledge; addressing past injustices and historical trauma; and promoting community autonomy. These will be taken up at Summit III in 2019. 

Dolores Huerta @ MSU

Dolores Huerta, an internationally-known Chicana activist, feminist, and mother who co-founded with César Chávez in the 1960s the United Farmworkers of America union, visited Michigan State University on February 27, 2018. She was the keynote speaker at the Annual César E. Chávez Luncheon Celebration, which attracted a large audience that included local community leaders, MSU faculty and students, high school students, and Latino community members and leaders. Ms. Huerta began her inspiring presentation by recalling critical events in U.S. history; namely what occurred in the nation during the 1960s when people like César Chávez, Martin Luther King, John F. Kennedy, and Robert F. Kennedy fought against many types of discrimination and for people's civil and human rights. Ms. Huerta also thanked MSU for its strong and continuous support for farmworkers.

According to Ms. Huerta, it is unfortunate the nation has returned to those dark days in our nation's history when rampant racism, sexism, homophobia, and bigotry were common. Farmworkers, despite working hard and harvesting food for the entire nation, still are not respected and are frequently neglected by the public and policymakers. Huerta stated that during the week of her presentation the U.S. Supreme Court was deliberating issues of funding for unions of government workers. She stated that without money labor unions cannot carry out their work on behalf of employees, who currently benefit from the work of labor unions. It is important, she argued, that we should continue supporting their work.

Ms. Huerta also highlighted the importance of education, because educated persons have manners, support civil rights, are prepared for the labor market, and have many opportunities to change society's current conditions. She gave the example of the work of the Dolores Huerta Foundation that supports a middle school through a local bond to build a new gymnasium for students and the community.

Ms. Huerta also emphasized the huge wealth difference prevailing in the country, with 10 percent of people having 90 percent of the wealth. She also promoted the idea of free tuition in higher education for everyone, much like in the European Union and Cuba.

Finally, Ms. Huerta urged audience members to follow César Chávez's commitment to non-violent actions, encourage voting in elections, and embrace rather than attack people because they are immigrants. She concluded her remarks by saying that we need to make the changes for a better society since no one else will do it for us. 

The 24th Commemoration of Genocide against Tutsi in Rwanda

On Saturday April 21st, 2018, Rwandan faculty, staff, and students at Michigan State University (MSU), in collaboration with the Rwandan Diaspora Community in the Midwest, organized “Kwibuka” to commemorate the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi. The term means to “Remember” in Kinyarwanda, Rwanda’s language. Every year, Rwandans worldwide celebrate the lives of relatives and friends who died by remembering them, honoring them, and sharing memories of times spent together. It is estimated that over 1 million innocent lives were slaughtered in approximately 100 days. Supported by several units on campus, the event was held at the International Center, with 300 people in attendance.

Dr. Hiram E. Fitzgerald, Associate Provost for University Outreach and Engagement, welcomed everyone, explaining why the event was hosted at MSU. As one of the first land-grant institutions founded over 160 years ago, MSU promotes an inclusive culture and atmosphere that encourage all people to reach their full potential. He added that MSU has the most faculty in the country engaged in Africa-related research, teaching, and development work. He called for renewed commitment and resolve in sustaining relationships and ended his remarks by saying: “We cannot, should not, forget a past event as harrowing and heartbreaking as the Rwandan Genocide against the Tutsi. MSU faculty, staff, and students are here to unite with you, and work with you.”

Dr. Jean Kayitsinga, a faculty member from Rwanda and co-organizer of the event, recalled the sociohistorical and political contexts and factors that contributed to the Genocide, including the role of Belgian colonization in the social construction of ethnicity and fragmentation of Rwandan society, institutional discrimination of the Kayibanda and Habyarimana post-independence regimes, and hatred ideologies that transformed local populations into killer machines. His presentation was followed by a song of remembrance by Callixte Kayiranga from Hamilton, Ontario, Canada.

In her keynote address, Honorable professor Mathilde Mukantabana, Ambassador of the Republic of Rwanda to the United States of America, Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina, thanked MSU faculty and students for organizing the event and the MSU administration for its friendship, solidarity, and support for this event. She said: “It is moments like this when friends come together.” She thanked the Rwandan community in the Midwest and Canada who traveled long distances to MSU to remember and celebrate together the lives of their loved ones.

Ambassador Mathilde recalled that in January of this year, the United Nations for the first time accepted to call what happened in Rwanda 24 years ago the “Genocide against the Tutsi.” The commemoration is a healing experience. Tutsis call it: “Gufatana mu Mugongo,” meaning we’ve “Got each Other’s Back.” It’s a nation of survivors that help each other because they no longer have families and friends to help them. It is a national journey that takes generations.

Ambassador Mathilde indicated that in 1994, most societal institutions were in disarray, including the state, churches, schools, and families. Rwanda would have been called a “failed state,” but people refused to surrender to despair. They collectively understood what happened, when neighbors turned against their neighbors, and killers knew their victims. Through Gacaca, a community-based traditional court, Rwandans punished the killers and, at the same time, created a dialogue for forgiveness and reconciliation. Rwanda now has a new identity: “Ndi Umunyarwanda,” meaning “I am Rwandan.” This new identity symbolizes peace, unity, and renewal for a better life.

Ambassador Mathilde said about the genocide: “This was not just a Rwandan failure, it was also a major failure for the international community.” She then added: “I am very proud of my people. We faced big challenges, but we successfully confronted them together as Rwandans. We now live in peace. Rwanda has turned the corner. People are happy and there is hope and light at the end of the tunnel. Remember, Reunite, and Renew – Twibuke, Twiyubaka.”

The audience was taken back to the dark days and nights of April through July 1994 by listening to powerful and painful testimonies of two survivors: Kizito D. Kalima, Founder and Executive Director of the Peace Center for Forgiveness and Reconciliation in Indianapolis, Indiana, and Mathilde Mukesharugo from Toronto. Survivors’ testimonies were followed by candle lighting, messages and a poem of hope, and a panel discussion on the themes of “Unite and Renew.”

In closing, Dr. Kayitsinga thanked sponsors of the event, including the Office for Inclusion and Intercultural Initiatives, International Studies and Programs, University Outreach and Engagement, the College of Social Science, the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, the Department of History, and the Julian Samora Research Institute. He also thanked the organizing committee, especially the students, and hundreds of Rwandans and non-Rwandans who attended the event. 

A Mi También

Over the past year, the “#MeToo” movement has exposed serial sexual predators in corporate and other settings and has given voice to those who have been victims of sexual abuse. The movement has empowered and given voices to women who previously were ashamed of and feared speaking out. The television and film industries have led the way in the “#MeToo” movement by uncovering the darker side to fame. Although most victims who have stepped forward are women, men have also been subjected to sexual abuse. The movement also took hold at Michigan State University where much still is unknown on how Larry Nassar, an osteopathic physician on campus, could prey on hundreds of female athletes, including children. Despite the surge the movement has caused, little attention has focused on the factors that contribute not only to sexual misconduct, but also to the silencing of victims. Studies on the sexual assault of farmworkers highlight the underlying factors that lead to sexual abuse. Farmworkers are vulnerable, impoverished, under-paid, and isolated due to cultural and linguistic barriers, not to mention citizenship status. These factors together leave farmworker women, the large majority being Latinas, susceptible to sexual abuse and exploitation.

Undeterred by low wages averaging \$11,000 a year, undocumented immigrants secure employment as farmworkers in the US out of necessity, demand, ability, and the political context of farm labor that facilitates the illegal hiring of undocumented workers. Yet, the low wages that farmworkers earn make them susceptible to sexual abuse by labor contractors and others who take advantage of their desperate situations. Conservative figures estimate that about 50 percent of farmworkers in the US are immigrants, while other figures suggest that over 70 percent of them are unauthorized to work in the US. An overwhelming number of Americans consider farm work to be undesirable labor. Foreign laborers are consequently needed to tend to fields and harvest crops, and since most have backgrounds in farm labor in their home countries, this makes them a capable workforce. Motivated by extreme necessity and poverty these workers enter the US to meet labor demands. By this point in their journey, some workers have already been exploited, both monetarily and sexually. These workers are also susceptible to violence or threats of violence and live vulnerable lives of fear.

