

UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

THE OKLAHOMA HISPANIC CULTURAL CENTER: A HISTORY OF THE LATINA/O
COMMUNITY IN OKLAHOMA CITY

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

By

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Norman, Oklahoma

2021

THE OKLAHOMA HISPANIC CULTURAL CENTER: A HISTORY OF THE LATINA/O
COMMUNITY IN OKLAHOMA CITY

A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND
POLICY STUDIES

BY THE COMMITTEE CONSISTING OF

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Acknowledgements

I would first like to thank Dr. Mirelsie Velázquez. Thank you for being an extraordinary educator, mentor, and support system throughout this entire experience. Words cannot express how grateful I am for all you have done these past two years. Thank you to my committee, Dr. Aiyana Henry and Dr. Kari Chew, for your knowledge and guidance. I would also like to thank Daisy, Diana, Maribel, and Yessy. Thank you for your unconditional friendship, love, and support. Thank you to my sisters for being my motivation and inspiration in everything I do. You are everything a sister could ever ask for. To my mom, gracias mamá por enseñarme a luchar y a nunca darme por vencida. Gracias por todos tus sacrificios, no estaría aquí sin ti. Thank you to each one of you; you each played an important role in making this possible. Lastly, thank you to my community for being my home everywhere I go.

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to reinsert the Latina/o community and the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center into the history of Oklahoma. The Latina/o community has contributed to the overall history of Oklahoma. However, as a marginalized group, often times their contributions are not recognized and are not documented. The Latina/o community, as well as other marginalized communities, are continually having to develop their own places and spaces. These places and spaces allow communities to preserve their history, culture, and language in a country whose assimilation efforts are persistent. They also create the support needed to survive in systems that were not meant for them to thrive in. My thesis will focus on the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center that existed in the 1970s and 1980s in Oklahoma City. There are many questions surrounding the center, its history, and what work initiated by the center can tell us about the community's needs today.

More importantly, I seek to reinsert the population, and with it, community spaces such as the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center, into the history of the city. Like other silenced and erased communities, there are so many contributions and voices that must be written back into history. Places and spaces like the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center and Oklahoma City are crucial to communities, and these contributions, stories, and voices must be documented in history. They are a part of our history and should be recognized as such.

Introduction

Community-based spaces and centers are crucial to marginalized communities in the United States. As Paulo Freire discusses, movements “must be forged *with*, not *for* the oppressed.”¹ This is fundamental, as community-based spaces and centers created for and by the community address the needs and the struggles that marginalized communities face at that specific moment. These community centers allow us to perceive all of these aspects through the marginalized community’s perspective. These are the same needs and struggles that the government and the dominant culture² often tend to ignore and minimize. These are the problems that are typically blamed on the marginalized communities, with no mention of the systems in place that created and continue to create these issues in the first place. The narrative is that if these marginalized communities “do not have more, it is because they are incompetent and lazy, and worst of all is their unjustifiable ingratitude towards the “generous gestures” of the dominant class.”³ This narrative leads to a lack of support and resources for marginalized communities in their everyday life and in times of crisis.

We see this in many different areas of society, including education, healthcare, the criminal justice system, just to name a few. For example, the current COVID-19 pandemic has

¹ Freire, Paulo. 1970. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

² A dominant culture is one that is able, through economic or political power, to impose its values, language, and ways of behaving on a subordinate culture or cultures. This may be achieved through legal or political suppression of other sets of values and patterns of behaviour, or by monopolizing the media of communication.

A Dictionary of Sociology. n.d. "dominant culture." *Encyclopedia.com*. Accessed April 13, 2021. <https://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences/dictionaries-thesauruses-pictures-and-press-releases/dominant-culture>.

³ Freire, Paulo. 1970. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

placed a magnifying glass on these disparities. As stated in the article *COVID-19: The Disproportionate Impact on Marginalized Populations*:

The most vulnerable populations are those with less access to resources, which makes life more complicated for them...[e]ven before the pandemic, lack of access to resources and opportunity, and lack of access to health care made those individuals and families more vulnerable. During a health crisis such as this, the situation becomes exacerbated in many marginalized communities.⁴

These centers create a place and a space in which communities are given access to resources that are not readily available to them. The Latino Community Development Agency in Oklahoma City is a prime example of this. The agency offers resources such as child development, health, youth development, and treatment services.⁵ Community-based spaces and centers allow the voices of marginalized communities to be heard. These community-based spaces and centers allow marginalized communities not only to survive but to also thrive in systems that were not created to benefit them in the first place.

Community centers aim to recognize and celebrate the differences of marginalized groups in the United States in order to ease their integration. However, the United States has a troubling history with this concept because often it selects assimilation and erasure as the solution to integration. As discussed in Vicky Ruiz' book, *From Out of the Shadows*, “[w]hile one group of Americans responded to Mexican immigration by calling for restriction and deportation, other groups mounted campaigns to “Americanize” the immigrants.”⁶ Even when the dominant culture offers support, they often times only assist marginalized communities with

⁴ Jane Addams College of Social Work. 2020. "COVID-19: The Disproportionate Impact on Marginalized Populations." *University of Illinois Chicago*. April 29. Accessed April 13, 2021. <https://socialwork.uic.edu/news-stories/covid-19-disproportionate-impact-marginalized-populations/>.

⁵ Latino Community Development Agency. n.d. *Programs*. Accessed April 15, 2021. <https://lcdaok.com>.

⁶ Ruiz, Vicki L. 1998. *From Out of the Shadows*. New York: Oxford University Press, Inc.

the hopes of assimilating them to their customs, language, culture, etc. This becomes evident through the combination of “Americanization programs with religious and social services.”⁷ This country has shown many people of color that it is not enough to simply be, that we are all, in fact, not equal. It has shown them that they do not matter. Yet, even with these obstacles, throughout time, our communities have shown the resistance and persistence that has allowed them to continue to survive and exist.

Similarly, the United States has silenced the voices of marginalized communities in history. The dominant culture has had the right and the privilege of creating narratives for communities of color to best fit their narrative. They have been and are the ones that are given the opportunity to document experiences that do not belong to them, and to tell stories that they have not experienced. In the archives, for the most part, we only see what the dominant group has chosen to document and preserve. It is not the history of the United States; it is the history of the dominant culture *in* the United States. The voices of the dominant culture are amplified, while the voices of our marginalized communities are silenced. The dominant culture is given the opportunity to say and decide who we are. They are given the right to educate others on our experiences. With all of this, the dominant culture is granted the opportunity to attach stereotypes to black and brown bodies, stereotypes and narratives that have consequences.

We see many examples of this within the archives. As stated in Vicky Ruiz’ book *From Out of the Shadows*, Latinos and Mexicans are “commonly described as lazy, sneaky, and greasy. In Euro-American journals, novels, and travelogues, Spanish-speaking women were frequently

⁷ Ibid.

depicted as flashy, morally deficient sirens.”⁸ We do not have the right to decide how we are represented; they do. This silencing is harmful in many ways and continues to perpetuate harm today. Likewise, their contributions and accomplishments do not receive the recognition that they deserve. Because of this, we are forced to find our communities in the footnotes of history and the archives. At times our communities are forced to reconstruct our histories through the very little evidence found in the writings of a larger historical narrative. My work on the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center in Oklahoma City is a part of that process.

This is not unique to the topics of history and the archives, as this happens in other ways in society, with schooling similarly a place of erasure. Major events in history are often taught from the dominant culture’s perspective or sometimes not taught at all. An example of this is the Tulsa Race Massacre. The Tulsa Race Massacre occurred in Tulsa, Oklahoma in 1921. However, it was only referred to as a massacre recently. Originally, it became “known as the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921, one of the most devastating single episodes of racial conflict in the postslavery United States.”⁹ The terminology is important as a riot is defined as “a tumultuous disturbance of the public peace by three or more persons assembled together and acting with a common intent.”¹⁰ On the other hand, a massacre is defined as “the act or an instance of killing a number of usually helpless or unresisting human beings under circumstances of atrocity or cruelty.”¹¹ One word determines the narrative. My entire education and schooling has taken place in Oklahoma. However, in my entire K-12 experience, the Tulsa Race Massacre was never

⁸ Ruiz, Vicki L. 1998. *From Out of the Shadows*. New York: Oxford University Press, Inc.

⁹ Messer, Chris M., and Patricia A. Bell. 2010. "Mass Media and Governmental Framing of Riots: The Case of Tulsa, 1921." *Journal of Black Studies* 851-870.

¹⁰ Merriam-Webster. n.d. *Riot*. Accessed April 14, 2021. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/riot>.

¹¹ Merriam-Webster. n.d. *Massacre*. Accessed April 14, 2021. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/massacre>.

discussed nor included in the curriculum. This is consistent with the experiences of many of my peers. Even in classes specifically about Oklahoma history, this event was not a part of the conversation, although it is significant to the history of Oklahoma and the United States. I did not learn about this historical event until I entered higher education. This is also a form of erasure and violence.

In the same way, many of the historical figures we are taught to idolize are white, with no consideration of the harm they may have caused to communities of color. Christopher Columbus is an example of this. In U.S. schools, students are taught that Columbus “discovered” America. This “discovery” is so significant that the United States has a federal holiday to honor him, Columbus Day:

Yet behind this tale of courage, adventure, and "discovery" is the gruesome reality. For Columbus, land was real estate and it didn't matter to him that other people were already living there; if he "discovered" it, he took it. If he needed guides or translators, he kidnaped them. If his men wanted women, he captured sex slaves. If the indigenous people resisted, he countered with vicious dogs, hangings, and mutilations. On his second voyage, desperate to show his royal patrons a return on their investment, Columbus rounded up some 1,500 Taino Indians on the island of Hispaniola and chose 500 as slaves to be shipped back to Spain and sold.¹²

Yet, we are taught to celebrate them regardless. Students in public schools are exposed to historical figures that are often conflicting with their own lived experiences or that represent the historical narrative that centers whiteness as the only perspective. As mentioned, students learn about the history of Christopher Columbus without learning about the atrocities of settler colonialism enacted by him, and this is the case for other historical figures as well. This is

¹² Bigelow, Bill. 1992. "Once upon a Genocide: Christopher Columbus in Children's Literature." *Social Justice* 106-121.

harmful to students that are a part of marginalized communities. They do not have the opportunity to see themselves represented in the curriculum. This does not change with time; the experience is the same throughout most of K-12 schooling. This is something I can attest to. Many times, they are taught by teachers who do not understand where their students come from and the barriers that they must face. They are not given the opportunity to decide who they will be because oftentimes, someone else in a position of power has already decided what they are capable of becoming. This is unacceptable.

Funding and resources are another way in which we see harm being perpetuated towards students of color in schools. Many of the students that are a part of marginalized communities attend urban schools. Urban schools, especially those with a higher concentration of students of color, tend to be significantly underfunded. This is not a coincidence, and Oklahoma is not the exception to this. As it is, Oklahoma is already one of the states that values education the least. This is clearly demonstrated through its lack of funding and lack of investment in education. However, this lack of funding is not equal. The experiences of students who attend schools with predominately white students and those who attend schools with a heavier concentration of students from marginalized communities vary greatly. The inequity is visible. Recently in Oklahoma City, schools have been closed due to the lack of investment, funding, and resources. However, the blame is placed on the students and their “inability” to perform well. It is not a coincidence that most of these school closings are schools with a heavy concentration of students of color. At the same time that this is happening, there are brand new schools being built for predominantly white students in gentrified neighborhoods. This is something that should not and cannot be ignored. The lack of investment in students of color is evident, and it speaks volumes. Our students in Oklahoma and all across the United States deserve better.

