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Latinos in Rural America

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Latinos in Rural America

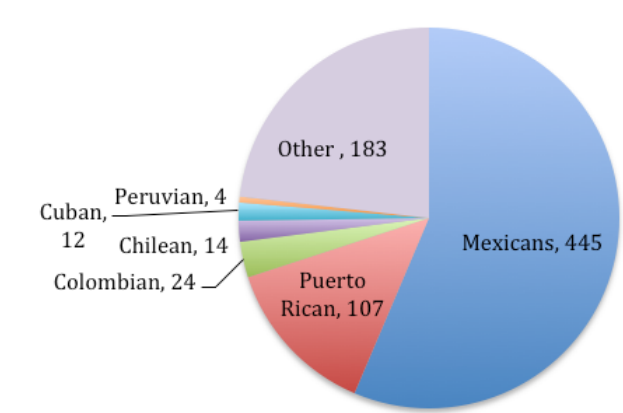
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ABSTRACT

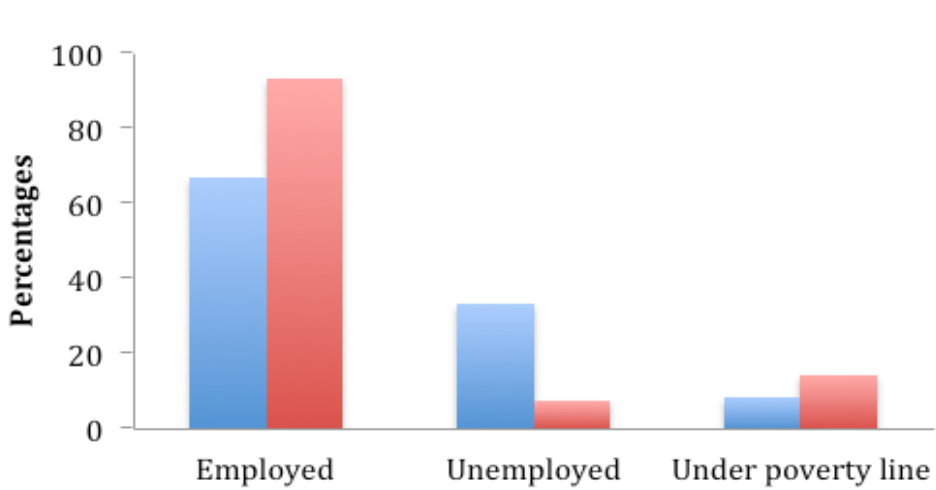
Latinos in Rural America (LiRA) is an oral history project designed to broaden knowledge, engagement and understanding of the Latino/a experience in rural Ohio. The project pursues the goal of providing an intimate window into the lives, origins, and aspirations of Latinos in Knox County. LiRA is rooted in interviews and direct personal interactions with members of the community who represent diverse economic conditions, stages of life and aspirations within the broad social fabric of Knox County. During the summer of 2015, the team conducted research on and with local Latino community members to produce the bulk of the materials for this oral history, including: archival work on the history of Latinos in Knox County, video and audio interviews of local community members, and the production of short multigenerational narratives and photography. Through transcription, coding of texts, and interpretation, the research team identified six recurring themes that characterize the experience of Latinos in Knox County: circular journeys, a sense of place and displacement, values and culture, intercultural identities, visibility/invisibility, and dreams and aspirations. This content will serve as the basis for *Latinos in Rural America: Stories of Cultural Heritage, Values, and Aspirations*, a bilingual exhibition that will travel locally and throughout Ohio between December 2015 and March 2016. Through LiRA, we were able to uncover Latinos' distinctive challenges and rewards as they conduct their daily lives in rural Ohio.

KNOX COUNTY DEMOGRAPHICS (2013)

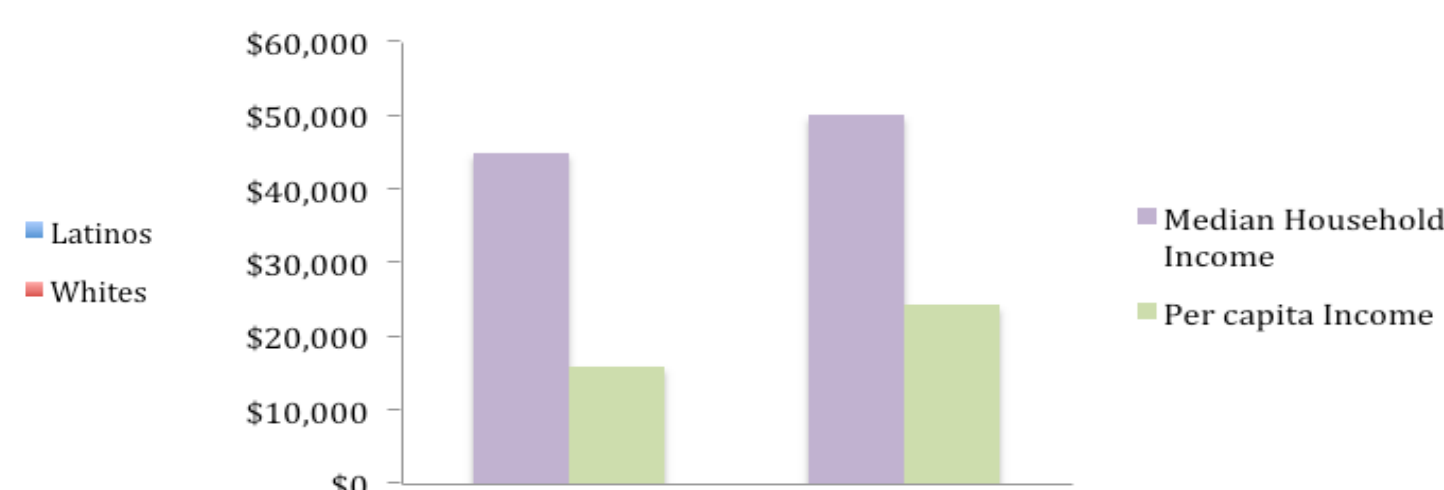
Nationalities of 789 Latinos in Knox County