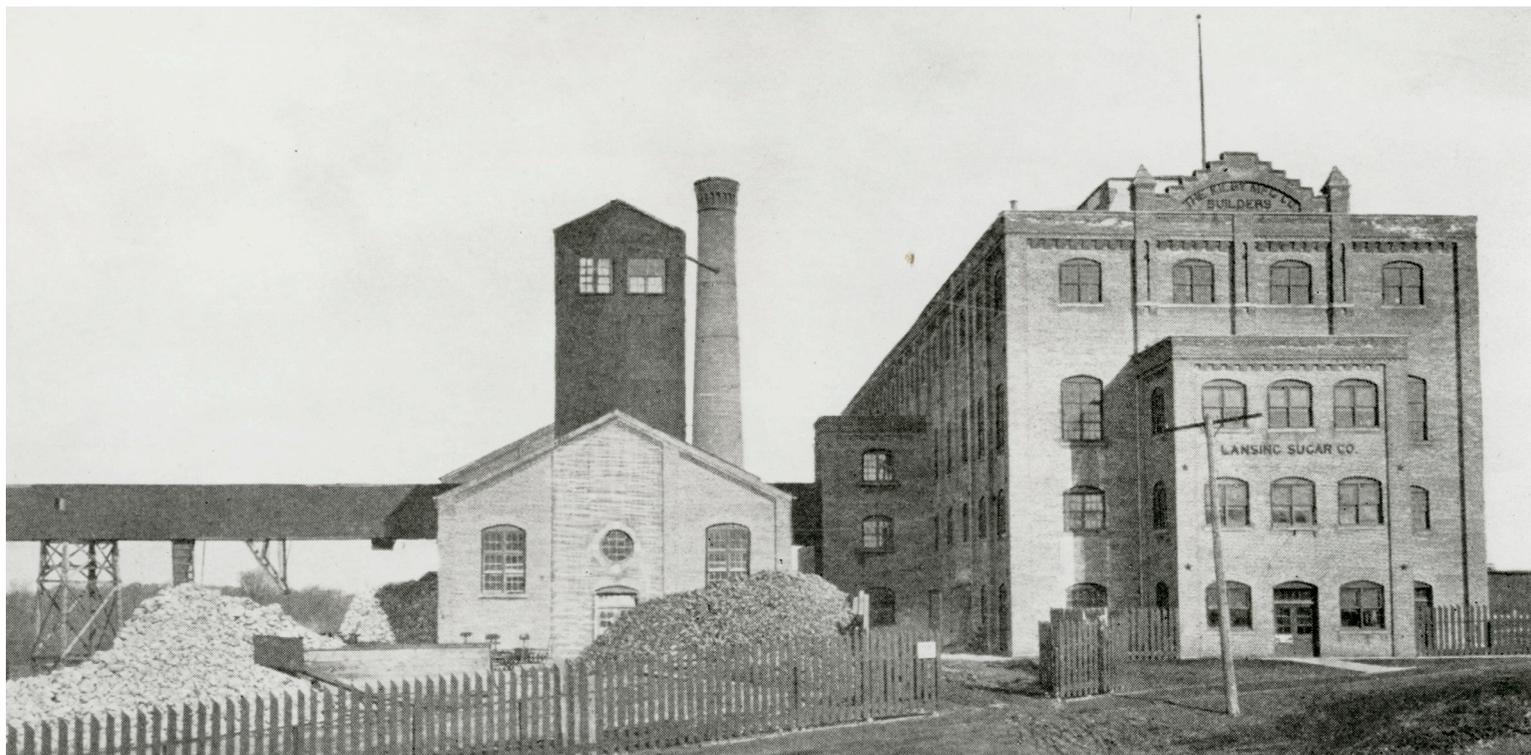
The fields are isolated places where women fall victim to sexual harassment, abuse, and assault. In 2013, PBS’s *Frontline* featured the documentary *Rape in the Fields* that depicted the

brutal rape culture that exists in farm labor. The film describes the “fields de calzones” or “fields of panties” or “green motels” where women are subjected to sexual harassment and abuse, including quid pro quo demands for sex in order for them to gain or maintain employment. Like most victims of sexual assault, these women are fearful of not being believed or being abused. However, unlike other groups, undocumented Latinas are hesitant to reach out to law enforcement officials out of fear of deportation and or violent retaliation by their perpetrators. Language and cultural barriers, along with unfamiliarity with US law, perpetuate the silencing of sexual assault victims in the fields.

Still, sexual abuse in the fields is not limited to women, as children and men also fall victims to sex crimes. In socially conservative Latino culture, conversations about sex or sexual behaviors are often taboo, creating an inclination to not speak of what otherwise could be considered embarrassing, shameful, and unvirtuous behavior, further leading to low reporting levels of sexual abuse. In addition, young Latino males also deal with similar vulnerabilities in which issues of machismo and homosexuality shun victims of sexual abuse and lead to low reporting levels.

The Alianza Nacional de Campesinas (National Alliance of Female Farmworkers), an advocacy group, was established in 2011 with the aims to provide aid and resources to farmworker women. Bringing attention to the struggles of female farmworkers, this advocacy group has identified sexual harassment and sexual abuse as its top concerns. Nevertheless, to fully confront sexual abuse of farmworkers, labor, wage, and immigration issues must be addressed as well. Sexual abuse and exploitation will not go away until the economic and situational vulnerability of farmworkers is addressed. Americans must stop taking farmworkers for granted as through their hard work they help feed the nation while keeping the oldest industry in this country alive.

The farming industry in North America has historically relied on exploiting vulnerable people for its survival. Whether it was indentured servants, slaves, immigrants, braceros, or poor Americans, and now undocumented immigrants and H-2A workers, manual labor in the agricultural industry has been subsidized by individuals regarded as aliens and, to many, as subhuman, thereby exposing them to inequality and injustices. Until the humanity of farmworkers is recognized, affirmed, and protected, their physical and sexual exploitation will continue. 



Settling Out, Settling Down, Settling In: The Oral History of Latinas/os in Michigan Project at JSRI

Juan D. Coronado

As a young man during the 1960s Juan Díaz worked in a foundry in Flint's Buick City. The foundries were home to a large number of ethno-racial minorities, as the intense heat and "the extremely dangerous and dismal conditions" were less than desirable in a racialized labor hierarchy. At the time, Michigan's automotive industry was booming, making the state an attractive destination for those seeking employment, including Latinas/os. In the mid 1960s, Michigan was home to the highest paid blue-collar workers on the planet and Flint led the state with the highest wages. Many Latinas/os were employed in the automotive industry, yet Michigan's written history has not been inclusive of the vast experiences of Latinas/os. Through oral history interviews, the experiences of Latinas/os in the state of Michigan are being recovered and preserved.

The field of oral history has grown tremendously in recent times, and the same is the case with the Latina/o population in the United States. Contrary to popular belief, not all Latinas/os are newcomers to the US, and oral history is as old a tool to record history as it gets. Latinas/os have a direct bond with oral history as historically, family, local, and group history were preserved through oral traditions. The Oral History of Latina/os in Michigan Project (OHLM) at the Julian Samora Research Institute at Michigan State University builds upon

the oral traditions among Latinas/os. To better understand the needs, challenges, and history of Latinas/os in Michigan, JSRI researchers have been collecting oral histories with elders over the past decade and are continually looking for persons to interview for the OHLM project.

