New Efforts to Document Latino History

BY KRISTIN HUFFINE AND MATTHEW MALETZ

The NIU Latino Oral History Project

Lawyer, Jon Lauck, and Historian, David Brown, recently issued a call to arms for the historical study of the Midwest. Too long, they argue, has the history of America been written by and for the coastal elite. Derisively calling the variegated lands in which a quarter of American citizens live, work, and die “fly-over country,” these predominantly Eastern scholars have seen the Middle West as the home of McCarthyism, “ignorant biblical literalists, rednecks, and crypto anti-Semites.” Because of this, the Midwest has been according to Lauck, “a ghost among regions.” In an attempt to change this misperception, Brown documented recent scholars’ efforts to study the region. He writes of the far-reaching influence of a group of Midwestern historians who rejected the consensus that the twentieth century was the “American Century” of capitalism, imperialism, and centralized power. Moreover, according to Lauck and Brown, Midwesterners are less ignorant hicks than populists, communitarians, and individualist, small-d democrats. Echoing the great advocate of self-reliance, Ralph Waldo Emerson, who claimed that, “Europe extends to the Alleghenies, while America lies beyond,” Lauck and Brown similarly articulate the importance of the Midwest to American history. Perhaps more than any other American region, they suggest, the Midwest represents the dream of Jefferson’s land of yeoman farmers. Northern Illinois University has long championed the study of the region, housing the Regional History Center and Illinois Regional Archive Depository in Founder’s Memorial Library, providing a tenure home for historians publishing on the Midwest, offering undergraduate courses in Illinois history, and producing history Ph.D. students who have taken the region as the subject of their dissertations. At the Center for Latino and Latin American Studies, we are pleased to announce a new initiative to document the history of the Chicagoland and greater Illinois region, the NIU Latino Oral History Project. If the Midwest is “a ghost among regions,” then the contribution of its Latino inhabitants is something even
less substantial. James West Davidson and Mark Hamilton Lytle explain why in an essay: political leaders are the movers and shakers in society. Their work intersects with the major issues of the day. They are more apt to keep journals and write memoirs. Their words are recorded in official minutes and records and their actions are more often written about and commented upon by their contemporaries. The work of everyday folk—farmers and field hands, factory workers and small business owners—“is often repetitive and appears to have little effect on the course of history.”5

But how working- and middle-class people have lived their lives has grown more popular as people of modest backgrounds have entered the historical profession and with the growth of popular history in the media. One tool that social historians have turned to in order to document the lives of common people is the oral history interview. Using this method to record and archive the stories of Latinos in the region, whose lives are even more anonymous than those of their neighbors, is an important way of ensuring that when a new generation of historians writes the history of the region, the contributions of its Latino members are not left out.

NIU’s Latino Oral History Project is a long-term student and faculty research initiative designed to produce a collection of local interviews and archival documents on the Latino experience in Chicago and rural Illinois. Faculty and students are working together with people from DeKalb/Sycamore, Chicago, and the northern Illinois region to identify historical conditions and events that have shaped the twentieth-century Latino experience. This takes place in the classroom, the archives, and in the field. Students learn interviewing and ethnographic methods from professors in the classroom. They interview Latino subjects in the field, and mp3 files of their interviews are deposited in the Regional History Center and Illinois Regional Archives Depository at Northern Illinois University. The first NIU Latino Oral History class was taught during the spring of 2014 by Dr. Stanley Arnold. History 494: Oral History Methods introduced students to the discipline and practice of oral history, and provided them with the opportunity to learn the craft of interviewing, employing ethnographic methods, and writing historical accounts of Latinos in the region. In this first course offered by Professor Arnold, students interviewed Latinos on their experience with community activism in Chicago, the U.S. military, and with Latinos and the contemporary cultural production of narcocorridos or drug-smuggler ballads.

This semester, Dr. Arnold is teaching HIST 494 and a new class of students is documenting Latino life histories. Student projects include studies of Latino immigration to the United States; Latino student and community activism in Chicago; Latina workers in rural Illinois; Chicagoland descendants of the Mexican Revolution, and other studies of the local Latino population. A group of students and faculty will also spend July and August of 2015 interviewing Latino subjects and transcribing their interviews.
views for deposit in the Regional History Center. The Center for Latino and Latin American Studies is funding two research teams, both with one faculty member, one graduate student, and three undergraduates. One team will work on Latino political organizing in Chicago under the leadership of Dr. Simón Weffer-Elizondo and History Graduate Student Adam López. The other team will be led by Dr. Kristin Huffine and History Graduate Student Matt Maletz.

