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We Chicanos, Puertoriqueños, and other Latinos find it difficult to study our own history in Michigan, and in the Midwest generally, for several reasons. One is that with few exceptions, we have come to the region as a working people and have tended to keep our memories in our heads rather than to put them in writing. Another is that because we have been working people, government and academic investigators have been less interested in us than if we had been merchants or professionals with financial resources and potentially greater political clout. When we are the objects of study, the investigators more often are interested in our consumer habits or the problems we supposedly create, rather than our historical presence and the world we have created here.

The most important drawback to recovering our past is that we live in a country that suffers from a case of permanent historical amnesia. This is hard on us, and our parents and grandparents, because we were reared in a tradition of great respect for history--not only of the recent past, but also of our colonial history and our indigenous roots. As children, most of us learned something about Mexico's past, the Aztecs and the Maya, or the Taino. Many of us return to Latin America and find a universal interest in our ancestors, their past cultures, and their accomplishments. Even little kids in Mexico know something about the Aztecs, the Toltecs and the Maya, and their worlds of several centuries past. In the United States, the public schools typically hire

coaches to teach history, but their principal concern is winning sports contests, an attitude reinforced on radio and television programs, as well as most Hollywood films. If the nation and its educators are not interested in their own past, how can we expect them to be interested in ours?

Another part of the problem is that non-Latinos don't really want to find out any more than they already know, and with good reasons. The history of the two largest Latino groups in Michigan and the United States, Mexicans and Puerto Ricans, has been profoundly influenced by military conquest, occupation, and annexation. Among many other Spanish-speaking peoples, conquest and occupation also have loomed large. For example, during Jimmy Carter's Presidency, in the midst of the debate on whether to return the Canal Zone to Panama, Ronald Reagan was among those who led the opposition. At one time he argued, only half in jest, "We stole it fair and square, didn't we?" I ask Ronnie, who's we?

The Midwest has the appearance of being different than the Southwest or Puerto Rico, in that its Spanish-speaking inhabitants are mostly immigrants and migrants, or their children and grandchildren, whose history here is confined to the twentieth century. Indios y Españoles from Mexico came to the region long ago, but the record they left is imprecise. We do know from archaeologists that native peoples from Central Mexico traded with those from the Upper Peninsula from who they acquired copper. It is also apparent that they left more than bowls and jewelry. The word Michigan (pronounced Michican in Spanish, meaning land of great waters) has an uncanny similarity with Michoacán, referring to a place by the waters. We can speculate linguistically that the word Michican, en español, quiere decir, tierra del Michicano. En México, hay un dicho: somos todos Mexicanos. En Michican, hay otro dicho: aunque no todos, somos Michicanos.

We also know of the Spanish-Mexican presence in Southwestern Michigan during the 18th century. If Spain had not sold Louisiana to Napoleon in 1800, it is possible that we would still be part of Mexico. But that sale cut off Latino history in Michigan until the 20th century.

The twentieth century history of Latinos in Michigan has four generations. I will provide a brief sketch of each in the rest of this platica, examining both divergent and common features of those who migrated and settled in the state.

The First Generation

The first generation was comprised of Mexican immigrants, who came here directly or by way of Texas during the 1910s and 1920s. Almost all of them came as unskilled workers. They were recruited for the betabel by employers to fill job vacancies created by the economic boom of World War I and the 1920s. Southern and Eastern European immigrants had done this work earlier, but they "moved up" economically during these years of boom. The United States government and many of its WASPS felt some strong pangs of nativist fear against these immigrants and passed a series of laws in 1917, 1921 and 1924 to restrict further entry. U.S. policymakers permitted Mexicans because they anticipated that they would not stay permanently. The lawmakers were surprised when we did stay.

Mexicans worked both in agriculture and industry. Michigan Sugar, Columbia Sugar, Isabella Sugar and Continental Sugar Companies recruited a majority of them. Ford, Briggs, Saginaw Grey Iron and other foundries, and the Michigan Central and other railroads recruited smaller numbers.

