



C. Caton: So can community outreach, or service-learning, or teachers going out and working with those who don't have access to the higher educational institutions, to remove some of that class barrier . . . can that help? What do you see as the role of the academic?

V. Villanueva: Yes it does. It depends on the kind of work it is, though. I mean, part of the problem with service-learning, back in '98 when I was chair of CCCC, that was the beginning of service-learning presenting itself in our business. And what I asked of the service-learning folks was for them to theorize what they were doing, and to begin to look at its downsides as well as its upsides. The downside I see is that it can be too easily converted into social work. And I don't mean that there's anything necessarily wrong with social work, but I do mean that there's a perception by those of color and in poverty about bureaucrats, about do-gooders, and you don't want to fall into that because all that you're going to get then is bullshit back. And so you will be taken advantage of, the service-learners will be taken advantage of, at the same time that the real learning isn't allowed to happen. Paula Mathieu, she's got a book on service-learning that shows the ways in that service-learning can really work. It's really great stuff, and Ann Feldman and her work in Chicago is also really interesting work. So yeah, I think there's a lot that can be done on that end.

I'm in a program now where we're not just preparing students to go on, you know, it's not this little incestuous thing, where you prepare students only to go into universities and do what we do. But among the students here are students who want to go into NGOs and work in the neighborhoods and the like, and I think that it would be good for us to change—and "us" means English-types, or in your case, Writing Program-types—to include that in how we talk about our business. That our business isn't solely to produce little clones who will go into universities and write diatribes that will be read by our clones again, but that we can—and should—get things happening in the neighborhoods.



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Our Southern 'Roots' in New Orleans: Early Latino/a Immigration and Its Relevance to a Post-Katrina World

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Research on early Latino/a immigration in the deep South is minimal largely because of the Black and White racial dichotomy that pervades the South. New Orleans has a rich Latino/a and Spanish presence, yet little research covers Latino/a immigration from the 1700s to the mid- 1900s. This paper will trace the early history of Latino/a immigration in New Orleans to help foster deep Southern Latino/a "roots" for this growing immigrant population. The paper will also focus on the largest New Orleans Latino/a community, Hondurans, tracing their early history and current immigrant experiences after Hurricane Katrina.

The presence of Hispanics in Louisiana is too important to be passed over unnoticed. Unfortunately, the information is scattered and inadequate. The Latin American Apostolate wishes to assemble this information and hopes that this publication will contribute to an awakening of interest and commitment

(Foreword to *The Hispanics in Louisiana* (1982) by Luis Emilio Henao)

It was then the year 1980 that I started to look for documentary sources, any source of information related to Hispanics in the past and the present, studies which have been conducted by Tulane University, Loyola University, and LSU in Baton Rouge. I went to the libraries, to the archives to look for any investigation

which had been made concerning Hispanics. I tried to compile these investigations and present a general panorama of who the Hispanic is in Louisiana given a historical antecedent which was also unknown and which continues to be unknown as is a general history of the Hispanic in the United States.

(Excerpt from an interview conducted by Beatrice Rodriguez Owsley with Father Luis Henao in 1987)

After writing “When Students Care: The Katrina Awakening” in the *Writing the Blues* issue of *Reflections*, I knew another story needed to be told about Katrina that would take readers to an earlier time in New Orleans, where Latinos/as were “rooted” in its history. “Roots” provide validation, and recent Southern Latino/a communities struggle with invisibility and oppression. When I was a teenager in the early 70s, my Tia told my mother “hay bastante Hondureños en New Orleans” or “there are many Hondurans in New Orleans.” Another Tia used to talk about her cousins in New Orleans and how successful they had become as doctors, lawyers, gas station owners, and journalists. My Honduran relatives, like many Latinos/as, immigrated or grew up in New Orleans long before Hurricane Katrina hit. Latino/a immigrant “roots” in New Orleans is not a recent phenomena but goes back for hundreds of years.

In the last two decades, the South has seen a dramatic increase in the number of Latinos/as who are migrating and immigrating to this region. As stated in an article written for the Pew Hispanic Center, “The Hispanic population is growing faster in much of the South than anywhere else in the United States” (Kochar, Suro and Tafoya). Some states, such as North Carolina, Arkansas, and Georgia, have seen an increase of over 300% from 1990-2000. This recent change creates an interesting shift in the Black and White racial binary that has pervaded Southern racial mentality for hundreds of years. Unfortunately, this historical Black and White racial binary

in the South can make the Latino/a immigrant population virtually invisible with repercussions that impact academic and nonacademic knowledge-making communities.

