

From Marginalized Migrants to Permanent Residents of North Carolina: How Libraries and Latinos Are Collaborating to Build Multicultural Communities in the Tar Heel State

There is a need for more education on understanding the role of Latinos from Mexico and Central America in the United States in general and in North Carolina particularly. The following history provides a framework for understanding the role North Carolina libraries have played in the transformation of Latinos from temporary migrants, working primarily in agriculture, to permanent residents, contributing to the economic well-being of North Carolina in wide-ranging economic venues from construction and housing to food-processing.

The modern history of Latinos in North Carolina does not begin until around 1970, but there are turning points in U.S. history much earlier that have had a great impact on their eventual migration to and settlement in North Carolina. These earlier laws, treaties, and court rulings must be understood in order to get the total picture of the transformation of Latinos and the beginning of a new era in multiculturalism in North Carolina, and how libraries have worked with Latinos in this process.

From the Naturalization Act of 1790 to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848

From the very beginning of the United States, immigrants were able to become naturalized citizens according to the Naturalization Act of 1790, if, and only if, they were white persons.

Notwithstanding this racial prejudice embodied in one of the first laws of the newly founded United States of America, there were several historical events that paved the way for Latino migration to North Carolina, beginning as early as the Mexican-American War of 1846-48. President James Polk, a native North Carolinian himself, claimed vast amounts of former Mexican territory as the spoils of war in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, including the present-day states of Arizona, California, Nevada, New Mexico, and Utah.¹

Federal Courts Address Racial Status of Mexicans Displaced by the Mexican American War of 1846-48

It was not until 1897 that federal courts addressed the racial status of these displaced Mexicans, who originally became part of the American nation after the annexation of southwestern territory conquered in the Mexican-American War. These Mexicans were made citizens, and thus implicitly declared white persons by way of their descent from Europeans, via Spain. Their Indian ancestry was for the moment laid aside. This legal action secured the loyalty of numerous large landowners, especially in resources-rich California.

While many of the displaced Mexicans felt pressure to move south, others were pressed into labor by U.S. companies moving into the newly ceded

territories. These companies also sent recruiters to Mexico throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to locate laborers to build railroad tracks, pick crops, and clear land for new towns and homesteads in the new territory. As displaced persons with questionable status, who had only a poor nation to return to, many Mexicans stayed where they were to take advantage of these new work opportunities.

U.S. Border Patrol Impedes Migration from Mexico

On the popular level, Mexican “whiteness” was hotly contested. Political agitation to drop them from the citizenship list failed, but after 1924, when the U.S. Border Patrol was established, the federal government worked to impede their entrance by leveling a head tax on Mexicans entering the country and by denying visas on the grounds that they could not be assimilated and would become dependent on public assistance.

Need for Mexican Migrant Farm Workers During and After World War I

Toward the end of World War I, the need for agricultural laborers increased due to the absence of men serving in the armed forces. The U.S. and Mexican governments together created a guest worker program to allow U.S. farmers to hire Mexican laborers on a temporary basis. In the 1930s, as the

1. David A. Gerber, *American Immigration: A Very Short Introduction* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 33.

U.S. economy began to suffer from what would later be called the Great Depression, many Americans rather than welcoming the much-needed labor began to accuse Mexican newcomers of taking their jobs and calling for them to go home, not realizing, of course, that many of them were legally home already. This anti-immigrant sentiment led to the establishment of more restrictive immigration measures.²

The continuing demands for agricultural laborers in the Southwest region of the United States meant that Latino migrants continually crossed the porous U.S.-Mexico border to find employment in the grape fields and orange groves. The U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service did not have enough Border Patrol agents at that time to prevent this heretofore unregulated and familiar migration pattern.