From storytelling to the singing of corridos (folk ballads), Latinas/os have long been compelled to oral tradition. As a child growing up, I was intrigued by family members gathering around the dinner table in the evenings to retell stories of significant events that impacted their lives and their pueblito, La Palmita, Nuevo León, México. Conversations would start, "*Te acuerdas cuando pusieron la luz en el rancho? 'Si!' Era el '69. 'No, se me hace que era el '68.' No, si era en '69.'*" ("Remember when electricity was introduced in our village? 'Of course!' It was in '69. 'No, I think it was in '68.' No, it was in '69.'") The discussions inevitably led to serious conversations about the ways of life and the challenges they confronted in their daily lives in order to survive. Through the collective memory of these interactions, the youth learned life lessons as family and local history were preserved and passed on by the elders reminiscing about the days of old. These were important lessons for a Chicano growing up in a different environment than that of the previous generation.

Chicanas/os and Latinas/os continue to be excluded in written works of history, especially in areas where they are constantly and erroneously seen as newcomers. For many people in Michigan, diversifying and bringing inclusion to the historical perspective is adding the African American experience, which is important, but incomplete. The historical perspective must go beyond the White and Black binary and must reflect the many ethnic peoples in our society. This is especially so since the experiences and lives of Latinas/os are integral to the state's industries. We must continue to expand the historical perspective or else we will not understand our society and the diverse cultures and values that comprise Michigan and the nation. Through the OHLM project we learn about the experiences, discover the contributions of Latinas/os, and amplify the body of historical knowledge to better understand our communities, state, and nation.

When Dr. Rubén Martínez became the director of the Julian Samora Research Institute in 2007 he quickly became interested in the origins of the Latina/o populations throughout the state. He launched the OHLM project with several objectives in mind, including: 1) to discover, record, and disseminate the place-making activities of Latinas/os in Michigan, and 2) to better understand the experiences of Michigan's Latina/o population. Focusing on settled out farmworkers, those who left the migrant stream, he parsed the process into three phases: 1) settling out, the decision to leave the migrant lifestyle; 2) settling down, moving into a particular community, and 3) settling in, joining secondary organizations in their communities.

To better appreciate and understand Michigan's Latina/o population it is important to know their history. It is also important for Latinas/os to have an appreciation of their own history and have a sense of belonging without falling victims to the false narrative that casts them as recent immigrants and denies them claiming a first-class citizenship. By understanding the experiences of Latinas/os in Michigan, initiatives can be launched to improve their lives and policies can be shaped to integrate them within the state's institutions.

As early as the late 1890s, Mexicans¹, mostly migrant workers from Texas began to travel to Michigan and found seasonal employment in the sugarbeet industry. While most farmworkers returned to their communities of origin at the end of the season, some began to settle out into Michigan's various communities throughout the state. While the growing agriculture sector and the booming auto industry expanded work opportunities for Latinas/os in Michigan, political and social upheaval in both Mexico and Texas, where these folks mostly originated from, pushed them away from their communities. It

is within this context that the OHLM project is rooted and JSRI staff members have worked diligently to conduct, transcribe, and incorporate oral histories into scholarly endeavors.

The OHLM project has targeted elderly community members with an understanding of their knowledge of their communities and an appreciation of their historical memory. Several of the interviewees are now deceased, but their oral history lives on at JSRI. As well, several interviewers have also passed through JSRI and have moved on to other jobs. A survey instrument was developed in both English and Spanish and has been used for every oral history interview that has been conducted, standardizing the areas of inquiry while allowing for differences in experiences. Every interview is audio recorded with two digital recorders to ensure it is captured with minimal technical problems. While some interviews are conducted in English, others are conducted in Spanish, and many are bilingual. Thus, an interviewer or oral historian must have bilingual skills, as using the language, whether it is English, Spanish, or a mixture of both, of the interviewees allows them to become comfortable with the conversation and truly express themselves.

Bilingualism facilitates discussion of topics that perhaps he or she may not discuss in monolingual terms. Chicano civil rights leader, Reies Lopez Tijerina explained it best, "De cuando en cuando sería bueno lucir el brío de nuestro idioma, lucir la fuerza del calor de nuestro espíritu. El espíritu de un pueblo está en el idioma. Si la cultura la clasificamos con números, el idioma sería el número uno de nuestra cultura" (Tijerina 5/9/69). [Every now and then it is good to let the light of our language shine through, let it shine on the strength of our spirit. The spirit of a community is its language. If we classify elements of culture numerically, language would be number one in our culture.] From an oral historian's perspective, the comfort produced by addressing participants in their native language establishes an atmosphere that is conducive for their sharing of information that otherwise they might be hesitant to share.

Interviewees easily shift from English to Spanish language and often use Chicana/o terminology. Consequently, a transcriber must not only possess bilingual skill sets that include understanding and writing both languages but also bicultural skills and familiarity with Chicana/o culture. JSRI employs graduate and undergraduate students with these abilities and they are trained to transcribe each oral history interview with precision so that it can be analyzed and archived.

In being able to conduct successful oral histories with elder Latinas/os in Michigan, it is important to understand their communities and their struggles. While many interviewees came from Texas following the migrant stream, others are the sons

and daughters of those migrants, and others are from Puerto Rico, Cuba and Central America. Despite the nostalgic memories they may have about the “good ole’ days,” interviewees share rough impoverished upbringings. It is also important to note the current conditions in which Michiganders find themselves. Michigan is one of the leading states in the nation promoting a neoliberal regime that has governed the state in the past thirty years. Representations of the neoliberal path Michigan is on include incessant tax cuts that force elimination of government programs, privatization of government functions, emergency managers, battered roads and highways, anti-labor unions, and other initiatives by those who have governed and continue to govern the state with a business perspective that benefits the few at the expense of the many.

Coming from an area with a nearly ninety-percent Latina/o population and arriving to Michigan where Latinas/os only comprise about five-percent of the population, several overt characteristics shared by many Latina/o Michiganders stand out. Despite the many barriers and challenges experienced by Latinas/os in Michigan, such as having led relatively culturally isolated lives from their rich historical backgrounds, they have an interest in reconnecting with those roots. They are a people who remain hopeful in their lives. Many of them are from farmworker backgrounds and César Chávez and the United Farm Workers Union slogan “¡Si Se puede!” still resonates with them.

Latinas/os in Michigan have weathered the storm unleashed on them by a neoliberal order responsible for the Great Recession of 2007-2008. The changes in the political landscape gave rise to a neoliberal order based on extreme *laissez-faire* principles that shape the economic system. It calls for an economy that is unregulated by government. This neoliberal order has privatized public goods, moving public dollars to the private sector while rolling back social programs that provide positive services to the community. The era of extreme *laissez-faire* has given rise to great income and wealth inequality as large corporations have become increasingly powerful, leading to increased corruption in a society in which workers are increasingly denied benefits and labor rights.

Today’s neoliberal order denies funding of projects that promote the public good. The communities of the participants in the OHLM Project reflect these regressive policies. From the field notes of the oral histories we note the neighborhoods in the many areas we have conducted interviews including, Lansing, Flint, Saginaw, Detroit, and other surrounding communities throughout the state. With the infrastructure in decline, epitomized by the endless cracks and potholes on the highways and the closure of community centers, working



communities seem abandoned and are not reflective of the once proud automotive state that was Michigan. Impoverished neighborhoods in Lansing, Flint, and Detroit are inundated with “Party Stores” at almost every corner with signs promoting all the “essentials” for the community: “Beer, Wine, and Lotto.” Worse yet is the continuing Flint water crisis which, despite the lack of attention it is receiving in this election year, continues to threaten the lives of thousands of people. These are the living conditions in which many Michiganders find themselves today.