One example of this invisibility occurred in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina within a Black and White city, New Orleans. Since Katrina, numerous books have been published on this disaster: poignant survivor stories and novels, outstanding edited collections focused on race relations, amazing photography collections, heart-wrenching books that show the health, environmental, poverty, and education problems facing this city. In what I’ve read so far, the Black and White issues are pervasive, and I found very few articles, books, and documentaries that focused on Latinos/as in Hurricane Katrina. This is quite surprising since Latinos/as make up around 15% of the population in New Orleans and its surrounding communities, according to some surveys. Ernesto Schweikert, a prominent Latino radio announcer of the first Spanish-language station in New Orleans, KLGA Tropical, expressed in an interview with *New America Media*, how “The Hispanic population is always overlooked in New Orleans.” KGLA was one of the few Spanish-language communication sources in New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina. The only national media stories that predominantly covered Latinos/as in New Orleans centered on the rebuilding efforts and the influx of immigrants who came looking for work. However, Latino/a immigrants came to New Orleans long before Hurricane Katrina. Univision was one of the few national stations that consistently covered Latino/a survivor stories.

The aftermath of a devastating hurricane in one of the most internationally recognized Southern cities is an event that demonstrates the repercussions to a Southern Latino/a immigrant community when the Black and White Southern racial binary subsumes almost all coverage and research. Outside some cities in the South, such as Miami and Tampa, which already have a good body of scholarship on their Latino/a communities given Florida’s known “Hispanic” influences,



Southern cities such as New Orleans have, for the most part, evaded the national Latino/a immigrant research conversations. This is especially true with the early Spanish colonial and Latin American immigrant history that can explain why many twentieth- and twenty-first-century Latino/a immigrants would be drawn in large numbers to this city. A number of Latino/a immigration scholars (including those who study New Orleans and Louisiana) are rather dismissive of studying Latino/a immigrants before the 1960s and would rather focus on the large waves of immigration. However, to take this approach with New Orleans creates a shallow understanding of this city's Latinized historical presence. Lengthy studies on Latinos/as in New Orleans or Louisiana consist mainly of either print or microfilm Sociology/Anthropology theses, dissertations, interviews housed in Special Collections, and a few locally books published by the Archdiocese and Latin American Apostolate of New Orleans. The research, for the most part, is located on some dusty shelves in a few libraries. I propose in this paper to share the rich Latino/a immigrant history of a Southern community. The South is long overdue in recognizing the contributions of its Spanish, Mexican, Latin American, and Latino/a inhabitants throughout its history. I hope this paper will encourage readers of *Reflections* who are interested in studying, researching, and/or working with Latinos/as in the South to celebrate this rich Latino/a immigrant history of New Orleans and work to break the Black and White Southern historically racial dichotomy. Although New Orleans does not represent every Southern city, lessons can be learned from studying its Latin-based immigrant population and historical roots. Southern Latino/a immigrants and those who work with them through studies, community engagement, or other interactions must know that the deep South does have a history (outside of Florida) with Spanish, Mexican, and Latin American immigrants who arrived well before the last few decades and significantly influenced certain Southern communities. Groups and leading figures who have helped Latino/a immigrants throughout the early history of New Orleans may not fit within the conventional



perceptions of community activists or groups, but then again, Southern cities and their immigrant populations have their own characteristics. Southern Latino/a immigrants will be empowered to know their "roots" in Southern history as they find ways to form their Southern identities as Latinos/as. As a Southern Latina who has a father from Tennessee, a Honduran immigrant mother, and Latino/a immigrant relatives from New Orleans, this research journey was transformative and makes me proud to identify myself as a Latina from the South.