World War II, Creation and Demise of the Bracero Program, and the Beginning of the Era of Undocumented Immigration

During World War II, the policy toward Mexican migrants was once again reversed because of the shortage of agricultural labor and related work in canneries. To aid the agriculturally dependent states like California, in 1942, the U.S. and Mexican governments created a bilateral but temporary contract labor program called the Bracero Program, a term that comes from the Spanish word for “arms.”

Over the next twenty years or so, the Bracero Program continued, although very few braceros came to North Carolina. The Bracero program, however, was critical to the establishment of Latino communities in the United States that would later become

part of migrant networks that would one day reach North Carolina. The Bracero program officially ended in 1964 due to a lack of a regulatory structure to provide oversight of the hiring, payment, and treatment of workers. With the termination of the Bracero Program, legal avenues to migrate to the United States decreased significantly while the need for migrant labor continued unabated. Needing employment, Mexicans continued their journeys northward to the United States, thus beginning the era of growing undocumented immigration.³

1965 Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) Allows Latinos to Migrate to North Carolina

In 1965, during the Johnson administration, the U.S. Congress passed the INA, which abolished the national-origins system quotas enacted by Congress in 1924 that had favored European immigration from Germany, Scandinavia, the United Kingdom, and Ireland. The INA prioritized family reunification and designated an unlimited number of visas for immediate relatives of U.S. citizens. Asians, and Latin Americans gained more equal access to visas and citizenship for the first time in U.S. history.

The INA paved the way for Latinos who had previously worked in the Sun Belt states as agricultural laborers to come to North Carolina to do the same kind of work and perhaps to get employment in other growing segments of the economy, including the meat and poultry-processing industries. Beginning in the 1970s, Latinos began to find hospitable destinations in urban cities of the southeastern states. Atlanta, Charlotte, and Miami beckoned with

new opportunities in the manufacturing and agricultural sectors. North Carolina, being not far geographically from Florida, where migrant farm workers had picked oranges for decades before, was becoming a new destination for Latinos.

1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) Provides Impetus for Latinos to Become Permanent Residents of North Carolina

The shift of Latino migration to North Carolina was also due in part to IRCA, passed by the U.S. Congress during the Reagan administration. The IRCA included measures to facilitate immigration not only to North Carolina, but also many other destinations throughout the country where work opportunities existed. On the other hand, IRCA introduced new restrictions, heightened border controls, and created more punitive systems for employers who hired undocumented immigrants. IRCA, by making it more difficult for Latinos to continue their cyclical seasonal migrations, ironically provided the impetus for many Latinos to settle permanently in the United States.

The most controversial measure of IRCA provided amnesty for about three million undocumented Mexican and Central American migrants living in the United States, who could prove that they had lived or worked in the country for extended periods. As newly naturalized U.S. citizens, these Latinos had the opportunity to petition the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service for visas for family members and together strengthen migrant networks to aid other family and friends to join them in North Carolina. Although

2. Hannah Gill, *Latino Migration Experience in North Carolina: New Roots in the Old North State*, 2nd ed., rev. and exp. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 57-58

3. Gerber, *American Immigration*, 33, 57-58; Gill, *Latino Migration*, 59.

amnesty succeeded in slowing the flow of undocumented immigrants, it infuriated nativists who were opposed to Latino migration period.

Many immigration officials ignored the new provisions of IRCA. When visas were not adjusted to meet labor demands and the IRCA provisions promising the chance of family unification, undocumented immigration increased, reaching unprecedented numbers in the early twenty-first century. Migrants were ironically blamed for taking advantage of the provisions of IRCA, the law of the land. It is instructive to note that the immigration reforms of 1965 and 1986 affected other immigrants to North Carolina, not only Latinos, but also Asians, including South Vietnamese, Hmong, and Cambodians, Middle Easterners, including Syrian and Lebanese, and African immigrants and refugees.⁴

Libraries Begin to Collaborate with Latinos to Build Multicultural Communities in North Carolina