The Migrant Stream

Farm labor is backbreaking work, but like other difficult jobs the intensity eventually gets lost in the monotony and then it just becomes routine. Hard labor becomes normalized by farmworkers whose daily work in America’s food systems brings food to the tables of millions of people. Yet, when describing their day, an interviewee simply recalled,

Waking up early in the mornings we would go to either hoe or pick whatever the crop was at the time and then work until four o’clock, five o’clock. I enjoyed it at the time. Sometimes it would be boring. Sometimes it was long and hot days, but I always thought it [was] good exercise² (OHLM #008).

Despite the less than ideal working conditions, the interviewee’s memory carries positive experiences from being a migrant farmworker.

Many of the OHLM participants spent their youth traveling to Michigan with their families as migrant farmworkers in Michigan’s vast agricultural sector. This entailed traveling every year, spring through fall, between Texas and Michigan and sometimes to other locations.

I guess you know I was very mature at that time, but yeah, we would do a farm until September, sometimes October. We would pick cucumbers or cabbage, harvest the cabbage or cauliflower, and then that was it. That was the end of the season. Then we would

go to school and the following year the same thing (OHLM #008).

Families would return to their homes in Texas for winter with their small earnings and prepare for the next season. The same participant elaborated:

Then we would wait until the next spring to start all over again, so it was a routine. We would go back to school, and then the last two years, my junior year and senior, they started migrant school for the migrants during the summer in Sturgis [Michigan]. Since we spoke Spanish we were recruited to summer school, it was very interesting (OHLM #008).

The agricultural cycle became engrained in the lives of migrant farmworkers even though the lifestyle meant that the family would have to travel extensively. It also inevitably interrupted the education of farmworker children. Bringing comfort to these difficult times was the fact that regardless of where they were or how difficult the job was, the family remained together.

I remember California was one [of the work destinations] that we went to, but at that time I was not old enough to work. I think I was like maybe nine or ten years old or something like that, and I would stay with my siblings, with my sisters at home. I think it was a couple of years we went out there and back to Texas; and the following year we went to Bear Lake, Michigan and they picked strawberries and raspberries, then back to Texas (OHLM #008).

Another participant recalls their days as migrant farmworkers trying to make ends meet. “My dad used to work at a slaughterhouse, right there, in Weslaco, Texas. Me acuerdo, we would make barbacoa on Saturday nights. My dad would send us to las calles, gritando ‘barbacoa, 35 cents a pound,’ fijate, me and my sister!” (OHLM # 025). Whether it was in their community of origin or in their work destination, farmworker children worked to contribute to the family’s income.

Every late spring the journey to the Midwest would begin for many of these Tejanas/os from the Río Grande Valley. Out of necessity, they left behind their warm comfortable worlds in South Texas for a rigid and culturally colder Midwest where they often encountered racism and/or cultural resentment. “I remember vividly that we would stop at some of these restaurants, they wouldn’t let us in. They [Mexican American adults] had to order and receive food through the backdoor” (OHLM # 025). The sudden acts of racial discrimination made migrant farmworkers feel unwelcome, yet they had to endure the

treatment to economically sustain their families.

Racism existed in South Texas, but it was clear where Mexicans and Mexican Americans were not allowed. Especially in a town like Weslaco that remained segregated by the railroad well into the 1960s. In Weslaco, the railroad tracks ran (and continue to run) east and west dividing the town into north and south. South Weslaco, the Anglo part of town, had paved streets with English names and well-built homes. North Weslaco, El Pueblo Mexicano, was filled primarily with impoverished homes and unpaved streets. Supporting segregation in Weslaco was a despicable racist ideology —“The wind blows from the southeast in the Valley,” explained Juanita Elizondo Garza. “Anglos did not want Mexicans living in South Weslaco because they would have to smell them [they claimed] as the wind blew from the southeast into the north. My God, can you believe that?”³

Settling Out

To many Mexican American families, the decision to settle out of the migrant stream did not come easy. They lived between two worlds, each being as important as the other. The migrant world in Michigan, although only seasonal or temporary, allowed families to earn the necessary income to subsist back in their home communities in Texas. Many of these Tejanos left their hearts and dreams in Texas and eagerly waited to return to their home communities. However, economic opportunity triumphed and motivated many families to settle out of the migrant stream. At times the settling out process took several years as migrant farmworkers had to psychologically detach themselves from their communities of origin.

Family unity and wellbeing for Chicanas/os and Latinas/os remained critical and influenced many families to settle out of the migrant stream. Parents observed the struggles their students endured in transferring schools and missing instructional time. After a few years, families sought a less transient lifestyle and settled out of the migrant stream. “Back when I was ten years old, my parents used to go back and forth, they would travel up here for the summer to work in the fields, then go back to Texas,” recalled a sixty-year-old single female. “And I think it was 1965 that they settled in Stockbridge, Michigan, and we just stayed here. And that was it” (OHLM # 008). For this family the migrant stream ended, yet their lives as farmworkers continued.

Although Latinas/os looked for work in various industries, especially in the automotive plants, many remained working in agriculture. “When we went to Sturgis, Michigan is when they [parents] settled; [we] stayed in Sturgis,” commented a sixty-year-old female. She continued,

Then we were in that farm for about eight years,

we had the same farmer. We would transplant the cucumber plants, the pickle plants and then we would hoe them, harvest them, and then pick them. And then it was the cabbage and the cauliflower, and that was it, that was like the end of the season. Then we would go to school and the following year the same thing (OHLM #008).

Agriculture remained part of life for many Latina/o families who depended on crops to survive. Their knowledge of the industry is evident in the oral histories.

While it took some families decades to settle out of the migrant stream, it took others just a couple of years. This was true for one Saginaw family that envisioned more to life than traveling year after year as a migrant family. “We’d go to Ohio, we went to Minnesota, Wisconsin, Indiana picking tomatoes. Bueno, [picking] everything. We did that for two, three years, and then, finally, my dad settled out in Saginaw,” commented an eighty-year-old male who had returned to live in Texas (OHLM #025). An eighty-nine-year-old great-grandmother recalls her parent’s decision to settle out of the migrant stream and relocate to Freeland, “I don’t know how my folks decided that were going to sell our house [in Texas] because we were going back up to Michigan and we stayed there. That’s what we did. We’ve been up here since then. So, we sold the little house and we came up here” (OHLM #035). Although her memory of the exact details was fading, she was able to share important aspects of her life and community history.

For many of the interviewees settling out of the migrant stream, the decision was the best option for themselves and their families. “Well, you know, there were better wages over here. They made a better living and there were more opportunities over here. I know my stepfather wanted to go back to Texas, he always migrated back and forth,” commented an eighty-three-year-old male. He continued,

Anyway, my mom talked him into staying over here as there were more opportunities, especially for the



younger people. You could get educated, you could get a lot of more things over here. And there wasn’t that much racism over here. I mean, I don’t know I was four years old when I came over here. People tell me and I don’t remember anything about Texas, but that’s the way we ended up here... In 1938, we settled out here (OHLM #022).

Settling Down

Settling down in a new community became the next phase for Latina/o Michiganders, who faced the challenges of their new environment in the frigid Midwest. Adults found year-round work, a home, and enrolled their children in schools. Many were the first or one of the few Latina/o households in their communities. Attracting early Chicanas/os to Michigan was the sugar beet industry. Early arrivals in Lansing worked at the Michigan Sugar Plant, “There was a company on West Grand River, a sugar company,” recalled a ninety-two-year-old man whose family was one of the first Latina/o families in Lansing (OHLM #028). The plant recruited workers from Texas who transitioned into lifelong Michiganders.

