

Introduction: A Historical and Regional Overview of Latinas in the United States



LATINAS IN THE SOUTHWEST

Since 1540 with the arrival of the Coronado expedition, Spanish-speaking women have migrated north decades, even centuries, before their Euro-American counterparts ventured west. They participated in the founding of Santa Fe in 1610, San Antonio in 1718, and Los Angeles in 1781, all part of the Spanish borderlands. The Spanish colonial government, in its efforts to secure its territorial claims, offered a number of inducements to those willing to undertake such an arduous and frequently perilous journey. Subsidies given to a band of settlers headed for Texas included not only food and livestock but also petticoats and silk stockings. Few women ventured to Mexico's far northern frontier alone as widows or orphans; most arrived as the wives or daughters of soldiers, farmers, and artisans.

The colonists themselves were typically mestizos (Spanish/Indian) or *mulattoes* (Spanish/African). Indeed, more than half of the founding families of Los Angeles were of African descent. For those settlers who garnered economic and social power, they and their children, would often position themselves as "Spanish," putting into practice the truism "money buys color" common throughout colonial Latin America. These successful individuals not only found economic opportunity on the frontier but also reimagined their racial identities. Women such as María Feliciano Arballo and Victoria Reid illuminate this privileging of a fictive Spanish past.

In the early years the concern was less on status than on survival as settlements, especially in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona, teetered on the brink of extinction through starvation or combative relationships with native peoples. However, the missions, pueblos (towns), and presidios (forts) took hold, and over the course of three centuries, Spanish/Mexican women raised families on the frontier and worked alongside their fathers and husbands herding cattle and tending crops.

Women also participated in the day-to-day operation of area missions. Whether heralded as centers of

godliness and civilization or condemned as concentration camps, the missions, particularly in California, played instrumental roles in the economic development of an area and in the acculturation and decimation of indigenous peoples. In an environment of social indoctrination, acculturation, and servitude, missions relied on Indian labor to feed the growing colony and produce essential goods for trade. While the Francis-



"Comadres" Teresa Grijalva de Orozco and Francisca Ocampo Quesada, 1912. Courtesy of the Ocampo Family Collection, Chicano Research Collection, Department of Archives and Manuscripts Arizona State University Tempe.



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cans were certainly zealous and energetic, they did not act alone. To support their endeavors, mission friars recruited women such as Apolinaria Lorenzana and Eulalia Pérez into their service as housekeepers, midwives, cooks, healers, teachers, seamstresses, and business managers.

The close proximity between Indian and Spanish/Mexican engendered little pretense of a shared sisterhood. Indentured servitude was prevalent on the colonial frontier and persisted well into the nineteenth century. Indians and, to a lesser extent, people of African heritage were pressed into bondage. For instance, in 1735 Antonía Lusgardia Ernandes, a *mulatta*, sued her former master for custody of their son. The man admitted paternity, but claimed that his former servant had relinquished the child to his wife since his wife had christened the child. The court, however, granted Ernandes custody. In other cases this pattern continued with tragic results. As noted by historian Miroslava Chávez-García, the murder of the Indian servant known only as Ysabel at the hands of her mistress Guadalupe Trujillo in 1843 offers but one example of the violence inflicted by one group of women on another. Race and class hierarchies significantly shaped everyday life on Mexico's far northern frontier.

Spanish/Mexican settlement has been shrouded by myth. Walt Disney's *Zorro*, for example, epitomized the

notion of romantic California controlled by fun-loving, swashbuckling rancheros. Because only 3 percent of California's Spanish/Mexican population could be considered rancheros in 1850, most women did not preside over large estates, but helped manage small family farms. In addition to traditional female tasks, Mexican women were accomplished *vaqueros* or cowgirls. Spanish-speaking women, like their Euro-American counterparts, encountered a duality in frontier expectations. While they were placed on a pedestal as delicate ladies, women were responsible for an array of strenuous chores. One can imagine a young woman being serenaded in the evening and then awaking at dawn to slop the hogs.

Married women on the Spanish borderlands had certain legal advantages not afforded their Euro-American peers. Under English common law, women, when they married, became *feme covert* (or dead in the eyes of the legal system) and thus could not own property separate from their husbands. Conversely, Spanish/Mexican women retained control of their land after marriage and held one-half interest in the community property they shared with their spouses. Rancho Rodeo de las Aguas, which María Rita Valdez operated well into the 1880s, is now better known as Beverly Hills. Rodeo Drive takes its name from Rancho Rodeo. Other women, such as Juana Briones, Victoria



"Cowgirls/vaqueras," circa early 1900s. Courtesy of Ocampo Family Collection, Chicano Research Collection Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Arizona State University Tempe.



Reid, Gretrudis Barceló, and María Calvillo, proved successful entrepreneurs and property holders, even defending their interests in court when necessary.

Life for Mexican settlers changed dramatically in 1848 (1836 for Tejanos given the Alamo and the Texas revolt) with the conclusion of U.S.–Mexican War, the discovery of gold in California, and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Mexicans on the U.S. side of the border became second-class citizens, divested of their property, political power, and cultural entitlements. Their world turned upside down. This period of conquest and migration was marked by pejorative stereotypes and widespread violence. In Euro-American journals, novels, and travelogues Spanish-speaking women were frequently portrayed as flashy, morally loose vixens.

At times these images had dire results. On July 5, 1851, a Mexican woman swung from the gallows, the only woman lynched during the California gold rush. Josefa Loraiza (also known as Juanita of Downieville) was tried, convicted, and hung the same day she had killed a popular Euro-American miner and prizefighter, a man who the day before had assaulted her. Nine days later a San Francisco newspaper editorialized, “Now we venture to say that had this woman been an American instead of a Mexican . . . had she been of the Anglo-Saxon race, instead of being hung for the deed, she would have been lauded for it.”

For elite families, holding on to their ranchos assumed primary importance, and according to some historians, they believed they had a greater chance of retaining their land if they acquired a Euro-American son-in-law. Intermarriage, however, was no insurance policy. In 1849 María Amparo Ruiz married Captain Henry S. Burton, and five years later the couple purchased Rancho Jamul, a sprawling property that covered much of present-day San Diego. When Henry Burton died in 1869, the ownership of the ranch came into question. After several years of litigation, the court awarded his widow only 8,925 acres. Squatters challenged even this amount, and she continued to lose acreage in the years ahead. Chronicling her experiences, Ruiz de Burton, considered the first Mexican American novelist, penned *The Squatter and the Don* (1885), a fictionalized account of the decline of the Californio ranching class.

Segregated from the Euro-American population, Mexican Americans in the barrios of the Southwest were relegated to lower-tier jobs, such as farm labor, domestic work, and food processing. Nineteenth-century Spanish-language newspapers reveal ample information on the social mores and expectations within these tightly knit communities. Newspaper editors upheld the double standard, and at times women

wrote letters to protest. When one Tucson editor used biblical authority to bolster traditional views, one woman wrote that given that “the Bible itself was written by men and since ‘all men were liars,’ it could not be trusted.” The Catholic Church couched its opposition to public schools in New Mexico and Arizona solely on moral terms, and one New Mexico priest in 1877 argued that women’s suffrage imperiled both the family and the future of humanity.

Some women did transgress the bounds of convention. Gertrudis Barceló ran a successful gambling hall and saloon in Santa Fe, a business that became a popular landmark in Santa Fe. Loreta Janeta Velázquez, an elite woman from Cuba, fought for the Confederacy disguised as a man, Lt. Harry Buford. Perceived as a heretic by the Catholic Church but as a saint by her followers, Teresa Urrea was a powerful *curandera* who for a time conducted public faith healings.

Despite conventions that relegated women to hearth and home, women worked for wages, most commonly out of economic necessity. Whether in cities or on farms, family members pooled their earnings to put food on the table. Some women worked at home taking in laundry, boarders, and sewing. Others worked in agricultural fields, in restaurants and hotels, and in canneries and laundries. Some sold food on the streets, while others operated small cafés or served their neighbors as *curanderas* and midwives.

In 1900 more than 100,000 people of Mexican birth or heritage lived in the Southwest, but by 1930 this figure increased tenfold as more than million Mexicanos, pushed out by revolution and lured by prospective jobs, came to the United States. They settled into existing barrios and forged new communities in the Southwest and the Midwest. Like their foremothers, women usually journeyed north as wives and daughters. Many, however, crossed the border alone or as single mothers. As in the past, women’s wage earning proved essential to family survival. Urban daughters (less frequently mothers) worked in canneries and garment plants, as well as in the service industry. Entire families labored in the fields and received their wages in a single check made out to the head of the household. Peeling chiles by hand all day long at a cannery or picking berries for a penny per basket did not make for warm memories. Supporting her family at thirteen, Erminia Ruiz remembered the long hours at the doughnut shop and being hidden in the flour bins because of her age when health inspectors arrived.

Exploitation in pay and in working conditions prompted attempts at unionization. Through mutual-aid societies and progressive trade unions, Mexican women proved tenacious activists. In 1933 alone thirty-seven major agricultural strikes occurred in Cali-



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Mother and infant, 1949. Courtesy of Lee (Russell) Photograph Collection, The Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, Neg. no. 13918-EF12.

ifornia, twenty-four led by the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union. The Los Angeles garment workers' strike (1933), the San Antonio pecan shellers' strike (1938), and the California Sanitary Canning Company strike (1939) provide examples of urban activism in the Southwest. In southern California cannery activists such as Carmen Bernal Escobar negotiated significant wage increases and benefits as members of the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing, and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA/FTA).

Like the daughters of European immigrants, young Mexican women experienced the lure of U.S. popular culture. Considerable conflict emerged between daugh-

ters and parents because teenagers wanted to dress and perhaps behave like their Euro-American peers at work or like the heroines they encountered in movies and magazines. Evading traditional chaperonage became a major pastime for youth. Stories of ditching the *dueña* (chaperone) resonate in the memories of Latinas who came of age between the two world wars.

While youth experienced the lure of Hollywood, a considerable number faced the specter of deportation. From 1931 to 1934 more than one-third of the Mexican people in the United States (more than 500,000) were either deported (summarily taken off the streets and transported across the border) or repatriated (leaving on their own, frequently under the threat of deportation), even though most were native U.S. citizens. Discrimination and segregation in housing, employment, schools, and public recreation further served to remind youth of their second-tier citizenship. A resident of the San Joaquin Valley of California put it this way: "I remember . . . signs all over that read 'no Mexicans allowed.'"

Operating small neighborhood businesses, the Mexican American middle class at times made common cause with their working-class customers, but in other instances they desired social distance. Members of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) did both simultaneously. Envisioning themselves as patriotic "white" Americans pursuing their rights (the other white group), LULACers restricted membership to English-speaking U.S. citizens. Taking a page from the early NAACP, LULAC stressed the leadership of an "educated elite" who would lift their less fortunate neighbors by their bootstraps. From LULAC's inception women participated in numerous grassroots service projects and quickly assumed leadership positions in



An employee of La Malinche Tortilla Factory, Corpus Christi, Texas, 1949. Courtesy of Lee (Russell) Photograph Collection, The Center for American History, The University of Texas, Austin, Neg. no. II DF-6.



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and endorsed the rights of immigrants to live and work in the United States without fear of deportation. Although El Congreso was short lived, it demonstrated the potential for building regional and national coalitions.