Already oral histories have proven crucial to writing the history of the Latino experience in the region. Jeffrey Marcos Garcilazo’s work on Mexican railroad workers relies heavily on his interviews with track workers and their families. His work is important because while seemingly everyone knows that Irish and Chinese immigrants dug tunnels and laid track, few realize that by the early twentieth century, the majority of railroad workers were Mexican.7 NIU Ph.D., Susan Palmer, interviewed Mexican immigrants who fled the Cristero Rebellion against the Mexican revolutionary government and found work in the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railroad scrapyard just outside of Aurora, Illinois. Many of the scrap workers lived in boxcars converted into living quarters on site. This community was, according to Palmer, the only exclusively Mexican neighborhood in Aurora. Mexican immigrants otherwise lived quite dispersed throughout the city, including in the railroad’s other boxcar community located on the shop grounds in Aurora proper. Palmer finds that the Eola scrapyard boxcar community, which was shut down in the 1930s due to the Great Depression, was attractive to Mexican workers because rents were cheap and the railroad provided coal, kerosene, and lumber. They also allowed residents to customize the cars, which were not on tracks as in other boxcar communities in the region, but on the ground. This, besides being a major improvement in the cold winters, allowed community members to build decks and other additions to the cars. The cars did, however, lack running water. Mexicans tended to work in the lowest-paying jobs under native-born American foremen until the labor movement secured better hiring practices.7 Palmer argues that the dispersed nature of Mexican residence throughout Aurora, combined with the shuttering of the boxcar community in the 1930s, meant that the Mexican community did not build lasting institutions in Aurora before renewed immigration in the 1980s. The Eola boxcar community had built a church and maintained a mutual aid society during its existence, but these institutions did not survive the destruction of the scrapyard. Palmer writes that few Auroraans were even aware that there had been a Mexican community in Aurora before the period of renewed Latino migration.8

The interviews conducted in the 1920s and 1930s by Paul Taylor, George Edson, Manuel Gamio, and others serve as sources for Juan García’s history of Mexicans in the Midwest. He finds that after first working on the railroads and in sugar beet fields, Mexicans in the region often took industrial jobs. Once the Great Depression undermined the need for their labor in the United States, voluntary and forced repatriation movements sent Mexicans back to their homeland. Some of those deported were American citizens and had known no other home in their lives. García argues that mutual aid societies attempted to preserve national identity and cultural heritage among Mexican immigrants and to protect them from discrimination. While applauding the efforts of the mutualistas in the face of local hostility, García also documents their shortcomings due to growing class differences, personality conflicts, and internal dissension.9

Michael Innis-Jiménez’s Steel Barrio: The Great Mexican Migration to South Chicago, 1915-1940 takes Mexican migration to South Chicago in the years bracketed by the Mexican Revolution and the start of WWII as his case study. Innis-Jiménez argues that unlike Mexican immigrants to the Near West side and the Back of the Yards area who found and relied on settlement houses to provide education, recreation, and social services, immigrants to the South Side had to found their own

SEE HISTORY PAGE 4
institutions, like mutual aid societies, newspapers, and sports teams. They also relied on Spanish-language businesses and churches to create and maintain their distinct Mexican identity. Many of these migrants were refugees from the political and economic consequences of the Mexican Revolution and Cristero Rebellion between 1926 and 1929, and found work in steel mills, at times by replacing striking workers. Most of these workers intended to return to Mexico, and many did, especially in the years between 1930 and 1934. These years saw mass forced deportations of Mexicans and Mexican Americans in response to nativist and racist resentment in the depths of the Great Depression. However, Mexicans in South Chicago were largely spared the violence experienced by immigrants in the Southwest and even Indiana, owing, according to Innis-Jiménez, to strong, active advocacy groups and ties to other ethnic groups in Chicago.¹⁰

Much of the history of the Latino experience in the region remains to be written. Historical studies have, perhaps understandably, focused on Mexicans, the largest Latino group in the area. Their less numerous Latin American brethren have gone considerably less remarked upon. Documents in the Regional History Center demonstrate that many Latinos in the area, or their parents, formerly worked as migrant laborers in Illinois tomato fields. When farmers switched from planting labor-intensive crops like tomatoes to highly mechanized crops like corn and soybeans, demand for migrant labor dried up. Some of these migrants found fieldwork elsewhere, but many others settled permanently in the area, finding work in factories or starting their own businesses. Their contributions in other areas of community life remain somewhat more obscure to historians. The NIU Latino Oral History project seeks to make sure that they do not remain so.