Beginning back in the 1970s and forward, the majority of new immigrants to North Carolina were Latin American in origin, including Mexican farm workers, university students from Colombia, Chile, and Peru, and Puerto Rican families on military bases in the eastern part of the state, including the Army's Fort Bragg, the Air Force's Seymour Johnson base, and the Camp Lejeune base of the Marine Corps. During this same time period, migration of Central Americans from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua became more extensive as people fled political, humanitarian, and

“...researchers found that 26% of Hispanic respondents had used the public library at least monthly, with 40% reporting use in the past year.”

economic crises in those countries. During the thirty-year period from 1970 to the turn of the twentieth century, Latinos continued to settle in North Carolina in larger numbers and in the process strengthening migration networks that connected them to Mexico, Central America, the historic Southwest communities, and the Southeast states of Georgia, Tennessee, and Virginia.⁵

By the mid-nineties, the *Charlotte Observer*, serving North Carolina's largest metropolitan area, reported that state officials had documented that public school enrollment of Latinos grew 285 percent from 1990-91 to 1997-98, with Mecklenburg County, jumping from 740 students to 2,813, Cumberland County, from 1,328 to 2,454, and Onslow County, from 457 to 822. Hispanics were arriving in Charlotte at a rate of 12 per day. English as a Second Language (ESL) programs served 1,478 students speaking 48 different languages in ESL classes, with Spanish as one of the most common languages.

First Latina Librarian Hired by Public Library of Charlotte & Mecklenburg County (PLCMC)

In October 1997, to meet this demonstrated need for library services to Latinos, the PLCMC hired Irania Macias Patterson as Bilingual Children Specialist as part of the Early Intervention Reading Program for Hispanic/Latino families, funded in part by the Foundation of the Carolinas through

their new Building a Better Future grant program. The program provided low-income Hispanic children 18 months through 4 years of age and their families with reading readiness and language experience in both Spanish and English.⁶

State Library of N.C. Investigates Expansion of Services to Spanish-Speaking Communities

In 2000, due to the increase in Latino migration, the State Library of North Carolina contracted with the consultant firm Rincon and Associates to produce a study on the library needs of Hispanics living in North Carolina. Based on 1,003 telephone interviews, the researchers found that 26% of Hispanic respondents had used the public library at least monthly, with 40% reporting use in the past year. The study indicated that the most influential factors affecting library use were proximity to a library, and strong parental support of children under eighteen years of age for learning English-reading skills and pursuing higher education.

That same year, John Sudell found similar findings in his research on library service to Hispanic immigrants, specifically in Forsyth County. These studies indicated that there were Mexican and other Central American immigrants in North Carolina well before the turn of the twentieth century, although library services for this population were limited or at least not reported in the library literature.⁷

4. Gill, *Latino Migration*, 60-61.

5. *Ibid.*, 62-63.

6. Irania Macias Patterson, "Charlotte Public Library Speaks Espanol: Approaching the Hispanic Community through Storytelling." *North Carolina Libraries* (Winter 1998): 145-147. Article includes statistics from the July 2, 1996, issue of the *Charlotte Observer*.

In 2001, it was clear from Frances Flythe's research based on interviews with seventy-one Hispanic immigrants in Durham County, North Carolina, that only 22% had used the library at some time. Her research showed that the barriers to public library use by Latinos included cultural unfamiliarity with libraries, language barriers due partially to low education and literacy levels, and an overall mistrust of government agencies.⁸

U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Established and Immigration Reform Languishes

In 2002, in reaction to the 9/11 disaster, the new DHS was established to deal with immigration, terrorism, response to natural disasters, and a host of other responsibilities formerly administered by several federal agencies. In 2007, in the midst of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the U.S. Senate passed a Comprehensive Reform of Immigration bill, which had the potential for fixing the immigration process, particularly with regard to the issue of undocumented immigration, but it languished and died without approval from the U.S. House.