One of the greatest harms created by schooling in the education of students of color in the United States is the idea that children should be assimilated through it. Children are taught that English is the superior language. They are forced to leave parts of them behind, like language, if they want to succeed in these systems. Not only do they create harm, but they do not work. As stated in *The Latinization of U.S. Schools*, “Assimilationist paradigms that require students to discard or suppress elements of their cultural identities for an opportunity to achieve academic success, therefore, are largely inappropriate and ineffective when working with Latino youth.”¹³ How can students be successful in schools that do not value who they truly are and the gifts that they bring?

It is because of these reasons, among others, that marginalized communities must create places and spaces that meet the needs that are being ignored and silenced. However, in the United States, formal education is what is valued. Formal education is the form of education that is deemed “best.” But formal education does not meet the needs of students of color. Formal education fails to tap into the rich funds of knowledge that students of color bring. “Funds of knowledge [that] are bodies of local literacies, everyday knowledge learned through participation in home and community practices.”¹⁴ This is why students from marginalized communities need community centers like the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center. Community centers offer something that is not always available to them through public schools. They offer community.

¹³ Irizarry, Jason G. 2011. *The Latinization of U.S. Schools*. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers.

¹⁴ Alvarez, Steven. 2017. *Community Literacies en Confianza: Learning From Bilingual After-School Programs*. Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English.

“[F]inding community becomes an important part of achieving a sense of belonging.”¹⁵

Community centers give them a place in which they belong and are accepted in.

Community centers are significant in the lives of marginalized communities in the United States. The Latina/o community and other marginalized communities must constantly advocate for themselves and create their own places and spaces. Oklahoma is not the exception. The Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center was developed in south Oklahoma City in the early 1970s. The center was originally named the Mexican-American Cultural Center. The center was initiated to meet the needs of the Latina/o community residing in Oklahoma City. The center addressed the needs of the community in topics such as education, immigration, language development, and employment, among others. The Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center was founded by Dr. Edward Esparza in December 1974 and was directed by Rosa Quiroga-King for the majority of its duration. These places and spaces are created to help our community. They are created by us and for us. They allow us to preserve our history, culture, and language in a country that is determined to assimilate us. Historically speaking, through these places and spaces, we are given the opportunity to have an insight into what struggles our community was facing at the time. Through these places and spaces, marginalized communities have the power to create their own narrative.

Ending the Silence: Reinserting Latinas/os

The silencing of voices is dangerous and harmful. Throughout the history of the United States, we have been able to see this. Through the archives and history, the dominant culture has

¹⁵ Ibid.

been able to create many narratives, narratives that they control, and narratives that do not belong to them. “History, after all, is the story of the conquerors, those who have won. The vanquished disappear.”¹⁶ These narratives erase the Latina/o community. These narratives silence the Latina/o community. Latinas/os have been and continue to be contributors to the history of the United States and Oklahoma. Latinas/os are a part of Oklahoma’s history, and as such, their efforts and contributions deserve to be documented. However, this is not what the archives have done, and the narratives created by the dominant culture continue to perpetuate harm.

Throughout time, it has become evident that the contributions of Latina/os in the United States are not recognized. They are often not documented. These contributions are erased. The archives have that power. After all, how can one prove anything happened if it is not documented? “[W]ho owns history...the answer has traditionally been well-to-do white men since they, until relatively recently, have been the ones who authored and, therefore, determined the content of most histories of the United States.”¹⁷ How can the experiences, efforts, or contributions of Latina/os be validated when this has been the case? “As communities often denied a sense of belonging, historically, even the archives work to exclude our contributions and realities.”¹⁸ Especially in the United States, where the dominant culture controls what is documented and what is not. Not only that, but they also control what is accessible and what is

¹⁶ Pérez, Emma. 1999. *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas Into History*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

¹⁷ Ramsey, Paul J. 2007. "Histories Taking Root: The Contexts and Patterns of Educational Historiography during the Twentieth Century." *American educational history journal* 347-363.

¹⁸ Velázquez, Mirelsie. 2019. "Lessons from the Past: Listening to Our Stories, Reading Our Lives – The Place of Oral Histories in Our Lives." In *Fitzgerald T. (eds) Handbook of Historical Studies in Education*, 863-875. Springer, Singapore: Springer International Handbooks of Education.

not. This was evident as I began to navigate the archives. Digitized archives are more accessible; however, in conducting research, the difference in the number of archives in Spanish versus those in English is immense. The archives and the access to them hold power. As members of the Latina/o community and other marginalized communities, we have to take this upon ourselves. We have to go back and reinsert our communities into history. We have to piece together the bits and pieces the archives have of our communities, and with our communities, begin to give them their voice back. We have to reclaim the narrative that belongs to us. We have to put an end to the silence and give our communities the voice that was taken from them.

Throughout my entire K-12 schooling experience, I attended Oklahoma City Public Schools in southside Oklahoma City, which is predominantly a community with Latina/o students. Throughout all of those years of schooling, I never learned about or even heard any mention of the contributions the Latina/o community has made in the United States, much less Oklahoma. I grew up convinced that this was because Latinas/os did not do things that were worthy of being documented or recognized. I was convinced I could not change this narrative because, after all, no one had been able to do so. This is what history showed me. However, what I did learn through my K-12 experience was how we were perceived. I faced racism, discrimination, and fear. I learned about the stereotypes attached to my body, of which I had no say in. It took many years beyond my schooling experience for me to understand none of this was true. We are contributors, and we do achieve amazing things despite all the barriers we face. The reality is that many of these contributions and achievements are not recognized or documented. They are kept in the shadows of history. They do not fit the dominant narrative that

the dominant culture has created for us.¹⁹ We are not who they say we are. This is why this thesis and research is so important. We must give our communities their voice back.

Research Method and Sources

To write the history of the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center, I relied on archival research and stories. Most of the archival research that was gathered comes from newspapers. Newspapers are essential because they provide information and perspective at a specific moment in time. “The press constitutes the most important type of public source material...it records the political and social views that are most influential at any particular time (and place, it might be added); it provides a day-to-day record of events; and it sometimes offers thorough enquiries into specific issues deemed to be of public concern.”²⁰ I also relied on the stories of the people through these newspapers for this study. Stories are and continue to be “central to our community’s survival and must now work to help those communities survive history.”²¹ Stories are crucial, especially to the culture and survival of the Latina/o community. Through archival research and stories, I was able to piece together the history of the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center.

¹⁹ A dominant narrative is an explanation or story that is told in service of the dominant social group’s interests and ideologies. It usually achieves dominance through repetition, the apparent authority of the speaker (often accorded to speakers who represent the dominant social groups), and the silencing of alternative accounts. Because dominant narratives are so normalized through their repetition and authority, they have the illusion of being objective and apolitical, when in fact they are neither.

A Dictionary of Sociology. n.d. "dominant culture." *Encyclopedia.com*. Accessed April 13, 2021. <https://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences/dictionaries-thesauruses-pictures-and-press-releases/dominant-culture>.

²⁰ McCulloch, Gary. 2004. *Documentary Research in Education, History and the Social Sciences*. New York: RoutledgeFalmer.

²¹ Velázquez, Mirelsie. 2019. "Lessons from the Past: Listening to Our Stories, Reading Our Lives – The Place of Oral Histories in Our Lives." In *Fitzgerald T. (eds) Handbook of Historical Studies in Education*, 863-875. Springer, Singapore: Springer International Handbooks of Education.

However, these research methods also present some limitations. In engaging with the archives, we must keep in mind who gets to decide what is valued in the archives. Everything that is in the archives needs to validate the narrative the dominant culture has already created. For this reason, I was limited in my research. Latinas/os have been in Oklahoma for decades, yet many of their contributions are not documented. I was able to find that many different newspapers created by the dominant culture have been digitized. Yet, I was not able to find any Spanish newspapers digitized in the archives. This is problematic as this means that most of the information that I was able to find in these newspapers is through the white lens. This leads me to another limitation. As I am conducting this research, we are currently in the middle of a global pandemic due to COVID-19. The way the government has handled this pandemic has prolonged its duration. Due to this pandemic, there is another barrier placed on access to the archives. This is also placing a barrier on the stories I am able to obtain.

One of the most significant challenges the qualitative researcher encounters is finding stories. I had originally planned on conducting interviews with those who attended the center. Oral histories are a fundamental part of the Latina/o community, and often times this is the only place in which our experiences live. Pairing these oral histories with archival research would strengthen the voices of the Latina/o community. Through these oral histories, the impact of the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center would be shown directly from the perspective of the community. However, with the lack of information on the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center, locating individuals created a challenge. In the articles I found about the center, there were not many individuals named. I have also found through my research that oftentimes, even when named, the names of the individuals were often misspelled. This was especially true if the individuals had what could be described as an ethnic or Spanish name. As mentioned previously,

we are currently in an ongoing global pandemic that has existed from the beginning of my research. Had I been able to find individuals that attended the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center, the COVID-19 pandemic currently taking place would have placed limitations on the ability to interview these individuals.

Currently, there is not extensive work centered on the places and spaces that the Latina/o community has created for themselves in Oklahoma City, especially regarding the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center. This is also the case for Latina activism in Oklahoma City. However, there have been previous studies and works around these topics. There are also previous works that show how the use of stories has been and can be used with marginalized communities. These works lay the groundwork and starting point for this research study.

In order to better understand the role that community centers play and the issues the Latina/o community faces, I used several different sources. The first source is *From Out of the Shadows* by Vicki Ruiz. This book is an excellent example of how the Latina/o community, Mexican American women specifically, addressed the issues they were facing and built community. Marginalized communities, such as Latina/o communities, have been made to feel as if they do not belong or fit in with the dominant culture in the United States. This stands true for the Latina/o community in Oklahoma City. We exist in an in-between space, as Anzaldúa explains throughout her work. As stated in *Borderlands*, these “[b]orders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the

emotional residue of an unnatural boundary.”²² Because of these borderlands, the Latina/o community and other communities of color are forced to create places and spaces that fulfill that intermediate space we often belong to. This research study uses the notions of this borderland theory focusing on the places and spaces that are created arising from the idea of living in an in-between state in the United States.

The Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center focused on many aspects of life for the community, inclusive of conversations and resources on education for both children and adults. When asked what the main functions of the center were, the executive director, Rosa Quiroga-King, stated, “To promote education, is a big thing. They [the foundation] also sponsor a youth program for us all year long, so we use that for the youngsters to make sure that they stay in school and finish school. Because the drop-out rate in Hispanic students is quite high.”²³ Due to this, it is important to understand the experiences and struggles of Latina/o students in schooling in the United States and in Oklahoma.

Jason Irizarry’s *The Latinization of U.S. Schools* effectively demonstrates the experiences of Latina/o students in schooling.²⁴ This book shows a narrative not highlighted often. It demonstrates the inaccuracy of the stereotypes created about Latina/o students’ and how these stereotypes are affecting their education. The authors and researchers of the book are high school students writing about their schooling experience. Irizarry and the students give readers the reality of the Latina/o students experience in schools. The students create a survey for their

²² Anzaldúa, Gloria. 1987. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Book Company.