In addition to offering HIST 494: Oral History Methods during the spring of 2014 and fall of 2015, the History Department and Center for Latino and Latin American Studies will also offer HIST 374: Latinos in the United States during the 2015/16 academic year. The Sociology Department and Center for Latino and Latin American Studies will be offering SOCI 395: Contemporary Topics in Sociology / Latinos in Sociology during spring 2015 semester. This course will be taught by Símon Weffer-Elizondo. Beatrix Hoffman will offer a HIST 374: Latinos in the United States during the 2015/16 academic year. Other faculty involved in the Oral History Project include Professor Taylor Atkins and Associate Professor Rosemary Feurer in the History Department at NIU.
Scholarship Winners

ROBERT MARCELIN MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

Pictured from left to right is the CLLAS Interim Director Dr. Kristin Huffine, 2013-14 Marcelin Award recipient Lupe Lopez, and Alison Thomson.

The Robert Marcelin Memorial Scholarship was endowed by employees of Ameritech Corporation to honor the late Mr. Marcelin, a co-worker and friend who graduated from Northern Illinois University. The committee, which includes principal donor Ms. Alison Thomson, meets annually to select an outstanding student of Latino heritage. The 2014 award went to Guadalupe Lopez, who is studying Psychology.

CENTER FOR LATINO AND LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES’ SCHOLARSHIP

Dr. Kristin Huffine with CLLAS Scholarship recipient Noemi Rodriguez.

Since 2006, the Center for Latino and Latin American Studies has sponsored an undergraduate scholarship competition for students of Latino heritage. Candidates are judged on their academic achievement and promise. This year’s winner was Noemi Rodriguez, a Pre-Nursing major.

CLLAS EVENTS 2013-2014

NIU LATIN JAZZ DANCE PARTY
September 19, 2013
Featuring: Ritmos Unidos Led by Michael Spiro, hosted by NIU percussion faculty Michael Mixtacki

LATINO HERITAGE MONTH
FEATURED SPEAKER
October 15, 2013
Manuel “Manny” Sanchez is the founder and Managing partner of Sanchez Daniels & Hoffman LLP, the second-largest minority-owned law firm in the United States.

GRADUATE COLLOQUIUM
SPAKER:
Dr. Mario Sifuentez, University of California, Merced School of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts. February 4, 2014.
Lecture: By Forests or By Fields: Immigrant Labor and Foundations Of Modern Farmworker Unionism.
Seminar: Methods of Oral History with a Special Focus on Latino Subjects.

GRADUATE COLLOQUIUM
SPAKE:
Dr. Tanya Golash-Boza University of California, Merced School of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts. February 11, 2014.
Seminar: Fourteen Months, Four Countries and Three Kids: Tales from the Field

THE UNDOCUMENTED
April 18, 2014
The Undocumented by Marco Williams reveals the ongoing impact of immigration laws and economic policies on the very people who continue to be affected by them. By going beyond politics, the film also tells a story that is deeply personal.
What is your current research focused on?

I have a new project examining immigration protest in Illinois. I am working with two Research Rookies, Sara Briseño and Lizbeth Roman. We want to understand where immigration protest occurs, which organizations participate in it, which events get covered (and which don’t) via newspapers, and what the network and make-up of the organizations look like. I also have two other projects I want to get started in the next nine months, one on Latina/o obesity, and the other on education-related protest.

What led you to develop an interest in your two areas of specialization in Latino Studies, social movements and race and adolescent obesity, among Latinos?

Growing up in Chicago, and watching the politics of the city—its relationship to protest, and how race and income intersect it all—was always of interest to me. I remember watching Jane Byrne on TV and Harold Washington’s election. So when I began graduate school and it was time to choose a topic, I chose to look at protest in Chicago, by neighborhood, over time. That has evolved into general interests in the motivations and reasoning behind protest. I chose to focus on immigration protests because it deals with all the issues I am interested in: race, power, politics and inequality. It does not hurt that these are some of the hottest topics in politics today. It makes research extremely relevant.

In terms of obesity research, my first job at the University of California, Merced, opened up opportunities to participate in building a new campus. The campus opened in the fall of 2005, and I arrived in July 2006 as the founding Sociologist. There were only about 30 faculty on campus at that time, so there was a chance to do interdisciplinary work. I ended up working with a Biologist, Rudy Ortiz, who specialized in the study of metabolism, because we wanted to learn about health among Latinos in the surrounding community.