In the post-World War II economic boom, Fisher Body Auto Plant (General Motors Division) also attracted Latinas/os to Lansing. An eighty-seven-year-old woman described her arrival in Lansing from Texas in 1946:

No había mucha gente [Mexicana], pero la familia Velásquez vivía aquí por la Case [Street]. El señor Randy tenía una hija y un hijo. Ellos nos rentaron a nosotros cuando llegamos. Pues no había muchas casas de renta. Especialmente no había gente Mexicana. Entonces ellos nos rentaron a nosotros un apartamento. Y, ahí vivimos como un año. Mi esposo agarró trabajo en el Fisher Body, right away, luego luego! Y le gustó y ahí se quedó. Y trabajó casi como treinta años en eso (OHLM #009).⁴

This woman’s husband was able to find work at the Fisher Body Plant, and the pair settled down in Lansing. Another participant spoke about being the only Latina/o family in her community:

We were the only ones [Mexicans], and we got along real well. I still have one of my friends that I went to school with; she lives in Arkansas. We still keep in touch. But, yeah, I went to school there. Then they [my parents] bought this property here, and then later on we got two acres, and then the other two acres with the house. Later on, my husband and I bought it (OHLM #035).

The attractive wages and benefits afforded by the automotive industry appealed to raza from Texas who grew tired of the limited opportunities in their home state and by agricultural work that was back-breaking and relatively inconsistent due to weather. “My uncles on my mother’s side all went to work for General Motors in Flint. So, it was maybe five of them,” remembers a seventy-year-old male from Clio. He provided details of how his family members settled down and obtained employment:

They worked agriculture and then applied for jobs in General Motors. For example, [they worked in] what they call the change of the equipment or the change of machinery, ‘change over.’ That’s what it was called at the factories when the models would change from one year to the next. Some of them were laid off so they would work in the crops, picking crops and so forth, around Genesee and Lapeer counties (OHLM #036).

Through a hard-work ethic and diligence, Chicanas/os persisted and demonstrated tough character as they took on different types of jobs in times of adversity.

While GM attracted many workers, agriculture, including the beet industry, paved the way for many Mexican Americans to settle down and transition to life-long Michiganders. The eighty-nine-year-old great-grandmother recalls settling down in Freeland in the 1930s,

And at that first house that we stayed there was a [beet] field right there so my dad would be out there because you’d have to thin them [the plants] because they’re so thick. So, he’d be out there and he’d take three or four rows. I’d go and take one row and [he would] make sure that I was doing it right. So, we picked them all up and took them to the house and then we’d have to wash them. And then she’d cook them and it was just like spinach (OHLM # 035).

Agriculture allowed any families the opportunity to settle down and get acclimated in Michigan, and from there many transitioned into other sectors of labor including the automotive sector.

Settling In

Once these early Latina/o pioneers settled down in Michigan, they settled into their respective communities and became involved in civic and social matters. Latinas/os are not just a labor force, they have a political and social consciousness, and they became active participants in society. Both, Latina/o youth and adults sought an education and upward mobility. They



became involved in labor unions, civic organizations, church congregations, and other community groups with the aspirations of creating a more inclusive society that would offer more opportunities to their children. Through their efforts in settling in, the forging of a Latina/o community is vivid in their memories as they began to take ownership of their neighborhoods and society.

While some Chicanas/os slowly settled in, others took a running start by connecting with socially active and prominent community leaders. “So, I was working at Fischer Body por la noche y luego durante el día iba a LCC [Lansing Community College]; in 1967 ya tenia credits porque a lot of the credits que traje didn’t transfer,” commented a seventy-five-year-old male who is now living in Texas. He added in his eloquent bilingual tone,

Y luego este Rubén Alfaro quería que trabajara en Fischer Body. Lunes y miércoles iba a la escuela, y martes y Saturdays I was a welder. Ayudaba a un señor que conocí que necesitaba ayuda, y me quede a few years. Y luego, creo que era en ‘68 o ‘69 que Ángel (José Ángel Gutiérrez) me hablo de que estaban haciendo un research study en el department de Labor con MSU⁵ (OHLM #033).

With connections to the right people, and arriving at an opportune time when the Chicano community found itself entangled in the midst of political and social upheaval, this autoworker-turned-community activist was not only able to settle into the community in Lansing, but he was “sent to the front-lines” in the battle for social equity in which Chicanas/os found themselves.

Integrating their children in school systems became a top priority for Chicanas/os despite the fact that they themselves had a limited formal education. “We arrived in Flint when I was probably about three or four and started public school in Flint and I needed a lot of help,” recalls a seventy-year-old male participant. He continued sharing about his educational

experiences, “In fact, a very nice lady, Ms. Johnson knew I needed extra help and she took the time to help me with reading, but you know it was always difficult for me in school” (OHLM #036). Notwithstanding the educational challenges he faced, the participant continued his education and went on to become a school teacher and served his community for over twenty years.

Latina/o baby boomers saw their parents’ generation demand a place in their communities by participating in civic organizations and becoming part of labor unions, actions that not only represented the settling-in process, but that were quintessential models of becoming part of their larger communities. A resident from the Flint area explained:

My father spoke English because he was in the War (World War II), and later he was a member of the GI Forum. So, I think it was his connections that got him through groups and the union. Everyone belonged to a union, you know, and that helped him with [his] English. My mother learned English as she grew older in Flint, but she prefers to speak Spanish. We spoke Spanish at home and English at school and then kind of mixed it up as we learned along (OHLM #036).

By interacting with American institutions and intertwining their own culture and language, Latinas/os in Michigan developed their own spaces in communities throughout Michigan.

By the mid 1960s, Latinas/os in Michigan were well tied to national Chicano efforts seeking equality. No other movement was more relevant to Latina/o Michiganders than the farmworker struggle led by César Chávez and the United Farm Workers Union. A now retired barber and community organizer shared his recollection of hosting Chávez and supporting the farmworker struggle for equality in Michigan:

The migrant thing is always close to me, and this was close to me in 1965 when César Chávez was starting his movement in Delano [California]. He went to Michigan, you know, and he had heard about me somehow or other because I had a barbershop almost right next to the State Capital. And, I would lobby with some of these legislators on migrant legislation that was coming up. César Chávez at that time would go around with the grape boycott and I met him, and he’d stay over in my house. He wanted me to leave Michigan and go to Delano with him, and I said: ‘Well, hell, I got four kids,’ and they were all in school, and I said: ‘I’ll help you as much as I can.’ I was very involved with the Movement. That inspired me to do more for the Hispanic community. So, back in 1968,

there was a migrant march from Saginaw to Lansing. I was involved with it because it was [for] legislation to cover the farmworkers with workman’s compensation. If they were to get hurt on the job, somebody had to be responsible. We wanted them [legislators] to include them [farmworkers] in the Workman’s Compensation Bill back in 1965 (OHLM #025).

In the settling-in process Latinas/os of this generation strived for social and political inclusion by attempting to cement ties with national leaders such as César Chávez and Robert Kennedy.

The movement for social change was fueled by college students at Michigan State University who actively sought inclusion from within the system in the late 1960s and early 1970s. By the late 1960s, Chicanas/os began to see the dwindling number of migrant farmworkers being employed in the state. Due to the decline of the sugar beet industry and the mechanization of agricultural work, there was less demand for farmworkers. A group of Chicanas/os saw an opportune time to demand change and fulfillment of the promises of the Morrill Act, which established land-grant institutions, and MSU served as its model. They called for retraining the Latina/o workforce that found itself unemployed due to the mechanization of the agricultural industry.

One student used the Morrill Act to argue that it was the responsibility of the land-grant institution to re-train farmworkers:

I got to reading in the library. Somebody had been looking at the Morrill Act and left the page open. The Morrill Act says that universities like Michigan State were created in the United States to help those who worked the land. So, migrant workers, right? They meant the farmer o el dueño pero no dice farmer, dice ‘those who worked the land’.