After World War II Mexican women were involved in a gamut of political organizations, such as LULAC and the Community Service Organization (CSO). While militant labor unions faltered during the cold war era, the classic film *Salt of the Earth* recorded the real-life story of the Mexican mining families who staged a successful strike in New Mexico. With an emphasis on local issues and voter registration, CSO brought together two dynamic organizers who would change trade union history, César Chávez and Dolores Huerta, cofounders of the United Farm Workers (UFW) during the early 1960s. Huerta, the principal negotiator and lobbyist, relied on extended kin and women friends to care for her eleven children during her absences. The idea of a “union family” undergirded UFW organizing campaigns that significantly improved the living conditions and wages of migrant farmworkers.



An elegant flapper, Luisa Espinel, a popular entertainer and great-aunt of singer Linda Ronstadt. Courtesy of the Arizona Historical Society, Tucson.

both local chapters and national posts. LULAC stalwarts such as feminist Alicia Dickerson Montemayor and folklorist Jovita González engaged in voluntarist politics and educational reform that sought to meet community needs. An important civil rights organization, LULAC used the courts to protest discrimination and played a vital role in *Méndez v. Westminster*, a landmark school desegregation case.

Taking a more working-class community action approach, El Congreso de Pueblos de Habla Española (the Spanish-Speaking People’s Congress) represented the first national Latino civil rights assembly, held in 1939. Luisa Moreno, an immigrant from Guatemala, and Josefina Fierro, a native of Mexicali, were the driving forces behind El Congreso, Moreno in organizing the first conference and Fierro in terms of the day-to-day activities of the southern California chapters. Welcoming all Latinos regardless of cultural background or citizenship and drawing delegates mostly from labor unions, mutual-aid societies, and other grassroots groups, El Congreso called for an end to segregation in public facilities, housing, education, and employment



Symbolizing a bicultural heritage, María Soto Audelo at a Fourth of July celebration, 1917. Courtesy of the Arizona Historical Society, Tucson.



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As part of global student movements of the 1960s, Mexican American youth joined together to address continuing problems of discrimination, particularly in education and politics. Embracing the mantle of cultural nationalism, they transformed the pejorative term “Chicano” into a symbol of pride. “Chicano/a” represents a commitment to social justice and social change. A graduate student at UCLA, Magdalena Mora, not only wrote about trade union struggles, but participated in them as well. An activist since high school, she died of a brain tumor at the age of twenty-nine. The informal credo of the Chicano student movement was to return to one’s community after one’s college education. Mora never left.

Many Chicanas chafed at the sexism they experienced in the movement, but they avoided mainstream Euro-American feminist groups, which they perceived as condescending and indifferent. In forming their own agenda, Chicanas looked to the histories of their mothers and grandmothers and to role models of the past, such as Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Sara Estela Ramírez, Emma Tenayuca, and Luisa Moreno. Women, including Martha Cotera, Adelaida Del Castillo, and Ana Nieto Gómez, began to articulate a Chicana feminist vision that was predicated on the politics of the community, not the politics of the individual. No armchair activists, they provided leadership on a number of fronts, including welfare rights, immigrant services and advocacy, sterilization suits, community organizations, La Raza Unida Party, antiwar protests, and campus activism. Chicana lesbians, however, found themselves isolated in movement activities. As Cherríe Moraga revealed, “My lesbianism is the avenue through which I have learned the most about silence and oppression.” Surprisingly, it was not until 1992 that the lesbian caucus of the National Association of Chicano and Chicana Studies was established. In their published works and community activities, Latina lesbian writers like Gloria Anzaldía and Moraga have strived to build interracial, transnational networks among women of color.

In the Southwest, where the majority of Mexican Americans live, a layering of generations has taken place from seventh-generation New Mexicans to recent immigrants. This layering has provided a vibrant cultural dynamic represented by artists Amalia Mesa-Bains, Judith Baca, and Carmen Lomas Garza and poets Sandra Cisneros, Pat Mora, and Demetria Martínez (to name a few). Substantial numbers of Latinos who are not of Mexican ancestry or birth have contributed to a new layering of communities and cultural orientations.

Since the 1980s more than 500,000 Salvadorans have immigrated to the United States and represent more than 40 percent of Central American arrivals, fol-



Erminia Ruiz at age nineteen. Courtesy of Vicki L. Ruiz.

lowed by Guatemalans and Nicaraguans, with smaller numbers from Costa Rica, Honduras, Panama, and Belize. Approximately 50 percent of Central Americans settle in California. Food can serve as a cultural barometer. In Los Angeles, for example, *pupusas* can be found as readily as tacos and one of the premiere Cuban bakeries, Porto’s, can be found in the southern California community of Glendale. Indeed, more than 60,000 Cubans reside in the Golden State. While tensions certainly exist among working class immigrant Latinos, service workers have come together as union stalwarts, as exemplified by Local 11 of the Hotel and Restaurant Workers’ Union in Los Angeles, led by former Chicana student activist María Elena Durazo. Individuals have also made a difference, for example, Mirna Burciaga, a Costa Mesa mother and small-business owner who took on the local school district and won. Born in El Salvador, Burciaga noted how officials underestimated her intelligence and tenacity. “I may talk with an accent, but I don’t think with one.”

A number of Latinas have capitalized on educational and entrepreneurial opportunities. Linda Alvarado of Colorado not only owns a major construction company but also is part owner of a major-league baseball franchise, the Colorado Rockies. A former farmworker, Amelia Ceja is the first woman president



of a world-class winery, Ceja Vineyards in Napa, California. A rocket scientist once employed by NASA, France Córdova is the chancellor of the University of California, Riverside. As businesswomen, philanthropists, physicians, attorneys, and educators (to name a few), Latina professionals demonstrate the importance of education and educational access for individual dreams and community well-being. Indeed, the quest for educational equity has been an integral part of the history of civil rights among Latinos in the United States.

Latinos can be found throughout the Southwest. Five southwestern states have the largest proportion of people of Latin American birth and heritage relative to the overall population. New Mexico is first, with Latinos constituting 42 percent of the state's population, followed by California (32 percent), Texas (32 percent), Arizona (25 percent), and Nevada (20 percent). In 2000 Latinos could be found in every state of the union from Alabama to Wyoming. The Latino population has also become more diverse, with Dominicans in Dallas and Puerto Ricans in Phoenix. Latinas in the Southwest have a history rooted in a Mexican American past, but their future will reflect in some measure a political and cultural coalescence on *latinidad*.

SOURCES: Chávez-García, Miroslava. 2002. "Guadalupe Trujillo: Race, Culture, and Justice in Mexican Los Angeles." In *The Human Tradition in California*, eds. Clark Davis and David Iglar. Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources; "Latinos in the United States," Winter, 1996. *OAH Magazine of History*; Ruiz, Vicki L. 1998. *From out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America*. New York: Oxford University Press; and Virginia Sánchez-Korrol, eds. 2005. *Latina Legacies: Identity, Biography, and Community*. New York: Oxford University Press; Social Science Data Analysis Network. "Nativity and Citizenship, 1990–2000." www.censusscope.org (accessed May 23, 2005); U.S. Bureau of the Census, June 2003. *The Hispanic Population in the United States: March 2002*. Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office.

Vicki L. Ruiz

LATINAS IN THE NORTHEAST

In all probability the first families from the Hispanic Caribbean settled in New York, Boston, Hartford, and Philadelphia during the early nineteenth century. Records indicate that a small but energetic trade between the islands and key urban centers in the Northeast attracted merchant families involved in commerce. By the 1830s trade expanded sufficiently to warrant the establishment of a Cuban–Puerto Rican Benevolent Merchants' Association. In the federal census of 1845 some 508 individuals from Mexico and

South America were found in New York City. A sizable Cuban community, including members of the Quesada, Arango, and Mantilla families, lived on 110th Street facing Central Park. Among the handful of Puerto Rican families in Connecticut was that of merchant José de Rivera, a wealthy sugar and wine trader who lived in Bridgeport from 1844 to 1855. De Rivera and his wife, son, and three daughters occupied an elegant residence on Stratford Avenue.

From the mid- to the late nineteenth century, immigration from the Hispanic Caribbean, Mexico, and South America increased. Political exiles and those who left on their own to escape tyranny and exploitation in the countries of origin were among the first to sow the seeds of identifiable Spanish-speaking communities in the Northeast. Others who came were artisans, labor leaders, professionals, or working-class individuals who were disillusioned with homeland conditions and sought a better way of life. Trade increased bringing a steady stream of merchants and well-to-do visitors to the North. Women were particularly attracted to the freedom enjoyed in large cities like New York in comparison with stricter gender expectations back home. "What a pleasure it is to see women here driving their own carriages, often alone, sometimes with a girl friend or young daughter," exclaimed the Cuban Aurelia Castillo de González on one such trip.

Among the earliest immigrants were students like the three daughters of Dr. Juan Fermín Figueroa and Angela Socarrás Varona, who graduated from pharmacy school in New York and returned to Havana to open the city's first female-owned pharmacy. María Dolores de Figueroa became Cuba's first licensed woman pharmacist. Rita Danau lived and studied in New York for years before returning to Cuba to open a school for fencing, cycling, and riding. Julia Martínez studied at Notre Dame in Baltimore and earned a doctorate from the University of Havana. Pilar Barbosa de Rosario was the first woman to teach at the University of Puerto Rico after receiving a master's degree and a doctorate from Clark University. Her contemporary, Amelia Agostini de del Río, also earned academic credentials from U.S. institutions. By the early 1900s American schools organized special programs for Spanish-speaking teachers such as the New York State Normal School at New Paltz, which invited thirty Cuban teachers every year. Similarly, Harvard University hosted some 1,300 Cuban teachers for instruction in the summer of 1900. Finally, among the handful of Dominican intellectuals who studied in the United States during this early period was the notable Camila Henríquez Ureña. The youngest daughter of an illustrious intellectual family, Henríquez Ureña received a master's degree from the University of Minnesota in 1919.



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In concert with the rebellions for Antillean independence from 1868 to 1898, expatriate communities in the Northeast swelled with staunch supporters of liberation, political activists, skilled and unskilled workers, and professionals. The life of Puerto Rican patriot Lola Rodríguez de Tió offers a wonderful example of women's roles in these struggles, as does that of the Cuban Emilia Casanova de Villaverde. Noted for writing the Puerto Rican revolutionary anthem, Rodríguez de Tió lived much of her life in exile because of her political convictions. Her writings, poetry, readings, and fiery discourses on political reforms electrified audiences in New York at the height of the conflicts. Casanova de Villaverde wrote extensively in support of independence and sold her jewelry and home furnishings to finance the war efforts. Her guidance was instrumental in founding *Las Hijas de Cuba*, located on New York's Washington Square. Like Rodríguez de Tió and Casanova de Villaverde, numerous women in exile formed political clubs and organizations that raised funds, held bazaars, hosted dances and theatrical events, featured speakers and recitals, commemorated cultural and historical events, and proselytized about Antillean liberation.