²³ Etter, Jim. 1988. "Rosa King: Hispanic Leader Works To Aid Growing Group." *The Oklahoman*, August 1.

²⁴ Irizarry, Jason G. 2011. *The Latinization of U.S. Schools*. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers.

teachers. The information provided in the survey demonstrates how many educators view Latina/o students and the stereotypes they believe about us. We don't care about education. We want handouts because we are not smart. Our culture does not value education. We are tough to teach because we are disrespectful.²⁵ The list goes on and on. Having the same students who were negatively described in the survey conduct research and write chapters shows how capable we are. The use of *testimonios* put into words what many of us feel as Latina/o students. At the end of each chapter, the students give recommendations on how to better educate them and support them. The recommendations show how much we do care about our education. As a Latina student, I was able to see myself in every chapter, and that is significant.

The book *Transforming Educational Pathways for Chicana/o Students* by Dolores Delgado Bernal and Enrique Aleman allows us to visualize and understand the impact community partnerships have on children in schools.²⁶ They specifically discuss the Adelante program. The program “developed by Delgado Bernal and Aleman at the University of Utah was designed to enable Chican@ Latina@ students, other students of color, and low-income students to attain knowledge, skills, and motivation to enroll and succeed in college, and consequently to move “ahead” in their educational aspirations and trajectories.”²⁷ Delgado Bernal and Aleman demonstrate throughout the book the transformative and positive impact of university-school-community partnerships, like Adelante. The book effectively proves that programs like Adelante transform young Latina/o children's education and schooling experience, which is very much

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Delgado Bernal, Dolores, and Enrique Aleman. 2017. *Transforming Educational Pathways for Chicana/o Students: A Critical Race Feminista Praxis*. New York, New York: Teachers College Press.

²⁷ Ibid.

needed in public education. The authors effectively demonstrated not only that the culture and expectations of a school can be positively transformed but also how it can be done.

Lastly, in *Strategies of Segregation*, David Garcia discusses the issues that Latina/o children have faced and continue to face in schooling.²⁸ The book describes the specific challenges and barriers Mexican-American students faced in Oxnard, California in the 20th century. Throughout the book, it is evident that the goal of the Oxnard School Board of Trustees is complete segregation. To achieve this, the Mexican-American population is portrayed as inferior and as a threat. The students were described as “impoverished youngsters of doubtful intelligence.”²⁹ It was argued that mixing Mexican-American students with Anglo-American students “would result in cultural contamination.”³⁰ This, in turn, “justifies” the inferior schools these students were subjected to. This ultimately leads to parents organizing and challenging segregation and inequity in *Soria v. Oxnard School Board of Trustees*. *Strategies of Segregation* demonstrates that educational inequality and segregation was what it was by design, not by coincidence. All of these sources framed this work.

With both primary and secondary resources, I attempted to piece together the significance and the history of the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center. Marginalized communities are still having to create their own places and spaces today. Because they are still needed, it is essential to understand the history of these previous places and spaces that existed to continue to improve and better serve our community as times change. However, this cannot be done if the

²⁸ Garcia, David G. 2018. *Strategies of Segregation: Race, Residence, and the Struggle for Educational Equality*. Oakland, California: University of California Press.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

contributions of these community centers are not documented. Places and spaces like the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center can be crucial to our community, and these contributions need to be documented.

History has also consistently erased the contributions of women of color. Because of this, Latinas must also be written into history, and this still holds true in the present. Rosa Quiroga-King directed this center for many years, and after leaving this position, she began *El Nacional*, which is one of the few Spanish newspapers in Oklahoma City. However, not much is documented about her contributions while she was the executive director of the center. With this research, I hope to provide more knowledge on community centers, specifically the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center, and the ways in which these centers support marginalized communities. I also reinsert the Latina/o community and their contributions into history.

Thesis Outline

This thesis is divided into three sections. Chapter 1 focuses on the history of the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center. This chapter examines the journey of the center since its founding in December 1974 through its closing in 1990. This chapter discusses the creation of the center, the goals and contributions of the center, and the circumstances that led to its eventual closing. Chapter 2 centers the individuals connected to Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center. This chapter examines those who worked in the center as well as their contributions outside of the center. Chapter 2 also discusses those in the community that attended the center. This chapter examines the activism within the center, especially of the Latinas/os in the community. Chapter 2 also dives into the role of Rosa Quiroga-King, the executive director of the Oklahoma Hispanic

Cultural Center. Chapter 3 explores the specific programs and projects that were offered by the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center. Throughout its history, the center was involved in many projects and collaborated with other organizations such as Catholic Social Ministries, the Oklahoma Police Academy, and the University of Oklahoma, among others. With these programs, the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center centers the needs of the Latina/o community in Oklahoma City at the time. These programs also created a space in which Latinas/os could build community. Through these programs and through all their contributions, the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center began to disrupt the narratives created by the dominant culture.

Chapter 1: El Camino Más Largo Comienza Por Un Paso

In order to understand the impact and importance of the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center to the Latina/o community in Oklahoma, we must first begin by discussing the fundamentals. This first chapter will discuss the timeline of the center, when it was created, and its eventual closing. Chapter 1 will also discuss the founding of the center and the circumstances that led to its creation. To thoroughly understand the purpose of the center, this chapter will dive into the goals and focuses of the center, as well as the progression of both of these throughout the years. To accurately comprehend the impact of the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center, it is critical that we address the services the center offered to the Latina/o community. Lastly, Chapter 1 will discuss the circumstances that led to the centers closing.

Brief Timeline

The Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center was incorporated in December of 1974. However, when it was initially founded, the center was originally named the Mexican-American Hispanic Cultural Center. In 1980 the name of the center was changed to the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center “as a signal to the state’s estimated 30,000 Spanish-surnamed residents that the center is a service for all Spanish speaking groups, including those from Central America, South America, and the Caribbean areas.”³¹ Throughout the years, the center changed locations a couple of times. The center moved once in December of 1980 to a larger location.³² The Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center moved again in December of 1985 as the larger location was

³¹ The Daily Oklahoman. 1980. "Center Takes New Name." *The Daily Oklahoman*, April 16: 2.

³² The Daily Oklahoman. 1980. "City Hispanic Unit to Move." *The Daily Oklahoman*, December 19: N25.

“bigger than needed and office space is scattered. It is also expensive to heat.”³³ Through these changes in locations, we can begin to see the shifts in the center’s financial difficulties beginning to take place. These changes in financial stability eventually led to the centers closing in 1990, which will be discussed in depth later on in this chapter. The center operated in Oklahoma City for 15 years, and throughout those 15 years, they created community for the Latinas/os of Oklahoma.

The Beginning

With a rapidly growing Latina/o population in Oklahoma, the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center was founded by Dr. Edward Esparza. Dr. Esparza explains in the article *Civic ‘Hole-in-One’ Celebrated*, the events that led to the center being established. “I guess the first thing that happened was a group of us started a Pan-American Golf Club” Dr. Esparza said.³⁴ “The golf organization was a social group, but it gave us a chance to talk about issues and how we could influence them.”³⁵ As issues began to come up, Dr. Esparza established a relationship with Catholic Action, a group at *La Florecita* (Little Flower Church) in southside Oklahoma City. Through Catholic Action, Dr. Esparza was able to help a young Latino, who was convicted of strong-arm robbery, and his family. As a physician, Dr. Edward Esparza was able to prove the boy was not physically able of dragging the victim for 15 feet. This was presented to the judge, and “the boy was given a suspended sentence.”³⁶ Situations like this further heightened the interest of Dr. Esparza regarding the issues the Latina/o community was facing. Dr. Esparza later questioned a newly opened CETA (the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act) office

³³ The Daily Oklahoman. 1985. "Hispanic Center Due New Home." *The Daily Oklahoman*, December 6: 3S.

³⁴ Atkins, Kay. 1980. "Civic 'Hole-in-One' Celebrated." *The Daily Oklahoman*, May 23: N5.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

about its lack of Latinas/os in the program. “They said they couldn’t find any...[s]o I told them to give me some money and I would find some for them.”³⁷ It was through these series of events that Dr. Edward Esparza received the funding and resources from CETA and the state government to create the Mexican-American Cultural Center in December of 1974.

Goals and Purposes

The Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center was created to respond to the needs of the Latina/o community. In order to accurately paint a picture of the impact the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center had on the Latina/o community of Oklahoma, we must first discuss the goals and the purposes the center hoped to accomplish through its services. In addition to this, we must also explore the evolution of these goals and purposes as shifts in society, and the community occurred. This is important because, in order to successfully serve the Latina/o community, the center must be able to adapt to the shifts in the needs of the community. These shifts in goals are also important because they allow us to better understand the evolution of the Latina/o community in Oklahoma.

In early 1975, a couple of months after the center opened, the purpose of the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center (then the Mexican-American Cultural Center) was “to promote Mexican-American self-help, and better relations between Mexicans and Anglos.”³⁸ It is also important to note in this article in *The Daily Oklahoman* the center is the only “social club” aimed specifically at the Latina/o community. Initially, the center’s purpose was very concise

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ The Daily Oklahoman. 1978. "Social clubs promote ethnic group interests." *The Daily Oklahoman*, February 19.

and to the point. However, as time progressed and as the center continued to grow and develop, so did the center's goals and purposes. A very clear indication of this becomes evident when the center decides to modify its name from the Mexican-American Cultural Center to the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center in 1980, as mentioned previously. As "Pepper" Garcia, chairman of the board of directors' states, "A first step has been changing the name of the organization...[w]e're trying to get away from the singular type of attitude so we can reach a broader aspect of the Hispanic population."³⁹ This is significant as this demonstrates the shifts and growth that were occurring in Oklahoma within the Latina/o community. The name change also signals the center's ability to adapt to serve the Latina/o community as a whole. The article goes on to state, "Garcia said the center hopes to dispel what he said has been a popular misconception about illegal aliens. A lot of aliens are not all Mexicans. We have many coming here from South and Central America, from a lot of places having revolutions. They come here for safety."⁴⁰ This is important as we begin to see a shift in the center's purpose occurring. Now the center also included a disruption to the perceptions of Latinas/os in the state.

As the community grew and developed, so did the focus of the center. The center began to create a more specific purpose and goal by age groups. For older Hispanics, the center strived for them to become reemployed. For younger Hispanics, the center aimed to "keep Hispanic children in school, largely through educating parents and keeping them settled in a job."⁴¹ This demonstrates the center's awareness of the fact that the issues the community is facing were not uniform. This also demonstrates the centers understanding of the different barriers and their

³⁹ Donovan, Kevin. 1980. "Determination Marks Director." *The Daily Oklahoman*, April 18: 24.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

causes and how they are linked together (for example, the link between children's education and their parents having a stable job). "In addition, Garcia said the center recruits Hispanics to volunteer for positions on boards and commissions to expand the Hispanic voice in civic affairs."⁴² From 1975 to 1980, the growth and development of the center is clear. The center went from focusing on self-help and bettering race relations as a purpose to being more inclusive, having goals for different groups within the community, and focusing on the representation and voice of the Latina/o community.

