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Latino/a Voices Oral History Project

Perceptions of “community” about Hispanic/Latinos living in Cache Valley, Utah

We are going to explore briefly the dynamic and complex communal stories of many Hispanic/Latino members living in Cache Valley. As we know, each community is unique and each one has different forms, sizes, capitals, and infinite human dimensions. It has been accepted that the concept of community should always include at least three important elements: a) A place or geographic territory, b) The people living on that place or territory, and c) The personal interactions and developed relationships that helped to establish common goals, principles, and values and shared beliefs. We will review some recorded stories on the context of the three elements of place, people, and interactions for interpretation and analysis related to the community life Hispanic/Latino residents of Cache Valley, Utah. These are stories we would like to tell and expand:

The Hispanic/Latino families in the United States are diverse, but there are commonalities despite its diversity. They represent more than 16% of the total US population (US Census, 2012), and their numbers are increasing at faster rates than other groups as a result of their high levels of fertility and relatively recent immigration. Within the Hispanic/Latino population, 45% are foreign born, 31% are a second generation of immigrants, and the rest have American-born parents (Rumbaut, 2006). The majority of this group has Mexican origins, but it also includes individuals from more than 20 different nations. On the other hand, the Latino culture is considered family oriented or to have a high level of “familism,” which is a concept that includes structural-demographic (large young families), and attitudinal (loyalty, reciprocity,

and solidarity among family members) variables that are declining among generations (Landale et al. 2006; Sabogal et al., 1987). Although most of the Hispanic/Latino people are concentrated in few states such as California, Florida, and Texas, there are other states and places such as Cache Valley which have seen increasing the numbers of Hispanic/Latinos residents move into their communities.

The place - Cache Valley has been an agricultural area located at the north of Utah and southeast of Idaho. Cache Valley was a traditional hunting ground for the Northwestern Shoshone. The Mormon White settlement in this area started around mid-1800s
http://historytogo.utah.gov/utah_chapters/american_indians/bearrivermassacre.html

At present, Cache Valley working industries include education, agriculture, manufacturing, and construction. The town of Logan in Cache Valley is the home of Utah State University, which is a land-grant institution founded in 1888 and known as USU. Its current enrollment is 28,994 students with a large number enrolled in Regional Campuses and Distance Education programs. In 2010 there were 172 international students from Latin American countries (<http://www.usu.edu/oiss/htm/about-oiss/countries-represented>) and only 3% of USU total enrollment were Hispanic/Latino students (<http://www.forbes.com/colleges/utah-state-university>). Historically, advances in dry-farming techniques and canal and reservoir construction increased farm production in the area around Logan. The county's sheep herds grew from 10,000 in 1880 to 300,000 by 1900, and dairy cows numbered 16,000 by 1910. Commercial creameries, flour mills, woolen mills, and knitting factories developed around Cache Valley's booming turn-of-the-century farm production. Today Cache Valley still supports active production of dairy products as well as hay, alfalfa, and grain
http://pioneer.utah.gov/research/utah_counties/cache.html). Also, a variety of manufacturing

firms, retail trade outlets, and service providers contribute to Cache County's diversified economy in the twentieth century.

The Hispanic/Latino people of Cache valley represent some of its diversity. Historical census data show Cache Valley doubled its population from around 18,000 people in 1900 to 36,000 in 1960, and from there it has more than tripled its population in the past 50 years to reach the current 112,656 people of whom 10% are Hispanic/Latino (census.gov, 2012). The majority of Latinos living in Cache Valley have arrived recently. For example, between 2000 and 2010, the number of Hispanic-Latinos in the area almost doubled from 5,786 to approximately 11,260 people among whom roughly 70% are Mexican origin

(<http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkml>).

Access to the local, well known University has resulted in distinctive educational attainment differentials within the group, as we can perceive from the interviews. For example, Hector Mendiola, a USU extension educator interviewee said that “Latino community living in Cache Valley has a very low (elementary) educational attainment...” but many of the interviewees had university degrees. In addition, religion is another variable to keep in mind when interpreting community interactions because many Hispanic Latinos are Catholic, and they are living in a place where the most prevalent religion is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day-Saints (LDS). Therefore, we will consider the complexity of demographics (age, sex, duration of residency), country of origin, socioeconomic status (education, income, and occupation), immigrant generation, and religion when analyzing this Latino/Hispanic community.

The common interactive places that Cache Valley Latino community members commented on in their narratives are: a) the church, b) the school/university, c) the neighborhood, d) the workplace, and e) the supermarket. The sense of safety and friendliness of

the valley has resulted in Latinos feeling generally accepted compared with other dangerous places they have lived before. Also, many voices said education is the key component for their progress. Additionally, cultural differences that included traditions, music, food, weather, and family interactive memories have been mentioned repeatedly. In general, there are positive and negative remarks about their interactions with other members of the local community.