Contingents of workers also made up early communities, many of whom were connected to either political or labor movements. Cigar workers were particularly identified with socialism and prioritized the plight of the working class. The practice of *la lectura*, reading aloud to cigar workers in Spanish owned factories, honed class consciousness, raised awareness about workers' struggles, and promoted solidarity. Luisa Capetillo was perhaps the only female ever to read in the New York cigar factories. Known for her feminist writings, Capetillo, who belonged to the leadership of the Puerto Rican union *Federación Libre de Trabajadores* (Free Federation of Labor), wholeheartedly supported women's equality, free love, and human emancipation. During her residence in New York Capetillo ran a vegetarian restaurant and a boardinghouse on Twenty-second Street and Eighth Avenue where she raged against tyranny and gender injustice and espoused strongly held views on revolution, classless societies, and anarchy. Indeed, boardinghouses, bodegas, dressmaking shops, and cigar factories were among the earliest entrepreneurial ventures in which Latinas were involved. One Cuban woman, Gertrudes Heredia de Serra, even ran the Midwife Clinic of Havana in New York City.

American citizenship, imposed on the people of Puerto Rico by an act of Congress in 1917, altered the migrant flow from the islands. Although Spaniards, Dominicans, and other Latin Americans continued to come to New York for study or business, Puerto Ricans, as citizens, came to predominate among the Spanish-

speaking population throughout the Northeast particularly because it was easier for citizens to enter the country than for noncitizens. The migrant flow followed two streams. Either they came voluntarily in search of better economic prospects not available to them in Puerto Rico, or they were actively recruited by American companies to work in the fields or factories. Whatever the reason, the dynamics of migration were intricately tied to the economic cycles of U.S. markets, ease of transportation, and job availability. In 1920 the 130 women recruited to work by the American Manufacturing Company joined dozens of Puerto Ricans already living in Brooklyn, site of the earliest enclave in the city. The company provided shelter and their basic needs, deducting a percentage of their salary for the initial steamship transportation and company-sponsored events.

By the early 1920s women immigrated to the United States for a myriad of reasons; they followed husbands or parents in the migration, or they came alone. Dominican writer Virginia de Peña de Bordas, came to live and study in the United States by herself. Antonia Denis, an activist and community organizer in Brooklyn, arrived in New York in 1919 on board the *Caracas*. By the 1920s she was deeply involved in borough politics, was active in the Betances Democratic Club, and was the founder of the *Hijas de Borinquen*. Denis was



Elisa Santiago Baeza, New York, circa 1927. Courtesy of Virginia Sánchez Korrol.



Butcher's shop at 111th Street and Park Avenue, New York. Courtesy of the Justo A. Martí Photograph Collection. Centro Archivos Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, CUNY.

known to provide room and board for needy compatriots in her Columbia Street house. In his memoir Joaquín Colón lauded Denis for accommodating close to forty migrants during a crisis in 1920. Victoria Hernández was an entrepreneur who ran a record store and gave piano lessons in the back of the store. The sister of noted composer Rafael Hernández, Victoria became one of the most prominent women in the Latin music business. Elisa Santiago Baeza explained her reasons for coming to New York in 1930. "We were eleven, six females and five males," remarked Santiago Baeza, who stayed for thirty years and raised a family. "We were poor and as the oldest female, I was like a second mother. The burden of caring for the younger children was always on me."

Women were homemakers and worked in restaurants, the garment industry, and factories [?? 59] or as domestics and housekeepers. They contributed to both the formal and informal economic sectors and altered their lifestyles and gender roles in the process. Women took in boarders, helped expand fledgling communities through ritual kinship, provided child care for working mothers, sold their home cooking, did piecework in the home, and tended to growing families. In times of need women organized rent parties, helped reestablish evicted families, shared apartments with other families, and opened their homes to newly arrived migrants. In this spirit women helped extend communal bonds at a point when nuclear families predominated over extended-family compositions, and they made lifelong friendships and support networks in an otherwise hostile environment. By the 1930s Latinas like the noted Guatemalan labor leader Luisa Moreno were vigorously engaged in union organizing, were active in

community groups and in the public schools that educated their children, and projected their views in a wide array of journalistic enterprises that flourished during the period. *Revista de Artes y Letras*, published in New York from 1933 until 1945, printed the work of major literary figures like Julia de Burgos and Gabriela Mistral. It published articles on family and child welfare, religion, society, the arts, and education. Founded and edited by Josefina Silva de Cintrón, this journal specifically targeted a sophisticated female readership but was not above confronting city officials on critical educational issues affecting the Puerto Rican community.

But for the most part, Latinas in the Northeast concentrated among the working class, and the 1930s and 1940s found them employed in factories, in garment-related occupations that relied heavily on the work of Puerto Rican women, as translators in civil service, as postal employees, in military service, and in other industries essential to the World War II war efforts. Nineteen-year-old Gloria Huertas, a native of Caguas, arrived in New Haven, Connecticut, with four children and no skills but soon found a job that allowed her to support her family. Community activist Antonia Pantoja arrived in New York in 1944 and worked in a series of factory jobs, all of which paid double what her salary had been as a rural teacher in Puerto Rico. Before she became the first woman mayor in the Western Hemisphere, (she served as mayor of San Juan, Puerto Rico, from 1946 to 1968), Felisa Rincón de Gautier worked in New York factories, as did the city's first bilingual teacher, Ana Peñaranda, recruited to teach English to the growing numbers of Spanish speaking children in the South Bronx's Public School 25. Most Latinas did



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Rally for community rights, Chelsea, Massachusetts.
Courtesy of Aura Sánchez Garfunkel.

not have the luxury to choose between working outside the home and being full-time homemakers. In the words of Connecticut community builder Genoveva Rodríguez, “What made me get up in the morning; it wasn’t because I wanted to. It was because I was poor. And I wanted a better life . . . for my kids. And they wouldn’t have a better life unless they went to school.”

After World War II Puerto Rican barrios multiplied throughout the Northeast, in great measure because of the industrialization policies of the government of Puerto Rico. Migrant populations increased dramatically, and during the 1950s and 1960s an additional 20,000 seasonal contract farm laborers added to the migrant numbers. Seasonal workers, recruited to plant and harvest agricultural production, often remained in the regions of their contractual obligations, sent for

their families, and gave rise to sizable communities in places like Dover, New Jersey, Hartford and Bridgeport, Connecticut, Lorain, Ohio, and Chicago, Illinois. (Until the 1970s, 80 percent of the migrant flow continued to come into New York City; 860,552 Puerto Ricans resided in New York, but 1.5 million appeared in the national census of that year, with sizable populations in Chicago, Philadelphia, Newark, Hartford, and Jersey City.) Moreover, the 1960s witnessed immigration legislation that eliminated preferences in the quota system based on national origins. Legal reforms encouraged Western Hemisphere emigration and family reunification and opened the door to an unprecedented immigration from the Caribbean, Mexico, and Central and South America. Economic uncertainty and political unrest were the most powerful factors in this immigration. The result was the emergence of a highly diverse, multilayered, ethnoracial Latino(a) community that combined recent arrivals with longtime residents, citizens with aliens, and Spanish speakers with second-, third-, or fourth-generation English-dominant hyphenated Americans.

For Puerto Rican, Dominican, Cuban, and other Latina women, community issues, such as bilingual education, access to higher education, health, environment, employment, and adequate living conditions, reigned supreme. Communities mobilized, formed organizations for advancement, created the conditions for an emergent leadership, and combated racism and discrimination. Organizations like ASPIRA, the Puerto Rican Family Institute, the Puerto Rican Association for Community Affairs (PRACA), and the Puerto Rican Forum in New York spawned counterparts throughout the Northeast with different names but the same intentions. Indeed, many of the groups that originated throughout the civil rights period had national and international connections and continue to the present.

Women were front and center in many of these ventures. In New York, Pantoja worked alongside a dedicated group of social workers and educators that included high-profile figures like Josephine Nieves, Alice

Participants in a social club organization, Hotel Granada, Brooklyn, 1962. Courtesy of the Justo A. Martí Photograph Collection. Centro Archives, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, CUNY.





Cubans in New York supporting the resistance against Batista's government, 1958, Courtesy of the Justo A. Martí Photograph Collection. Centro Archives, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, CUNY.

Cardona, Yolanda Sánchez, and María Canino to create ASPIRA, PRACA, and the Puerto Rican Forum. These organizations defined, structured, advocated, and provided for the urgent sociopolitical and economic survival of growing communities, often neglected by mainstream power brokers. Some belonged to the pioneer generation, like Patricia Rodríguez, a labor activist in Brooklyn, or Mamá Léo (Leoncia Rosado Rousseau), a Christian pastor who established a successful drug abuse program in the South Bronx, but others were more recent arrivals. In Hartford María Clemencia Sánchez laid the foundations for the first Puerto Rican Day Parade, a celebratory feat that reinforced cultural nationalism but was also steeped in local politics. Described as a “one-woman social-service operation,” Sánchez ran a candy store for a living where she held voter registration drives. She became the first Puerto Rican woman elected to the Hartford School Board in 1973 and the first Latina to serve in the state legislature. In Boston's South End Jovita Fontañez helped establish *Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción* (IBA), an organization that blocked the city from destroying a Puerto Rican community under urban renewal. Rallying to the cry “We shall not be moved from parcel 19,” IBA led the way in creating a model development project, *Villa Victoria*. In New Jersey María DeCastro Blake, a passionate and determined woman, fought to open the doors of Rutgers University to Latino(a) students.

In spite of continuous struggles to provide basic necessities, achieve, and hold on to gains against mainstream backlash, Latina activist efforts were intended to yield long-range benefits, not self-aggrandizement. Edna Negrón succeeded María Clemencia Sánchez as the state representative for her district following Sánchez's untimely death. Negrón, Connecticut direc-

tor of the Governor's Office of Puerto Rico, settled in Hartford in the 1960s and served as the city's coordinator for bilingual-bicultural education programs. Pantoja placed the directorship of ASPIRA, her most cherished organization, in the hands of Yolanda Sánchez and proceeded to blaze new trails in Puerto Rican and Latino community and educational advancement. María E. Sánchez, a leader in developing bilingual education in New York City, went on to direct the Department of Puerto Rican Studies at Brooklyn College, as did María Canino in the Department of Puerto Rican Studies at Livingston College of Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

Certainly women's political and union activism and intellectual and academic endeavors eroded the notion that Latinas were passive and uninterested in bettering their situations or in education. On the contrary, their contributions signaled another vibrant strand in the American mosaic. Claiming strong ties to cultural citizenship, Latina struggles in the Northeast ranged from securing bilingual education programs to admission into universities; from developing academic departments, programs, and research institutes on Puerto Rican, Latino, Dominican, or Hispanic American studies to incorporating Latino history and culture into the public school curriculum; and from marginalization on the job market to sitting at the negotiating table. By the 1980s and 1990s Latinas appeared to reap some of the fruits of this labor by assuming the reins of leadership in the public and private sectors.