The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Act

In 2008, the DACA Act was passed by the U.S. Congress during the Obama administration to protect underage children from trafficking in Mexico and to allow them asylum. This group, composed of the former children of

immigrants, who had been brought into the United States contrary to U.S. immigration policy, but through no fault of their own, were referred to as the Dreamers, who advocated a path to U.S. citizenship based on the fact that they were already in the United States.⁹

NCLA and the Short-Lived Carolina Chapter of REFORMA

From 2000 to 2008, the North Carolina Library Association (NCLA) showed its support to establish a chapter of REFORMA (National Association to Promote Library and Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish Speaking) under the auspices of the NCLA Roundtable on Ethnic and Minor Concerns (REMCo). The leader in this movement to form a chapter of REFORMA within NCLA and also to include the South Carolina Library Association (SCLA) was Robin Imperial of the Eastern Regional Branch of the Wake County Public Libraries. The new entity would be known as the Carolina Chapter of REFORMA. Imperial and other leaders did the ground-breaking work, gathered statistics and other materials to support their case, and presented them to REFORMA and the Carolina Chapter was recognized nationally.

The leaders of the newly formed Carolina Chapter soon learned that doing anything out of the ordinary and particularly as a bi-state venture was much more difficult than originally planned for. Participation and planning ended up in the hands of only a few dedicated and persistent "Reformistas"

like Imperial, who also sought the help and advice of long-time nationally recognized Reformistas, notably Yolanda Cuesta of Sacramento, California, and Garza de Cortes, REFORMA president in 2001, whom Imperial had earlier met at the 2001 NCLA Biennial Conference in Winston-Salem. Imperial believes that the economic downturn of 2008-2009 accounted for the seeming lack of interest. Imperial was proved correct in her assumption as she witnessed firsthand the similar trials of the DC (District of Columbia) Metro Chapter shortly after she moved from the Cumberland County Public Library & Information Center in Fayetteville, North Carolina, to the Petworth Neighborhood Library of the DC Public Library to serve as manager.

In North Carolina, librarians concentrated more on local concerns of helping mainly Mexican migrants, and the DC Metro Chapter focused on meeting the information needs mainly of Central American migrants. There has been no movement to resurrect the Carolina Chapter of REFORMA, which the REFORMA website lists as inactive. Further research into cooperative ventures between state library associations and REFORMA will be welcomed as valuable contributions to the library literature of library services with Latinos. North Carolina librarians working with Latino migrants will continue to work with organizations within the NCLA, like REMCo. Librarians who have the funds will also seek individual memberships in REFORMA.¹⁰

7. Rincon and Associates, (2000), *Survey of Hispanics in North Carolina*, accessed Dec. 7, 2018, <http://statelibrary.dcr.state.nc.us/hispanic/index.htm>; John Sudell, "Library Service to Hispanic Immigrants of Forsyth County, North Carolina: A Community Collaboration, in *Library Services to Latinos: An Anthology*, ed. Salvadore Guereña (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2000), 143-68; see also, Susan K. Burke, "Use of Public Libraries by Immigrants," *Reference & User Services Quarterly*, 48(2) (Winter 2008): 164-174, accessed, Dec 5, 2018, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20865036>.

8. Frances H. Flythe, "Identification of the Information Needs of Newly Arrived Hispanic/Latino Immigrants in Durham County, North Carolina, and How the Public Library May Address Those Needs," Master's paper for the M.S. in L.S. degree, University of North Carolina, Apr. 2001.

9. Gill, *Latino Migration*, 166-170.

The DREAM Act Is Thwarted by ICE and Municipal and County Enforcement Agencies

In December of 2010, the U.S. Congress voted on the proposed DREAM (Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors) Act. It passed the U.S. House by a margin of 216-198. However, in the U.S. Senate the DREAM Act was defeated. On December 8, 2010, a majority in the U.S. Senate, including North Carolina Senator Kay Hagan, voted in favor of ending debate on the DREAM Act.