Employment and Poverty By Ethnicity



Income By Ethnicity



OBJECTIVES

- Increase knowledge, engagement, and understanding of the Latino/a experience in rural Knox County.
- Develop intercultural exchange and relationships between the local Latino community and other Knox County and Ohio residents.
- Increase awareness of Latino/a contributions to the life of Ohio.
- Offer Latino youth new opportunities to interpret their past and articulate their future and, in this way, gain access to relevant educational and social goods.
- Establish partnerships with local and state organizations and researchers to support intercultural development between Latinos and other state residents.



Ivonne García, Associate Professor of English at Kenyon College, as a young girl in Puerto Rico.

METHODS

Institutional Requirements & Training

- IRB and CITI Training For Research with Human Subjects
 - Consent, assent, release, and video release forms
- Ohio Humanities Oral History Institute, Kenyon College, June 2-4, 2015
- Video and audio recorder training

Community Engagement

- Identification of social nodes and community leaders
- Enrollment of participants: phone calls and setting appointments
- Interviewee profiles: age, gender, nationality, ethnicity, economic condition, and occupation

Interview Logistics

The team used the *abbreviated life story* interview model (Brooke Bryan, Antioch College), which suggests that interviewers frame their questions in six domains:

- the introductory lead
- early life/context
- the purposeful turn toward the theme
- depth questions
- the reflective turn towards generalized meaning
- the wrap-up



The daughter of Amneris Pérez-Román, a native of Puerto Rico

Post-Interview Process

All the interviews were transcribed, translated, and coded for recurring themes. We then selected quotes from each interview for inclusion in the final exhibition panels and compilation video. We also worked as a team to write content that contextualizes the quotes for the panels, select and caption photographs for inclusion in the panels and video, and archive the interviews, video, and photographs in Digital Kenyon.

RESULTS

We assumed an interpretive approach to oral history and coded the transcribed text for recurring themes. From this method, we uncovered six main themes:

- Circular Journeys
- A Sense of Place and Displacement
- Values and Culture
- Intercultural Identities
- Visibility/Invisibility
- Dreams and Aspirations



The Ávalos family of Mount Vernon maintains strong ties with family members still in Mexico (shown here)

The final product of the project includes:

- A bilingual ten-panel display that presents the six main themes as well as background information and demographic statistics about Latinos in Knox County
- A 22 minute long compilation video of selected interview quotes
- A reflection piece where viewers can interact with the project by providing feedback
- A brochure with selected images and bibliographical information
- A primer that provides background information on cultural and communication norms for successful intercultural interactions with Latinos

Venues for the exhibition are:

- Kenyon College Olin Library (December 1-18, 2015)
- Mount Vernon Public Library (January 13-27, 2016)
- Global Gallery in Hagerty Hall, OSU (February 9-23, 2016)
- McMillan Hall Gallery, Miami University, Oxford, Ohio (March 30- April 12, 2016)

WEBLINK TO LiRA

- <http://www.kenyon.edu/academics/departments-programs/latinoa-studies/lira/>

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the oral history and analysis compiled in LiRA, we conclude that:

- Latinos' experience and reception in Knox County have been mostly positive.
- Defining values for Latinos in Rural Ohio include: 1) devotion to the family, a tight knit unit that includes extended family; 2) preserving Spanish, their native language; 3) receiving an education as a means to a better life; 4) celebrating through 'fiestas' and holidays; and 5) sharing food and "la sobremesa" ("table-talk") after meals.
- Important social centers for Latinos in Knox County include: 1) Mount Vernon's Saint Vincent De Paul Catholic Church, which offers Spanish Mass on the last Sunday of every month; 2) Glen Hill Orchard Farms, which is almost exclusively comprised of Latino workers; and 3) Fiesta Mexicana restaurant, which closes to the public several times a year to privately celebrate holidays and to foster a sense of community among local Latinos.
- Latinos appreciate when others try to speak Spanish, even those who are not fluent in the language.
- Latinos hope for stability, progress, and success in general, but they also have individualized goals.
- The children of immigrants inherit the hopes and dreams of those who have come before them, and in this sense their successes are family achievements.
- Difficulty speaking English may inhibit success in schools, businesses, and agencies.
- Students from Spanish-speaking households may face difficulty in pursuing higher education due to a lack of bilingual SAT and ACT materials and Eurocentric curricula.
- Some Latinos feel isolated and find it difficult to engage with non-Latinos who do not understand their customs.



Maria Esmeralda Villa, an agricultural worker and full-time student, with Maureen Buchwald (right)

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