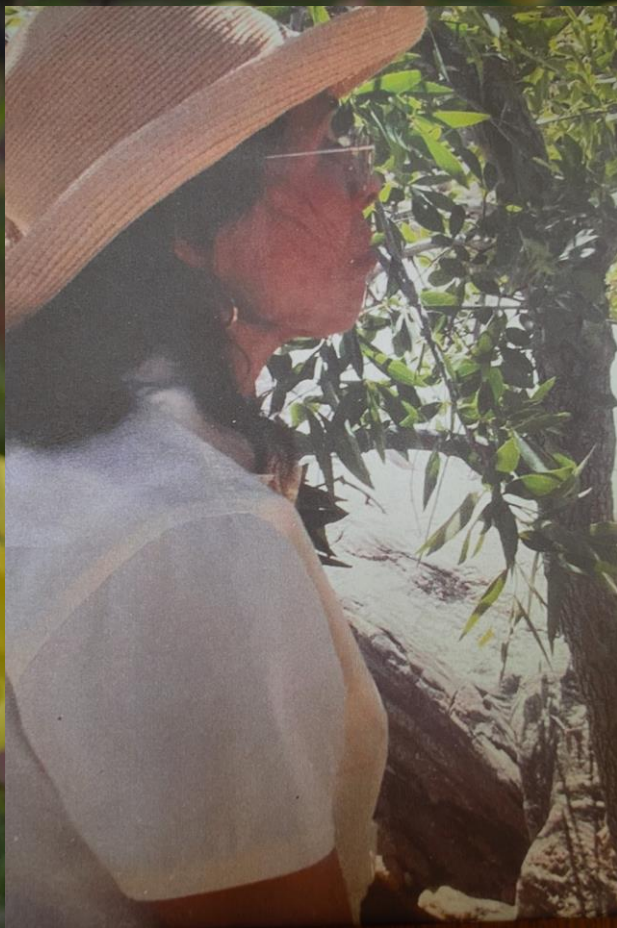




Brechas: Regional Migration Trends and Alternative Roads for Mexican and Latino Families in the Midwest

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Eloisa Viramontez Anguiano 1933-2021

My Mother and Mentor

Gratitude

Latino Families & Community Leaders in the Rural Midwest over 30 years

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Introduction

- The United States Midwest region has experienced Mexican and Latino migration for over a 100 years, commonly called the “Browning of the Midwest.” (Aponte and Siles, 1994)
- Mexican settlers faced resistance in their new communities and were often caught in social and political tensions causing more *barreras* (barriers) (*Apple Pie and Enchiladas*, Milard and Chapa, 2005)
- Cultural discontinuity has transformed into cultural awareness and responsiveness in some of these communities. Families have continued to demonstrate resilience and ingenuity for over one hundred years.
- Rural Midwest downtowns now contain *panaderias*, *tiendas*, and other Latino based businesses and general businesses, owned by Latino families.



Paper Explores

This paper explores the migration trends and realities of modern Latino Midwestern families. Specifically, this paper will illustrate the challenges and triumphs of families of Mexican and Latino descent as they have struggled to carve out a place in the heartland.

The experiences are based on the author's 30 years of ethnographic culturally responsive research.

Demographic Trends

- In the late 1980s, there was a large migration of families of Mexican and Latino descent into the Midwest to seek better opportunities (Congressional Research Services, 2012)
 - Increase in Iowa up to 1087%, Minnesota 1627%, Nebraska 1084% and Indiana 973%
- Major increases changed the fabric and infrastructure of Midwestern towns, especially rural communities.
- In 2018, Latino preschoolers changed the makeup of public early education in the Midwest (Education Trust, 2023)
 - Illinois increased by 30%, Iowa 33%, Michigan 20% and Nebraska 28%
- There was little to no increase in Latino teachers since 2018
 - In Nebraska, 4 out of 5 Latino student based district had no Latino teachers (Nebraska Department of Education, 2006)

Demographic Trends (Cont.)