In 2014, the 2008 law was again challenged in light of massive immigration of children, some with their mothers, to flee brutal regimes, gangs, and drug cartels in the Central American nations of Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador. By 2015, the North Carolina Legislature passed a law to penalize so-called sanctuary cities, which opted out of participation with ICE, the Immigration and Customs Enforcement division of DHS.¹¹

During 2016, ICE established the ACCESS 287(g) program, which enabled participating local law enforcement authorities to check the immigration status of anyone arrested and to hold undocumented suspects for deportation proceedings. As of March 2017, thirty-seven agreements were in place in sixteen states, including North Carolina, which had been at the forefront by its support and implementation of the ACCESS 287(g) program. Eight of the state's one hundred county sheriffs' offices, including those of Alamance, Cabarrus, Cumberland, Gaston,

Guilford, Henderson, Mecklenburg, and Wake Counties, along with the Durham Police Department, implemented these agreements. North Carolina had the second highest number of 287(g) agreements in the nation, following Texas.¹²

The Integration Model for Building Multicultural Communities Is Realized

By contrast some North Carolina municipalities have worked toward the actual integration of Latino residents rather than their attrition. Local government leaders in Charlotte, Greensboro, High Point, Burlington, Greenville, Winston Salem, Sanford, Chapel Hill, Carrboro, and Siler City have initiated programs, including library and literacy services, to improve communication, services, and civic engagement and leadership opportunities for immigrant and refugee residents. These efforts were in response to the reality of demographic change and the permanence of Latino communities in North Carolina and elsewhere in the United States.¹³

Hannah E. Gill reports in her study of Latino migration to and settlement in North Carolina has documented that the majority (56 percent) have U.S. citizenship because they were born in the United States. The rest (44 percent) are either naturalized citizens, legal permanent residents, or visa card holders. North Carolina's undocumented immigrants, an estimated 284,000 people, make up part of an estimated eleven million people living in the United States who are not

authorized to be present and/or to work.

The majority of Latinos in North Carolina are of Mexican descent: two-thirds are from Mexico or have Mexican ancestry, followed by Central American migrants from El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, and Costa Rica. Contrary to public opinion, not all Latinos speak Spanish. Some groups of indigenous Mexican and Central Americans speak Mayan, Nahuatl, and/or Purepecha as their first languages.¹⁴

When President Donald Trump was inaugurated in January 2017, he ordered that sanctuary cities for Latinos that refused to cooperate with the federal government to facilitate deportations would lose their federal funding. He directed the DHS to build a wall on the U.S.-Mexico border, hire 5,000 new U.S. Border Patrol agents, and construct new detention facilities. In August 2017, Trump set a deadline for the expiration of the DACA Act. He challenged Congress to come up with a solution for the already registered Dreamers, recipients of the protection proposed in the DREAM Act.

Democrats in Congress opposed all attempts to terminate the DACA program as well as the building of the wall and detention facilities at the U.S./Mexico border. Congressmen on both sides of the aisle voiced support for Dreamers, including Thom Tillis, the U.S. senator from North Carolina. In September 2017, Senator Tillis announced that he would reintroduce the DREAM Act legislation in response to polls indicating that a majority of Americans supported a path to

10. Author's e-mail correspondence with Robin Imperial, Lamond-Riggs Branch of the District of Columbia Public Library, Oct. 4, 18, 22; Nov. 20, 21, 27, 28; Dec. 11, 18. See also, Yolanda J. Cuesta, "From Survival to Sophistication: Hispanic Needs=Library Needs," *Library Journal* 115 (May 15, 1990), 26-28, & Yolanda Cuesta & Patricia Tarin, "Guidelines for Library Service to the Spanish-speaking," *Library Journal* 103 (July 1978), 1350-1356; and REFORMA (The National Association to Promote Library & Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish Speaking): Chapters, accessed Jan. 28, 2019, <https://www.reforma.org/content.asp?pl+2&sl=106&contentid=106>.