At the end of the season, the betabeleros often decided to go to Saginaw, Detroit or Toledo for the winter rather than return to Texas and Mexico. A few of them stayed in towns like Winn, Oil City, and Shepherd or on

their fringes out in the country, forming little colonias with names like El Pozo, El Hoyo, and cuatro esquinas (Four corners).

The cities were the heart of the action, and most of it was in Detroit, whose barrio was located on the edge of downtown on the West Side, extending onto Bagley. Other small but visible communities appeared at this time in Dearborn and Saginaw. In these places Mexicans organized community activities through dozens of ethnic organizations. The Comite Patriotico Mexicano, supported by the Mexican Consulate, was an umbrella organization, but many Mexican societies, especially mutualistas (mutual aid societies) were also active, providing a social life and basic social services to their members and families.

This world of the recently-arrived Mexican immigrant faced a severe trauma in 1929 when the Great Depression hit. Mexicans were portrayed by many public officials and creators of public opinion as responsible for the Depression. They used arguments we still hear in 1992--that Mexicans are taking away jobs from citizens, or that Mexicans are a burden on the public relief mechanism and costing valuable tax dollars. An elaborate repatriation scheme to send them back to Mexico was concocted involving the Detroit Department of Public Welfare, city police and social workers, and the U.S. Department of Labor and Immigration officials. Similar efforts took place in Dearborn, Saginaw and other places where Mexicans were visible. Much of the repatriation effort involved the use of force and included "returning" children born in Michigan to Mexico, which they saw for the first time. It divided many families permanently.

A number of employers, including Ford himself, did not want to fire their Mexican workers, but most of them ultimately did. The scheme to remove Mexicans was largely thwarted, however, by many Mexican people who

resisted pressures to leave, and by farmers and beet companies who encouraged them to stay, as they promised work in the spring. In effect, the Depression and Repatriation sent Mexicanos in divergent paths, some returned to Mexico, others remained in Michigan. The local communities were badly weakened, but did not collapse. Those who remained formed the core of old timers among the Detroit and Michigan Mexican community.

The Second Generation

The second generation were in their majority either children of the earlier Mexican immigrants, or Mexican Americans who started coming here from Texas in the late 1930s. The Tejanos originally were recruited by the sugar beet companies as unknowing strike-breakers and union busters. Most were children of Mexican immigrants who had themselves come to the United States in the early years of the century. They were recruited to a vastly expanded agriculture and with the coming of the war, to a wider range of urban industries.

Agriculture expanded beyond sugar beets in East-Central and Southeastern Michigan to include many vegetable crops and fruits for fresh consumption and for canning. In addition to older areas, new production occurred in Southern Michigan along the Ohio and Indiana borders, and especially along the Lake Michigan coast, which became the fruit-growing center of the Midwest. All crops that used hand labor hired Mexicans, and increasingly Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants came to dominate agricultural labor. By the 1950s, Grand Traverse County had more migrant workers than any other county in the country, and Michigan employed more migrants than any state outside of Texas. Many of these workers soon left the fields for the booming cities of the state to work in its factories.

The Detroit barrio expanded rapidly, and its nucleus spilled over from Bagley to Clark. Employers hired second-generation Mexican Americans from

Michigan and Texas to work in auto plants such as Cadillac and Ford, steel factories and foundries such as Kasel Steel, and in many other industries. Ecorse, Wyandotte, Pontiac, Port Huron, Lansing, Adrian, Grand Rapids, Muskegon, Holland and Flint lured agricultural and industrial workers, where Mexicans formed visible and rapidly growing communities.

Another important phase of Latino life, reflecting increasingly divergent roots, also occurred during this generation--the formation of the Puerto Rican community. It began on a large scale in 1950, when more than 5000 campesinos were recruited from Puerto Rico by Michigan Sugar. They were treated terribly, perhaps even worse than the workers from Texas who the company was trying to replace. The company plan failed, however, as the men walked out of the fields, never to return. Hundreds of them literally walked from farms around Bay City, Saginaw, Pinconning, and Freeland to Detroit. They were directed to Most Holy Trinity parish, the heart of the Mexican barrio, where Monsignor Clement Kern was then in charge, assisted by Father Carlos Talavera. The priests set the men up with housing and jobs in many places, including Kasel Steel. They became the core of the new and rapidly growing Puerto Rican community in Detroit.

