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Latino Voices in Cache Valley

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Latino Voices in Cache Valley: Complete Version

Randy Williams *Utah State University*, randy.williams@usu.edu

Eduardo Ortiz *Utah State University,* eduardo.ortiz@usu.edu

Maria Luisa Spicer-Escalante *Utah State University*, maria.spicer@usu.edu

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Voices: USU's Latino/a Voices Project Randy Williams, Utah State University

Utah State University Libraries' Special Collections and Archives Division (SCA) is home to rich oral history collections. SCA endeavors to preserve Northern Utah history and heritage by collecting the voices of everyday men and women. Our collections range from the poignant reminiscences of those who survived Idaho's Teton Dam disaster to the recollections of modern-day cowboys.

Our oral history efforts serve to enhance SCA's other documentary sources, such as manuscript, folklore and photograph collections. At times, oral history may be a first effort of discovering the history of some segments of our community. One such segment is Northern Utah's Latino population. While this community accounts for more than twelve percent of Northern Utah's population, its history is grossly under-represented in SCA's holdings. In 2007, as an effort to rectify this, SCA partnered with Utah's Cache Valley Latino communities to collect and preserve the stories of 45 people. This joint effort became known as the Latino/a Voices Project (LVP).

The project started with the creation of an advisory board drawn from community members and university specialists. Under the direction of the board we applied for matching funds from the Utah Humanities Council and the Marriner S. Eccles Foundation to hire a native-speaker to help direct the project, and to train and engage native speakers to do the interviewing. As the project progressed, we also hired a recruiter to help enlist community members as interviewers and interviewees. To this end, we advertised for a bilingual assistant director and received more than fifteen applications. We hired Elisaida Méndez, a native of Puerto Rico, and a doctoral student in psychology at USU to be the project's assistant director, and Jorge Rodas, a local real estate agent to train project interviewers and recruit project interviewees. Rodas immigrated to the United States with his parents from Guatemala when he was 19 years old. He lived in California and Arizona before moving to Utah. Aside from being a native speaker, Jorge brought the essential experience of migration, which would be part of the life-histories of many of those interviewed. Furthermore, he had personal experience in the two prominent religious traditions of Cache Valley's Latino communities: the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. These life experiences gave Rodas the cultural tools needed to introduce the project, get feedback from Latino community members and enlist their help and support.

In collaboration with folklorist Elaine Thatcher, Randy Williams (project director and USU SCA Fife Folklore Archives Curator) created the interview questions and wrote the project mission statement and letter of information. Williams and Méndez worked closely with USU's Institutional Review Board (IRB), which reviewed and approved the mission statement, release form, questions, and letter of information. The decision to work with the IRB gave project

participants an offsite, non project organization to interact with. This additional regulation worked to protect the community.

The project's success was contingent on our ability to organize, but also on our ability to win the support of Cache Valley's Latino community. We followed the American Folklore Society ideal that enjoins oral history professionals to work "at the invitation of and with the collaboration of the members of [the] community" (AFS). To this end we insured that all literature, advertisements, forms, and training materials were in both Spanish and English. This provided control and respect to the project community. We employed translators to examine all of our documents, which were then meticulously reviewed by Professor María Luisa Spicer-Escalante (Associate Professor of Spanish & Linguistics, Department of Languages, Philosophy & Communication Studies, Utah State University) and Elisaida Méndez.

After six months preparation we were ready to begin looking for individuals to participate in the project. Rodas engaged the community and posted our bilingual flyers in an effort to enlist interested community members as interviewers and interviewees. Méndez then took the contact information and along with Rodas and Williams planned an oral history workshop. Méndez, Rodas and Williams selected all the oral history workers and interviewees. Funded through grants from the Utah Humanities Council and the Utah Division of State History, we hosted the workshop at USU in June 2007. Sixteen community members attended, of whom 13 agreed to act as project fieldworkers. During an earlier workshop held in March, Williams trained five USU linguistics students who wanted use the interview experience as part of their Spanish linguistics course service learning component.