11. Gill, *Latino Migration*, 7, 172-73.

12. *Ibid.*, 5, 71-78, 175-77.

13. *Ibid.*, 7-8.

14. *Ibid.*, 3.

legalization for Dreamers and other comprehensive immigration reforms. North Carolina Attorney General Josh Stein joined fifteen other states in a lawsuit challenging Trump's plans to cancel the DACA program. Courts throughout the United States blocked Trump's funding restrictions for sanctuary cities.

In August of 2018, the Trump Administration enforced a new policy of zero tolerance. The enforcement of this strict interpretation of the original immigration legislation put in place during the Obama Administration resulted in separating mainly Central American families who crossed the U.S.-Mexico border in search of asylum. Often the parents were deported, while their children remained in detention centers in the United States. Many children and parents have not been reunited even as the country, as a whole, has expressed its collective condemnation of this brutal policy.¹⁵

To counter this negativism toward immigrants, public schools and their libraries have also played a significant role in welcoming Latino children to their classrooms and media centers. One exceptional example, given by Gill in her study of Latino communities in North Carolina, was the Southern Alamance Elementary (SAE) School in Graham, Alamance County, which had ironically been one of the several North Carolina counties that had supported the implementation of ICE's ACCESS 287(g) program.

The SAE made a firm stand against this policy. The SAE community viewed Latino children and their families as people with new ideas, new talents, and new skills. Putting their more integrative, diverse philosophy into action, the SAE school administrators created a dual-language "Splash"

program, which provided more than three hundred kindergarten through fifth-grade students with instruction and immersion in English and Spanish. Half of the students at SAE are native-English speakers, and the other half are native-Spanish speakers.

SAE was able to employ teachers from Latin American through the J-1 visa program. This enables these teachers to teach in accredited U.S. schools. This unique educational model addresses the needs of native-Spanish-speaking students who require additional support in learning English but also provides a rare opportunity for native-English-speaking students to learn another language from a very young age, the very best time for students to attain language fluency. The forward-looking SAE school administrators realized that Spanish is the second most widely spoken language in the world and that being able to speak it has become an important skill for immigrants seeking jobs not only in North Carolina, but throughout the United States.

SAE discovered that native-Spanish-speaking students in the dual-language program learned English faster than their counterparts in the ESL program, the standard program available to most school students in North Carolina public schools. ESL programs focus on assimilating students into English language courses as quickly as possible with no instruction in their native language. SAE's dual-language program enhanced students' social skills, leadership capacities, and respect for others.

Further proof of the educational efficacy of the dual-language program is found at Selma Elementary School in Johnston County, North Carolina, where students in the "Splash" model program significantly outperformed

their peers in traditional classes by achieving proficiency levels two to three times those of traditional students. This research-based approach holds great potential for supplementing the ESL model for Latino elementary students in North Carolina.¹⁶ More research is needed to document other collaborative efforts in school as well as public libraries to reach Latino students.

Libraries Support Creation of Multicultural Communities in N.C.

At the federal level, Democrats in the midterm elections of 2018 successfully secured a Democratic majority in the U.S. House of Representatives as well as increasing the number of governorships of many states, but did not gain control of the U.S. Senate. Negotiations on the DREAM and DACA Acts have taken second place to discussions regarding Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election, however, there is one note of hope: the Supreme Court of the United States will take up the DREAM and DACA Acts in the fall of 2019.

Librarians must transcend this negativism regarding immigration to the United States by continuing their commitment to provide unbiased information to educate state legislators as well as the North Carolina citizenry at large about the status of Latinos. Libraries must continue the essential work of providing adult literacy in English programs and an emphasis on the importance and benefits of citizenship, while encouraging Latinos to take pride in and document their native cultures. This advocacy for Latinos' access to libraries and other educational institutions is critical for building diverse multicultural communities in North Carolina.

15. Ibid., 172-73

16. Ibid., 175-79.