With the continued influx from Mexico, by the late 1950s, the Latino community was larger, had much more divergent roots, and could be found in a wider range of agricultural and industrial employment than a generation earlier. Yet it had in common an overwhelmingly working-class occupational profile.

The Third Generation. The "Movement" Generation

The features of work and recruitment changed only slightly during this period, although the Latino community continued to diversify, with a wider immigration directly from Mexico, Texas, Puerto Rico, the southwestern United States, and a very small number coming from elsewhere in the Caribbean, Central and South America.

The major source of population growth and the most striking feature was the increased size of the second and third generation population, often Michigan born. It was a consequence of parents being much in love. In comparison to earlier generations, the young people of this generation were nurtured as political activists en masse, at least briefly.

They were motivated in part by events in the Southwest and New York: The United Farmworkers, Reies Tijerina, Corky Gonzales, MEChA, La Raza Unida Party, and the Young Lords. They certainly were not discouraged by many of their parents when they took to the streets to protest neglect, mistreatment, and racism by the educational system, the public service network, and the police. Some of these activists worked through agencies, but they had the ultimate weapon of the streets. In combination, their efforts led to the formation of many important organizations--social, social service, and educational.

Some were rooted in the Southwest; others were creations of the federal government and its anti-poverty programs. Several of them were distinct. One of the more interesting was New Detroit, formed in the aftermath of the Detroit riots of 1967. New Detroit was created to address problems of relations between Euro-Americans and African Americans in the city, and to find solutions to many of the problems that created tension or simply were not being met for city residents, especially the poor, such as health, social services, and

education. When it was created, New Detroit was consciously a Black-white organization. But in keeping with the times, Latinos protested in the streets and elsewhere over the lack of a Latino presence in New Detroit. Their efforts resulted in the formation of the Latino Caucus. The Latino Caucus itself was responsible for the formation of many agencies and programs in the city geared specifically toward Latino needs, including Chicano-Boricua Studies at Wayne State. Chicano-Boricua Studies was the only Latino educational program in Michigan formed during this generation to focus on the central mission of the university--the education and training of students. It developed an academic program with Latino content--Chicano and Puerto Rican, intent on challenging the Euro-American ideological hegemony of the university.

At other universities in Michigan, including Michigan and Michigan State, student groups with names like MECha and Chispa formed. Their efforts led to the formation of support programs aimed at the recruitment and retention of Latino students and the hiring Latino staff. These universities were unwilling, however, to take the controversial step, to acknowledge the intellectual validity of Latinos as academics and Chicano and Latino Studies as academically worthwhile. Before students and their communities were sufficiently organized to maintain the pressure, the energy on the campuses had waned. This decline of activity by the middle and late 1970s signaled the beginning of the fourth generation.

The Fourth Generation

In the past decade Michigan's Latinos have become more varied in national background. The trend has been for increasing numbers of people coming into the state from Central and South American countries, adding to a greater divergence of national backgrounds. The new arrivals also tend to come from a greater variety of class positions. Although most are former

agricultural and urban workers, some have backgrounds as small shopkeepers and professionals. Among the youth of the fourth generation, we also see the results of schooling, leadership training programs, and simple demographics in the formation of a self-conscious Latino middle class, which did not exist a generation ago. Yet in comparison to national trends, migration to Michigan remains principally Mexican, and secondly Puerto Rican, and to be much more working class overall, than national trends. Despite frequent claims, the divergence of roots during this generation is less marked than in many other parts of the country, reflecting relatively comparative low levels of immigration, the result of a generation of nearly constant hard times in Michigan.