Scholars who research Louisiana's history usually focus on the French, Creole, and Cajun influences of this region. Little research exists on the Spanish influences except for studies on settlers in Louisiana from the Canary Islands. In fact, according to Father Luis Emilio Henao, Louisiana was a place of contention between the French, Spanish, and British (7). Under French colonization (1699-1764), the immigrants to Louisiana were limited to French deportees, French and German colonizers, and Black slaves. Minimal mixing of these groups occurred during this period (8). However, a dramatic population change took place during the Spanish colonization period of 1765-1803 under the influence of nine Spanish Louisiana Governors (Encyclopedia of Louisiana). Under Spanish governance, many "immigrants, independent of their origin or language, were offered a house, land, a set of tools for working and monetary assistance for a period of time until they became self-sufficient" (9). The Spanish significantly increased Louisiana's population and took in the following groups: Acadians, Canary island colonists, settlers from Kentucky and other Union states, French political refugees from Haiti, Mexican soldiers, and free Blacks from Haiti (9). The majority of immigrants sought refuge and freedom from oppressed conditions. Spaniards and Creoles frequently intermarried during this time, so the Spanish influences had a significant impact on the Creole population (Painter 20).

In the early years of Spanish colonization, Gen. Alejandro O'Reilly, a Spanish Irishman, proceeded to bring "stability and economic reform"



to the 13,000 inhabitants of New Orleans, and brought Catholicism to “civic affairs” (Laviastida and Rodriguez Owsley 77). Under Spanish rule, new residents paid homage to “the Spanish Crown and to the Catholic religion” (9). Governor Esteban Rodriguez Miró threw out a Spanish Capuchin friar who wanted to implement the inquisition in New Orleans (Lea 459). To ensure their adherence to Roman Catholicism, many Spanish clergy came to Louisiana along with the first Bishop, Santiago José Echevarría, who closely monitored the missions in this colony (Laviastida and Rodriguez Owsley 78). They also brought in Irish priests to reach out to their English-speaking communities (Henao 17). New Orleans missionaries and church leaders became significant community leaders that reached out to new inhabitants as they still do today with the Apostolate of New Orleans. New Orleans Catholics today still practice rituals that are of Spanish origin, and Latin American immigrants often noted the similarity in rituals practiced in their countries of origin. Today, New Orleans has the largest Catholic population of any city in the South, which makes it an attractive place for many Latino/a immigrants. Governor Bernardo De Gálvez (1776-1785) was largely responsible for bringing the impoverished Canary Islander immigrants to Louisiana, where many descendants still live today and celebrate their Spanish heritage. As a highly admired governor, he played a major role in defeating the British in Louisiana and securing West Florida for Spain. Governor de Gálvez defeated the British with 700 troops largely comprised of a “militia of all colors” shortly after a devastating hurricane (Woodward Jr., 104). Despite this hurricane’s wrath, which sunk many ships and destroyed many houses in New Orleans, de Gálvez rallied his troops and immigrants of Louisiana. He was beloved by Mexicans, Spaniards, and Louisiana immigrants. Manuel Antonio Valdes of the Mexican Gazette wrote an eloquent epic ballad dedicated to Governor de Gálvez shortly after his early death at 38. Parts of this ballad are haunting, especially given our knowledge of how neglectful political leaders have been to immigrants and the poor long-time residents of New Orleans:



He decreed to provide succor without giving alms,
As with works [projects] where a daily wage
Could be earned by the daily labor of many vagrant men
Who had become only habitual beggars.

He decreed by these measures that the Poor
In the future might be recognized
So that those not having a just claim
Would not defraud those who did.

He decreed that Pauperism be reduced
For many not wishing to be confined to shelters
Against their will, deserted,
And in their work they were happier. (127)

De Gálvez sought to open up the New Orleans port to Europe and the Americas through trade in order to bring prosperity to New Orleans’ inhabitants, but the Spanish ministry thought this was too liberal; however, trade with Latin America increased. He became the Captain General to both Cuban and Louisiana and was later appointed as the Viceroy of Mexico. He died shortly afterwards.