- It is important to point out that despite the record number of Latino growth that during times of economic hardship or economic growth that often immigrant Latino are more likely to have the lowest paying jobs and to be unemployed (Viramontez Anguiano, Reyes, and Chavez, 2013).
- Meatpacking plant workers in the Midwest were disproportionately affected by the pandemic, (Fremstad, Rho, & Brown, 2020; U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2021).
- Meatpacking plants were some of the first industries impacted by COVID-19 (Kline, 2021; U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2021)(U.S. Bureau Of Labor Statistics, 2022).

30 Years of Ethnographic Research and Key Themes

The researcher had sought out to learn about family life, family dynamics, cultural, generational realities, family-school relations, pathways and *brechas* to higher education, immigration issues, fatherhood and motherhood, community life and overall factors related to Latinos families.

The research unfolded in family homes, churches, community centers, schools, mobile home meeting rooms, farms and other spaces that respondents considered safe.

The major objective of the culturally responsive ethnography was to understand the nuanced daily lives of the families.

The researcher collected decades of culturally responsive data from the brechas (alternative roads) that families had to navigate in the Midwest.

30 Years of Ethnographic Research: **Living in the Shadows**

The romanticized interpretations of small rural communities would not hold true for Latino families as the process of adjustment for immigrant Latino families was difficult.

Passage of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRAIRA) for Latinos who had migrated to the Midwest as undocumented individuals would face less forgiving immigration policies and laws.

Despite living in the dark, or *shadows* as one father shared at a community meeting, the Latino community demonstrated resilience especially as they saw the future generations as a beacon for hope. This was a recurring theme from Northwest Iowa to Northern Ohio.

Over 30 years of ethnography, the researcher saw families and whole Latino communities utilize their various sources of capital to not only overcome the obstacles that they faced rather go beyond survival and thrive.

30 Years of Ethnographic Research: Living in the Shadows

Quotes

One person stated:

“We have to work together as a community to deal with the challenges that we face, whether it deals with immigration issues or helping our young people earn scholarships. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. struggled and fought for the rights of Black families so they would have a better life in America, Cesar Chavez fought for earlier generations of Latinos—we need to fight for our future, our children. It doesn’t matter how much education you have, if you speak English or not or if you are legally here we have to be one community working towards the same goals to better our community.”

Another person stated:

“Adapting—you can’t adapt now. You have to go out to go to the store, but it’s straight there and then back to the house. We go from home to work and back. We don’t want our kids to be like us, we want them to be involved. We have them in swimming, karate, chorus...We don’t want them to feel like us, it’s too hard.”



30 Years: Latino Families and Education and Schools in the Rural Midwest

The primary researcher had travelled across the Midwest from Iowa up to Minnesota and across to Ohio, one consistent interactive system was the Latino family and the schools. As discussed by Bronfenbrenner (1989) the mesosystem which was the interaction of the family, and the school was the center of the daily existence of Latino families in the Midwest.

What was clear was that the families experienced cultural and linguistic discontinuity. Over the years the researcher found that if a school district responded in a culturally responsive manner to the new Latino families rather than reactionary that not only did the Latino families benefit rather the whole community was better off.