Latina activists in bilingual education in the 1960s and 1970s like Carmen Pérez-Hogan, María Ramírez, and Hilda Hidalgo occupied decision-making positions at the state and national levels in the 1990s. Hidalgo served as assistant commissioner of education for the state of New Jersey, but before that she struggled with



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Latinos in New York asking for support of the Dominican Revolution against Trujillo's government. Courtesy of the Justo A. Martí Photograph Collection. Centro Archives, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, CUNY.



a cadre of committed individuals like Carmen Asencio in Trenton and Gloria del Toro in Newark to provide educational and social services for Puerto Ricans and Latinos. Bronx-bred Sonia Sotomayor, an assistant district attorney in New York, became U.S. district court judge for the Southern District of New York in 1992. The first Puerto Rican woman to serve in a U.S. federal court, Sotomayor earned her law degree from Yale University, where she edited the *Yale Law Journal*. Judge Carmen Beauchamp Ciparick, an associate judge of the New York State Court of Appeals in 1994, served as a staff attorney with the Legal Aid Society in New York City from 1967 to 1969. In medicine two Latinas from the Northeast stand out for their monumental service. Antonia Novello, the commissioner of health for the state of New York (and the first Latina surgeon general) advocated for quality health care and led the first national Latino initiative to identify and strategically address disease prevention. Helen Rodríguez-Trias directed the Department of Pediatrics at Lincoln Hospital in the Bronx, highlighting community based involvement in health issues, AIDS among women, and sterilization. Isaura Santiago and Dolores Fernández each became president of Hostos College in the City University of New York system. Elsa Gómez was president of Kean College in New Jersey, and Marta Casals Istomin, cofounder of the internationally recognized Pablo Casals Festival in Puerto Rico, heads

Manhattan's School of Music. Each of the women cited represents countless others who have enormously contributed to the legacy of Latinas in the Northeast.

In the twenty-first century a dramatic increase in the numbers of Mexican and Central American immigrants in northeastern states has emerged that signifies how each incoming group finds its own way to connect to a historical legacy. Catering to the growing numbers of day laborers in Long Island, a group scorned for altering traditional work patterns in suburbs like Farmingville, Latinas have formed a door-to-door business. As *cocineras* (cooks), they provide home made meals to men living away from wives and mothers. According to the *New York Times*, "These women make dinner, over-hear secrets, console those who cannot find work and quickly get used to grown men calling them *madre*." Hired to provide staples, cook, and clean house for legal or illegal communities of migrant workers, the women accommodate several homes a week. They cook the appropriate regional dishes required by each home, sometimes bring their children with them while they work, and serve as intermediaries with the surrounding societies when needed. Resilient and adapting to changing times, Latinas meet their own financial obligations, often earning more than they would at fast-food restaurants. Moreover, they serve as integral links in the preservation of com-





Community mobilization, Centro Latino de Chelsea, Massachusetts. Courtesy of Aura Sánchez Garfunkel.

munity and heritage, carrying forth a legacy forged in the distant past.

The effects of migration, daily life in diaspora, identity, biculturalism, bilingualism, race, class, and gender become subjects for analysis in a variety of venues. During the 1980s and 1990s Latina writers like Nicholasa Mohr (*Nilda*), Julia Alvarez (*How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*), Esmeralda Santiago (*When I Was Puerto Rican* and *Almost a Woman*), and Judith

Ortiz Cofer (*Silent Dancing*) explored these issues in semiautobiographical novels. In searching for their own answers, they gave voice to millions who experience the duality of “living on the hyphen.” Aurora Levins Morales expanded the paradigm by introducing intergenerational and cross-cultural perspectives that spoke to yet another reality—the coalescence of something new on U.S. soil, neither Latin American nor U.S. American but a synthesis of both. Simply stated, Levins



Antonia Denis supporting Celia Acosta Vice's candidacy for the New York State Assembly. Courtesy of the Justo A. Martí Photograph Collection. Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, CUNY.



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Carmen Cornejo Gallegos standing third from left to right. "Los Tomboys," Orange County softball champions of 1947. Courtesy of Lori Gallegos-Hupka.

Morales declares in her poem *Child of the Americas*, "I am new. History made me. My first language was Spanglish. I was born at the crossroads and I am whole." In this spirit Latina history in the Northeast shares common ground.

SOURCES: Acosta-Belén, Edna, Margarita Benítez, José E. Cruz, Yvonne González-Rodríguez, Clara E. Rodríguez, Carlos E. Santiago, Azara Santiago-Rivera, and Barbara Sjostrom. 2000. *Adíos Borinquen querida: The Puerto Rican Diaspora, Its History and Contributions*. Albany, NY: Center for Latino, Latin American, and Caribbean Studies, SUNY; Glasser, Ruth. 1997. *Aquí me quedo: Puerto Ricans in Connecticut*. Middletown, CT: Connecticut Humanities Council; Pérez, Louis A. 1999. *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture*. New York: Harper Collins; Sánchez Korrol, Virginia. 1994 2nd ed. *From Colonia to Community: The History of Puerto Ricans in New York* Berkeley: University of California Press; Ruiz Vicki L. and Virginia Sánchez-Korrol, eds. 2005. *Latina Legacies: Identity, Biography, and Community*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Virginia Sánchez Korrol

LATINAS IN THE MIDWEST

Latina migrants began arriving in the Midwest in significant numbers during the early twentieth century as part of larger Latino migrant flows. The Mexican community was the largest Latina/o population in the region throughout the twentieth century, followed by Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and Central and South Americans. Latina/o communities have historically emerged

in both urban and rural areas, and the group represents a diverse range of countries of origin, as well as class backgrounds. Many of the earliest residents, however, were working-class migrants in search of economic security.

The pre-World War II era saw largely Mexican immigrants, with smaller numbers of Central and South American and Caribbean immigrants. The first Latina/o immigrants to Chicago, for example, were workers contracted by the railroads in 1916. In that year 206 Mexicans were working on the railroads; by 1926, 5,255 Mexican men worked on the rail lines. Some wives, children, and other female relatives and single women also traveled to the Midwest. Women, however, made up a relatively small proportion of these communities. For example, of 17,000 Mexicans living in Chicago in 1927, only 1,650 were women and 3,350 were children. In the Indiana Harbor colony during this time, women numbered 500 and children 1,000 in a total population of 4,500 Mexican immigrants. Similarly, in Gary, Indiana, the population of 2,500 Mexicans included only 200 women and 350 children.

In urban areas like Chicago, Latina/o immigrants, predominantly males, were drawn by work in railroads, steel mills, and meatpacking houses. The railroads also drew workers to cities like Milwaukee and Kansas City, while cities like Gary and Indiana Harbor employed workers in steel mills. Detroit drew workers to the auto and other related industries. Overall, midwestern cities provided the opportunity for higher industrial wages compared with agricultural labor in the Southwest.

Many Latina immigrants worked outside the home,



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as well, in order to contribute to household economies. By the 1930s, according to Zaragosa Vargas, women constituted more than one-third of the Mexican immigrant workforce. Though women rarely found employment in heavy industrial work, some Mexicanas found jobs processing meats and sausages in the packing-houses or worked in candy, mattress, and paper factories. Smaller numbers found jobs as salesclerks or in office work. Although some men objected to women's employment outside the home because it disrupted the traditional gendered division of labor, for many families it was an economic necessity. Women also did work that blurred public/private boundaries, including taking in boarders, running restaurants that catered to single migrant men, or taking in piecework. Few Latinas during this period worked in domestic service.

In addition to paid labor, Latina immigrants also did the important work of sustaining social networks and kinship ties, performing productive labor in the home, and caring for other workers. Women, for example, often led collection efforts for fellow immigrants who were ill or had passed away. They organized cultural celebrations such as national independence days and other pageants.

Latinas and their families faced difficult conditions

in midwestern cities because Mexican migrants often lived in the most overcrowded and poorest housing available. Railroad companies often relegated Mexican workers to boxcar camps. Here women had the especially difficult work of making suitable homes for their families in the direst of conditions, usually without heating, plumbing, modern cooking facilities, or adequate shelter from the elements. Mexican women struggled to maintain households and feed and care for their families in the most inhospitable conditions. Moreover, social service agencies and settlement houses neglected Mexican communities in comparison to European immigrants. Some agencies, however, did provide assistance to Latina/o immigrants, targeting Mexican women, for example, in their Americanization efforts.

Mexican women also migrated to rural areas throughout the region, where they and their families worked as agricultural laborers. Agricultural recruiters often sought entire families for fieldwork because this would ensure more hands in the fields. The first Mexican workers in Minnesota arrived in 1907, while the first workers in Ohio and Wisconsin (Milwaukee) arrived in 1917. By 1927 the Mexican population in the Midwest numbered 63,700. In summer months, when



Elena Rico and partner at one of the Chicago Fiesta Guild Events. Courtesy of Elena Rico.



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The Gómez family immigrated to Kansas City, Missouri, in 1917 from Jalisco, Mexico. The eighteen children pooled their resources from their jobs in the meatpacking houses and beer factories to support the family. Courtesy of Lara Medina.



families headed north as migrant farmworkers, their numbers rose to as many as 80,000. Women, alongside male relatives and children, worked in the beet fields of Minnesota and Michigan, in the onion fields of Ohio, and on other crops throughout the region. Latina/o immigrants also found themselves in rural or small town communities in places like Nebraska, Kansas, and Iowa.

Not all Latinas during this time period, however, came from working-class backgrounds. A small number of professional Latin American migrants also made their homes in urban areas in the region. Argentinian, Colombian, Costa Rican, Cuban, Honduran, Mexican, and Panamanian consuls had offices in cities like Chicago, while Latin American doctors, lawyers, and other professionals relocated their families to midwestern cities where their services were in demand among the growing migrant population. The wives of these professional men often filled the roles of socialites, cultural ambassadors, and community leaders. They sometimes hosted or made appearances at social functions such as national independence celebrations where they represented their countries of origin to international government officials and the broader American society. Latin American students who studied in the Midwest also contributed to the migrant population. Latina young women from wealthy families who graduated from high school or college in the region were sometimes noted in local Spanish-language newspapers.

In Chicago Spanish-language newspapers of the 1920s and 1930s recognized the presence of Latina immigrant readers and printed columns that catered specifically to women. Advice columns addressed topics like beauty and homemaking. They advised readers

on disciplining children and the cultural and moral education of Latin American children growing up in the United States. Women also found recipes and house-keeping tips in the pages of Spanish newspapers. In addition, numerous advertisements announced products like beauty creams and cosmetics designed to appeal to Latina migrant women. In the growing consumer culture of the United States, Latinas too were potential consumers. Latinas also used the newspapers for their own entrepreneurial interests—to advertise their boardinghouses or restaurants to fellow migrants. Such advertisements sometimes included a photograph of the proprietress of the business as a way to personalize the establishment and evoke a sense of “home” for potential migrant male customers.

After the Great Depression the Latina/o population in the Midwest declined dramatically. Deportation and repatriation campaigns depleted the Mexican migrant communities in urban and rural areas alike. By 1936, for example, only 1,200 Mexicans remained in Detroit, a city that had had 15,000 immigrants only seven years earlier and was the second-largest urban settlement of Mexicans in the Midwest. Mexican communities dwindled throughout the region and did not reemerge until after World War II. The postwar era, however, also saw a rise in the migration of Puerto Rican women, men, and children.

The years after World War II witnessed a renewed flow of Latina/o migrants. In particular, Puerto Ricans became an attractive source of labor for some American companies. Women and men were recruited for agricultural labor, picking crops as Mexican immigrants had done in earlier decades. Industrial employers, however, also began seeking out Puerto Rican labor. Puerto Rican women and men found work in



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Two generations in 1939: a Mexican mother, Hermelinda Gómez Ornelas, with her Mexican American daughter, Ofelia “Rosemary” Ornelas. Courtesy of Lara Medina.

factories in eastern and midwestern cities, but Puerto Rican women found employment in domestic work as well.