In 1981, the center and other organizations were organizing a series on the Hispanic experience in Oklahoma (discussed further in Chapter 3). Executive director Rosa Quiroga-King in a letter to the Oklahoma Humanities Committee, stated that "the promotion of cultural awareness and understanding amongst all Hispanic groups in the State of Oklahoma is of the utmost importance to our community."⁴³ Through documents obtained from this project, we are able to obtain a clear picture of the purpose and goal of the center directly from the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center. The center describes itself as a "grassroots organization advocating the economic and social advancement of Hispanics" with "the purpose of investigating and more effectively addressing the needs of the Hispanic community in Oklahoma."⁴⁴ It is clear not only that the center was there to meet the needs of the Latina/o community of Oklahoma, but it was also clear that the center was there to raise awareness about the community as well as giving them a voice.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ University Archives Record Group 40/42, College of Arts & Sciences, Box 12, Folder 8, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma Libraries.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

However, there is not anything that is more telling of the center's purpose than the following goals that were listed in the project; they are as follows:

Over the next 3-5 years the organizational goals of the Center are as follows:

- a. To plan, develop and implement a community mental health center which will provide a culturally sensitive treatment model for Hispanics.
- b. To implement our Immigration Program on a self-sufficient basis.
- c. To implement our Translation/Interpretation program on a self-sufficient basis.
- d. To incorporate research as an organization function toward improving services and expanding data on Hispanics in Oklahoma.
- e. To plan, develop and implement a family intervention program.
- f. To promote and facilitate the development of Hispanic talent in the arts.
- g. To plan, develop, and implement a Community Leadership Training Program for the non and limited English speaking community.
- h. To plan, develop and implement a mobile community education/service program.
- i. To plan, develop and implement a bilingual training center for youth and young adults.⁴⁵

Through these future goals developed by the center, we can not only see the needs that needed to be met at the time, but we can also see the commitment the center had to the Latina/o community.

In 1983, the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center listed some of the center's goals on their application for the Community Development Block Grant, which made up about one-fourth of the centers budget. The following are some of the goals included in the application:

- a. Working with the business community to create 100 jobs for moderate and low-income residents.
- b. To inform and sensitize businessmen about the Hispanics and immigrations laws.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

- c. Bilingual counseling in house matters.
- d. Promoting a bilingual “Visit with Your Representative Day”. Residents could meet with city and state officials.⁴⁶

Also, in 1983, the city completed an inventory of the services that were available in the Capitol Hill area of Oklahoma City. Per the article provided in *The Daily Oklahoman*, the following was the purpose of the center; it “provides job counselling, placement and career development, English language training, and interpretation services.”⁴⁷ In 1988, when questioned about the purpose of the center, Rosa King responded that “the center was organized to provide services to the Hispanic population. We’re a service provider, that’s our No.1 purpose whatever is the need at the time.”⁴⁸ As mentioned earlier, the promotion of education was also a major function of the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center.

It is evident that as the center and community grew, the center was able to develop and adjust to meet the needs of the Latina/o community of Oklahoma. Through the goals and purposes developed by the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center, we can get a better sense of what the community was going through at these different points in time. The goals and purposes also give insight into the needs of the Latina/o community and the commitment the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center had to meet them.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ The Daily Oklahoman. 1983. "City department completes inventory of services for Capitol Hill." *The Daily Oklahoman*, September 6: 11S.

⁴⁸ Etter, Jim. 1988. "Rosa King: Hispanic Leader Works To Aid Growing Group." *The Oklahoman*, August 1.

Services

Community centers allow us to obtain a clearer picture of the experiences and of the issues being faced by marginalized communities. The Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center was established to meet the needs of the Latina/o community. The services offered throughout the center's existence offer insight into the community between the 1970s and 80s. As time progressed and society changed, so did the center. However, there were specific services the center offered that were consistent through time. Through these specific services, we can better understand the Latina/o community of Oklahoma and the center.

Language is crucial to communities. Language allows us to communicate and survive. This is especially true to marginalized communities in the U.S., where English is the dominant language. This is true of the Latina/o community in Oklahoma who predominantly speaks Spanish. The Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center realized this from the beginning. The center's purpose was to serve the community, and they knew that language was a barrier to the success of the Latina/o community. Because of this, throughout the years the center existed, they offered many English classes to the community. In a 1977 advertisement of the classes in *The Daily Oklahoman*, it states the classes are "designed to assist Spanish-speaking adults in improving their English."⁴⁹ However, the classes were not just targeted towards adults. In 1979, the center organized tutoring services for the Latina/o children enrolled in public schools. The Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural began this tutoring service "because elementary officials are reporting a number of Spanish-speaking students who have little English skills."⁵⁰ However, it is important

⁴⁹ The Daily Oklahoman. 1977. "Class Set For Spanish." *The Daily Oklahoman*, September 23: S1.

⁵⁰ The Daily Oklahoman. 1979. "Hispanic Tutoring Organized." *The Daily Oklahoman*, October 23: S9.

to note that the classes were not limited to the Latina/o community. As Miguel Milanés, the assistant director of the center, states, “we have counselors who speak Vietnamese, Spanish, French, Persian, Russian, and African dialects on staff.”⁵¹ It is significant to mention that the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center did not solely have English classes; the center also offered a conversational Spanish course.⁵²

The Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center not only offered language classes; they were also a part of language projects that benefited the Latina/o community. In 1979, the center’s assistant director Miguel Milanés assisted the Oklahoma City Police Department by teaching a “19-week Spanish course for local officers.”⁵³ This is not the only work the center did with the police department. In the Police-Citizen Relations in Oklahoma report of May 1981, it states:

One major aspect of cultural diversity is language. Rosa King, Director of the Hispanic Cultural Center in Oklahoma City, has worked very closely with the Oklahoma City Police Department in teaching officers to speak "street" Spanish. Aside from aiding in the transcendence of cultural barriers, language programs of this type serve the necessary functions of helping law enforcement officers to perform their duties more effectively, and of ensuring the rights of non-English speaking citizens.⁵⁴

The work with the police department done by the center served as a means to initiate a positive relationship between the department and the community. Interactions between law enforcement

⁵¹ Atkins, Kay. 1980. "Immigrants Solving Language Problems as They Plunge Into English Courses." *The Daily Oklahoman*, August 5.

⁵² The Daily Oklahoman. 1981. "Center Offers Spanish Class." *The Daily Oklahoman*, July 24: N9.

⁵³ Ward, Mike. 1979. "Police Becoming Bilingual." *Saturday Oklahoman & Times*, January 27: 17.

⁵⁴ Oklahoma Human Rights Commission. 1981. "Police-Citizen Relations in Oklahoma." *Office of Justice Programs*. May. Accessed March 19, 2021. <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/Digitization/85981NCJRS.pdf>.

and individuals of minority groups are oftentimes tied to negative situations; therefore, the center working towards a better relationship with the community and the police department is huge.



Figure 1 Rosa King, left, director of the Mexican - American Cultural Center listens as Oklahoma City Police Sgt. I.M. Miller details security procedures for a group of Spanish speaking Oklahoma City residents.

Source: Thompson, Michal. [Photograph 2012.201.B0397.0228], photograph, April 17, 1978;(https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc423126/: accessed April 15, 2020), The Gateway to Oklahoma History, https://gateway.okhistory.org; crediting Oklahoma Historical Society.

The Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center also realized that language was a barrier to the Latina/o community obtaining a driver's license. Because of this, the center established a six-week driver's education class for Spanish-speakers. As part of the project, "Elizabeth Coker, an interpreter at the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center, is trying to build a bridge over the

English-Spanish language barrier by translating the Oklahoma Driver's Manual."⁵⁵ Being able to transport themselves is essential to the success, and the opportunities of the community and the center was ready to meet that need. In 1981, the center, with help from the Oklahoma Humanities Committee, worked on creating a ten-program project titled *The Hispanic Experience in Oklahoma* (discussed further in Chapter 3). One of the proposed 2-hour sessions, *Language Loyalty and Culture: "I Only Speak 'Un Poco,"* dives into the "symbolic and functional linkage between the Spanish language and Hispanic culture."⁵⁶ Through these services, it is evident that the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center understood the importance of language in the advancement of the Latina/o community in Oklahoma.

A successful community center must value the cultural traditions of its people in order to truly create a positive impact in the community. When culture is valued, it is also preserved. Throughout the years, the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center demonstrated its commitment to the preservation of community traditions. During its existence, the center sponsored many events for the Latina/o community in Oklahoma that celebrated the rich culture and traditions of the community. It is important to once again mention that center did not only focus on the Mexican community. The events sponsored demonstrate this. In 1981, the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center sponsored the "Fiesta! Latino Americana" show in Oklahoma City. The show included poemas, Cuerdas Latinas from Venezuela, rumba-flamenco, a trio who played several favorite Mexican songs, El Chongo de Puerto Rico, Ballet Latino de Henry Hurtado from Colombia, and several Argentinian gaucho songs.⁵⁷ This is significant because it not only showcases the diverse

⁵⁵ Atkins, Kay. 1981. "Hispanic Drivers Learn to Avoid Language Barrier." *The Daily Oklahoman*, July 17: S1.

⁵⁶ University Archives Record Group 40/42, College of Arts & Sciences, Box 12, Folder 8, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma Libraries.

⁵⁷ Bradenburg, John. 1981. "'Fiesta' Performers Provide Hot Time at Theater Center." *The Daily Oklahoman*, May 19: 26N.

and rich talent in the community, but it also disrupts the narrative that most Latinas/os in the United States are primarily Mexican, something we continue to see in the present.

The Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center also sponsored other events through the years, such as the Festival '82, which was “truly a unique event in Oklahoma and one which should not be missed by anyone interested in the tradition and folklore of the Spanish-speaking world.”⁵⁸ The center also held annual Christmas parties for the Latina/o children in the community. The annual Christmas party held in December of 1986 featured “Pancho Claus,” piñatas, caroling in Spanish, refreshments, dancers from the Children’s Folkloric Group, and Los Viajitos musical group.⁵⁹ The Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center also often had Sunday parties for the community as means to build community.

⁵⁸ The Sunday Oklahoman. 1982. "Festival Saturday." *The Sunday Oklahoman*, May 9: 27.

⁵⁹ The Daily Oklahoman. 1986. "Hispanic Center to Sponsor Children's Party." *The Daily Oklahoman*, December 7: S14.



Figure 2 Johnna Lopez, 4-year-old daughter of Mr. and Mrs. John Lopez, and Elena Aldarado, 2-year-old daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Jose Aldarado, check out a piñata at Sunday's party at the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center

Source: Southerland, Paul. [Photograph 2012.201.B0262.0397], photograph, October 16, 1983;(https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc348891/: accessed April 15, 2020), The Gateway to Oklahoma History, https://gateway.okhistory.org; crediting Oklahoma Historical Society.



Figure 3 Celebrating a native Christmas Wednesday are Pedro Lazos, right, and Delia Carrales at the Mexican American Cultural Center.

Source: [Photograph 2012.201.B0395.0369], photograph, December 22, 1976;(https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc431011/: accessed April 15, 2020), The Gateway to Oklahoma History, https://gateway.okhistory.org; crediting Oklahoma Historical Society.