The interviews show that Latino community members have had limited interactions with their Anglo majority counterparts. The lack of English language proficiency for many constitutes an important barrier that sometimes produces fear. There is a strong notion of “us” and “them”. Also, there are perceptions of assumed stereotypes from the majority group about the Latino people and vice-versa, for example:

1. “Porque normalmente cuando tu ves a gente de color, se cree que esa persona no ha tenido ninguna educación, es un estereotipo... y la gente piensa que supuestamente como eres Latino eres ilegal y tu le dices a una persona que tú eres ingeniero y estás terminando tu maestría, ya la gente te ve desde otro punto de vista”

“If you see people of color, you think that person does not have education, it is an stereotype... people think about Latinos they are illegal but if you say I am an engineer or you are finishing a master(academic degree), then they see you from a different perspective”

2. “no hay mucha vida social acá. Digamos es un vecindario que nadie se mete contigo ni tu con ellos, no tienes cabida para desenvolverte ni para hablar ni conocer porque como son familias, entonces cada familia tiene su espacio, y se hace difícil interrumpir. La amistad se hace difícil porque las familias quieren estar entre ellos.”

“There is not much social life here. Let’s say, within a neighborhood nobody approaches to you and you don’t approach to them, you don’t have much opportunities to interact neither to get them know because they are families that wants their (own) space and it is difficult to interrupt. Friendship is difficult because families want to stay with themselves.”

Although the process of Latino integration has been very slow, religion has played a positive role in the process for new Hispanic/Latino immigrants. Latino people who shared the same

religion as the majority of the local community (LDS church in this case) found more ways to interact and get integrated into the community compared with other group members. For example, we have found the following comments:

3. “casi la gente no se involucra mucho entre si, aparte de la iglesia, de verse los domingos...Me gusta que es una comunidad en la que no hay muchos crímenes y todas esas cosas, es una comunidad muy segura, uno puede salir a cualquier hora ... pero me gustaría tener un poco más de actividad para mí como Latina que soy...”

“People almost don’t get much involved with others beyond Church where we see each other on Sundays... I like this community because there is not much crime, and these (related) things, it is a very safe community and we can go outside at any time... but I would like to have a little more activity as a Latina I am... ”

4. “Con mis vecinos vamos a la iglesia, con la gente con la que trabajo son miembros de la iglesia, y entonces puedes hablar de la iglesia, puedes hablar de lo que haces en la iglesia, de tus llamamientos y entienden de lo que estás hablando.”

“We go with our neighbors to Church. The people I work with are members of the (same) Church. So we can talk about church, we can talk about what we do in the Church, we can talk about our callings and they understand what I am talking about”

Latinos showed intense interactions within their own ethnic group including family, neighbors, and friends, but also they looked for interactions with people outside their own social network. Some interviewees have approached community interactions in many different ways such as finding common interest activities with others, having regular social activities with their neighbors, or going to public social events. The integration process for Latinos in the community represented a challenge for many of them, and it seems to be influenced by different contextual factors like their level of education, type of personality, time of residence, willingness, and opportunities for interaction with others outside their own ethnic group (comfort zone).

Following there are some examples addressing these ideas:

5. “Otra cosa cultural que he adoptado es el hecho de salir a eventos sociales públicos que aquí hay mucho de eso en el verano. En el invierno casi no hay de eso”

“Another cultural thing I have adopted is attending public social events especially in the summer time when there are many of them but not much in the winter”

6. “Trato de visualizar lo que tenemos en común... por ejemplo, tengo un vecino que es mi amigo y le gusta jugar videojuegos entonces yo trato de jugar con él de vez en cuando y es una manera de socializar. En cuanto a diferencias religiosas y creencias y costumbres nuestras vidas son totalmente diferentes pero creo que siempre hay una manera de encontrar algo en común para poder socializar”

“I try to visualize common interests... for example I have a neighbor who is my friend and he likes to play videogames, so I try to play with him once in a while. This is a way to socialize. In relation to (cultural) differences like religion, beliefs, and traditions, our lives (we) are very different but I think always there is a way to find something in common to socialize.”

7. “... la relación con los vecinos, yo voy a su garaje, cojo una herramienta y les digo “llevo tal cosa” o ellos vienen aquí, hablan conmigo... Sí, pasamos gritando de uno a otro lado del vecindario (risas). El 4 de Julio y no recuerdo que otras fechas solemos hacer picnics en algunos de los solares de las casas y todo el mundo llega y llevamos nuestras comidas o alguien pone la comida. Y nos conocemos...”

“...(about) the relations with our neighbors I go to their garage and take a tool and then I tell them “I’m taking something” or they come here to talk with me... We keep shouting (friendly) from one side of the neighborhood to another (laughing) On July 4th and other times I don’t remember we have picnics in some backyards and everyone comes, we prepare our food or someone bring food... and we get know each other...”

Conclusions

Community interactions constitute a critical component of the community concept. The Latino/Hispanic community in Cache Valley showed limited interactions with the majority community group members. The local Hispanic-Latino may need to increase the number and variety of their interactions in order to get fully integrated into the community. There are many different ways to walk along this process. For example, an interviewee said at a meeting that volunteering is an activity that opens doors for positive interaction and can lead to effective integration. In addition, we should initiate some of the interactions like inviting neighbors to get a cup of tea with cookies together. Also, we can create some continuous communication links

between the Latino people and the local majority members of the community by having regular meetings or sharing internet blogs.

The community needs to create opportunities for interaction with its minority Latino members. Hispanic Latino voices need to be heard at the community institutions and organizations such as schools, government, academia, media, events, and business. Such communication will result in sustained and increasing visibility that goes beyond a *Cinco de Mayo*, celebration which is even strange for many within this ethnic group. These connected interactions will help us to break some of the false stereotypes that surround us. Interaction and communication will strengthen our own identity as members of the same community. Latino's integration into the local community is an important goal to pursue because it will help us to improve our communal quality of life.

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