He closed his argument by highlighting that:

Michigan State... fue uno de los pioneros in the mechanization of agriculture. That displaced a lot of migrant workers. So, what we started saying was that MSU and other colleges in the nation have the responsibility to re-train and resettle their migrant workers because it’s in the Morrill Act (OHLM #033).

According to this participant, through these efforts MSU became more accessible to Latinas/os who aspired for a life beyond the beet, cherry, and apple fields. Through an agreement reached with the administration, scholarships began to trickle down to Latinas/os tying them to an institution that had been limited to women and people of color.

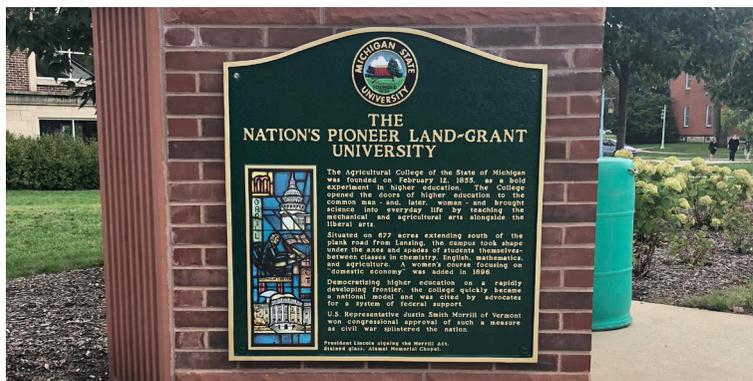
In the settling-in process, Latinas/os began to incorporate

themselves into their larger communities. Chicanas/os took a more active role in demanding equal opportunities for success in their communities, in labor, and in the education systems as they dreamed beyond the agricultural and automotive world and sought a better place in society for their families and community. Today, vibrant pockets of Latina/o culture are evident throughout the state.

Spinoff Projects and Continuous Research

The OHLM Project has led to other specialized oral history projects that have resulted in publications and exhibits. An early spinoff project focused on the contributions of Latinas/os in the formation of Cristo Rey Church in Lansing and culminated with a book celebrating its 50th anniversary.⁶ Interacting with church and community members, JSRI Director Rubén Martínez and colleagues wrote about the struggles by the Latina/o community. He and a colleague, Pilar Horner, published, “Hay que Sufrir: The meaning of suffering among Former Mexican American Migrant Farmworkers,” which shed light on the way former farmworkers interpret their hardships and social suffering.⁷

As the OHLM project grew, Martínez and researchers at JSRI, became increasingly interested in the lives of Latina/o autoworkers and launched the Latina/o Autoworkers project with colleague, Daniel Velez Ortiz. Oral history interviews were conducted with former and current autoworkers, and their contributions led to an exhibit at the Michigan State University Museum in 2015 that was funded by Motor Cities National Heritage Area. While these oral histories were being collected, JSRI researchers encountered former autoworkers who transitioned into business owners in the auto supply chain. The interest blossomed into “Hicimos el Camino en Michigan: Latino Business Pioneers,” an article based on thirty-three oral history interviews conducted with Latina/o business owners in the state.⁸ Oral history interviews with Latina/o auto supply-chain business owners were included in this study as were restaurant, store, athletic shop, and cleaning company owners, among others who pursued their own businesses in Michigan’s economy.



The OHLM project continues as JSRI researchers and students work to collect and transcribe oral histories. The latest projects to incorporate oral histories with Latina/o Michiganders include Richard Cruz Davila’s “MI Música: An Introduction to *Música Tejana* in Michigan” and other projects that help fill a void that exists in the literature on the Latina/o experience in Michigan. Director Rubén Martínez has conducted focus groups with Latina/o agricultural producers and with dairy workers. These projects explore the challenges Latinas/os continue to face in the agricultural industry.

Although today Latinas/os continue to be employed in the agricultural sector in Michigan, Latinas/os have grown beyond the traditional farmworker roles and hold important jobs in communities throughout “The Wolverine State.” Nevertheless, most people would not know this as, like other ethno-racial groups and women, Latinas/os have been excluded from written history by mainstream writers. Take Michigan history, for example. The history of Latinas/os is seldom considered, if ever mentioned, in books, discussions, and literature. The Julian Samora Research Institute will continue to expand the body of knowledge of Latina/o Michiganders. 

Endnotes

- ¹The term ethnic Mexican refers to all Mexicans regardless of nationality.
- ²Quotes have been edited minimally for readability.
- ³Juanita E. Garza, conversation with author, Weslaco, TX, December 4, 2010.
- ⁴There was not many Mexicans, only the Velásquez family that lived on Case [Street]. Mr. Randy had a daughter and a son. They rented a place to us when we first arrived. Well, there were not many homes for rent. Specifically, there was not any Mexicans. Then they rented us our first apartment. We lived there for about one year. My husband found work right away at Fisher Body. He liked it and he stayed working there. He worked there for about thirty years.
- ⁵Rubén Alfaro wanted me to work at Fisher Body. Mondays and Wednesdays I attended school, and Tuesdays and Saturdays I worked as a welder. I assisted a man who needed help and I stayed here a few years. Then in about '68 or '69, José Ángel Gutiérrez called me over a research study that was being conducted by the department of labor with MSU.
- ⁶Rubén O. Martínez, Evangelina Palma Ramítez, and Pilar Horner. *A Brief History of Cristo Rey Church*. Lansing, MI: Bradford Printing, 2011.
- ⁷Pilar Horner, and Rubén Martínez. “Hay que Sufrir: The meaning of suffering among Former Mexican American Migrant Farmworkers,” *Latino Studies* (2015).
- ⁸Juan D. Coronado and Rubén Martínez. “Hicimos el Camino en Michigan: Latino Business Pioneers,” *Dialogo* (2018).

MI Música

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and for his impact as a songwriter and recording artist. One of Aldaco's earliest songwriting efforts was a cumbia written around 1974 called "Maria Luisa," named after his wife, which he copyrighted by sending in a cassette recording and \$10 fee to the copyright office in Washington, D.C. The song was then recorded in a local studio and released on a 45 rpm record distributed by Freddie Records, a Corpus Christi, TX-based label, for which Aldaco received \$75. Aldaco says that he only received this money because he had copyrighted the song, and that he has never received the royalties to which he is entitled. Though Aldaco's comment that, "If you record with Freddie you don't get nothing [sic]," suggests frustration with the lack of compensation for the sale of his copyrighted works, he does see value in the exposure that comes along with writing and recording original compositions: "The more you record your own music, or music that [has] never been recorded before, the better you're off. Because then the other groups play your music. Like a lot of groups from here play our music." "Maria Luisa," for instance, was rerecorded by other artists such as Los Truenos de Texas, which released a version of *Linda Muñequita* on their album. In 1989, Carlos Miranda, a star of *la onda chicana* with whom Aldaco had formed a working relationship, planned to record two songs written by Aldaco, as well as two songs written by Aldaco's son Ernie. Having recorded numerous singles and albums, in 1990 Aldaco achieved national distribution when he was signed to CBS/Sony Records by producer Manny Guerra. This in turn led to a June 9th, 1991 appearance on *The Johnny Canales Show*, which showcased up-and-coming Tejano and *norteño* artists, a rare feat for a group based in Michigan.

Johnny Vasquez of Lansing's Tejano Sound Band also started playing *conjunto* music in the late 1950s, when he joined his first band at the age of eight. Vasquez, whose family had migrated from Texas to Michigan, formed his first band, Los Hermanos Vasquez, with his older brothers Richard, Fred, and Frank Jr., learning the songs of foundational *conjunto* artists such as Tony de la Rosa, Paulino Bernal, and Ruben Vela: "If I'd get paid for playing, I'd take all that money and go buy records. We'd take that song and learn it, sometimes add new music to it, sometimes take it just like it was." Vasquez initially started out as drummer but was drawn to the sound of the diatonic button accordion that defined *conjunto* music and eventually replaced Fred as accordionist. The group performed at dances and family gatherings, but were too young to perform in bars or clubs. In

the mid-1960s, the group dissolved when the eldest brothers took jobs working with their father at General Motors in Lansing. Vasquez stayed in *conjunto* music, playing accordion for a time with Juve Aldaco's band, as well as Los Capitolinos – of which the long-time radio announcer Chayo Cervantes was also a member – and Latin Sounds Orchestra.