30 Years: Latino Families and Education and Schools in the Rural Midwest Quotes

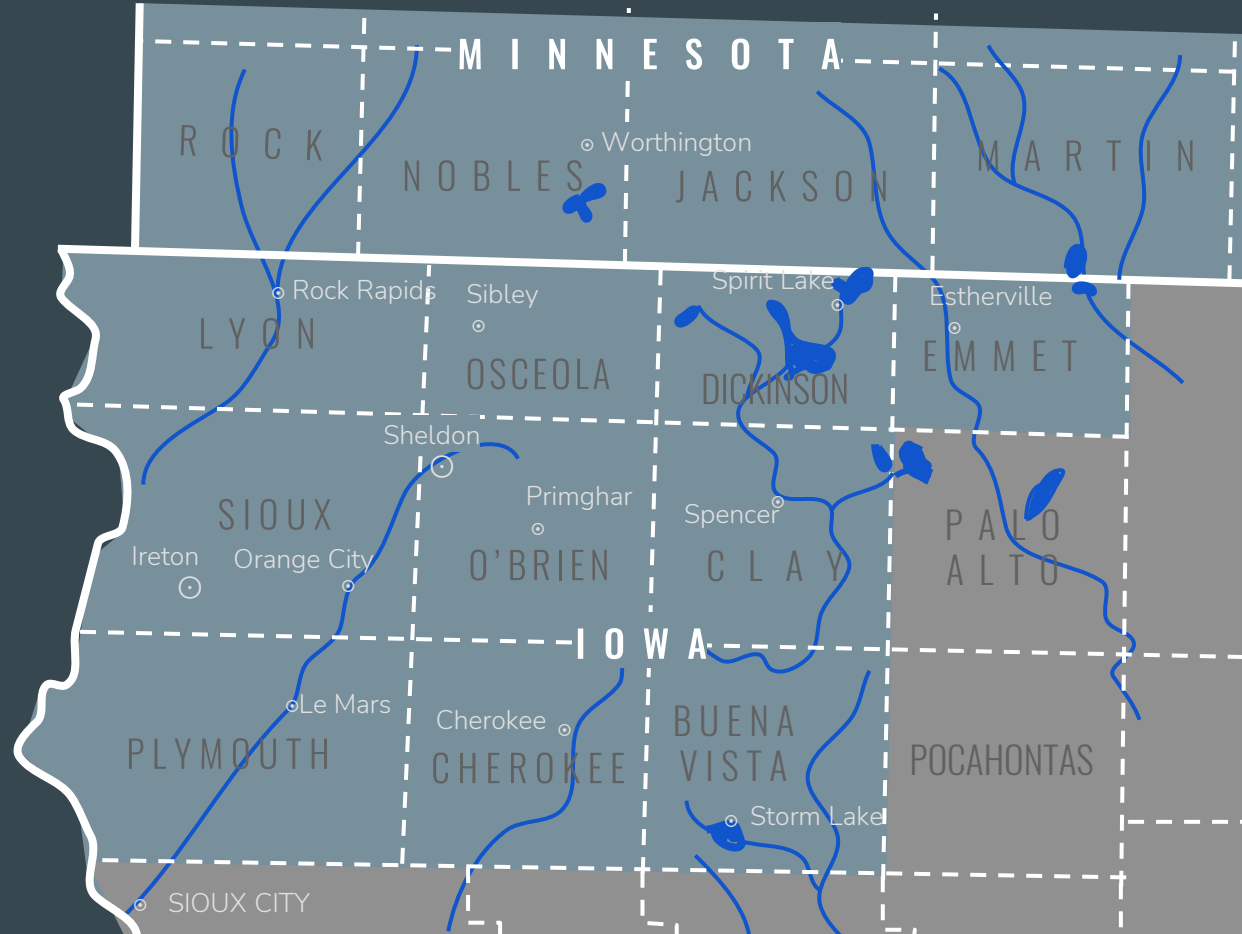
One person shared their experience with the school and district:

“We have always approached [the schools] as much as we can. Before, there were no people who spoke Spanish at the schools; now there are. Before, we did not visit the school because of our fear of the language. I remember when we enrolled my son in school, we went and there wasn’t a relationship with the teachers because they didn’t speak Spanish and we didn’t speak English. Now there are people that help us.”

Another person shared about how Mexican and Latino parents need to be dedicated to their children’s education and engage with the school:

“To be involved in your children’s education, that takes time, and sometimes that is difficult because a lot of the fathers here work at the meatpacking plant and they have long shifts. In my opinion, you have to review homework, ask how things are going at school, and you need to inspect the mochila (backpack) and ask what did you learn today and what did you see. You also need to be involved with the school and communicate with the teachers. Take time with your children. However, there are fathers that don’t inspect the mochila. They don’t take the time to learn about how things are going in school. At night, my wife and I work with our children. Sometimes I do it and other times she does. You must be focused on your children.”