In 1946 more than 300 Puerto Rican women migrated to Chicago as part of an experimental domestic-labor recruitment program. Because the women were hired as live-in domestics, they lived dispersed throughout the city in employers' homes rather than in concentrated ethnic communities. The recruitment program also included several dozen Puerto Rican men hired to work at the Chicago Hardware Foundry Company, which housed the men in a boxcar community on the company's premises. Within three months many workers began complaining about work conditions; some women worked as many as fifteen hours a day, others had poor living arrangements, and others complained of unfair wages. The women, who met one another at social gatherings sponsored by the local YWCA, gained the support of Puerto Rican students at the University of Chicago, including the famous Puerto Rican anthropologist Elena Padilla and Munita Muñoz Lee, the daughter of the then president of the Puerto Rican Senate (and soon to be governor of the island territory), Luis Muñoz Marín. Other sympathetic observers became involved as well, including a Puerto Rican social worker vacationing in Chicago at the time, Carmen Isaías. After interviewing thirty women and researching local prevailing wages, Isaías made the case that the women were discriminated against by a racially based wage differential: while employers paid white women as much as \$35 or \$40 per week for domestic work, Puerto Rican women earned

only \$15 per week. Eventually many of the recruited domestic workers quit their jobs and left the city. The episode, however, marked an important moment of Latina women in the Midwest advocating for one another and demanding equitable treatment as workers.

Small numbers of Latinas/os also continued migrating to the Midwest as university students. Puerto Rican and other Latina/o students attended universities throughout the region. Puerto Rican scholar Elena Padilla, for example, completed her master's thesis in anthropology at the University of Chicago in 1947. Though little was known about Latina/o immigrant populations in the Midwest during this time, Padilla's thesis compared Puerto Rican migration in Chicago and New York City. Her work made a significant contribution to the scholarship on Latinas/os in the Midwest.

Other Puerto Rican women also began migrating to the city after World War II. Those who did not live with their employers made their homes among Mexican immigrants (based on language affinities) or among African Americans (based on racial affinities). Many Puerto Rican women who migrated to the Midwest during this time had previous work experience in Puerto Rico, largely in the needle trades or in agricultural work. According to Gina Perez, Puerto Rican women and men migrated as part of household units seeking a strategy for economic survival. Puerto Rican women's work both within and outside the home together represented women's survival strategies as members of families and extended communities.

Puerto Rican and Mexican women continued to arrive in the Midwest during the 1950s, particularly in urban areas, as part of larger migrant movements. As in the 1920s, women found employment in agricultural work, in meatpacking and other factories, and, increasingly, in domestic labor. Mexican and Puerto Rican communities grew dramatically during this decade. These new (im)migrants, however, continued to be marginalized by the city and were relegated to the poorest neighborhoods, the worst housing, and the lowest-skilled jobs. Moreover, because of the rapid deindustrialization of American cities like Milwaukee, Chicago, Detroit, and Cleveland, the Puerto Rican community experienced growing unemployment and underemployment and increasingly turned to public assistance for economic survival. Thus, while many Puerto Rican migrants initially came to the Midwest because of the promise of economic opportunities, the loss of industrial jobs made the times much more difficult for many. According to Gina Perez, in Chicago by the 1960s, Puerto Ricans became stigmatized as culturally dysfunctional, an underclass, and largely dependent on welfare. Such characterizations of the



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Puerto Rican community rested largely on specifically gendered ideologies: like the denigrating views of African American women, these views described poor Puerto Rican women in very negative terms. Puerto Rican and other Latina women made efforts to better their socioeconomic conditions, however, by organizing around issues of welfare rights, education, and employment discrimination.

By 1965, when the Immigration and Naturalization Act reformed American immigration quotas, Mexican and Puerto Rican migrants to cities like Chicago and Detroit were increasingly accompanied by Cuban and Central and South American immigrants. Again, while Latin American men often immigrated alone as an economic strategy to provide for their families back home, women also immigrated as part of household units. Increasingly in the 1970s and 1980s, however, women also began immigrating alone, as men had done earlier, also seeking to provide economically for their families back home.

Cuban immigrants began arriving in larger numbers after the Cuban Revolution of 1959. The earliest waves of immigrants included mostly professionals and elites. By the 1980s the Cuban immigrant population included more working-class and less educated immigrants as well. Central and South Americans also included middle- and upper-class professionals, but particularly for Central Americans, migrants included large numbers of political refugees who were fleeing civil wars and political unrest in war-torn homelands. Mexican immigrants continued arriving, many of whom were fleeing Mexico's economic devastation during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Latina women from many of these sending countries played crucial roles in maintaining transnational ties and social networks between home and the U.S. mainland.

By the 1970s Latinas in the Midwest, especially the second and third generations, became increasingly politicized and more vocal about demanding services and rights for their communities. Women became the backbone of community organizing and grassroots activism and led various struggles for equitable housing, education, employment, and welfare rights. Maria Cerda, a Puerto Rican woman, became the first Hispanic to serve on the Chicago Board of Education in 1969. She advocated assiduously for bilingual education and a school curriculum that valued Latina/o children's cultural backgrounds. Six years later Cerda became the first executive director of the Latino Institute, a research and advocacy agency that provided technical assistance and support for local Latina/o community-based organizations. In 1973 Mexican and Puerto Rican women in Chicago founded *Mujeres Latinas en Acción*, a social service and advocacy agency that serves Spanish-speaking women. Mexican moth-

ers in Chicago during the 1970s also led the struggle against inequitable, segregated, and inferior education for their children in overcrowded Mexican neighborhood schools. As small numbers of women began gaining access to higher education and professions, Latinas also became more visible as artists, educators and businesswomen and in other professional roles during the 1970s and 1980s. By the end of the twentieth century Latinas began flexing some political power as well, running for city, county, and state political seats and gaining political appointments in municipal government.

Still, Latinas in the Midwest struggle with gender and racial discrimination in education, housing, and employment. Recent immigrants, in particular, experience high rates of poverty, low wages, inequitable education, and inadequate housing. But U.S.-born Latinas also experience high rates of unemployment, poverty, and lack of educational resources. Latinas in the region have faced particular challenges over the decades. Being in a geographic region that is often overlooked by the East Coast–West Coast emphasis on Latinas/os, Latinas have had to work hard to make their communities visible on the national level. They have also encountered significant diversity within the Latina/o community in the region. Today Latina immigrants continue to arrive from countries throughout Latin America—Colombia, Guatemala, Chile, Peru, Cuba, Mexico, Nicaragua and El Salvador. They also find, however, long-standing communities of women who trace their roots in the region back to the early twentieth century.

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Lilia Fernández

LATINAS IN THE SOUTHEAST

When one thinks of traditional areas of settlement for Latinos, one thinks primarily of the Southwest and the Northeast of the United States. However, the first Spanish settlement in what is now the United States was in



St. Augustine, Florida, in 1565. It was not until decades later that settlements were founded in New Mexico, Texas, and other areas of the Southwest. Since the sixteenth century Florida has been an important destination for many people who trace their ancestry to Spanish-speaking nations.

The Latino group most associated with the southeastern states is the Cubans. More than 1.3 million Cubans live in the United States today, and more than 60 percent of them live in southern Florida alone. Cuban migration to the United States can be divided into two distinct periods: the nineteenth-century migration prompted in part by the various wars of independence against Spain, and the post-1959 migration provoked by the Cuban Revolution. Cubans have migrated to the United States at other times, responding to a variety of political and economic crises in their country, but the largest migrations occurred during these two periods.

Thousands of Cubans migrated as a result of the Cuban wars of independence (1868–1878 and 1895–1898). Those who migrated to the United States settled in different cities around the country. Some settled in the Northeast, in places such as New York, Philadelphia, and Boston. The majority, however, settled in the southeastern United States, in cities like Key West, Tampa, Jacksonville, and New Orleans. Various Cuban cigar manufacturers relocated to Florida during this period, and Key West and Tampa emerged as the major cigar-manufacturing centers in the United States because of the Cuban factories that relocated to that area. These factories attracted thousands of Cuban workers who, faced with unemployment in Cuba in the midst of war, chose to leave for the United States and took their wives and children with them.

As a result of the relocation, many women were forced to work outside the home to supplement their family's income. They worked as seamstresses, laundresses, servants, cooks, midwives, peddlers, grocers, and boardinghouse keepers. By the 1870s Cuban women in Florida had a higher labor participation rate than women on the island. More women worked in the cigar industry than in any other trade, especially in Key West, where they constituted 9 percent of the industry's workforce. While men performed the highly skilled tasks of cutting, filling, rolling, classing, and selecting, women worked at semiskilled tasks, especially as *despalilladoras*, or tobacco strippers. Over time, however, more and more women gained access to the skilled occupations traditionally held by men. By 1890 women constituted up to one-quarter of all hand rollers in some factories in Tampa, working alongside the men. There was at least one case of a woman *lectora*, a reader in the cigar factory, occupying the most prestigious position on the factory floor.

Whether they settled in Florida or New York, most Cubans perceived themselves as exiles and planned to return to their homeland once it became an economically stable, independent nation. While they struggled to survive in the United States, they assisted in the liberation efforts. Throughout the Ten Years' War (1868–1878) Cubans raised money for the rebel forces. Women established organizations to assist the independence movement, among them the Hijas del Pueblo in New Orleans and the Junta Patriótica de Damas de Nueva York, which raised money to buy supplies for the rebel forces, and they rallied public support for the Cuban cause. Women also played a key role in José Martí's Partido Revolucionario Cubano (PRC). Of the 200 clubs that constituted part of the PRC, 25 percent were women's clubs. By 1898 Key West had the most *clubes femeninos*, with eighteen chapters, and Tampa had fifteen clubs. Total membership in the *clubes femeninos* in the United States and abroad reached nearly to 1,500 by the end of 1898. Some of the *clubes* were named for female heroes of the revolution such as Mariana Grajales and Mercedes Varona. Often the names the women chose for their clubs reflected the role they perceived for themselves in the liberation effort, such as Protectoras de la Pátria (Protectors of the Nation), Obreras de la Independencia (Forgers of Independence), and Protectoras del Ejército (Protectors of the Army). The *clubes femeninos* organized dances, picnics, raffles, auctions, banquets, rallies, and parades through which they promoted the idea of independence and raised money to supply and feed the rebel army.

Apart from their active fund-raising and propaganda work, the women assisted the revolution in more subtle ways. As their men left to fight in Cuba, the responsibility of supporting their families fell on women's shoulders. Women successfully raised families, worked outside the home, and contributed to the political cause. They often neglected their own personal comfort in order to contribute more money to the PRC. Throughout the war, as more and more Cubans sought refuge in their communities, the women also took in the homeless, collected clothes, and set up soup kitchens. They took in widows, orphans, wounded soldiers, and other victims of the war. They kept medical supplies and even weapons and ammunition, and they opened their homes to the rebel leaders who made periodic visits to the exile communities to rally support.

After the Treaty of Paris that ended the Cuban-Spanish-American war of 1895–1898, a radical relocation to Cuba did not take place. Over the years Cubans had established ties to the United States in spite of their nationalism. Although they may have been torn by their desires to return home, they realized that they



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could fare better economically if they remained in the United States. Many of those who repatriated following the war returned to Florida within a few years because of the political and economic instability on the island. They were joined by hundreds of new immigrants who chose to seek economic opportunities in the United States while Cuba rebuilt itself.