In 1994, Johnny and Richard Vasquez reunited to form Tejano Sound Band, along with their brother-in-law Frank Medellin. The incorporation of "Tejano" into the group's name is telling, as this was the label given to newer Texas-Mexican groups in the late 1980s and 1990s with roots in the *conjunto* and *orquesta* traditions, but with repertoires that included Pan-Latin, pop, and country influences that gave them greater crossover appeal. While Tejano Sound Band retained the accordion and *bajo sexto* sounds that originally defined *conjunto* music, they also added keyboards, electric guitar, and sometimes saxophone, and they built a diverse repertoire that mixed traditional elements with jazz influences and included *cumbias*, *merengue*, country, and *norteño*, the Mexican-regional style that initially developed in tandem with the Texas-Mexican *conjunto* and had grown increasingly popular in Texas in the 1990s and onward. Tejano Sound Band has since released several albums and continues to perform regularly. They, too, have gained recognition in Texas. The band's latest release, "Cierra Los Ojos," charted in the top 10 on the Tejano Magazine Top 40 (a Texas-based online publication featuring Tejano and *conjunto* bands, artists, and subject matter). In 2013, the band won the Tejano Music Award for "Vocal Duo of The Year" for their collaboration with Tejano star Ricky Valenz.

Raymond Bobby DeLeon, founder of Saginaw's Mas Caliente band, was born in San Marcos, TX into a family that had been migrating to the fields of Michigan. In 1963, the family permanently moved from Lubbock to Saginaw, MI where young Bobby found a very different musical culture than the one he left behind in Texas. While his family, one of the largest Mexican families in Saginaw, continued weekend family parties where his uncle often invited musicians from Texas, the Mexican American teenagers were dancing more to English-language rock. In Saginaw, DeLeon recalled, the closest thing to "Spanish music" — as he termed it — were popular hits by Latino artists, such as "La Bamba" (Richie Valenz) and "Tequila" (Daniel Flores). The DeLeon family was familiar with Lubbock's vibrant *orquesta* scene, and Bobby's mother loaned her records to Saginaw DJs. His uncles Juan Rosas and Fred Teneyuque had a series of *orquestas* featuring the typical instrumentation of trumpet, sax, keyboard, drums, bass, and vocals. Bobby taught himself guitar and keyboard in hopes of playing with his uncles. Eventually,

as musical styles changed, Bobby switched to vocals. By the early 1970s, groups were becoming smaller, and combos with accordion increasingly replaced the *orquesta* sound. Bobby had been introduced to *conjunto* music by his friends Henry Hernandez and Joe Levarios, with whom he formed his first band in the early 1970s. Their five-piece ensemble followed the newer *onda chicana* style with keyboard and accordion instead of brass. By the late 1970s, *Mas Caliente* was a staple of the Saginaw and larger Michigan scene with “a fast *ranchera* beat that makes you *alegre*, that gives you energy.” DeLeon observed that, for his audiences, the class distinctions originally associated with the *conjunto* and *orquesta* styles were disappearing.

Los Bandits de Michigan exemplify the entrepreneurial spirit of *música michicana*, self-producing two original cassette recordings by the early 1990s (and three more by 2011). Founded in 1991 by former migrant workers René Meave and Guillermo Martinez, Los Bandits performed a distinctive blend of Texas-Mexican *conjunto* music shaped by influences from blues, zydeco, country rock, gospel, rock ‘n’ roll, and reggae, all set to original, often bilingual, lyrics. As Meave explained in Dhera Strauss’ 2006 documentary *Los Bandits: More Than a Tex-Mex Band*, “We were attempting to take the music we were familiar with, Tejano music, and incorporate it into the experiences we were having here.” The band most recently included Meave (guitar and vocals); Martinez (vocals, accordion, keyboard); Ernesto Ortiz (bass guitar and vocals); and Esteban Ortiz (drums and vocals).

Unlike other groups that seek to duplicate the classic and current hits of the Texas-Mexican border, Los Bandits consciously tried to create a sound that reflects the heritage of, as Martinez puts it, “a Mexican born in Texas and raised in Michigan.” Los Bandits also composed specifically for Midwest audiences, as opposed to those *música michicana* bands that may write songs but whose goal is to break into the Texas market. Although other musicians share their migrant farmworker roots, Meave and Martinez used their music to create a traveling program titled “Cultural Sensitivity through Humor and Music” that has been used by social service providers, clinicians, community centers and schools across the Midwest to awaken sensitivity to the migrant farmworker experience.

Guillermo Martinez was the youngest of 14 children and began migrating to Michigan with his family in the 1950s. His father dabbled with violin and harmonica, but it was really his mother who instilled his love of singing: “She would get me to sing when we were picking in the field.” By the early 1960s, his elder brothers Alejo on accordion and Lorenzo on *bajo sexto* had formed a little group called Conjunto Martinez that drew on

migrant workers and other musicians in the area around Hartford in southwest Michigan. Lorenzo had a radio program, paid for by soliciting ads from businesses that sold to farmworkers, and the young Guillermo rode with him to the migrant camps where they would play music with musicians who came up from Texas. A succession of southwest Michigan bands followed: Los Cinco Magnificos (the first Guillermo had on his own), Sam Garcia and the Outsiders, the Lowrider Band, and Karizma.

René Meave, a self-taught guitarist, also came from a musical family. The richly diverse musical culture of his native South Texas would shape his future as a musician; as Meave explained, “In Texas you have to learn everything: blues, mariachi, country, Cajun, zydeco.” Early on, he recognized the similarities between *conjunto* and the accordion-based genres of Cajun and zydeco music. He also “learned a lot about crossing over from Freddy Fender. He’d do any song in Spanish, cross back and forth.” In 1970, after coming to the Berrien Springs area to work strawberries, Meave decided to stay, lured by two of Michigan’s musical icons: Motown Records in Detroit and the Gibson guitar factory in Kalamazoo. His plan was to get a job at Gibson, work on songwriting, and move on to Motown. Meave had started writing songs at age 13, creating lyrics and melodies in his head while working in the fields. Although he never made it to Motown, his life would include plenty of music and composing.

Until meeting and playing with Martinez, Meave had done little with the *música tejana* he heard as a boy. They named their band Los Bandits as a deliberate play on stereotypes. Meave by this time was an established songwriter and in 1982 had recorded his own solo album, *A Man in Love*. Martinez was the consummate entertainer, singing and playing with great passion and engaging audiences with his banter. They wrote bilingual songs (an example of Peña’s “compound bimusicality”) and, at times, deliberately political. Their social consciousness grew out of the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Martinez’ topical “Brown-Eyed Children of the Sun” – a riff on Daniel



Guillermo Martinez and Rene Meave perform after receiving a 2011 Michigan Heritage Award from the Michigan Traditional Arts Program. Photo by Laurie Kay Sommers, courtesy of Michigan State University Museum.

Valdez's classic protest song transferred to Michigan's fruit belt – and the song-poem “*En Michigan*,” illustrate Los Bandits' musical commitment to migrant farmworker issues. One verse of “*En Michigan*” reads: “Took a shower in the field one day, filled my body and my head with spray; kept on snapping all them spears [asparagus], and I, fighting back the tears, *en Michigan*.”