The training was *very* successful. Méndez, a gifted teacher, shared information on cultural sensitivity; and Williams taught oral history best practices. The participants clearly caught the vision of oral history work, and expressed excitement in being part of this collecting project. "I was very impressed with the scope and depth of this program. . . ." exclaimed one, noting how similar projects should be pursued "in Davis County [Utah] where I grew up." Participants universally expressed their belief that the project would be a "voice to the Latino community... [and] help the Latino Community feel more a part of... Cache Valley..." [UHC]. Méndez offered a concluding sentiment when she declared that as both "a member of this community, and a direct contributor to the project's fulfillment, I cannot think of a better way to bring the Latino community to light." The project, she asserted, would illuminate the "qualities and strength of character that have helped [my community] forge a present and a future in a western corner of a great nation. The Latino Voices Project is making justice as it enhances the quality of education, promotes further research and connects generations through the years" [Williams and Méndez].

The project collected forty-five interviews from community members between March and October 2007. From the start, we had envisioned that the entire collection would be in English and Spanish. In March 2008, we were able to have six of the forty five interviews translated from Spanish to English and in October 2008, with generous support from the Marriner S. Eccles Foundation and the Utah State Historical Records Advisory Board (USHRAB), we were able to have thirty two more interviews translated from Spanish to English. And plans are underway to have the remaining seven English language transcripts translated.

Each interview was transcribed by Workforce Language Services. We selected this company, in part, because its president is a cultural anthropologist who has conducted oral history work herself and understands the complexities and nuances of this work. In addition, she employs transcriptionists that are native Spanish speakers, an essential component of our project.

Following transcription, we returned the transcript and interview to each informant for vetting. We made all the suggested changes and returned the revised copy to each interviewee. The revised version is the one that we use in the physical (FOLK COLL 38) and online collection (http://uda-db.orbiscascade.org/findaid/ark:/80444/xv83200).

The project received great media coverage, both locally and from Wasatch Front newspapers. Although much of this coverage was positive, blogs associated with several articles included vitriolic posts which confirmed to us that our efforts to preserve and present the life experiences of Cache Valley Latinos is vital. We carried this mission forward by holding public presentations. In October 2007, Méndez and Williams presented the project at the Cache Community Connections' Tabernacle and Lecture Series at the Logan LDS Tabernacle. Approximately 50 people attended, where a question and answer session led to a particularly interesting discussion. Following the presentation several individuals shared with us their interest in oral history work for their community/group, including Providence City, the Logan Presbyterian Church and the Cache Community Connection organization. These contacts have since enabled Williams to hold oral history presentations or workshops for each of these groups. All of these groups have conducted and completed oral history projects for their organizations; and the Cache Valley Presbyterian Church (FOLK COLL 44) and Cache Community Connections (FOLK COLL 47) have deposited their oral history projects in USU Libraries' SCA.

In an effort to analyze the LVP project Méndez and Williams organized a symposium and in September 2008 invited all the LVP interviewees, interviewers, advisory board members and some community members. Twenty participants, ranging in age from seventeen to seventy attended. Participants were asked to read selections from the LVP oral histories prior to the symposium to guide discussion. While preparing the readings,

Méndez noted four major themes in the "voices" of the participants: social/political, family, work, and community. USU scholars, participants of the projects, were asked to moderate each theme group. From the vibrant discussions at the symposium, Williams, Méndez, M. Spicer-Escalante, Eduardo Ortiz and JP Spicer-Escalante prepared short essays about the project and themes. At present, Ortiz, M. Spicer-Escalante and Williams are working on Latino/a Voices II, an effort to enhance the LVP by adding youth perspectives to the collection by collaborating with students in Mountain Crest High School's Latino Discovery.

Along the way, Méndez and Williams received a Utah Humanities Council *Human Ties Award* on behalf of the effort. The publicity kept the LVP in the spotlight and paved the way for further donations into a subset of the LVP, including Mountain Crest High School's yearly Latinos in Action class publications *A Journey to the American Dream: One World, Many Countries, One Family, One Purpose* (2010) and *In Hope of a Better Future: Making our Parents' Sacrifice Worth it* (2011); *Utah Latinos: A Proud Legacy*, Vol. 1 and 2; and *OKEspanol* (formerly *El Observador de Utah*), Utah's leading Spanish language newspaper published by the *Deseret News*.

From concept to (near) completion, the Latino/a Voices Project works to strengthen SCA's Latino holdings. From the insightful oral histories and commentary of forty five Latino community members to the engaging symposium from which central themes from the histories were discussed and short essays inform the collections' digital presentation the LVP was a success. But, most importantly the collection is a robust beginning of Latino community connections and community involvement in Utah State University Libraries' Special Collections and Archives.

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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=bkmk). 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 podes hablar de la iglesia, podes 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).