Upon the U.S. Louisiana Purchase in 1803, many Spaniards left New Orleans, but the Mediterranean cultural presence flourished during the first half of the nineteenth century. Trade with Latin American and the Caribbean increased significantly because of the New Orleans port expansion. Large numbers of Cuban and Mexican exiles immigrated to New Orleans, which created a strong Spanish-speaking political climate (Lavastida and Rodriguez Owsley). The first U.S. Spanish language newspaper, *El Misisipi*, originated in New Orleans with its first publication in 1808. It paved the way for more Spanish-speaking publications that would soon develop in the U.S. The Latino/a immigrant and resident population used the newspaper to voice their views on Caribbean politics and show their support of



Southern slaveholders. Hundreds of New Orleans Cuban residents and immigrants, who had leanings toward Caribbean slaveholding interests, joined the Confederacy (Sánchez Korrol). New Orleans also became known as a place where secretive plots developed to overthrow various Latin American governments, such as the one instigated by William Walker to overthrow the Nicaraguan regime (Lavastida and Rodriguez Owsley). These plots were the early beginnings of New Orleans' longstanding connections with the Banana Republics, which lasted well into the twentieth century (Braken 17). Although some of the Latino/a immigrant and resident population of New Orleans engaged in activities this writer strongly opposes, they did demonstrate to other U.S. Latino/a communities the vital roles Spanish-language newspapers and eventually other forms of media would play in giving voice to Latino/a immigrant communities. A little known but interesting development during the 1850s was that hundreds of Louisiana Creoles immigrated to Mexico so they could escape the threat to their free status. According to Mary Gehman, many Creoles went to Vera Cruz or Tampico, Mexico. These Mexican Creoles significantly influenced these regions and New Orleans' influences are evident in their food, architecture, and names. Many of their descendants have French and Spanish surnames and celebrate their Mexican Creole identities. This may be one reason some recent Mexican immigrants are attracted to working or living in New Orleans. This U.S. city on the Gulf of Mexico may remind them of their cities or familiar places on the Mexican Gulf coast. Some Mexican immigrants to New Orleans could be distantly related to Creoles from New Orleans. Ironically, Mayor Nagin, who is of Creole descent and who has publicly expressed his fear of Mexican immigrants in post-Katrina New Orleans, may be related to Mexican Creoles and/or Mexican immigrants wishing to seek a better life in his city.

The 1920s saw another wave of Latin American and Mexican immigration to New Orleans. In the early 1900s, Archbishop Placide Chapelle of Louisiana appointed a Dominican Friar, Thomas Lorente, to be his secretary in New Orleans. He attempted to bring the Latino/a



immigrant community to his church by offering services in Spanish to serve this growing Mexican and Latin American community. However, Latinos/as were all over the city and tended to want to go to church in their neighboring communities (Lavastida and Rodriguez Owsley). A number of Latin American social clubs developed during this time with many women serving on the Board of the Directors. Some Latino men blamed women for these social clubs' disintegration because "they want[ed] their way," but a more realistic reason stemmed from the tensions between the various Latin American nationalities within these clubs (Painter 41). As the "gateway to Latin America," New Orleans brought immigrants from numerous ports throughout Latin America who held strong loyalties to their former countries.

In the 1940s, many immigrants who arrived in New Orleans were educated, spoke English, attended New Orleans universities, and assimilated into the New Orleans community (Painter). They contributed in many ways to this community and surrounding communities. However, many individuals outside of long-time residents of New Orleans are unaware that New Orleans' port was once the gateway to Latin America, where immigrants arrived, and, as is the case with many first entries, remained in New Orleans. During the first half of the twentieth century, many New Orleans storeowners had signs in their downtown windows that said "Aqui Se Habla Espanol." Wealthy Latin Americans frequented their stores, and the New Orleans business owners catered to them with their bilingual staff (Painter 71). New Orleans was mostly a U.S. Southern haven for white Latin American and Mexican immigrants, students, and visitors.

If it were not for Norman Wellington Painter's Master's Thesis in Sociology (1949) entitled *The Assimilation of Latin Americans in New Orleans*, we might know little about the emerging Latino/a community in New Orleans during the first half of the twentieth century. Painter was a graduate student at Tulane University, a university which is deeply committed to its Latin American students and which, since its



inception in 1834, “has pursued a mission of advancing progressive and cutting-edge study and research in Latin America” (Stone Center for Latin American Studies). Indeed, Tulane was and still is a U.S. higher education gateway for Latin American students and professors. It serves as one of only a few U.S. institutions of higher learning that has a long history of promoting research on the Americas and fostering extensive research ties with Latin American professors. The University of Louisiana, Louisiana State University, Loyola University, and Delgado Community College are other institutions with a long history of admitting and educating Latino/a immigrants, especially immigrants who could not afford Tulane (Garcia Ponce). Painter, who was an undergraduate member of the Hispanic honor society at Baylor University and grew up in a small town in Texas during the 1920s, must have witnessed differences in the way Latin American and Mexican immigrants were treated in New Orleans, which perhaps created a strong incentive to study the New Orleans’ Latino/a community. A clue about his Texas roots emerges when he says “Again the personal attributes of the researcher may have unconsciously influenced the various analyses. But objectivity was striven for at all times” (164). One quote from a case study participant who used to live in Texas demonstrates the differences between Dallas and New Orleans:

In Dallas, Texas I went to get a shave; the barber would not shave me. The people all over Dallas are ignorant; there is widespread prejudice. They class all Latins together and judge them by the worst examples. I asked the barber where the Mexican quarter was; I wanted to get some Mexican food.

The barber said, “See that n____r over there? Ask him, he can tell you. (55)

This quote haunts me almost 60 years later, as a South Texas professor who knows the history of Mexican lynchings, the Texas Rangers’ tyranny, segregated Mexican-American and white schools, children



being beaten for speaking Spanish in their classrooms, and the myriad of other discriminatory measures that still linger in the parents’ and grandparents’ *cuentos* (stories) from my Latino/a students. Painter must have been challenged to be “objective” during the ‘40s when New Orleans appeared to be significantly less oppressive for Latin American and Mexican immigrants than cities and towns in Texas and California.

He studied 67 case histories of “Latin American people” in New Orleans. Case histories represented 4% of the Latin American population in New Orleans who were born outside this country, and Latin Americans in New Orleans represented 1/3 of one percent of the total population. This percentage was probably lower since the Latino/a population in New Orleans has always been undercounted, even after Hurricane Katrina. Painter’s study on Latino/a immigrant assimilation was relatively groundbreaking for his time since most research focused on European groups and concentrated on “northern industrial cities.” A few studies were conducted on Mexicans immigrants and migrants in Texas and California, but Painter’s study was unique in that he captured immigrants from all over the Americas that settled in New Orleans. Painter notes that American Sociology emerged as its own academic department in universities because of multiple studies of immigration (2).

His groundbreaking study of Latino/a immigration is fascinating in that it occurs in the South and portrays Latino/a immigrants as significantly less oppressed in New Orleans than in almost any other city. He acknowledges, like many other researchers, that the focus in New Orleans centers on a Black and White conflict. He sees this as a benefit to Latin American immigrants who he claims can easily assimilate given their small population (141). However, he creates a more complex picture of New Orleans and its history with Latin America that explains why these immigrants from a variety of Latin American and Caribbean countries might not experience the hardships other Latino/a immigrants faced elsewhere. From his case studies, he found that many New Orleans Latino/a immigrants came



from good educational and middle class backgrounds, knew some New Orleans' schools and universities would welcome their children, familiarized themselves with New Orleans' cultural ties to Spanish history and Catholicism prior to immigrating, spoke some English, and successfully secured employment in a city with strong economic ties to Latin America. Latino/a immigrants lived in neighborhoods throughout New Orleans, and it was quite common for them to intermarry with U.S. citizens. Many of them had just as many friends that were Latinos/as as they had with Anglos/as. Thirty- one percent of Latinos/as he interviewed said that they belonged to mainstream organizations, such as the American Medical Association, AAUP Young Men's Business Club, Masonic Lodge, and the Association of Commerce. Some of the interviewees said that they were barred from joining mainstream organizations like these in other states like Texas and California (42).

A significant flaw in Painter's study is that he failed to interview Black Latino/a immigrants and, according to Mary Karen Bracken, they were in New Orleans at this time (41). According to an interview she had with Ismael Cacho Nuñez, a Black Honduran retired U.S. Merchant Marine, many Black Latino immigrants were seamen or port workers who easily eluded documentation checks because they could pass for Black Americans (53). Black seamen have long been respected in Black culture given their worldly experiences and their ability to bring port communities news from other parts of the country. They frequently intermarried with Black Americans and quickly assimilated into Black American culture (53). Xavier University in New Orleans (established in 1925) was the only Black and Catholic university in the nation and did recruit Black Latino/a college students (see Evelio Grillo's *Black Cuban, Black American*). However, Southern Black Latinos/as were often seen as only Black and not Latino/a. Black Latino/a immigrants quickly assimilated into Black American culture in New Orleans and elsewhere in the South because of the harsh Jim Crow laws at that time. They needed



to survive in a Black and White Southern city. However, given the strong Black Catholic population in New Orleans, Black Latino/a immigrants found assimilation easier given the religious affinity to Black Americans that was almost nonexistent (and sometimes oppressed) in many parts of the South. They hoped that their children could attend Black Catholic schools and a Black Catholic university. They also found affiliation with the Black Caribbean influences that were part of the Black American culture of New Orleans.