After independence the Cuban exile communities now channeled their energies into improving their domestic environment and especially their working conditions. The Cubans had a long tradition of militant trade unionism, but instead of joining U.S. labor organizations such as the Knights of Labor or the International Cigarmakers Union, they created their own labor unions such as the Union de Trabajadores and la Resistencia that addressed not only immediate concerns such as wages and benefits, but long-term issues such as class struggle. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Cuban cigar workers in Florida, especially in Tampa, went on strike on several occasions. Female cigar makers struck alongside the men for higher wages, better benefits, and union recognition. The women of the community assisted the protesters in countless ways. They set up soup kitchens, or *cocinas económicas*, to feed the striking cigar workers and their families, and they collected clothes, food, and medicine for them. When the strikers were evicted from their houses because of their inability to pay rent, women took families into their homes.

Less is known about Cuban women's lives after the 1920s because this period has received comparatively limited scholarly attention. Migration to the United States continued in the decades after Cuban independence because of high unemployment and a work climate hostile to organized labor. Records show that from 1921 to 1930, 16,000 Cubans immigrated to the United States. However, immigration decreased because of the Great Depression of the 1930s, as it did for most other immigrant groups. From 1931 to 1940 only 9,000 Cubans immigrated to the United States. A return migration to Cuba also characterized this period. Cigar workers were particularly likely to return. By the early 1930s the cigar industry in the United States had fallen on hard times, and many cigar makers either returned to Cuba or looked for factory jobs up north. Black and mixed-race Cubans were the most likely to move north during the first decades of the twentieth century because of segregation and heightened racial tension and discrimination in the South.

The political violence in Cuba during the 1940s and 1950s also compelled Cubans to emigrate, many as political exiles. From 1941 to 1950 some 26,000 Cubans immigrated to the United States. During the following decade 79,000 individuals immigrated. Cuban expatriates maintained contact with the homeland in multiple

ways. They sent remittances to their relatives and kept Cuban traditions and the memory of their homeland alive through various cultural activities associated with religious or patriotic celebrations. Cubans published Spanish-language newspapers with news of the homeland, wrote books, and composed music that evoked their ties to both Cuba and the United States. Until 1959 Cubans on the island and on the mainland were able to travel back and forth, exchanging stimulating ideas and maintaining a sense of nationhood. They imported Cuban products and exported some of their own. Many emigrated to the United States with the hope of returning to their homeland one day; others never looked back. Like their nineteenth-century forebears, they played an active role in the politics of their homeland by raising money or campaigning for political candidates running for office back home. But the longer the Cubans stayed in the United States, the stronger the ties they developed to the country that gave them refuge.

By far the largest Cuban migration to the United States occurred as a result of the Cuban Revolution in 1959. Ironically, the revolutionary movement that produced the greatest reform also distanced the greatest number of people by its radicalism. More than one-tenth of Cuba's present-day population chose, or was forced to emigrate after 1959; nearly 1 million settled in the United States and in the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. Due to the visible and active U.S. presence on the island before the revolution, as well as a long historical connection between the two, it was logical that Cubans turned to the American nation in this time of need.

The postrevolutionary migration occurred in four distinct waves: 1959–1962, 1965–1973, 1980, and 1994 to the present. It also followed a socioeconomic progression. The first to leave were the upper and middle classes, followed closely by the working classes. The U.S. government granted the Cubans of the first two waves refugee status and welcomed them with a comprehensive assistance program, the Cuban Refugee Program (CRP). By 1973 CPR had dispensed more than \$957 million in relief through job training, education programs, loans, medical care, surplus food distribution, and emergency relief checks, as well as a resettlement program. Subsequent arrivals did not receive the same levels of government assistance, but they did encounter a fairly open door policy. Most Cubans who found the means to leave the island were accepted into the United States, even if they entered the country illegally.

Cuban women often found their first jobs more readily than men because they were willing to work for lower wages. These jobs, for the most part, were unskilled or semiskilled labor that did not require fluency



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in English or contact with the general public. Women found jobs as factory operatives, seamstresses, domestics and nannies, janitors, cooks, dishwashers, waitresses, sales personnel, and agricultural workers and in other low-level service occupations. The garment industry and textile manufacturing were important employers. By the mid-1980s more than 25,000 Cuban women worked in the garment industry and had become the backbone of that industry.

Because thousands of Cuban women were seeking employment, the Cuban Refugee Center in Miami created vocational training programs specifically for them. In 1964 a program titled "Training for Independence," or *Aprenda y Supérese*, was established by the center to help single women and heads of households become self-supporting. In two-month sessions women received intensive English instruction and training in a number of marketable skills: hand sewing, sewing-machine work, clerical office work, nursing assistance, housekeeping, and even silk-screen art work. Afterward the government assisted the women in finding employment, often resettling them to other parts of the country. *Aprenda y Supérese* trained more than 3,000 Cuban women and was so successful that it became a model for the amended Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program during the Johnson administration in 1968.

Women also encountered opportunities in the teaching profession, where they contributed to the accommodation of thousands of refugee children into the Dade County school system. In 1961 Dade County, Florida, established a Cuban Teacher Training Program to prepare former and aspiring teachers for positions in southern Florida's rapidly growing school system. The Cuban "teacher assistants," the majority of whom were women, spent up to eight hours per day in a class-

room, assisting in curriculum planning, teaching, and supervision and acting as interpreters for the refugee children. At night they took English-language and education courses to prepare for their certification exams. Once certified, the teachers headed their own classrooms in Dade County schools or were relocated to school systems around the country.

As each year decreased their chances of returning to Cuba, women began to work toward improving the quality of their lives in the United States. Many returned to school either to revalidate their professional credentials or to train for a more marketable career, accommodating language courses and college curricula into their busy schedules. To assist each other in these efforts, women helped found and maintain professional organizations that served as clearinghouses of information on job and educational opportunities. These professional associations had a largely male membership. However, in some associations, such as the *Colegio Nacional de Bibliotecarios en el Exilio* for librarians and the *Colegio Nacional de Farmaceuticos en el Exilio* for pharmacists, women constituted at least half the membership. For those women who did not have professional training, informal networks emerged to inform each other of job and educational opportunities.

Exile taught women to be resourceful and to work together within their families, neighborhoods, and communities. As their spheres of responsibility expanded, they found new and innovative ways of balancing work at home and in the workplace. Out of their common need they created networks of female relatives, friends, and neighbors to exchange services: they took care of each other's children and took turns doing the grocery shopping; they served as interpreters for one another; and in some cases they shared the ex-



Members of the *Colegio Nacional de Bibliotecarias en el Exilio*. Sitting from left to right: Evidia Blanco, Dolores Rovira, Ana Rosa Nuñez, and Rosa Abella; standing from left to right: Elena Peraza, Carmen Martínez, María de los Angeles Menéndez, Sara Sánchez, and Lesbia Varona. Courtesy of the Cuban Heritage Collection, Otto G. Richter Library, University of Miami.



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penses of major appliances that they traded from house to house. These networks of family and friends were crucial to women who worked outside the home. Although women expanded their roles to include wage earning, their spouses did not expand their roles to include housework. Elderly women, in particular, played a crucial role in this network. In three-generation households the elderly supplied an additional income from either outside employment or public assistance, which, in turn, helped assist their families financially. More important, they played a pivotal role in child rearing and home maintenance, allowing their daughters, granddaughters, and neighbors to go out and find work.

Some entrepreneurial women created lucrative businesses that catered to the needs of women who entered the workplace. They established housekeeping and delivery services, laundries and dry cleaners, home ateliers and dress shops, beauty parlors, day-care centers, driving schools, and even subscription home-delivery food services. Cubans discovered that any business that made life easier for women who worked outside the home had a good chance of succeeding.

The shift in roles and responsibilities has had a tremendous impact on Cubans' economic "success" as a group. As early as 1980 Cuban American median family income was almost equal to that of the total U.S. population. This was an important accomplishment for a community of predominantly first-generation immigrants. Women's high participation in the labor force helped raise the median family income. Without their contributions, these statistics would have been much different. While women's new roles brought them independence and power, it also strained marriages because many men felt threatened by these nontraditional relationships. By 1980 census figures showed that Cuban women had the highest divorce rates in the United States: 9.3 percent of Cuban women aged fifteen years and above identified themselves as divorced in the 1980 census, as compared with 7.3 of the total U.S. population.

While women's participation in the labor force had a notable impact on the economic success of both their families and the larger community, their participation in the political activities of the community was less obvious. During the 1960s exile politics was concerned more with Cuba than with the United States, and hundreds of political organizations emerged in Miami, Union City, New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago to lead the counterrevolution. Since politics was generally regarded as too hostile or violent an arena for women, for the most part, they were excluded from these organizations. The vast majority of women were also too preoccupied with domestic and economic re-

sponsibilities to be full-time advocates of *la causa cubana*. Tradition cast them in a supportive role. They could always be counted on to do the thankless and tedious work of sewing or painting banners, preparing food for protesters at demonstrations, writing letters and making phone calls, and marching in demonstrations. The handful of political organizations that emerged exclusively for women, among them the Union de Mujeres, the Cruzada Femenina Cubana, and the Movimiento Femenino Anticomunista de Cuba, functioned as auxiliaries, providing moral and financial support to different men's organizations by participating in their rallies and fund-raisers, organizing public relations campaigns and membership drives, and even sponsoring memorial services for the men who died for *la causa*. These organizations, however, offered no real political alternatives.

The one political issue that drew a significant participation from women was human rights. Numerous coalitions emerged dedicated to calling world attention to the plight of political prisoners in Cuba. Perhaps the most notable of these groups was the nonprofit organization Of Human Rights, founded in 1961 by Elena Mederos González to monitor human rights abuses in Cuba. Other groups that have emerged include the Committee to Denounce Cruelties to Cuban Political Prisoners, the Centro de Derechos Humanos del Movimiento Demócrata Cristiano, and El Movimiento Mujeres pro Derechos Humanos. Women played a crucial role in this political campaign, since it was their fathers, husbands, sons, and sisters who were imprisoned in Cuba. They wrote letters and sent petitions to Amnesty International, Americas Watch, the International Red Cross, and the PEN clubs, and they met with presidents, congressmen, and foreign dignitaries. They organized fund-raising banquets to raise money for their publicity campaign, arranged special memorial services to pray for the prisoners, and helped erect monuments honoring the prisoners in parks and public areas to keep them in the community's consciousness. It took years, however, to see the fruits of their work. It was not until the late 1970s and early 1980s that the Castro government finally began to release thousands of political prisoners.

Younger women who came of age in the United States and studied at U.S. colleges and universities tended to have greater opportunities for political expression than their mothers. Influenced by the civil rights movement, the feminist movement, and the student activism of the 1960s and early 1970s, they joined various student political groups and staged protests and demonstrations on college campuses. Some of these younger women, influenced by the radicalized milieu of the 1960s, came to adopt a more tolerant view of the revolution and began to work for the nor-





Refugee camp in Miami during the Cuban massive immigration known as the Mariel Boatlift, 1980. Courtesy of the Cuban Heritage Collection, Otto G. Richter Library, University of Miami.

malization of relations between both countries. Many young women also played key editorial roles in political journals of the 1970s such as *Areíto*, *Nueva Generación*, *Joven Cuba*, *Krisis*, and *¡Cuba Va!* that analyzed *la problemática cubana* and the plight of Cubans in the United States.