The presence of a middle class is made more visible by national political leadership, which has created the "Hispanic." These Hispanic "leaders," have been under a range of often profound pressures, especially since the accession of Ronald Reagan to the presidency. Reagan represents a most articulate version of what my colleague Guillermo Rojas refers to as "social amnesia." That is, an eagerness and pleasure in being ignorant, promoting ignorance, and encouraging others not to learn what is not part of the dominant way of looking at the past and present. It has also involved consciously avoiding the most profound feature of the past decade, namely that material conditions among the Latino population have declined sharply. The decline in overall conditions of Latinos can be measured both in relation to the Euro-American population and in absolute terms. Latinos overall are worse off than they were at the end of the 1970s. In effect, although a small Latino middle class has formed, the large class of people comprised of the poor, or nearly poor, has grown much more rapidly.

The effort to find "comfortable" Hispanic leaders who don't act like minorities, and offer them slots and programs that don't rock the boat, fits in

neatly with the ideological and material onslaught against Latinos, especially those who are poor. In effect, it has heightened the divergence or separation between the rising Hispanic middle class and the vast majority of working and occasionally unemployed Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and other Latinos, whose leaders have been subdued.

In recent years, the amnesia has reached a point at which even affirmative action in employment, university admissions and scholarship programs are under attack. We must not allow this amnesia to let us forget that without affirmative action, Dan Quayle never would have become vice-president. We must also remember that only three percent of scholarships to college are based on ethnicity and/or race, and they are the only ones under attack. This is a further demonstration that racism is on the increase, evident among politicians, in the newspapers, in our schools, on the streets, and at work.

The struggle on campuses in Michigan in the present generation reflects these general trends. In the case of Wayne State, Chicano-Boricua Studies' funding was slashed after 1980, and for many years it had no full-time instructors. Presently it has only one full-time faculty member, compared with three when Jimmy Carter was president. A Latino Studies Program at Michigan was created in 1984, but it has neither the autonomy to determine its own direction, nor the kind of leadership that will enable it to establish an independent voice on campus.

The unfolding of an academic program at Michigan State should be more advanced, based on its earlier history, because it has a much longer tradition of admitting Chicano and other Latino students, both undergraduate and graduate, than Michigan. Since the 1950s and 1960s, many MSU graduates have gone on to make a mark, including people like Richard Santos at the

University of New Mexico and Refugio Rochín at the University of California at Davis. Michigan State can also take pride and comfort in the Julian Samora Institute, but we must remember that it is largely self-supporting. It allows the university to develop a high profile and espouse a rhetorical interest in Michigan and Midwestern Latinos, but it doesn't affect the students of the University. The researchers are not hired to teach, or to assist students interested in engaging in Latino research. It does not offer any corrective to the rising political, social, and cultural amnesia of the present student generation. In fact, Michigan State is the worst of the major state universities, because it does not even have the semblance of a Chicano or Latino academic program to engage students.

Those of us who now are able to wear suits to work and perform research, even though it may focus on Latinos, must not fall victim to "social amnesia" or "historical amnesia." We must continue to recover our past, and to use its lessons. If we seek a common destiny, it is incumbent on us to forge it ourselves, both in the communities where we reside, and in our community at the University.

APPENDIX

THE CINCO DE MAYO AND MICHICANO HISTORY: A RECONQUISTA

On today, the 5 de Mayo, it is common in Mexican communities for a local viejo, often the resident historian, to talk about the 5 de Mayo, usually to instill either patriotism or education, which are often hard to tell apart. The story most often told is about the Battle of Puebla, 5 de Mayo, 1862, when Ignacio Zaragoza led Mexican troops in the defense of Puebla and maintained Mexican resistance to foreign intervention, contributing to the ultimate expulsion of the French from Mexican soil in 1867.

I want to talk about a 5 de Mayo much closer to home, namely 5 de Mayo of 1916. It is a story of the Mexican Revolution, and has a much better known hero, Pancho Villa.

After Victorian Huerta conspired with U.S. Ambassador Henry Lane Wilson to murder president Francisco Madero in 1913, Pancho Villa and Venustiano Carranza became the two main leaders of the struggle to oust Huerta. They succeeded by 1914, but then turned against each other.