Since the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center focused on the Latina/o community, it makes sense that one of the major contributions of the center was its immigration services. As changes in the immigration system occurred, the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center was there to fulfill the needs of the community. Similarly, the center understood the importance of employment to the success of the community. “The center is the only employment service in the state that works with Hispanics with limited English-speaking skills.”⁶⁰ The center also focused

⁶⁰ Sutter, Ellie. 1985. "Oklahoma Hispanic Center Hoping for Boost in Funds." *The Daily Oklahoman*, September 4.

on the health of the community. In 1978, the center offered its location to the Metropolitan Library System to give free testing for oral cancer.⁶¹ In 1982, the center also offered free health screenings that would record “weight and blood pressure and [would be] checking for glaucoma and diabetes.”⁶² The Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center also realized that many of the Latina/o community still held familial ties in their home countries. The importance of this became evident in 1985 when a massive earthquake hit Mexico. With little information on the well-being of those back home, the center was “taking calls, counselling, and being as supportive as [they] can.”⁶³

All of this is extremely important to the Latina/o community as the United States constantly pushes marginalized communities to assimilate to American culture. Assimilation is violence as it requires marginalized communities to erase who they are. This was the expectation and attitude towards marginalized communities and still is. This is demonstrated by the following excerpt, which comes from an Oklahoma resident, J. Shroyer from Durant, in response to an article about the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center published in *The Daily Oklahoman*:

[The work of the center] should be directed toward teaching them the English language, customs, etc. Teach the history of our country so the new immigrant can know what they are a part of, so they can be useful, working people and eventually become a citizen of this great country. We miss the whole point of our society when we develop and encourage small pockets of these “heritage” groups for blacks, Hispanics, Indians, Asians – whatever... Those that come here for the free life, to swell the welfare rolls, keep their native identity and not become part

⁶¹ The Daily Oklahoman. 1978. "Library Offers Cancer Tests." *The Daily Oklahoman*, October 10: 12N.

⁶² The Daily Oklahoman. 1982. "Free health testing planned for center." *The Daily Oklahoman*, October 19: 11S.

⁶³ Shell, Paul. 1985. "Hispanic Center Flooded With Calls." *Saturday Oklahoman & Times*, September 21: 10.

of the society only bring hardship, bad feelings, and poverty...[w]e don't need or want "little Havanas" like in Miami, Fla.⁶⁴

Assimilation is constantly being pushed on communities of color in the United States. The events and services of the center disrupt this narrative and gives the community the support to retain their identity, language, culture, and traditions while at the same time surviving in the United States.

The wide variety of services offered by the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center prove that the center was aware of the needs of the Latina/o community in Oklahoma at the time. It also shows us that the center was truly committed to supporting and addressing these needs and issues. The Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center gave the Latina/o community access to services that are usually unavailable or difficult to obtain due to the barriers they face. These services impacted the community in a positive manner and changed many lives of Oklahoma residents, not just the Latina/o community.

Todo Lo Que Comienza Llega a Su Fin

Unfortunately, *cómo dice el dicho*, eventually everything must come to an end. This was the case for the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center in the year 1990. But what events exactly led to this ending? In order to understand this, we must understand how the center was funded and the importance of that funding. It is essential to address funding, as it is tied to the success of the center but also to the perception of immigrants. Quiroga-King, the executive director of the

⁶⁴ Shroyer, J. 1988. "Encourage Bonding." *The Sunday Oklahoman*, August 7: 12.

It is important to mention that the article Shroyer is responding to is an article in which Rosa King simply provided information about the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center and its functions

center, stated in 1980 that donations were minimal. “We’re doing the work that churches do – and should do – in many areas of the country...[b]ut the idea of helping immigrants isn’t very popular.”⁶⁵

As previously mentioned, the center began with Dr. Edward Esparza receiving funding from the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) office in Oklahoma City because of its lack of Latina/o involvement in its program. With this funding, the era of the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center began, and CETA was a major contributor. Within years, the center began to obtain even more funding for its operations and projects. In 1979, the Oklahoma City council would vote on funding which included \$65,000 for the center.⁶⁶ The funding was approved, although the specific amount is not specified in the article.⁶⁷ However, in 1980 the center was added as an agency of United Way of Central Oklahoma.⁶⁸ The CETA program was dropped as an aid program sometime between 1980 and 1981, so this addition to United Way was significant. This event would alter the path and future of the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural for years to come as United Way of Central Oklahoma would become one of the two major financial sources for the center. In 1981, the center also received a \$40,000 grant from the Campaign for Human Development to be used for the center’s Oklahoma Immigration Advocacy Project (OIAP).⁶⁹ Oklahoma City’s Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) became an important financial resource, along with United Way of Central Oklahoma, and attributed around

⁶⁵ Atkins, Kay. 1980. "Funds Shortage Hurts Program For Immigrants at City Center." *The Daily Oklahoman*, August 1: 4N.

⁶⁶ Hamilton, Lynn. 1979. "Federal Funds Include Several Bond Projects." *Saturday Oklahoman & Times*, January 6: 25.

⁶⁷ Hinton, Mick. 1979. "Council Backs Cook's Revenue-Sharing Split." *The Daily Oklahoman*, January 24: 20.

⁶⁸ The Daily Oklahoman. 1980. "United Way Goal OK'd by Directors." *The Daily Oklahoman*, August 15: 16S.

⁶⁹ The Daily Oklahoman. 1981. "Center given \$40,000 lift." *The Daily Oklahoman*, November 5.

25 percent of the centers operating budget; however, exactly when the CDBG began to support the center is unclear.⁷⁰

In 1990, all of this changed. United Way of Central Oklahoma and Oklahoma City's Community Development Block Grant ended their funding to the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center. The center's two major financial sources were gone. "Oklahoma City's acting assistant director for community development, said funds were suspended because more than half of a \$34,597 grant had been spent with no financial or projects reports."⁷¹ United Way of Central Oklahoma's allocation director said there were "several concerns" that led to the center being stripped of funding.⁷² In an article in *The Daily Oklahoman*, Bob Lorenz, chairman of the community initiatives and allocations committee, stated that although it is rare for United Way to drop agencies, it can happen as it did to the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center. However, the funds that were used by dropped agencies are given to "other agencies United Way officials decided could provide those services more effectively."⁷³ In response to this, the center's director at the time, Jose Sedillo, stated that the center offered many services, and "the services we provide couldn't be counted in dollars and cents. But we are trying to find answers to questions that have been raised."⁷⁴ The center hired an accountant to get the records in order. Although the center tried to bounce back from this and held fundraisers, it was not able to, and 1990 marked

⁷⁰ Paschal, Jan. 1983. "City-federal feud cancels payday for employees at Hispanic center." *The Daily Oklahoman*, July 22.

⁷¹ Kuhlman, Judy. 1980. "Hispanic Center Loses Funding, May Shut Doors." *The Daily Oklahoman*, March 28.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Zizzo, David. 1991. "Volunteer Committee of 150 Decides On Division of United Way Funds." *The Sunday Oklahoman*, September 8: 22.

⁷⁴ Kuhlman, Judy. 1980. "Hispanic Center Loses Funding, May Shut Doors." *The Daily Oklahoman*, March 28.

the end of the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center after over 15 years of service to the Latina/o community of Oklahoma.

Chapter 2: Sin Gente No Hay Pueblo

The Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center became what it was because of the people. Both those who worked at the center and those in the Latina/o community who used the services provided by the center. That is why it is of the utmost importance that this chapter recognizes them. It is also crucial to recognize the ways in which those at the center were active in the community through activism and representation, oftentimes outside of the center. The activism of marginalized communities is oftentimes overlooked; this is especially true for women. Because of this, this chapter will dive into who Rosa Quiroga-King is. Through the lens of the community, we will further comprehend the impact of the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center. By showcasing these Latinas/os through their activism, contributions, and experiences at the center, the significance of the center becomes clear.

Dr. Edward Esparza

In discussing the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center, it is important that Dr. Edward Esparza is mentioned. He is the founder of the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center, as mentioned previously in Chapter 1. Dr. Edward Esparza received a degree in industrial engineering at Oklahoma A&M (now named Oklahoma State University). Years later, Dr. Esparza attended medical school at the University of Oklahoma and eventually opened his own practice. However, before attending medical school, Dr. Esparza enlisted in the Army. Eventually, Dr. Edward Esparza created the Pan-American club, which, as mentioned in Chapter 1, ultimately led to a series of events that resulted in the creation of the Mexican-American Cultural Center (later

renamed the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center).⁷⁵ He served as chairman of the center's board of directors for the entirety of the center's duration.

Nevertheless, the involvement with the Latina/o community of Oklahoma by Dr. Edward Esparza was not limited to his role at the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center. In 1978, Dr. Esparza was chairman of the Governor's Advisory Council on Spanish-American relations. Dr. Esparza "urged Hispanics to get involved in local politics if they want public officials to know about their particular problems."⁷⁶ Dr. Edward Esparza was also a spokesman for the Hispanics Citizens Concerned Committee. As a spokesman for the committee, Dr. Esparza addressed the shooting of a young Latino, Marc Rios, at the hands of the Oklahoma City Police Department. After the officer faced no disciplinary action, Dr. Edward Esparza stated, "the shooting should not have been investigated solely by the police department."⁷⁷ In August of 1986, Dr. Esparza was set out to publish the first issue of his newly established newspaper *El Herald*; however, it is not clear if the newspaper became a reality or if it was successful.⁷⁸ As the founder of the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center, Dr. Edward Esparza is a key part of the center and of the Latina/o community of Oklahoma.

⁷⁵ Atkins, Kay. 1980. "Civic 'Hole-in-One' Celebrated." *The Daily Oklahoman*, May 23: N5.

⁷⁶ The Daily Oklahoman. 1978. "Boren Using Hispanic Council, GOP Charges." *The Daily Oklahoman*, October 5.

⁷⁷ McCoy, Don. 1987. "Policeman Gets Leniency." *The Daily Oklahoman*, November 24.

⁷⁸ Thomas, Imogene. 1986. "Oklahoma County Free Fair Welcomes Public." *The Daily Oklahoman*, August 27: 21N.

Miguel Milanés

Miguel Milanés served as the assistant director of the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center, a position he occupied for 12 years. Milanés, of Cuban descent, graduated from Oklahoma City University in 1974.⁷⁹ Milanés garnered many accomplishments in his role as assistant director of the center, as well as outside of it. As assistant director of the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center, Milanés played a fundamental role in the language program the center held in 1979 with the Oklahoma City Police Department. Miguel Milanés was responsible for teaching the 19-week course.⁸⁰ Milanés was also instrumental to the centers sponsoring and participation in festivals. In 1982, Milanés directed plans to host the fall arts festival in Capitol Hill for the center.⁸¹ In 1983, Miguel Milanés was appointed to serve on a festival committee whose purpose would be to promote Capitol Hill.⁸² Milanés also served as editor-in-chief for the center's newsletter *La Voz*.⁸³

Outside of the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center, Milanés' work for the Latina/o community did not stop. In 1984, Miguel Milanés served as vice-president for the Capitol Hill Neighborhood Association (NHA).⁸⁴ Milanés later went on to serve as president of NHA.⁸⁵ Miguel Milanés was also a member of the Olde Capitol Hill Council. It is evident that Milanés was committed to the center and community, but also to the Capitol Hill district. This is

⁷⁹ The Daily Oklahoman. 1988. "Cityan Awarded Fellowship." *The Daily Oklahoman*, June 17.

⁸⁰ Ward, Mike. 1979. "Police Becoming Bilingual." *Saturday Oklahoman & Times*, January 27: 17.

⁸¹ The Daily Oklahoman. 1982. "Capitol Hill may host fall arts festival, organizers say." *The Daily Oklahoman*, December 17: 7S.