Were there any formative academic experiences that led you to develop these research interests?

In terms of understanding race and poverty it was getting the chance to work with William Julius Wilson as an undergraduate through the Summer Research Opportunities Program program at University of Chicago. My interests in protest was created by my mentors at Stanford, Doug McAdam and Susan Olzak. But all of it goes back to the work of my parents in the Latino community as a kid, wanting to improve educational and life outcomes in Pilsen and other Latino communities in Chicago.

Why is the study of obesity among Latino youth important?

It is important because of not just the health issues, but also the long term economic ef-
fects of increased heart disease, stroke, diabetes and other health issues that will impact the growing Latino population. Given that we know Latinos are less likely to have healthcare coverage, the financial impact will be felt by all of us as we are dealing with chronic conditions like diabetes being managed via ER visits, or huge increases in the number of lost work days due to heart disease, stroke etc. And of course this impacts families as well. What happens when the primary wage earner suffers a heart attack or stroke, or misses work because of complications due to diabetes such as gout? It can be catastrophic, forcing families to change residence, and kids to drop out of high school or college to work. Latinos will soon be the largest minority group in Illinois and the nation, and so their health will greatly impact decisions about politics, education and a host of other topics.

Why are studies of obesity important to the field of Sociology?

It’s one of the newest and fastest growing subfields in Sociology. Understanding the societal impacts of health disparities and their effects on the growing Latino population is huge and of great importance. Obesity is an example of how health inequality disproportionally impacts certain groups. It can create long-term economic disparities due to the need to treat chronic diseases such as diabetes, but also, we see that discrimination based on how you look is increasing - not just in terms of skin color/race, more studies in the social sciences are finding that individuals perceived as more fit are more likely to get hired and get raises. So aside from the negative health impacts of obesity, there are other real-world implications.

How has your work on Latinos in rural and urban settings helped you develop new understandings of Latino social movements and the politics of health care?

I think living and doing research in rural California, has helped broaden and deepen my understanding about Latinos in the U.S. Having grown up in Chicago and lived in the Bay Area, I really only understood Latinos in an urban context. From the time I was an undergraduate, through my time at Harvard, I was always looking at Latinos vis-a-vis neighborhood effects, residential segregation, and public housing, which are all urban issues. By taking the position at UC Merced, I learned about the differential circumstances of Latinos in rural communities, from health to politics to immigration and finally work. So it provided a very important contextual change and a new lens to view my research on Latino social movements, inequality, and health. Health care access means something totally different when you live in a rural community, 90 minutes from the nearest trauma center or with a limited number of doctors than it does in Chicago, an urban center where you have multiple top-tier hospitals and medical research centers. From a protest mobilization standpoint, is it different organizing in an urban area, where people are densely concentrated, than it is in rural areas where migrant workers live across a 2000 square mile county.

What is the future of Latino Studies look like?

I’m teaching a variety of classes for the Center for Latino and Latin American Studies and Sociology. Every year I teach ILAS 100: Introduction to Latin American Civilization as well as Sociology 361: Race and Ethnicity. Then I have a series of courses on inequality. Sociology 451 is a course on Urban Communities, which I will be teaching during the spring 2015. I will also be teaching courses on the sociology of Latinos, Chicago inequality, sports and society, and social movements and protest.

In terms of the students, I’ve worked with two as Research Rookies, which was an incredible experience for me, as we worked on two exciting projects. But I also try and make myself available to our students in whatever capacity they need me, as an advisor about graduate school and alternative career paths, or as a speaker at events like Cinco de Mayo or student-run conferences. It is important to me to be a resource for them.

I’ll be working with Professor Huffine on the project as a whole, but will be specifically working on the Latino Oral histories component, as well as a project examining immigration to and from Jalisco in Chicago and Illinois more broadly. This will involve undergraduate and graduate student research as well as collaborative research with faculty at NIU and at the University of Guadalajara.

Are there any fields that are particularly important and underdeveloped?

I think immigration is the most important topic currently, but I think we will see more on protest and mobilization, as well as interdisciplinary health disparities – combining health sciences, public health, and social sciences.

What does the future of Latino Studies look like?