Little has been written on the Latino/a population in New Orleans during the 1950s and early 1960s except for when Cubans arrived in New Orleans to escape Fidel Castro. However, according to the census data that Elmer Lamar Ross collected in 1973, the Latin American Foreign Born population increased dramatically from 2,728 (1950) to 8,331 (1960) to 15,388 (1970) in Orleans Parish (5). The census data may be understated given the number of illegal immigrants in New Orleans. Something happened during these decades to attract a Latino/a immigrant group to New Orleans, one that is seldom written about in this country, Hondurans. Often, when I mention that my mother is from Honduras, I receive perplexed looks from folks, especially in the South, who I know are not sure where this country might be.

However, this is not the case in New Orleans, a city that has the largest population of Hondurans outside of Honduras at around 140,000-160,000 out of approximately 300,000 Latinos/as in New Orleans. They are a significant population in New Orleans who received little attention as a primary focus of study. Only one U.S. lengthy work (a thesis) has been written on the Honduran presence in New Orleans (see Samantha Euraque's 2004 thesis entitled "Honduran Memories: Identity, Race, Place, and Memory in New Orleans, Louisiana"). Hondurans have had a long and sometimes tumultuous relationship with New Orleans dating back to at least the late 1860s. Interestingly, the Honduran presence in New Orleans



became much more prominent when three Italian immigrants in New Orleans, Joseph, Luca, and Felix Vacarro, decided to import bananas from Honduras. These poor Italian immigrants worked on Magnolia Plantation hauling produce before opening up a store with Salvador D'Antoni. Their store was lost to a Mississippi levee break and a few years later they lost their orange crop due to a harsh Southern winter. With a small battered ship, they began a successful business of importing bananas to New Orleans from La Ceiba, Honduras. They quickly acquired more ships and formed the Standard Fruit Company. Unlike the United Fruit Company that cared little about their Latin American communities, the Vacarro brothers built hospitals, schools, and infrastructures along with a railroad that helped the people of Honduras (Sanchez). They gained prominence in New Orleans as well, although the people of New Orleans stereotypically claimed that these Italian immigrants had ties to the mob (Karnes 32). They also had a fleet of 35 ships that not only carried bananas but also passengers from Mexico and throughout the Caribbean area, including Central America, starting around 1924. These Italian immigrants brought the Latin American, Mexican, and especially Honduran immigrants to New Orleans.

According to Trujillo-Págan, the number of Central Americans in New Orleans increased from 100 in 1890 to 1,023 in 1930. The Standard Fruit Company and the United Fruit Company employed many Hondurans who immigrated to New Orleans and were responsible for forming early Latino communities in the Mid-City region (99-100). These early Honduran immigrants arriving mostly from the coastal regions of La Ceiba, Trujillo, Tela, Porto Cortez and San Pedro Sula played a role in attracting immigrants from other Latin American countries. With the Standard Fruit Company cruise ships, between 1927 and 1951, the Vacarro brothers also offered residents of New Orleans many excursions to Havana, Cuba, La Ceiba, Honduras, Nicaragua, Vera Cruz and Tampico, Mexico, the Mexican cities that have Creole influences (Maritime Timetable Images). Today, the



cruise ships from New Orleans predominantly go to the Caribbean islands. With the Vacarro brothers centralizing their Latin American ties in La Ceiba, it soon became a place that attracted immigrants from the continent and beyond. The most frequent cruise ship stops from New Orleans were in La Ceiba. New Orleans and La Ceiba residents found a particular familiarity in their respective cities since both cities have the largest Carnivals (Mardi Gras) in their country and regions. La Ceiba has week-long festivities in the third week of May to commemorate San Isidro and is known to be the largest Carnival in Central America. This city also has a significant Black population (Garifunas) who are descendents of African slaves and a local Indian tribe. Zora Neale Hurston conducted extensive anthropological studies of Garifunas (see *Tell My Horse: voo doo and life in Haiti and Jamaica*). Starting in the late 1980s, the Honduran community sponsored well-attended Honduran festivals in New Orleans, where New Orleans experienced Honduran music, food, and culture. The Latino/a community also had Carnaval Latino, another festival that started around the same time (Treadway). In recent years, they were also instrumental in bringing Fiesta Latina, a Latin music festival presented by the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Foundation. These similar communities would explain why many Hondurans in Painter's case studies and later immigrants to New Orleans expressed a familiarity with this city that reminded them of home. This may explain why some from New Orleans in the first half of the twentieth century were quite comfortable with their Honduran immigrants.