⁸² The Daily Oklahoman. 1983. "Joint Festival Planned." *The Daily Oklahoman*, April 12: 2S.

⁸³ Olsen, Rolf. 1983. "Newspaper spreading its voice throughout Hispanic community." *The Daily Oklahoman*, January 4: 7S.

⁸⁴ The Daily Oklahoman. 1984. "Gilbert Accepts Bid." *The Daily Oklahoman*, March 19.

⁸⁵ The Daily Oklahoman. 1986. "Capitol Hill Neighbors to Meet." *The Daily Oklahoman*, January 29: 3S.

interesting to see as we are currently seeing efforts to revitalize the historic neighborhood. Milanes offered representation for the Latina/o community as a member of the Metropolitan Library Commission.⁸⁶ However, this was not the only instance in which Milanes provided representation for the Latina/o community. Miguel Milanes also served on the advisory committee to select the president of the Oklahoma City Community College in 1987.⁸⁷ Milanes was a part of all of these organizations while serving as assistant director for the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center. However, in 1988, Miguel Milanes was recognized in *The Daily Oklahoman* for receiving a National Urban Fellowship (14-month program concluding in a master's degree in public administration). Due to this, "Milanes [left] for New York to attend the City University of New York."⁸⁸ This event brought to an end Milanes' role as assistant director to the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center.

Alfonso Macias

The immigration programs were one of the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center's largest projects. Because of this, it is important to recognize the work of Alfonso Macias. Macias was the director of the Oklahoma Immigration Counseling Project (OICP) at the community center.⁸⁹ Through this role in the center, Alfonso Macias was able to assist the Latina/o community in a topic that was critical to them. But his involvement with the community did not stop here. In December of 1979, new chapters of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) began to form. With its formation, Alfonso Macias was appointed as the first LULAC director in

⁸⁶ Vogt, Valerie. 1986. "Metropolitan Libraries Post Book Circulation Increase." *The Daily Oklahoman*, December 29: N2.

⁸⁷ *The Daily Oklahoman*. 1987. "6 on Panel to Help Pick College Cheif." *The Daily Oklahoman*, November 20: 7.

⁸⁸ *The Daily Oklahoman*. 1988. "Cityan Awarded Fellowship." *The Daily Oklahoman*, June 17.

⁸⁹ Atkins, Kay. 1980. "Funds Lack Threatens Immigrant Aid Project." *The Daily Oklahoman*, August 1: S1.

the state of Oklahoma.⁹⁰ This is significant as LULAC is the largest organization for the Latina/o community whose purpose “is to advance the economic condition, educational attainment, political influence, housing, health and civil rights of the Hispanic population of the United States.”⁹¹ Alfonso Macias, through his commitment to the community, made a difference in the Latina/o community of Oklahoma.

Rosa Quiroga-King

Women of color have consistently contributed to the betterment of our communities throughout time through their work, activism, and commitment to our communities. Unfortunately, many of these contributions have not been recognized or documented and thus have become erased. As Pérez states about these “women who are so well hidden from history. Documents are rare and difficult to find, either because they were not recorded or because archivists have not actively sought materials by women of color. When we do find evidence of women’s activities, it is often overlooked.”⁹²

Rosa Quiroga-King is a native of Mendoza, Argentina. Back home in Argentina, Quiroga-King’s father was a public-school teacher, and her mother was a homemaker. In Argentina, Rosa Quiroga-King followed in her father’s footsteps and became a public-school teacher as well. When asked about the differences in the profession in Argentina versus the United States, Quiroga-King states that “in Argentina, you must create the tools in teaching, but

⁹⁰ The Daily Oklahoman. 1979. "Latino Group Forming New Chapters in City." *The Daily Oklahoman*, December 11: S11.

⁹¹ League of United Latin American Citizens. n.d. *Mission*. Accessed March 24, 2021. <https://lulac.org/about/mission/>.

⁹² Pérez, Emma. 1999. *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas Into History*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

in the U.S., you just buy them.”⁹³ Rosa arrived in Oklahoma in 1962 to join family members already here and resided in southside Oklahoma City, a predominant area for the Latina/o community to this day.⁹⁴ Rosa comes from a large family, eight siblings, and coming from a large family made it easier for them to preserve many of their traditions and Argentinian identity.



Figure 4 Rosa Quiroga King

Source: Gooch, Steve. [Photograph 2012.201.B0334.0070], photograph, June 16, 1988; (<https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc385304/>; accessed April 15, 2020), The Gateway to Oklahoma History, <https://gateway.okhistory.org>; crediting Oklahoma Historical Society.

⁹³ Item H2019.003. Oklahoma Historical Society Oral History Collection. - 2010-2019. - 2019. INTERVIEW WITH ROSA AND RANDY QULROGE-KING, 11/10/2008

⁹⁴ Etter, Jim. 1988. "Rosa King: Hispanic Leader Works To Aid Growing Group." *The Oklahoman*, August 1.

In Oklahoma, Quiroga-King has been and has continued to be committed to the Latina/o community. Rosa Quiroga-King served as executive director of the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center for 15 years, from its opening in December 1974 until March 1989, when she resigned. As director of the center, Quiroga-King took part and achieved many things. In 1982, Quiroga-King represented the center as a speaker for the Families and Work Conference that took place at Oklahoma State University. In the conference, Quiroga-King addressed barriers that the Latina/o community faces. “Besides having to deal with social problems common to everybody – child care and disintegration of the family, Hispanics live with pressure to assimilate into an American society, sometimes viewed as hostile and contradictory to the Hispanic culture.”⁹⁵ Participation in conferences such as this is crucial as it allows for the representation of the Latina/o community.

Nevertheless, Quiroga-King’s activism was not limited to the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center. In 1980, Quiroga-King was selected as first vice president of the Central Oklahoma Chapter of Incorporated Mexican-American Government Employees (IMAGE).⁹⁶ The purpose of IMAGE “is to develop employment opportunities for Hispanic government workers.”⁹⁷ In 1988, Rosa Quiroga-King was also appointed to the Oklahoma Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, which “assists in the factfinding and investigative functions in Oklahoma concerning discrimination cases.”⁹⁸ Rosa’s activism was not limited to the center; Quiroga-King was committed to disrupting the false narratives about the

⁹⁵ Sapulpa Daily Herald. 1982. "Ethnic and minority perspective told." *Sapulpa Daily Herald*, April 28: 6B.

⁹⁶ The Daily Oklahoman. 1980. "Officers Selected." *The Daily Oklahoman*, June 10: S15.

⁹⁷ The Daily Oklahoman. 1979. "Hispanic Group Spurred." *The Daily Oklahoman*, May 4: N13.

⁹⁸ The Daily Oklahoman. 1988. "Committee Appointed." *The Daily Oklahoman*, May 2: N10.

Latina/o community. This is evident through her response in 1985 to an article published in *The Daily Oklahoman* titled “U.S. Complexion Changing.”⁹⁹ Quiroga-King says the following:

The portrayal of all Hispanics as being only recent immigrants or illegal aliens shows how little knowledge you have of U.S. history...[m]ust you be reminded that it was the Mexicans who taught the Anglos ranching and farming in the Southwest? That in Oklahoma, Mexicans were the builders of the railroads and the meat-packing industry? Hispanic people continue to make outstanding contributions to this country in all areas of life...[m]ost dangerous of all is your statement that “a few more years of inaction and it will be too late to do anything about it.” What is your final solution for the Hispanic problem? Apartheid?¹⁰⁰

Rosa Quiroga-King fights for our community, and that is clear in her response. Quiroga-King was also the president of Maranatha Cristo Viene church. A nondenominational church that mainly served the “Hispanic community, Indians, and whites.”¹⁰¹ Through her involvement and actions, the commitment that Rosa Quiroga-King had to the Latina/o community is unquestionable.

Nonetheless, although many of these contributions are not often spoken about, there is one that has been highlighted; it is the establishment of the newspaper *El Nacional*. Founded in May 1988, *El Nacional* is one of the first Spanish newspapers established in Oklahoma City and is currently one of the largest Spanish newspapers in the state. Quiroga-King states that *El Nacional* was started because the community needed information and needed to have a means of communication among themselves.¹⁰² The newspaper has made its mark in the history of the

⁹⁹ The Daily Oklahoman. 1984. "U.S. Complexion Changing." *The Daily Oklahoman*, December 21: 12. U.S. Complexion Changing is an article published in The Daily Oklahoman which discussed the growing numbers of immigrants arriving to the United States. The article discusses the “browning of America” and stated that “a few more years of inaction and it will be too late to do anything about it.”

¹⁰⁰ King, Rosa. 1985. "Hispanics Here Before Anglos." *The Daily Oklahoman*, January 10: 13.

¹⁰¹ Item H2019.003. Oklahoma Historical Society Oral History Collection. - 2010-2019. - 2019. INTERVIEW WITH ROSA AND RANDY QULROGE-KING, 11/10/2008

¹⁰² Ibid.

Latina/o community of Oklahoma. However, the contributions of Rosa Quiroga-King prior to the newspaper must not be erased. Rosa Quiroga-King's activism, contributions, and love for our community deserves recognition.

The People

Although the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center was initially named the Mexican-American Cultural Center, the center served more than the Mexican community, and even the Latina/o community, of Oklahoma. The center assisted in the resettlement of Indochinese refugees (discussed further in Chapter 3) in Oklahoma. It is also important to mention that those served by the center were diverse not only in nationality but also in gender, age, and language. The diversity of the individuals the center assisted is demonstrated through the various projects of the center, all of which is discussed in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: La Gente Unida Jamás Será Vencida

As previously mentioned in Chapter 1, the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center provided a variety of services to the Latina/o community in Oklahoma. This chapter will discuss the specific projects the center took part in that impacted the Latina/o community, and that created a disruption to the narratives created by the dominant culture regarding the community. This chapter will focus on the immigration projects, a series on the Latina/o experience in Oklahoma, help created specifically for the elderly, their refugee programs, the center's role in the 1980 census, the youth and education programs, and the translation and interpretation project. Through these particular projects, the impact of the center and its importance is further demonstrated.

Immigration Projects

Immigration projects are crucial to the Latina/o community. The Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center took part in two specific immigration projects that impacted the community; the Oklahoma Immigration Advocacy Project (OIAP) and Oklahoma Immigration Counseling Project (OICP). The center also served as a Qualified Designated Entity (QDE) for Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS).¹⁰³ Through these two immigration projects, the center was able to help the Latina/o community of Oklahoma significantly.

The Oklahoma Immigration Advocacy Project (OIAP) was organized in 1978. "The OIAP provides support and assistance to people having family reunification problems due to their immigration status."¹⁰⁴ The Oklahoma Immigration Project (OICP), directed by Alfonso

¹⁰³ DeFrangé, Ann. 1987. "Immigration Office Distributes Amnesty Forms by Hundreds." *The Daily Oklahoman*, May 6.

¹⁰⁴ The Daily Oklahoman. 1981. "Center given \$40,000 lift." *The Daily Oklahoman*, November 5.