Carranza, an upper class landowner, who always posed as an ardent nationalist, was pitted against Villa, who is usually portrayed as a humble, somewhat simple hero of the rural and urban working classes of the Mexican north.

Villa and Carranza fought each other through 1914 and 1915, each seeking the support of the United States. At the great and bloody battles of Celaya and Leon, Carranza's allies, led by Alvaro Obregon, defeated Villa soundly. The United States, which had been playing a waiting game, soon made peace with Carranza and quietly sought to help him defeat Villa. Villa retreated to the North, and in an important battle near the border at Agua Prieta,

United States support helped Carranza again defeat Villa. The border was important during the Revolution, in part because it supplied Villa and others with arms. The United States was selective about how many arms it sold and to whom. Since arms sales had long been a big business in this country, the United States did not completely cut off anybody, as that would have been against the free enterprise system. Villa continued to try to get arms, making deals and often paying for goods, although the dealers sometimes absconded with the money. The worst offender was Sam Rabel, one of the biggest arms dealers along the border, who lived in Columbus, New Mexico. Rabel in early 1916 made a big deal with Villa, took his money, then tipped off United States authorities, who prevented Villa's forces from getting arms. It meant that the dealer, Rabel, got a lot of money, but provided no goods, a lot like drug running of a later era. And like later eras, the buyer, namely Pancho Villa, was enraged. Thus he staged the famous Columbus raid of March 8-9, 1916.

The U.S. government, continuing to play favorites in its gun running activities, responded to the raid vigorously by sending Black Jack Pershing, soon-to-be hero of World War I, into Mexico on the so-called "Punitive Expedition" a week later. It wanted to eliminate Villa. Although Carranza was supposed to be a vigorous protector of Mexican sovereignty, he did not complain about the violation of Mexican territorial sovereignty, for he wanted nothing better than to eliminate Villa. In fact, Carranza silenced the Mexican press and the people of Mexico during March and April of 1916. In the United States, the land of inquisitive reporters, the free press maintained a very low profile and lack of curiosity. Few except those immediately affected knew of the presence of U.S. troops on Mexican soil.

But both the United States and Carranza quickly realized that "catching" Villa was going to be a lot harder than they expected, as he had widespread

support among rural and urban working-class residents of Chihuahua. They quietly arranged an agreement for U.S. troops to evacuate Mexico.

Villa did not allow them to get off the hook. He chose the 5 de Mayo, 1916, to invade Glen Springs, Texas, killing at least 10 people. The people of Mexico and the United States, who had not been told publicly about the three divisions of U.S. troops that had been in Mexico for almost two months, heard about Villa's 5 de Mayo raid immediately. U.S. public opinion was upset about Villa's so-called atrocities, and Mexican public opinion was enraged about Pershing's invasion and indiscriminate killing of hundreds of Mexicanos. On the basis of his strategically-chosen 5 de Mayo invasion, Villa was able to gain attention and to arouse the Mexican people to defend themselves against the foreign invaders.

The United States was compelled to send in more troops, and to chase Villa deeper into Mexico. It is notable that among these troops were hundreds of volunteers from the state of Michigan. I know a Euro-American woman from Flint whose late father was among those troops who invaded Mexico with Pershing. They stayed more than a year, but failed to catch Villa, and were harassed constantly by campesinos and workers.

Almost immediately after Pershing's warriors returned to their homeland, they were followed by thousands of Mexicans, many of whom came to Michigan as the first major wave of Mexicanos to enter the State in the 20th century. Some of the popular press portrayed them as workers, others identified them as dangerous invaders and revolutionaries. From a historical perspective, they were simply reoccupying Mexico's far northern frontier, following the patterns of earlier generations in ancient times, and Spanish-Mexican soldiers and campesinos in the eighteenth century. Villa's 5 de Mayo raid symbolically

marks the beginning of the Mexican reoccupation of Michigan in the 20th century.

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