Pandemic research was conducted in Northwest Iowa and Southern Minnesota



30 Years: Midwest Latino Families During the Pandemic

During the summer of 2020 at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the researcher made an important decision to continue the ethnography in person rather than moving the research to an online format. He concentrated the research in Northern Iowa and Southern Minnesota.

The research was conducted in some of the communities with the highest percentage of COVID-19 in the Midwest and the United States. Often, he was forced to meet families outdoors, conduct interviews through windows, large halls with no central heating and other spaces to ensure the health of the respondents and himself.

Family members and Latino leaders were open about how COVID had impacted their families and their communities. Unfortunately, families lost members and Latino communities were caught in the middle of a national political tug of war as it related to COVID. *However, for the families, despite the life threatening realities of the COVID they continued to demonstrate resilience to overcome.*

30 Years: Midwest Latino Families During the Pandemic Quotes

One of the Latino parents shared the realities of COVID in the Midwest:

“At the plant, people were getting sick and still coming to work because they did not want to lose money. Eventually, I got sick with the COVID and my wife also got sick as she also works at the plant. My young daughter had to take care of us. It was a scary time. People from the church and people from the community helped. Unfortunately, my daughter also ended up with COVID. Thank God, we made it through.”

Another parent shared how Mexican and Latinos were caught in the political realities of COVID at the national level.

“The pandemic hit the meatpacking plants in Iowa towns hard. Parents were not speaking up about the difficult work conditions at the plant during the pandemic and were getting sick and were afraid to speak up. Local Latino young people and other Latinos met with at the time candidate Joe Biden during a town hall meeting on Univision to discuss the dire situation. The young people and other Latino community members spoke up about the difficult work conditions that Latinos were facing at the meatpacking plants during the pandemic.”

30 Years: Midwest Latino Families During the Pandemic Quotes (Cont.)

A person shared:

“I was in a coma for a month, in a coma, one month, and one week entirely in a coma, sleeping. That was in May, in June I was really strong, and all of the people there when I was infected, they all died, I was the only one who saved myself. A lot of people died, it’s barely been a month and they stopped the therapy, they would give it to me here in the hospital, but from there they sent me to the hospital. Only two weeks to give therapy for the basics, how to shave, put my shoes on, change my clothes, but only with one hand, this hand I could not move, it was completely numb. Also, with a gadget they would put my socks on, for shoes they gave me therapy, little by little it was here that I began to recuperate more in therapy. It was there that I lost all of my savings, apart from the insurance paying their part, I had to pay my part. I paid a lot of money. A lot there, my savings of 20 years, there it all went, ambulances everything. I have healed a lot because I couldn’t move, and when I was in the hospital where they gave me therapy, they would stand me up and I wouldn’t last even 5 seconds standing, I would fall, I couldn’t walk, not even 15 steps.”

Conclusions

The purpose of this paper was to illustrate the migration trends of Mexican and Latino families in the Midwest.

From 1900 Mexican families and eventually other Latino families migrated to El Norte (the North) to establish and cement their futures in the heartland.

Their resiliency has served as a foundation to their survival and thriving in this vast region from the great plains to the great lakes.

This paper through 30 years of ethnographic research chronicled the lives of the regional migration trends of the families and their Latino communities in the rural spaces of the Midwest.

In summary, whether it was Iowa, Minnesota or to the shores of Lake Michigan generations of Mexican and other Latino families celebrate the Midwest as their home.

Recommendations

Create an environment where school districts can work with each other to help develop genuine Latino family, school, and community partnerships at the local and state levels to help encourage positive learning environments and educational achievement for Latino children and youth.

Facilitate policies and programs at the local, state, and national level that would create an environment where undocumented Latino adults would feel safe and comfortable to be able to live their daily lives and not live in the shadows.

Develop local, state, and national policies and programs that would enhance financial opportunities including scholarships, other forms of financial aids and employment opportunities that help offset the brechas that young undocumented Latino youth have been forced to embark upon as they pursue higher education and post-graduation employment.



Muchas Gracias!

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