Since the 1980s a number of women have begun to distinguish themselves in local politics, serving in city and county governments. Ironically, because women were excluded from exile politics, they carved a niche for themselves in ethnic politics, that is, domestic policy making. Working with other racial and ethnic groups, they addressed issues of importance to the community as a whole, such as crime, racism, education, taxes, utilities, and urban development. As representatives of the Cuban community at the local level, they also addressed issues of specific importance to their fellow émigrés. In 1989 one Miami politician, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, was elected to occupy the House seat long held by the late congressman Democrat Claude Pepper.

Cuban women were perhaps most influential in cultural matters, specifically, preserving *cubanidad*, or those customs, values, and traditions that they associated with being Cuban. Preserving *cubanidad* became a cultural mission in the exile community: an attempt to preserve those values they regarded as important for the distant day when repatriation became possible. Over time, however, as the exiles resigned themselves to a lengthy, if not permanent, stay in the United States, preserving *cubanidad* became important to establish the cultural boundaries that would allow Cubans to survive as a distinct community. Women reinforced *cubanidad* at both the family and community

levels. As parents, they were traditionally responsible for instilling cultural values in their children and grandchildren and making sure that they learned to speak Spanish, as well as appreciate their cultural heritage. With this goal in mind, they established after-school programs in churches, schools, and community centers that taught children the basics of Cuban history, geography, and culture for a few hours each day. On the community level, women created cultural organizations that sponsored various activities for the general public: lectures and seminars, literary contests, scholarship programs, variety shows, and festivals and parades. Through these activities they encouraged study and pride in *la tradición nacional*.

In their mission to preserve *cubanidad*, women also published newspapers and magazines and wrote essays, articles, and editorials for the Cuban exile press. A small few even had their own radio and television shows. Through these media they educated the public on a variety of cultural and historical topics. They entertained the public with stories and interviews and offered practical advice about life in exile. Initially, women did not hold as visible a representation in journalism, radio, and television as they did in cultural organizations, since men dominated the communications media. Of a sample of 665 periodicals at the Cuban Exile Archives of the University of Miami, published by Cuban exiles during the period 1959–1988, roughly 10 percent were published, edited, or directed by women. The percentage of female contributors varied, however, depending on the type of publication. Political newspapers employed few or no women, while the so-called women's magazines usually had a predominantly female staff. During the 1990s, however, the number of women in journalism and the communications media increased. At the *Miami Herald* and other city newspapers in the southeastern United States, Cuban women and other Latinas served as writers and editors. One Cuban woman, Liz Balmaseda, won a Pulitzer Prize for her work at the *Miami Herald*. Women served as reporters and anchors at local television stations, as well as national networks such as the Spanish-language Univisión and Telemundo. Among the women who have distinguished themselves in this medium are Cristina Saralegui, María Elvira Salazar, and Teresa Rodríguez. Cuban women from Miami also made names for themselves in the English-language mainstream and cable networks, for example, Daisy Fuentes and Maty Montfort.

As their spheres of influence expanded, women also demanded more of their organizations. The Cuban Women's Club (CWC), for example, founded in 1969 as a social club for middle-class women, diversified its activities to retain the participation of its wage-earning members. Modeled after the elite Liceo Cubano in Ha-



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vana, the Cuban Women's Club sponsored luncheons, conferences, art exhibitions, and literary contests. Members were also involved in local charities and fund-raising activities, just as women of their social class were expected to be back in Cuba. By the mid-1970s, however, members demanded that the club do more than just organize social and charitable events. They wanted their club to address issues pertinent to their careers and their new roles in U.S. society. By the late 1970s, conferences addressed such issues as bilingual education, voting and political representation, salaries, and the workplace. The CWC ceased to be an exclusively Cuban social club and counted more than 300 members of various nationalities and professional and educational backgrounds by 1980.

Several business and professional organizations also emerged in southern Florida during the 1970s and 1980s, reflecting women's permanent shift into the workplace. Groups such as the Comité de Mujeres Latinas, the Latin Business and Professional Women's Club (LBPWC), and the Coalition of Hispanic American Women (CHAW) were created by younger women, graduates of U.S. colleges and universities, who regarded themselves as Cuban Americans. Whether at the local or national level, CHAW and the LBPWC addressed the problems all women in the U.S. workforce faced: unequal pay, inadequate child care, discrimination, and sexual harassment. Their workshops taught women strategies to achieve equal access to education, social services, and the judicial system. However, they also discussed issues relevant to the larger Latino community such as bilingual education, immigration reform, affirmative action, and domestic violence. Both organizations sponsored a scholarship program to help needy students attend college.

The exile experience, thus forced women to expand their participation in labor, the economy, politics, and the overall life of the community. To deal with the problems and challenges of life in a new country, they created social, familial, and professional networks. Women reconciled the past with the present and promoted an appreciation of the Cuban cultural heritage while contributing to their families' adaptation into the mainstream. They helped create a strong and stable ethnic community with ties to two countries and two cultures.

The Cuban population of southern Florida is the best known of the Latino/a populations of the southeastern United States, but it is not the only group to have settled in this state and region. Even in Miami and Dade County, long considered a Cuban stronghold, that group no longer constitutes the numerical majority. A recent influx from Central and South America, particularly from Nicaragua and Colombia, means that Cuban-accented Spanish is not the only form of the

language heard on the streets of southern Florida. Puerto Ricans, Salvadorans, Dominicans, Mexicans, and others have also migrated to southern Florida and have established transnational economic and political connections that contribute to the city's reputation as the "gateway to the Americas." While Miami/Dade County was the most popular destination of Latinos, migration to other parts of the state also increased. By 1999 the Latino population in Florida stood at 2,334,403.

Elsewhere around the southeastern United States, Latinos have settled in towns and cities not traditionally associated with their populations. Some of them are recent immigrants, legal or illegal; others are contracted laborers who arrive with temporary visas; and still others are internal migrants who migrate from other areas of the country in search of better economic opportunities. The Latino/a population of Georgia is one of the fastest growing in the nation, doubling in size in just one decade. According to estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau, in 1999 there were 239,566 Latinos in Georgia, compared with 108,933 in 1990. Statistics for the Latino populations in 1999 in other southeastern states and their percentage increase since 1990 include the following: Alabama, 45,349 (84.1 percent); Louisiana, 119,496 (28.4 percent); Mississippi, 23,975 (49.9 percent); North Carolina, 175,707 (128.9 percent); and South Carolina, 54,299 (78 percent). Apart from a few studies of agricultural and oil workers in the region, non-Cuban Latinos of the Southeast remain one of the most understudied populations.

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María Cristina García

LATINAS IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

A historical overview of Latinas in the Pacific northwestern states of Washington, Oregon, and Idaho re-



veals that according to the 2000 census, the Latino population of this region constituted about 7.8 percent of the total population. More than 75 percent of the Latino population in these states is of Mexican origin. The historiography of Latinas in this area remains almost nonexistent. Scholarly writing about Latinas appears here and there in brief mentions by scholars focusing on twentieth-century farmworkers, immigration, labor, and the family. Themes of importance for Latinas include the immigrant experience, farmworker women's issues, education, cultural preservation, political involvement, and the isolation of living in the Pacific Northwest.

Spanish exploration of the Pacific coast regions of Washington and Oregon began in the 1790s with the appearance of sailing ships and a few settlements. Latinas came into the Pacific Northwest as members of families and groups such as the wives and daughters of miners, vaqueros, mule packers, soldiers, and settlers. The most striking aspect of the Latina experience from the 1790s until the beginning of the twentieth century was the fact that women, along with their families, did not tend to become permanent residents in the Pacific Northwest. Most returned to the U.S. Southwest or headed into Canada and Alaska.

When the Spanish sent out forty-three ships of exploration in the late 1700s, indigenous women were often among the first to make contact with them. The rosters of the Spanish expeditions are scarce, but it seems that the crews were all men, with no women family members aboard. According to several scholars, the relationship between the Spanish sailors/settlers and indigenous women was not respectful or cordial. Native women faced abuse, rape, and enslavement by the Spaniards. In 1792 the Spanish established a two-year garrison of soldiers on Vancouver Island and another outpost at Neah Bay on Washington's Olympic Peninsula. The Spanish settlements consisted of about eighty mixed-race Spanish colonials, Peruvian Indians, and no female inhabitants. Some Spanish soldiers deserted and took up residence with local peoples such as the Mowachaht, one of the Nuu-chah-nulth (formerly Nootka) tribes of the area. Children born to these unions were reared in the mother's indigenous culture. By 1795 the last garrison contingent of twenty soldiers left Nootka.

The turmoil of the Mexican American War (1846–1848) and its aftermath drew Mexican families to the Pacific Northwest from their homes in California or New Mexico. The most famous woman visitor to Oregon was María Josefa Tafoya, the wife of pioneer Oregonian Ewing Young. Young died in Oregon in 1843, far from his home in Taos, New Mexico. Tafoya and her son traveled to Oregon in 1855 to successfully claim Young's estate of \$4,994.64. In her petition Tafoya de-

tailed her dire poverty and her dependence upon the day labor of her son, as well as charity and assistance from her relatives.

Rosario Romero from Sonora, Mexico, settled in Yakima, Washington, during the 1860s. Although she is credited with starting the region's sheep-herding industry, she, like many others, did not remain in Washington as a permanent resident. Laurita Galina was another settler from Sonora. Born in 1830, she married and migrated with her husband to Oregon in 1862. By the 1870s Laurita had three children and lived in Josephine County, Oregon. Carmelita Colón, also born in Mexico, settled in Walla Walla, Washington, with her husband in the 1860s. Together they ran a mule pack train from Walla Walla to Idaho. When their business failed, they stayed in the area to run a Mexican restaurant. Their descendants lived in Walla Walla until the 1950s.

The twentieth century witnessed a significant increase in the number of Latina migrants and immigrants to the Pacific Northwest, people who stayed on as permanent residents. Since the 1920s Yakima County, Washington, has ranked among the ten most productive agricultural counties in the United States and thus has required large numbers of workers (predominantly Mexican) from the April asparagus harvest to apple picking in October. The level of hardship and segregation earned Yakima County the unflattering nickname "Little Mississippi of the Northwest." Mexican American migrants came from New Mexico, Texas, and Wyoming, while immigrants arrived from Mexico. In recent times they have been joined by immigrants from Central and South America.

Juanita Ramírez migrated to Pocatello, Idaho, in 1916, and by the 1920s immigrant families lived in Nyssa, Oregon. Between 1915 and 1917 some of the early Latino migrants to Portland, Oregon, hailed from New Mexico. Born in Texas, Francisca García became part of the migrant labor stream that traveled from Texas to Ohio to pick sugar beets and tomatoes, then on to Wyoming for sugar beets, then on to Washington for asparagus, before moving further south to Oregon for hops and berries and then a final stop to pick cotton in California. Finally García and her family settled in Woodburn in Oregon's Willamette Valley. Catalina Trujillo remembered her family's journey from Mexico to Oregon via the railroads. Her father worked for the railroad, and the family's home was a railroad car, part of a boxcar barrio that had been set aside as housing for the workers.