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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Specific historical, political, and economic reasons explain the presence of Hispanics in the United States. These factors must be understood to interpret the importance and impact of Hispanics in the workforce in the United States. Therefore, it is necessary to briefly review the circumstances and events that have created the social context in which the Hispanic population is now embedded. For example, in the case of the Mexican-American population, many families have been here since before the English arrived, settling in the former Mexican territories now known as New Mexico, Colorado, California, Arizona, and Texas. Other families, who immigrated to the United States during the 20th century, have already lived here for several generations (Peñalosa 1980, as cited in Spicer-Escalante 2002). Moreover, during the Second World War, the United States and the Mexican government instituted the Bracero Program (1942), which allowed Mexicans to work for short periods of time and for low wages in this country (Valdés, 2000). Although the Bracero Program ended in 1964, Mexican workers have continued coming to the United States. This historical context explains, to some extent, the Mexican presence in the United States – 63% of the total U.S. Hispanic population (U.S. Census Bureau 2011) – and particularly its presence in Utah, where 12.0% of the population is Hispanic compared to 16.3% of the nation's total population (Pew Hispanic Center 2011).

Other Hispanic groups, such as Bolivians, Argentinians, Salvadorans, and Dominicans, were driven by the political, social, and economic challenges in their country of origin to come to the United States, looking for other options and for an alternative way of living. According to the most recent statistics available, more than 50 million Hispanics currently live legally in this country, representing approximately 16% of the total U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau

2011). The Hispanic population is projected to reach 132.8 million by the year 2050, which will represent approximately 30% of the nation's population (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). According to the U.S. Department of Labor (2011), Hispanics comprised 15% of the United States labor force in 2010; by 2018 they will represent approximately 18% of the country's workforce. In light of this situation, we might ask ourselves: Where do these Latino/Latina people work? What are their experiences in the workplace? What are their dreams and their struggles with regard to working in this country? What are their expectations? And, most importantly, what are their plans for fully participating in the opportunities that this country has to offer, as well as contributing to the challenges it will face over the next few decades?

The following 16 interviews with Latinos and Latinas from different nationalities display a set of similar attitudes on how this population conceives of work. That is, for most Latinos and Latinas in Logan, Utah, working and providing for their families is considered a matter of pride, self-identification, and respect. Likewise, the interviews show common patterns in how Latinos and Latinas have adjusted their personal and professional skills, aptitudes, and preferences in order to be successful in the workplace in the United States. The interviews also illustrate how their diverse work experiences have opened new pathways and opportunities to achieve both current and future professional and personal endeavors.

Several common topics can be identified in these personal narratives. For example, although most of the interviewees explicitly express in various ways that education is one of the most important aspects of achievement, some of them consider working and providing for their families more important than having a college degree. According to national statistics, it is common among Latinos to drop out of school to support their family. According to the Utah Sate Office of Education, 26% of Hispanic students dropped out of high school in 2010 (Salt Lake

Tribune 2011). In this regard, the stories of Delina Carpio Amestoy, Enrique Mendoza, Ena Murillo, and Enrique Sotelo are examples of the challenges and struggles Hispanic people face in pursuing an education. It is noteworthy that, among Latinos and Latinas, education is understood not only in the strict sense of formal education at school but also as an extension of learning both the English language and how to adapt to the conventions and rules of a new culture. Both Ana Trujillo and César Hernández reflect on having learned to navigate the new culture to better fit into society in this country. Most of the interviewees agree that persistence, sacrifice, and consistent effort are necessary for success not only in the United States but elsewhere. Although the reader encounters these themes many times throughout the present conversations, the stories told by Clara Galeano, Ana Trujillo, and Gustavo Estrada make these points especially clear.

It is important to mention that despite the countless difficulties they have encountered while establishing themselves in the United States, most of the interviewees have been able to succeed and to achieve a high level of education (i.e., Germán Sabillón, Ariel E. Rosario, and Daniel Useche). As a matter of fact, some of them have continued to pursue professional goals, as mentioned by Ernesto de la Hoz, Eduardo Ortiz, and Elisaida Méndez. Similarly, in some cases, these Latino/Latinas have managed to expand their professional horizons and have found new pathways not only by using their previous expertise but also by learning new skills, as illustrated by both Héctor Mendiola and Carmen L. Yupanqui Zaa. In short, these interviews portray stories of the successes and struggles that Latino/Latinas have experienced in the workplace in the United States. They also describe their dreams, their hopes, and their potential as part of the workforce of this country.

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