Macias, was a project that helped immigrants obtain needed documents, as well as helping them get those documents certified and translated.¹⁰⁵ “In 1979, the Mexican American Cultural Center (Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center) allowed the Oklahoma Immigration Counseling Project (OICP) to establish an office in its facility to serve the populace and to provide not only money but also technical advice and assistance.”¹⁰⁶ The OICP also assisted in educating immigrants on their rights in the U.S system as well as the immigration system, sometimes not even qualifying for resident status and not knowing. Macias mentions an instance in which a “couple was 65 years old...[f]orty years ago, they crossed the border and raised a family in the United States. Now they want to become citizens because they’re afraid they’ll be sent back. So their children applied for them.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Atkins, Kay. 1980. "Funds Lack Threatens Immigrant Aid Project." *The Daily Oklahoman*, August 1: S1.

¹⁰⁶ Widener, Jeffrey M. 2011. "The Latino Impress in Oklahoma City." *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 22-50.

¹⁰⁷ Atkins, Kay. 1980. "Funds Lack Threatens Immigrant Aid Project." *The Daily Oklahoman*, August 1: S1.



Figure 5 Barbara Arroyo and Gorge Tavarez pick up applications for permanent resident status prepared by Alfonso Macias at the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center. It normally takes about seven months to prepare the paperwork, Macias said.

Source: Albright, Bob. [Photograph 2012.201.B0262.0393], photograph, July 29, 1980; (<https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc360574/>; accessed April 15, 2020), The Gateway to Oklahoma History, <https://gateway.okhistory.org>; crediting Oklahoma Historical Society.

With the passing of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 by President Reagan, the immigration programs were one of the center's biggest projects. This led to the center becoming a Qualified Designated Entity (QDE) Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS); at the time, there were only four in Oklahoma City.¹⁰⁸ As Rosa Quiroga-King states, "What we do then is help individuals in filing their immigration documents to obtain legal

¹⁰⁸ DeFrance, Ann. 1987. "Immigration Office Distributes Amnesty Forms by Hundreds." *The Daily Oklahoman*, May 6.

residency. And all of this, the center provides all of this we do the fingerprinting here, we take pictures, we file the documentation, we translate all the documents.”¹⁰⁹

The Hispanic Experience in Oklahoma

The experiences of the Latina/o community in the United States are often not highlighted or discussed, and when they are, it is not uncommon that it is through the lens of the dominant culture. However, in 1980-81, the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center sponsored a project with the Oklahoma Humanities Committee (OHC). The project “Hispanics in Oklahoma: A Search for Identity” was funded by the Oklahoma Humanities Committee (OHC). The project was a series of “programs involving local representatives of the Hispanic community as presenters of their own “personal story,” and local humanists as reactor-discussants.”¹¹⁰ Due to the success of this project, a follow-up program was contemplated.

In April 1981, the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center and the Mexican-American Student Services at the University of Oklahoma submitted their application for the follow-up project, “The Hispanic Experience in Oklahoma.” The project would “cover more in-depth, issues which had only been briefly touched upon by the previous programming.”¹¹¹ The Oklahoma Humanities Committee approved the project application for funding in June of

¹⁰⁹ Etter, Jim. 1988. "Rosa King: Hispanic Leader Works To Aid Growing Group." *The Oklahoman*, August 1.

¹¹⁰ University Archives Record Group 40/42, College of Arts & Sciences, Box 12, Folder 8, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma Libraries.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

1981.¹¹² The project would consist of 10 2-hour programs from September to November of 1981.

The following is a brief description of the program topics listed on the application:

1. Immigration to Oklahoma: “Land of Opportunity?” – highlights the immigration experience (group and individual) as well as the pull of the mother country.
2. Acculturation and Conflict: “Why Can’t They Be Like Us?” – addresses the internal and external conflicts of new cultural values, beliefs, perceptions and behaviors.
3. Inter-Marriage and Conflict: Hispanic “Romeo and Juliet?” – discusses aspects of inter-group marriage and its effects on children, family relations and friendships.
4. Hispanic Identity and Economics: “Is There Money in Being Ethnic?” – focuses on the advantages and disadvantages of being Hispanic in social situations and settings.
5. Sex Roles and Cultural Stereotypes: “Machismo and Marianismo?” – explores the transition of gender roles from Hispanic to American (or even Oklahoma).
6. Cultural Continuity and the Family: “Hispanic Roots?” – addresses the shifts in cultural traditions in families from generation to generation; specific question addressed: why do some Hispanic individuals hold on to tradition while others try to make a clean break?
7. Hispanic Ethnicity and Intra-Group Conflict: “Who’s Been Angry the Longest?” – focuses on intra-ethnic trust, cooperation and good will within the those that identify themselves as “Hispanic”.
8. Ethnicity and Lifestyle: “Hispanics Are All Alike!” – explores the different ways of being and doing Hispanic at different phases.
9. Language Loyalty and Culture: “I Only Speak ‘Un Poco’” – discusses the link between Hispanic culture and Spanish language, as well as “public language” vs. “family language”.
10. The Hispanic Experience in Oklahoma: “Summing Up and Looking to the Future” – pulls together previous programs and puts them in context of the Hispanic future in Oklahoma.¹¹³

It is important to highlight each of the programs in the series for several reasons.

Each of the topics in the program gives us an insight into the specific issues the Latina/o community of Oklahoma was facing at the time. It also offers a better understanding of

¹¹² The Daily Oklahoman. 1981. "Hispanics Series Gets Grant OK." *The Daily Oklahoman*, June 12: 8S.

¹¹³ University Archives Record Group 40/42, College of Arts & Sciences, Box 12, Folder 8, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma Libraries.

the center because, as stated in their application, this project “can assist the Center in all of these goals” (previously listed in Chapter 1).¹¹⁴ However, the most important reason is because this series was created by the Latina/o community. Each of these ten programs gives the Latina/o community the opportunity to speak instead of being spoken for. These programs give the community the agency to disrupt false narratives and perceptions about them. Their voices and experiences are amplified.

Support for the Elderly

The elderly of marginalized communities and their struggles are oftentimes forgotten by social movements. Advocacy is often centered around the youth as they are considered the future. DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) is an example of this.¹¹⁵ The immigration movement is centered around the young “DREAMers” while there are Latinas/os that have been here long before us. They are undeniably some of the most disadvantaged. This is the case for some of the elderly in the Latina/o community. As Carmela Lacayo states, “Triple jeopardy has been the term often used to designate the older person who, in addition to being both old and poor, is also a member of a minority group. Surely, such persons are in many ways the most disadvantaged members of our society.”¹¹⁶

The center was able to address some of these disadvantages. From 1978 to 1979, the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center became the “statewide sub sponsor for the National

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ DACA is a policy that protects young people who entered the United States unlawfully as children, often referred to as “DREAMers”, from deportation.

¹¹⁶ Lacayo, Carmela. 1980. "A National Study to Assess the Service Needs of the Hispanic Elderly Final Report." *ERIC*. December. Accessed March 23, 2021. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED210361.pdf>.

Association of Pro Spanish Speaking Elderly for the Senior Community Service Employment and Training Program.”¹¹⁷ Through this project, the center was able to help the elderly community of Oklahoma. Gerardo Viso, a Cuban exile who was 78 at the time, was one of those who were helped. Viso sought work but was not able to find a job. “I was locked in my house and never saw anybody...[t]his opportunity made me able to feel like somebody again.”¹¹⁸ The participants of the program declared that one of the biggest benefits of the program for them was a boost in self-esteem.¹¹⁹ Through this program, the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center was able to provide support to the elderly of the Latina/o community.

Supporting Refugees

From 1980 to 1981, the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center, together with Catholic Social Ministries and took part in the Cuban Refugee Resettlement Program.¹²⁰ This program in Oklahoma City was at the time one of only ten in the United States that helped single Cuban men adjust to living in the United States.¹²¹ This was significant to these Cuban men because helping them was harder than helping families. “It’s just easier to get families out into the mainstream...[s]o younger males are just about all that’s left. To the average American, handling a 24-year-old male is a little bit threatening”, stated Dr. William Swanson, who was the coordinator of the program.¹²² The Cuban refugees who were a part of the program were paid to

¹¹⁷ University Archives Record Group 40/42, College of Arts & Sciences, Box 12, Folder 8, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma Libraries.

¹¹⁸ Atkins, Kay. 1979. "Minority Elderly Find Usefulness - Back in Work Force." *The Daily Oklahoman*, September 28: S1.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ University Archives Record Group 40/42, College of Arts & Sciences, Box 12, Folder 8, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma Libraries.

¹²¹ Bean, Covey. 1980. "Center Preparing Men for Life in American Society." *The Daily Oklahoman*, November 28: S1.

¹²² Ibid.

attend 20 hours of English classes every week. The program also provided them with counseling, advice, and other forms of assistance such as housing, of which Catholic Charities paid for their rent.¹²³

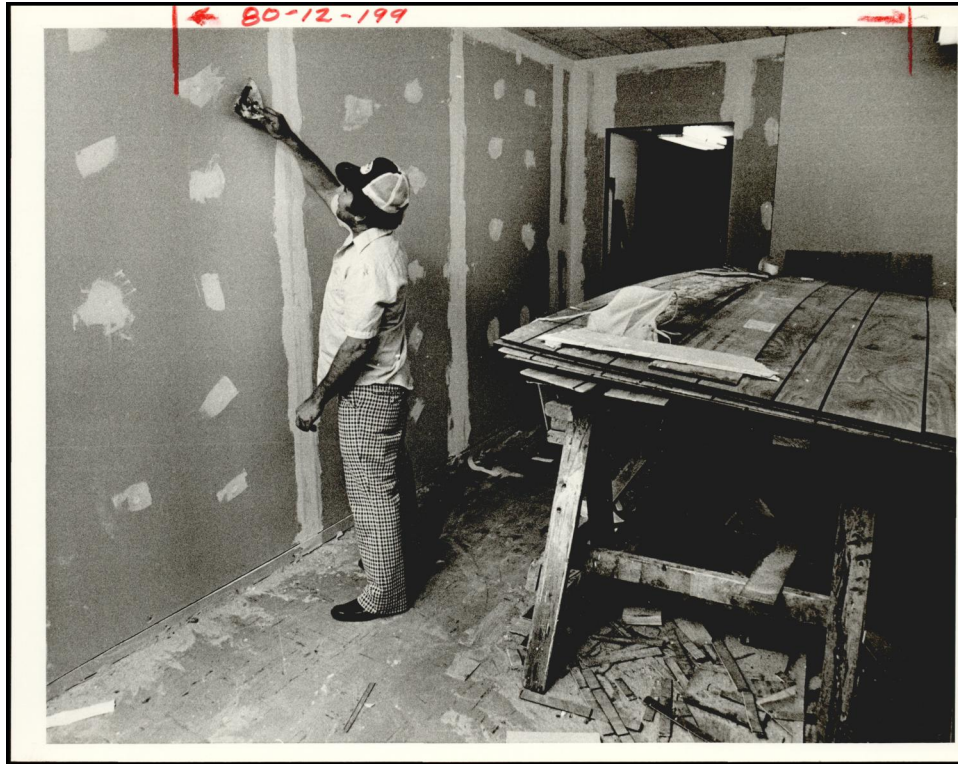


Figure 6 Eliecer Serrans, one of the last of the Cuban refugees to move through the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center's educational program, works on the walls of the center's new home.

Source: Southerland, Paul B. [Photograph 2012.201.B1162.0226], photograph, February 10, 1981; (<https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc523008/>; accessed April 15, 2020), The Gateway to Oklahoma History, <https://gateway.okhistory.org/>; crediting Oklahoma Historical Society.

Cubans were not the only refugees the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center assisted.