Migration from the United States and immigration from Mexico and South America to the Pacific Northwest began to increase dramatically during the 1940s. Families that moved during this period represent the nucleus of the Latino communities that currently thrive



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in the Northwest. Born in La Junta, Colorado, in 1924, Victoria Archuleta Sierra moved permanently to Pocatello, Idaho, in 1942. Sierra attended Idaho State University, became an electrician's helper and a railroad worker, and in 1945 joined the Women's Air Corps (WAC). She trained as a hospital aide and a medic in her eighteen months of military service. In a letter to her daughter, Antonia, Irene Castañeda detailed the family's move to Washington from Texas during the 1940s. Castañeda criticized the labor contractor for lying to the family that conditions in Toppenish were good and fair. The family experienced horrendous hardship, arriving in "bitterly cold weather" after traveling on a flatbed truck. The Castañedas discovered that their housing was "some old shacks, all full of knotholes in Brownstown—about twenty miles outside of Toppenish." Irene Castañeda recalled working in the hops fields in which women were paid 75 cents per hour while men received 85 cents per hour. Braceros (Mexican guest workers from 1942 to 1964) were also recruited to work in the Pacific Northwest. While the braceros in the Pacific Northwest were all men, women nonetheless wrote letters, trying to remain in contact with their departed husbands and sons.

By the 1950s the character of the settled Latino communities became evident in the celebration of cultural and religious events. *El Día de las madres* became an important annual event in Mexican communities. In Toppenish, Washington, on September 15–16, 1952, Margarita Rodríguez was crowned "Queen Liberty" in celebration of Mexican Independence Day. In summer migrant worker families abounded and at times held *tardeadas* (afternoon) and evening dances. Women such as Beatriz Escalante, the daughter of a migrant worker family in Sunnyside, Elaine Romero, the daughter of a family that operated a tiny Mexican restaurant in West Seattle, and María Dena, whose family had left field labor behind for other jobs, retained selected elements of Mexican border culture that fused the values of family, community, and small-town traditions with hard work. As part of this cultural preservation, Herminia Méndez began Spanish radio programming in the Yakima Valley in 1951. According to historian Erasmo Gamboa, in the hop fields when mechanization took place, "a division of labor by gender occurred with women and sometimes children going on the belt lines removing leaves and doing other 'light jobs' that required more dexterity, while males specialized in areas of the kiln where the hops were 'cooked' or dried. Naturally, a differentiated wage system for women and men also developed."

Eva Castellaño, a *curandera* (healer) in Guanajuato, Mexico, in 1938 migrated with her husband

Teodoro to the Snake River Valley in eastern Oregon. In addition to rearing nine children, she has worked as a migrant laborer, teacher, county activist, and traditionalist artist. For her creation of *coronas* (traditional wax and paper crowns used for weddings and quinceañeras), she received a National Heritage Award in 1988.

The arrival of Latinas from many different countries in South America occurred during the 1960s. The first groups that came from South America were called "the new Hispanics" and migrated to the Northwest for better jobs or a peaceful sociopolitical climate. Aida Pelaez Edenholm arrived in Washington during the 1960s, joining about a dozen Bolivian-born immigrants. She worked as a Pan American Airlines hostess and married a Seattle resident. Later during the 1960s a trickle of refugees from repressive regimes made their way into the Pacific Northwest. They remain most concentrated in the state of Washington. These "new Hispanic" Latinos in Washington grew from 1,371 in 1960 to 6,073 by 1980. Berta González fled Chile with her husband and two daughters during the Chilean military coup that ousted the popularly elected president Salvador Allende. The family settled in Seattle in 1977.

With the number of farm labor jobs decreasing year by year because of the decline in prices for the crops, unreliable water supplies, and farm land prices, increasing numbers of Latinos are migrating from small towns of the Pacific Northwest to urban areas. Most have not settled in defined barrios but remain scattered throughout city neighborhoods. One remedy for this scattered population has involved establishing settlement houses or community centers. In Seattle el Centro de la Raza established the Frances Martínez Community Service Center in 1983 as a tribute to the tireless activism of Martínez and her valiant struggle against leukemia. A former farmworker, she worked until the end of her life helping Latinos find jobs, housing, and counseling. Through el Centro de la Raza she organized emergency food programs and classes and secured legal advice for recent arrivals in Seattle.

Activism often became a family affair. Two women, Ninfa Tanguma and her daughter Yolanda Alaniz, provided leadership for Latinas in their transition from rural to urban areas. In 1970 Tanguma took her turn at picket duty in a hop-ranch strike in Yakima. Latinas were at the forefront of the strike and seemed "more willing to sacrifice than many men when it comes to supporting the union." Her daughter Yolanda joined the picket line at the age of six. Her sister recalled that Yolanda would study after working in the fields in order to educate herself out of farm labor. She attended the University of Washington in the early 1970s



and recalled having to fight the “machismo” of El Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MeChA). She wrote a pamphlet titled “In Defense of Adultery” because the male leaders of MEChA slanderously accused their Chicana comrades of being sexually promiscuous. Her struggles with sexist and nationalist men and her experience helping organize a campus union of low paid service workers led her to become a socialist feminist. In 1993 she ran unsuccessfully for the Seattle City Council as a socialist. She was by far the most important leader for the group Radical Women until the late 1990s, when she left the Pacific Northwest to become an activist in California.

The 1980s witnessed the first Latinas to win public office. Two Latinas currently serve in the Washington state legislature. In 1988 State Senator Margarita López Prentice, a Democrat representing the Eleventh District, was the first Latina elected to public office. Before going into politics, she worked as a registered nurse for thirty years. Health care and worker protection have long been of major concern for López Prentice. In 1989 she sponsored a bill that would require doctors to report pesticide poisoning cases to the state Department of Social and Health Services. Phyllis Gutiérrez-Kenney represents the Forty-sixth Legislative District in Seattle. Born into a farmworker family, she was one of eight children. Her father organized the first beet workers’ union in the state of Montana. In Washington the family picked potatoes by hand. At the age of five, her job was to shake the vines free of potatoes so the older children could pick them up and put them in heavy sacks that they dragged behind them. Allergic to pesticides, she could not work in the hop fields. Gutiérrez-Kenny remembered picking asparagus for “seventy-five cents an hour and no bathrooms in the field.” A mother of ten children, she stayed in the fields until the ninth month of her first pregnancy. Her own family would “pick grapes, prunes and other fruit in the Tri-Cities on weekends for extra money.”

Her first stint at organizing began when she cofounded the Migrant Daycare Centers of Washington. She also cofounded the Educational Institute for Rural Families in Pasco. Two tragedies motivated her to focus on farmworker issues, one involving the death of a friend when she fell off a plank and into an irrigation ditch, the other the death of a brother who died of pneumonia caused by the poor housing. Gutiérrez-Kenney recalled that “the snow would come in through the cracks and the windows would break and we’d have to cover them with blankets.” Today she is the owner of her own retail business (Felipa’s) and devotes much of her time to working for many professional and volunteer efforts toward quality education and social

and economic equity for women and people of color. She has been a consistent spokesperson for the rights of farmworkers, especially in relation to education and housing. In 1998 she ran unsuccessfully for the position of secretary of state in Washington.

Latinas who have served as commissioners in Oregon’s Hispanic Commission include María de Jesús García, Consuelo Lightner, Liliana Olverding, Nancy Padilla, Wendy Veliz, and Annabelle Jaramillo. The first Latina to be appointed to King County Superior Court in Seattle was Carmen Otero, and the second Latina appointed to the bench was Judge Debora Juárez.

Although some professional and entrepreneurial gains are evident, women in the Pacific Northwest share many of the same concerns that Latinas face in other parts of the United States. Education statistics in 2000 indicate about 51 percent of Latinos had completed at least a high-school diploma, compared with 83 percent of European Americans in the Pacific Northwest. In employment, about 36 percent of Latinas in Washington and Oregon were employed in the white-collar occupations of service and administrative support, while less than 8 percent of Latinas labored as farmworkers.

Latinas continue to form groups that seek to better their situation in the Pacific Northwest. Hortensia Villanueva formed a mothers’ club in December of 1994. The wife of a union leader in eastern Washington, Villanueva used space at the Farm Workers’ Clinic to organize the mothers of children who came down with contagious virus infections. Other groups include the long-standing Mujeres Unidas de Idaho in Boise, formed in 1989 to sponsor an annual conference and work as a network support system for Idaho’s Latinas. Latinas have been leaders in groups such as the United Farm Workers of America, the Mexican American Women’s National Association (MANA), Mujeres de Oregon, and the Oregon, Washington, and Idaho Commissions on Hispanic Affairs. Currently Rosalinda Guillen serves as Washington’s regional director of the United Farm Workers, and Mona Mendoza is the cofounder of Hands off Washington, a gay/lesbian rights organization.

Entrepreneur Celia D. Mariscal and her family group own Juanita’s Fine Foods in Hood River, Oregon, which grosses about \$4 million per year. Her mother had wanted to own her own business and passed on this desire to her thirteen children, who decided to start a business when they were adults. In starting their tortilla factory in 1969, Mariscal recalled, “At night we made our tortillas—about 30 boxes. Since I was the only one who didn’t work during the day I would take the tortillas out to the stores to try and sell them.” She further emphasized that Mexican women can be suc-



Abarca, Apolonia "Polly" Muñoz



Las Cuatas Diego, 1980. Painting in oil on canvas by and courtesy of Cecilia Concepción Alvarez.

cessful and reflected that "in our company my brothers respect my decisions because I am the oldest. They don't treat me with any less value because I'm a woman."

Latinas in the Pacific Northwest continue to be divided by cultural group, although the majority are of Mexican birth or heritage and have some connection to the rural areas and farm labor. Young rural Latinas,

often reared in modest circumstances, feel torn between embracing traditional cultural values and wanting to further their education. In urban areas campus women's organizations, including Latina sororities, seek to address the lack of substantial women's networks and role models. Insitutions like Centro de la Raza also promote a sense of community. In 1989 a group of Latinas in Seattle formed the Hispanic Women's Network (HWN) to promote the personal, professional, and educational growth of its members.

Artist Cecilia Concepción Alvarez arrived in Washington State in 1975 and has developed a national reputation for her paintings. Her art reflects her experiences as a Chicana/Cubana, and [?? 102]through it she expresses her own vision of beauty and strength. In her opinion, people, art, and society have an obligation to advance humanity and find solutions to problems that threaten human coexistence and survival. Latinas living in the Pacific Northwest reflect in a variety of ways Alvarez's thoughts about combining selected cultural traditions with environmental concerns for today and the future.

SOURCES: Gamboa, Erasmo, ed. 1992. *Voces hispanas: Hispanic Voices of Idaho*. Boise: Idaho Commission on Hispanic Affairs; Gamboa, Erasmo, and Carolyn M. Buan. 1995. *Nostros: The Hispanic People of Oregon: Essays and Recollections*. Portland: Oregon Council for the Humanities; Valle, Isabel. 1994. *Fields of Toil: A Migrant Family's Journey*. Pullman: Washington State University Press; Villarroel, Luz E., and Sandra B. Fancher García. 1995. "A Cultural Profile and Status of Chicanas in the Northwest." In *The Chicano Experience in the Northwest*, ed. Carlos S. Maldonado and Gilberto García. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company.

Elizabeth Salas