After WWII, Honduran soldiers immigrated to New Orleans, where they attained American citizenship (Henao 22). The 1950s brought several strikes, a large Honduran hurricane, and several political upheavals that propelled some Hondurans to leave their country for economic reasons. The natural place for many Honduran workers was New Orleans, especially for La Ceiba residents more familiar with this U.S. city. A wave of migration began in the late 1950s (Euraque). Earlier in the decade, a more affluent class of Standard Fruit



Company Honduran employees often sent their children to boarding schools in New Orleans after their children finished attending the Standard Fruit Company-sponsored elementary bilingual school in La Ceiba. Many of the New Orleans boarding schools were receptive to Honduran children who later attended U.S. universities. Elmar Ross's study of the educational level for the Latino/a population in 1970 shows that Latinos/as ranked highest out of Blacks and Whites in educational attainment for the state (99). He also found that Latinos/as had higher percentages in attendance of nursery schools, kindergartens, and college (97). With the acquisition of Transportes Aéreas Centro-Americanos (TACA airlines) by Waterman Steamship Company in 1949, TACA airlines becomes chartered in New Orleans. Central American immigrants (especially Honduran immigrants) now have easy access to New Orleans via planes and ships (Grupo TACA). In 1959, Dr. Raul G. Reyes "founded the Asociación Hondureña de Nueva Orleans with the goal of preserving Honduran cultural traditions through the sponsorship of folkloric and social events" (qtd. in Bracken, 57). He later ran for the Presidency of Honduras, but lost the election (Garcia Ponce). Reyes still practices in New Orleans. The association he formed coincided with the first Latino/a concentrated community, "El Barrio Lempira" that was located in the lower Garden District (Euraque). Honduran restaurants, bars, supermarkets, and other small businesses began cropping up in the area and in Elysian fields. Other Honduran groups developed in subsequent years, such as the Honduran American Emergency Fund, Asociación Hondureña Unificada de Louisiana, and Hondureños Unidos de Louisiana. The groups have had problems that hindered the leadership, but they worked to help Hondurans and their Louisiana Honduran communities, especially in Post Mitch and Katrina.

Early Honduran and other Central American communities developing around the city paved the way for other Latino/a immigrants to come to this city and find hope in fulfilling their American dreams. The Honduran immigrant population and its relative early success



in New Orleans may have seemed attractive for other immigrant groups. Cubans arrived in the early 1960s seeking refuge from the Castro government. Two decades later this established community of Cubans, New Orleans sea captains, various priests, and journalists were instrumental in bringing Cubans to New Orleans in 1980 during the Mariel boatlift (Owsley-Rodriguez interview with Joan Treadway). Hondurans and Cubans made up the largest Latino/a population from particular countries making New Orleans different in its Central American/Cuban dominance compared to other areas of the country. Post-Katrina has brought in another large immigrant population, Mexicans. The last few decades of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century have seen a dramatic increase in the number of New Orleans Latino/a immigrants and more researchers focus on this time period. However, the early period of Latino/a immigration and Spanish influences are rarely touched upon to any great length.

To extensively focus on the early period and contrast it to the Post-Katrina Latinos/as would serve as a reminder of a historical past of immigration that should not be forgotten. It may remind the New Orleans population and educate others outside of New Orleans that the Latino/a presence is deeply grounded in the cultures of this Southern community and that the new Latino/a immigrants have a place in this cultural history. Decades later, after Hurricane Katrina, I find it difficult to read articles in 2005 that focus on what Honduran immigrants endured in New Orleans. Many Hondurans fled to New Orleans after Hurricane Mitch in 1998, which devastated Honduras and sent the country into economic turmoil. They endured two devastating hurricanes in seven years and now face hardships reaching the U.S. In 2005, it was reported that 505 Hondurans died on their way to the U.S., many from train injuries in Mexico as they tried to board or disembark. The once easy access to New Orleans from Honduras is no more. U.S. Honduran immigrants were sending approximately \$1.2 billion dollars to their families prior to Hurricane



Katrina, so the negative impact for Honduras was profound (“Region Tallies Toll of Katrina: Honduras Hardest Hit”). The money sent to Honduras from families in New Orleans was approximately 20%-30% of all family money that came from immigrants.