From 1975 to 1980, the center was active in the resettlement of Indochinese refugees.¹²⁴ Some of

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ University Archives Record Group 40/42, College of Arts & Sciences, Box 12, Folder 8, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma Libraries.

the problems encountered by the arriving Indochinese refugees included “finding a place to live, getting a job and trying to learn the language.”¹²⁵ The center, which was already helping the Latina/o community with language development, was able to provide this service to the Indochinese refugees as well. The Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center was able to offer these classes to “Indo-Chinese, Russians, Japanese, Spanish, and Middle Eastern students.”¹²⁶ It is evident that the center was also committed to the Indochinese refugees because even when placing advertisements in the newspaper, the center mentioned they needed aides who would help “students of Indochinese or Hispanic origin.”¹²⁷ This specific refugee resettlement program is important as it demonstrates that the center’s advocacy transcended both the language and ethnicity of those it helped.

The Census

The United States conducts a census of the population every ten years. The census is important for many reasons. The census data is used in the following way:

1. To make planning decisions about community services, such as where to provide services for the elderly or where to build new schools
2. To determine the distribution of Congressional seats to states
3. To distribute federal funds to local, state, and tribal governments each year in areas such as education, public health, and much more¹²⁸

¹²⁵ The Sunday Oklahoman. 1979. "Beginning New Life Grueling For Non-Fluent, Bereft Refugees." *The Sunday Oklahoman*, November 25.

¹²⁶ Atkins, Kay. 1980. "Immigrants Solving Language Problems as They Plunge Into English Courses." *The Daily Oklahoman*, August 5.

¹²⁷ The Daily Oklahoman. 1980. "Helping Hands." *The Daily Oklahoman*, December 5: 22S.

¹²⁸ United States Census Bureau. n.d. *What We Do*. Accessed March 23, 2021.
<https://www.census.gov/about/what.html>.

The census affects many aspects of our daily life. Through the census, communities gain needed representation and improvement for their communities in the present and future.

Unfortunately, oftentimes the Latina/o community does not participate in the census. This is especially true for undocumented immigrants in the United States because of their fear of the census being used to trace or deport them; because of this, “those in the country illegally avoided census-takers.”¹²⁹ This continues to be true today. Nevertheless, from 1979 to 1980, the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center served as “the official liaison for the U.S. Bureau of the Census and the Hispanic community in Oklahoma”¹³⁰ for the 1980 Census. An office for the U.S. Bureau of the Census was opened in the center.¹³¹ The Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center also held a meeting with agencies in May of 1979 “to inform the people in the community about the different agencies and their particular programs as it relates to the Hispanic community.”¹³² Representatives from the Bureau of Census were a part of this meeting.

The Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center’s involvement in the census is significant as the United States has a long history of debating whether to exclude undocumented immigrants from it. This is an issue that affects the Latina/o community directly. In 1979, the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) filed a lawsuit concerning the 1980 census. The lawsuit, which sued the Census Bureau, sought to:

¹²⁹ Broyles, Gil. 1980. "Revolution-Plagued Hispanics Sought Opportunity in U.S." *The Daily Oklahoman*, December 10: 12.

¹³⁰ University Archives Record Group 40/42, College of Arts & Sciences, Box 12, Folder 8, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma Libraries.

¹³¹ Black, Michael. 1979. "Census Takers Beginning Task." *Saturday Oklahoman & Times*, October 13: 21.

¹³² The Daily Oklahoman. 1979. "Agencies to Meet With Hispanics." *The Daily Oklahoman*, May 15: 20N.

exclude undocumented aliens from the 1980 census apportionment counts. The plaintiffs argued that including undocumented aliens in the population base for apportionment defeated the purpose of apportionment, that is, equal representation for equal numbers of "people of the United States."¹³³

By excluding them from the census, the government would leave millions of people in the United States unrepresented. Efforts such as these continue today. In July of 2020,

President Donald Trump signed a memorandum Tuesday claiming that undocumented migrants should not be counted in the census for purposes of deciding how many members of Congress are apportioned to each state – though the practical impact of the president's expected move is uncertain at best.¹³⁴

The importance of the Latina/o community taking part in the census was clearly understood by the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center. Throughout time there have been debates on whether undocumented immigrants should be counted and, in turn, represented because they are not “legal” U.S. citizens (although they do, in fact, pay taxes and contribute to the United States and have so for decades).

Youth and Education

The dominant culture has been able to create many false narratives throughout time regarding the Latina/o community. One of these narratives is that the community, both youth, and parents, do not care about education. Widener states that “Latinos were not accustomed to valuing education as a way to improve their lives.”¹³⁵ When Latina/o students do not perform

¹³³ Library of Congress. 1986. "Enumeration of Undocumented Aliens in the Decennial Census." *Library of Congress*. January 28. Accessed March 24, 2021. <https://www.loc.gov/law/find/hearings/pdf/00172011883.pdf>.

¹³⁴ Jackson, David. 2020. "Trump tells census to not count undocumented people for purposes of deciding House apportionment." *USA Today*. July 21. Accessed March 24, 2021. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2020/07/21/trump-tell-census-not-count-undocumented-immigrants/5459873002/>.

¹³⁵ Widener, Jeffrey M. 2011. "The Latino Impress in Oklahoma City." *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 22-50.

well, the blame is usually placed on the community and rarely on the institutions that directly cause this. An example of this is demonstrated through a survey conducted by high school student Carmen Ortiz at her high school. When asked why Latina/o students fail to graduate from high school, “[s]eventy-seven of the eighty-seven responses given by teachers located the “problem” only with students and their families.”¹³⁶ However, what is usually not mentioned is that “schools are often the first places where Latino youth encounter discrimination based on race, language, and/or class.”¹³⁷ This is one of the reasons why community centers, like the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center, are crucial to the Latina/o community. The Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center disrupts this narrative that the Latina/o community does not value education. The center was dedicated to education and to the youth of the Latina/o community. As mentioned previously, promoting education was one of the main functions of the center.¹³⁸ This was evident through the various language development programs and classes held through the center.

The Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center was committed to the Latina/o youth. In 1982, the center began a “counseling and tutoring program aimed at keeping students in school – and out of the courts.”¹³⁹ This was due to the fact that the statistics of the time showed that the Latina/o students were dropping out at alarming rates. As a result, the center provided “personal, vocational and academic counseling, tutoring in English, science, math, and social studies and job development and placement.”¹⁴⁰ The Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center also participated in the federally funded Summer Jobs for Youth program. The program gives young people the

¹³⁶ Irizarry, Jason G. 2011. *The Latinization of U.S. Schools*. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Etter, Jim. 1988. "Rosa King: Hispanic Leader Works To Aid Growing Group." *The Oklahoman*, August 1.

¹³⁹ The Daily Oklahoman. 1982. "Aid aimed at Hispanic youth." *The Daily Oklahoman*, October 12.

¹⁴⁰ The Daily Oklahoman. 1982. "Dropouts." *The Daily Oklahoman*, October 12: 4S.

“experience that enables them to compete later for other jobs.”¹⁴¹ In 1986, masks made by students at the center’s Summer Youth Program were a part of the Children’s Gallery at the University of Oklahoma Museum of Art.¹⁴² The Latina/o community and the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center deeply valued education.

Translation and Interpretation Project

Language and the significance of it has been discussed throughout all three chapters. This is because language is crucial as it is one of the major barriers that the Latina/o community of Oklahoma faced. The Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center addressed this issue by doing more than just offering English classes to the community. In 1980, the center began its Translation and Interpretation Project (TIP). The project was funded by United Way and was “provided to institutions, agencies, and individuals.”¹⁴³ Through this project, the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center was able “to assist individuals, hospitals, police, the courts, and businesses when translation or interpretation services is needed from English to Spanish or vice versa.”¹⁴⁴ Communication is crucial to the success of any community, and through this project, the center gave the Latina/o community the power to be heard.

Each of the programs and projects discussed in this chapter demonstrates specific examples of the ways the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center took action to support the Latina/o community in Oklahoma. These projects did not just support the community; they also disrupted

¹⁴¹ Graham, Dawn. 1985. "Teens Sought for Summer Jobs." *The Sunday Oklahoman*, May 19: 13.

¹⁴² The Daily Oklahoman. 1986. "OU Museum of Art Plans Family Day." *The Daily Oklahoman*, September 4: 22.

¹⁴³ University Archives Record Group 40/42, College of Arts & Sciences, Box 12, Folder 8, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma Libraries.

¹⁴⁴ The Daily Oklahoman. 1984. "Senior Companions Helping Elderly to Remain Independent." *The Daily Oklahoman*, November 9: 11N.

false narratives about the Latina/o community. Through these projects, a better understanding of the Latina/o population of Oklahoma at the time and of the center itself is gained.

Conclusion

In the United States, the dominant culture holds power. This power is displayed through the narratives that are created about marginalized communities and through the erasure that takes place in the archives and in history. This power is validated through the many institutions that take part in systemic oppression, oppression that is ingrained in the systems of America. This power perpetuates harm to marginalized communities. This power is violence. But the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center is a disruption to this power. This community center, with its dedication to the advancement of the Latina/o community of Oklahoma, represented more than just a means to assist the community. Through its many services and programs, the center was a place and space of survival for the Latina/o community. The Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center was an active source of resistance for our community.

Similarly, this thesis also serves as a disruption of that power and narrative. It is a disruption to what is done to our communities, to my Latina/o community, in the archives. This thesis removes the Latina/o community from the footnotes of others' history, a place we are often found in if even found at all. By highlighting the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center, both through their influence and contribution to Oklahoma, a disruption to the narrative and perception created by the dominant culture takes place. Through the center, we see who the Latina/o community truly is. This thesis is for my Latina/o community, not about them.

As I reflect on everything the center represents, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paulo Freire comes to mind. Freire discusses in his work this pedagogy in which the oppressed lead the movement towards liberation:

Who are better prepared than the oppressed to understand the terrible significance of an oppressive society? Who suffer the effects of oppression more than the oppressed? Who can better understand the necessity of liberation? And this fight, because of the purpose given it by the oppressed, will actually constitute an act of love.¹⁴⁵

The oppressor cannot lead effective movements towards liberation for marginalized communities. As Freire states, “A real humanist can be identified more by his trust in the people, which engages him in their struggle, than by a thousand actions in their favor without that trust.”¹⁴⁶ The oppressor should not be the leading or speaking for communities, as this is also a form of violence.

Resistance is an act of love. “Because love is an act of courage, not of fear, love is commitment to others. No matter where the oppressed are found, the act of love is commitment to their cause.”¹⁴⁷ The existence of the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center is a representation of this; it is an act of love. A love committed to the Latina/o community of Oklahoma. A love that supports, honors, values, respects, and humanizes our community. The center, to me, is the embodiment of this pedagogy, a pedagogy of love.

Through this thesis, I realized the responsibility that engaging in research and in the archives entails. Research should not perpetuate the harm the archives have created. Today, I hope we are creating an archive that is not dehumanizing, that gives a voice to everyone, and that allows communities to create their own narratives – an archive rooted in love. For me,

¹⁴⁵ Freire, Paulo. 1970. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

documenting and recognizing the contributions of the Oklahoma Hispanic Cultural Center, of those that contributed to the center, and of the community of the center, became more than just a thesis topic or research study. For me, the center became a testament of who my community has been in the past, who they are in the present, and who they will continue to be in the future.

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