Los Bandits were unusual among *michicana* bands in their ability to play for diverse audiences in varied settings: from in-group community gatherings and dances to public ethnic festivals; from large multi-genre popular music events such as Lansing's Common Ground and Meijer Gardens in Grand Rapids to intimate family celebrations; and from college campuses to programs dealing with farmworker issues. Their stylistic flexibility facilitated sharing the stage with an eclectic mix of performers, among them Buckwheat Zydeco, Terry Clark, Little Joe y La Familia, Los Lobos, Patty Loveless, the Texas Tornados, Junior Brown, and Kenny Wayne Shepherd. Although they have received several awards both for their musical contributions and their role in public education about migrant farmworkers, perhaps most significant is their impact on *michicana* audiences. As one woman told the makers of the 2006 documentary, *Los Bandits; More Than a Tex-Mex Band*, “They express how we really feel. They sing from the heart.” These sentiments attest to the power of *música tejana* for Michigan's Tejana/o diaspora.

Conclusion

As is made clear above, what started as a small number of Tejana/o migrants operating short-lived radio programs or performing music in the fields and in migrant camps eventually flourished into an entire industry of radio programs, dance halls, record stores, and local musicians catering to the tastes of Michigan's Tejana/o communities. As Julio Guerrero states,

That was pretty much the way the culture... was carried from *Tejas* to the Midwest. This happened in rural areas of Wisconsin, and Iowa, and Illinois, and Minnesota, because I lived in most of those states as an organizer, and in every state they had the same thing: somebody had the dance hall, somebody had the record shop, and somebody had a radio program... So the whole music industry proliferated from something the migrant workers initiated.

Though a small local music industry emerged, *música michicana* remained closely tied to the music industry in Texas. Indeed, many of the musicians discussed in this article built their repertoires on songs that were popular in Texas at the time. They might have learned these songs by hearing them on jukeboxes at local bars, listening to records they bought

in local record stores, or having friends and family in Texas mail them copies of the most recent hits. Further, musicians in Michigan often released their music through Texas-based labels, sometimes even paying the labels to distribute their music, hoping to have hit songs in Texas. Musicians traveling from Texas to Michigan and the Midwest also brought with them the latest trends and stylistic shifts in *música tejana* that influenced stylistic developments in Michigan. *Música michicana* was thus continually renewed through the movement of people and goods between Texas and Michigan, which helped maintain strong cultural ties to Texas among Tejana/o migrants who had settled out in Michigan, as well as their descendants.

As Guerrero suggests, similar developments of local music industries were likely happening in other Midwestern states where Tejana/os migrated to work the fields and where some eventually settled out. Michigan-based musicians regularly traveled elsewhere in the Midwest to perform. Broadening the scope of the study to include the dispersion of *música tejana* throughout the Midwest is one area for future research. Recent trends in *música michicana* also merit further study. While the research presented here focuses on developments through the early 1990s, for a large portion of Michigan's Mexican American population, the rich legacy of *música tejana* remains an integral part of their cultural identity. 

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Endnotes

¹ Sommers' fieldwork files are housed in the museum's Folklife and Cultural Heritage Collections. Their research includes fieldwork on Mexican American Music (1988, 1989); Latino Radio and Latino Music (1992); research for the Michigan Heritage Award nomination of Guillermo Martinez and René Meave, founders of Los Bandits de Michigan (2011); fieldwork on Tejano Sound Band (2014); and oral interviews with Bobby DeLeon (1988), Hilario Perez (1988 for a Michigan Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program site visit), Juve Aldaco (1989), José Burciaga (1989), Augustine Burciaga (1989), Tony “El Chayo” Cervantes (1992), Guillermo Martinez and René Meave (2011 as part of Michigan Heritage Award nomination), and Johnny Vasquez (2014).

² Davila's interviewees include Martin Solis (2018), Julio Guerrero (2018), Juan Beltran (2018), and Tony “El Chayo” Cervantes (2018). Interview transcripts are held by JSRI.

Latino-Owned Businesses in the United States

The number of Latino-owned businesses (LOBs) has been increasing over the last 20 years. The vast majority of these businesses are small, unipersonal, or family-owned. The number of LOBs has been doubling every 10 years. They increased by 46.2 percent from 2007 to 2012, while the number of non-Latino businesses declined by 2.1 percent during the same period. A publication from Geoscape states; “This means their hard work will continue to accrue to the benefit of small and large business for many decades to come.”¹

Following the 2007 to 2012 period, LOBs have grown 31.6 percent since 2012, more than double the growth rate of all businesses in the U.S. (13.8 percent). In the last 5 years, LOBs in the South Atlantic Region grew by 42.8 percent, surpassing those in the Pacific Region, which grew at 27.3 percent. The Latino share of new entrepreneurs represented 24 percent of all firms, compared to 10 percent a decade ago – reflecting a 140 percent increase. Latinos are 1.5 times more likely than the general population to start a business, according to the Kauffman Index of Entrepreneurial Activity. Sales from LOBs experienced an increase of 32 percent since 2012. Between 2012 and 2017, 27.4 percent of the growth in all businesses in the U.S. can be attributed to Latino-owned businesses.² According to Geoscape, there were 4.37 million Latino-owned businesses at the end of 2017 that contributed \$709 billion to the U.S. economy.

There are many factors that influence the number of LOBs: 1) the growth of the Latino population; 2) a new wave of Latino immigrants; 3) discrimination in labor markets; 4) lack of access to formal credit markets; 5) increases in Latina-owned businesses; and 6) low educational attainment of business owners.

Growth of the Latino Population

The Latino population in the U.S. has been steadily increasing in the last decades. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the Latino population reached just over 57.5 million in 2017, representing 17.8 percent of the U.S. population. It is projected that the rapid increase of the Latino population will reach over 28 percent by 2060, fueled by native-born Latinos, a younger population with a median age of 27 years, and their high fertility rates.

A New Wave of Latino Immigrants

Large numbers of Latino immigrants with high educational levels, vast business experience, and large social and business networks have been immigrating to the U.S. Fleeing political and economic crises in their native countries, these immigrants are from Latin American countries such as Cuba, Venezuela, Colom-

bia, Argentina, and Brazil. Most of them have settled in the Miami area, which explains the rapid growth in the number of Latino businesses in the South Atlantic region. These immigrants came to the country searching for business opportunities. Due to their business experience, access to financial capital, and the extent of their social and business networks, many of them tend to start up and develop medium and large-scale businesses.

Discrimination in Labor Markets

A large percentage of native-born Latinos and immigrants who came to the U.S. in search of better economic opportunities for their families continue to face discrimination in the nation’s labor markets. Discrimination is often due to bias against them, their immigration status, and language accents. This exclusion pushes some of them to start up small businesses.

Lack of Access to Formal Credit Markets

Most LOBs do not have access to formal credit markets at the time of start up, so they rely on family savings, loans from extended family and friends, and recently they are using credit cards with high interest rates. The lack of or limited access to credit is a huge constraint for their business operations.

Increases in Latina-Owned Businesses

Between 2007 and 2012, the number of Latina-owned businesses grew by 87 percent, from 800,000 to 1.5 million. Usually, their businesses are very small, located in homes, and offer goods and services sought by ethnic peers. Like Latino-owned businesses in general, a large number of them face constraints both at their start-up and in the development stages.

Low Educational Attainment of Business Owners

Low educational levels place important constraints for business development because they limit business owners’ business knowledge, access to new opportunities, to market information, and new technologies.

In summary, LOBs have grown in numbers in the last few decades. They contribute to the U.S. economy through their sales levels and the number of jobs they create. LOBs in the U.S. come from diverse social, economic, and geographic backgrounds making them different depending on their heritage and national origin. Each of these groups have advantages and deal with constraints when doing business in today’s economy. 

Endnotes

¹ GEOSCAPE, 3-20-17.

² BusinessWire, 05/06/2018

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