In one interview with a Honduran immigrant, Mirta Flores, who endured both Hurricane Mitch and Hurricane Katrina, was asked what it was like to experience another hurricane in such a small time period:

[Translated by Melissa Gutierrez] She says really only God really knows, but that I would really like, sometimes I have the feeling to just get up and leave and go back to my country, but when I think about my five children, I think that really, there I have—they have no future, because of the poverty that we live in there. And so I just feel and I believe in God that he’s going to help us get through this, and eventually, we’ll be able to get a job in the future. (Honduran Immigrants in New Orleans)

Mirta, like many Honduran immigrants, feared deportation and fled to the shelters once she heard Immigration was searching for undocumented immigrants. Many immigrants fled to Houston and flooded a Honduran restaurant, El Coquito, asking for “food, shelter, medicine, and information” (Hondurans Helping Hondurans After Katrina). They distrusted shelters and more conventional sources of information, so Cristina Berrio, the restaurant owner, became “the informal consulate.” The Honduran Consulate provided little help. A local Latino/a newspaper, *Jambalaya News*, covered the corruption and incompetence of the Honduran Consulate General Office in New Orleans that ultimately harmed Honduran immigrants seeking help (Murphy 12).

Hundreds of Garifunas from the North Coastal Honduran region were also reportedly in New Orleans when the storm hit. Garifuna



immigrants and their descendents have a large community in New York City with many relatives residing in New Orleans. Various Garifuna organizations banded together to raise money for relief efforts (“Garifuna in New York Rally for Hurricane Katrina Victims in the South”). Some Garifuna immigrants reportedly stayed at the Super Dome and eluded Immigration authorities because they could pass for African Americans in this Southern Black and White city.

Another Honduran population who fled New Orleans and then came back to rebuild their homes and businesses are professional immigrants and their children who either resided in this city for a long time or were born here. They are professionals who returned to rebuild, left the city for other jobs, or retired to Honduras or other places. They often employed Latino/a immigrants or serviced them through their respective professional occupations. Throughout the years, many of these successful Honduran professionals helped newly arrived Latino/a immigrants with their American dreams and established a welcoming Latino/a environment through cultural events, fundraisers, and other community endeavors.

Honduran Americans like me have respect for this resilient community in New Orleans which perseveres despite insurmountable obstacles. Some are now new immigrants rebuilding New Orleans or established immigrants returning to rebuild their familiar communities in physical, cultural, and/or social ways. Others are sons, daughters, grandsons, or granddaughters of immigrants who know no other home and have heard the early stories of immigration that “root” them in a Southern Latino/a New Orleans. It is a community that cannot and will not be ignored.

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Listen to My Story: The Transformative Possibilities of Storytelling in Immigrant Communities

Mark Lyons, Proyecto Sin Fronteras / Open Borders Project

Since 2006, Open Borders Project / Proyecto Sin Fronteras has used digital storytelling in our work with teens and adult learners in summer workshops, computer courses and ESL classes. Participants write stories or interview others about their immigrant experience, record, edit and mix their stories on an open-source program, and create short audio stories. Their stories are published on our website, used to stimulate discussions, shared in public forums, and played on the radio. The process of creating stories and sharing them has been profound. Listening to each other's stories and reflecting on our common experience is an act of honoring our lives and affirming our sacrifices and dreams. Through our stories, we build a collective identity as immigrants. Telling our stories allows us to take risks, to talk about missing our families, our isolation, our frustrations as we try to feel at home in our new world. Our stories create openings for conversations with our friends and family, to say things unsaid. Our biggest challenge: how to use our stories as instruments for change, to give us a voice, to be heard, to organize, to become actors responding to issues that affect our lives. This article is accompanied by a CD of several of the stories produced at Open Borders Project and referred to in the text.