It will be exciting as we become more interdisciplinary and folks make new connections combining areas we hadn’t thought of before, like literature and biology or Sociology and Law. I think the politics of health for Latinos, the issue of LGBTQ individuals and organizations in the Latino community will be two new directions people will emphasize. The politics of health will be the next big area for Latinos to mobilize around, access to quality healthcare, and language issues, therefore something we as researchers in Latino studies will focus on. Of course, that’s assuming we can get some traction on comprehensive immigration reform, which will still be the primary issue Latinos mobilize around.
2013 FACULTY PUBLICATIONS AND ACTIVITIES

GREGORY BEYER
Associate Professor, Music

PUBLICATIONS
Berimbau Trio no. 1, for three berimbau, 2013

Berimbau Duo no. 5, for two berimbau, 2013

New compositions self-published via Arcomusical and available online at www.arcomusical.com


LOUISE CIALLELLA
Associate Professor, Foreign Languages and Literatures

PAPERS PRESENTED

ANNE HANLEY
Associate Professor, History

PUBLICATIONS


PAPERS PRESENTED


KRISTIN HUFFINE
Acting Director, Center for Latino and Latin American Studies; Associate Professor, History

PUBLICATIONS

PAPERS PRESENTED


INVITED TALKS
“De Scientia Sacerdoti Necessaria: Religious Knowledge and Indigenous Cultural Reform in the Writings of José de

“Redefining Race at the Margins of Empire: Indians as Categories of Natural Historical Analysis in José de Acosta’s Historia Natural y Moral de las Indias.” Center for African American History, Northwestern University, April 20, 2013.

PROFESSIONAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS
Promoted to Associate Professor of History and Acting Director of the Latino and Latin American Studies Center

FRANCES JAEGER, PHD.
Associate Professor, Foreign Languages and Literatures

PAPERS PRESENTED


MELISSA LENCZEWSKI
Associate Professor, Geology and Environmental Geosciences

PUBLICATIONS
“Assessing Microbial and Chemical Contamination in Groundwater From The Tulum Area, Cancun, Mexico,” Journal of Environmental Protection. 1272-1279, 2013 (with R. Leal-Bautista, A. Gabala, C. Morgan, and J. McLain).


Natural Attenuation of Pharmaceuticals and an Illicit Drug in Laboratory Column. Chemosphere, forthcoming (with A. Greenhagen, and M. Carroll).


PAPERS PRESENTED
“Chemical and Biological Tracers to Determine Groundwater Flow in Karstic Aquifer, Yucatan Peninsula,” AGU Meetings of the Americas, Cancun, Mexico, 2013 (with R. Leal-Bautista, and J. McLain).

“Novel Source Tracking Techniques to Trace Groundwater Pollution from Different Sources in a Coastal-Karstic Aquifer,” AGU Meetings of the Americas, Cancun, Mexico, 2013 (with J. McLain, and R. Leal-Bautista).


INVITED TALKS


POSTERS
Enhancing Student Geophysical Experiences at the NIU Environmental Geology Field Camp, SEG International Exposition and 83rd Annual Meeting, Society of Exploration Geophysicists, Houston, TX, Sept., 2013 (with A. Greer, and E. Raimondi).


Assessing Groundwater Quality in Karst Aquifer, Yucatan, Peninsula, Mexico. NGWA Summit, San Antonia, TX, 2013 (with R. Leal-Bautista).

ELOY MERINO
Associate Professor, Foreign Languages and Literatures

PUBLICATIONS

LEILA PORTER
Associate Professor, Anthropology

PAPERS PRESENTED


**PAPERS PRESENTED**


“Hair Cortisol Concentrations in Wild Weddell’s Saddleback Tamarins (Saguinus fuscicollis weddelli),” *American Association of Physical Anthropology*, Knoxville, TN, 2013 (with N. Fourie, R. Bernstein, and P. Garber).

**PROFESSIONAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS**


**ROBER RIDINGER**

**FOUNDERS LIBRARY**

**PUBLICATIONS**


**RODRIGO VILLANUEVA**

**ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, MUSIC**

**PUBLICATIONS**


**RADIO BROADCASTS**


**PERFORMANCES**


“Rhythm Section Master Class with the legendary jazz bassist, Eddie Gomez and his trio,” Tercer Festival Internacional de Jazz Chihuahua, Chihuahua and Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico, August, 2013 (with E. Gomez, and S. Karlsson).

“Rhythm Section Master Class with the legendary jazz bassist, Eddie Gomez and his trio,” Sexto Festival Internacional de Jazz y Blues en Zacatecas, Zacatecas, Mexico, Presenters, August, 2013 (with E. Gomez, and S. Karlsson).
NOTES FROM THE COVER STORY


3: Quoted in Lauck, 25.


8: Juan R. Garcia, Mexicans in the Midwest, 1900-1932. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996.)

