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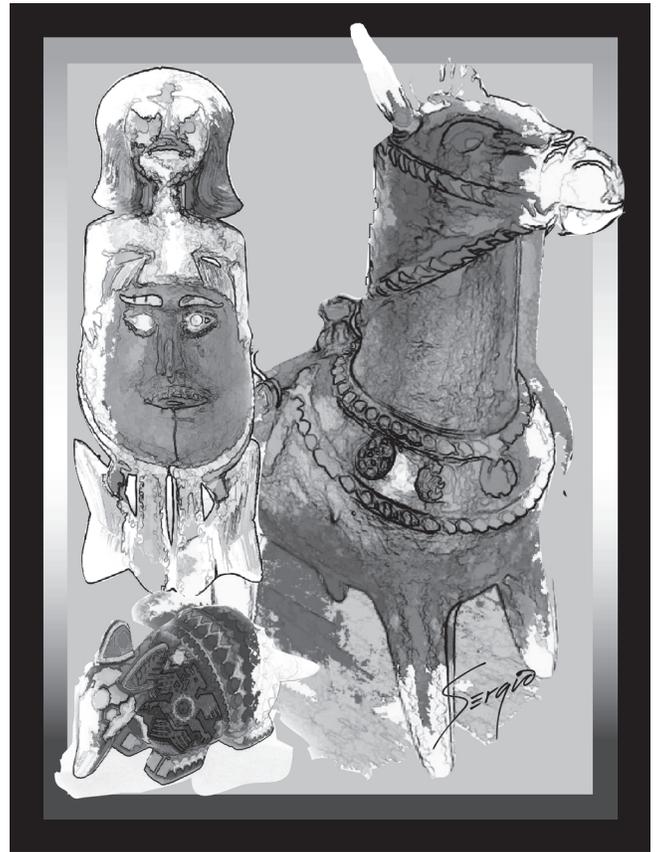
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This report was produced by the Alabama Center for Traditional Culture in partnership with the Alabama Latin American Association with administrative support from the Alabama Folklife Association.

The Alabama Center for Traditional Culture, a division of the Alabama State Council on the Arts, strives to document, preserve and present Alabama's folk culture and traditional arts and to further the understanding of our cultural heritage.

The general mission of the Alabama Latin-American Association is to provide statewide advocacy, to procure official support, to improve education for the Hispanic community, and to develop cultural sensitivity in all people through collaboration with existing community-based organizations in Alabama.

This project was made possible with funding from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Alabama State Council on the Arts.



Cover art by Sergio Portillo of Florence, Alabama.





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## Introduction

This guide to Latino/Hispanic cultural traditions within Alabama is based upon research supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). We hope this report will provide some basic information about Alabama's fastest growing population. It is specifically designed to introduce arts organizations in Alabama to new immigrant groups from Spanish-speaking countries. We also hope that the knowledge gained in collecting data for this report will enhance the ability of the Alabama State Council on the Arts (ASCA) and the Alabama Latin American Association (ALAS) to support Latino traditional artists and help connect them to the state's arts infrastructure.

# A ..... Report ..... On ..... Hispanic ..... Cultures ..... In ..... Alabama



*Grupo Folclórico México performs the traditional Michoacán viejitos (old men) dance at the amphitheatre in Gadsden.*

*Photo: Courtesy of Alabama Latin American Association (ALAS).*

Like many groups who have come to Alabama, Latinos have maintained many cultural traditions of their homeland. We feel that a better understanding of these traditions can serve as a bridge between this new group of Alabamians and the English-speaking population.

The guide contains sections on cultural traditions and demographic information. This information points out the diversity within this population, including many Mayan Indian immigrants, rural settlers from the Mexican Yucatán Peninsula and from northern areas of Guatemala, whose primary language is not Spanish. There is also a diversity of traditions and art forms now practiced by many important Latino/Hispanic tradition bearers and artists.



*A concert at the Hispanic Festival in Birmingham's Linn Park.*

*Photo: Courtesy of ALAS.*

The Alabama Center for Traditional Culture (ACTC), the Folklife division of the Alabama State Council on the Arts (ASCA), worked with the Alabama Latin American Association (ALAS) in gathering this information on Alabama's Latino community. Our partners, ALAS, provided two fieldworkers. One fieldworker, Raul Valdez, was recruited by ALAS for the project, and has recently immigrated to Canada. Another, Charles Kelley, is a bilingual Anthropology graduate who is now a teacher in Atlanta. ACTC folklorists Anne Kimzey and Steve Graubeger also conducted some fieldwork and wrote sections of this report. Anne Kimzey coordinated the writing of this guidebook. Hank Willett wrote the NEA application and served as the initial project director.

We would like to thank the Alabama Folklife Association (AFA) who helped with this project. Charles Kelley and Raul Valdez received fieldwork training in an AFA-sponsored Alabama Community Scholars Institute, July 2004.

The development of a relationship between ALAS and ASCA was an important outcome of this endeavor. Another outcome of this project was the documentation of artists who are representative of various traditions in the Spanish-speaking community and conveying some of this information to non-Spanish speaking organizations within the state. This is in step with the mission of the ASCA in that the research will help "promote Alabama's diverse and rich artistic resources." The project also addressed the goals of ALAS to "provide statewide advocacy,

to procure official support, to improve education for the Hispanic community, and to develop cultural sensitivity in all people through collaboration with existing community-based organizations in Alabama."

In doing so, we hope that the cultural traditions of Spanish-speaking Alabamians will be better understood and appreciated.

Joey Brackner  
Director  
Alabama Center for Traditional Culture,  
a division of the Alabama State Council on the Arts

Hernán Prado  
Director



Photo: Courtesy of ALAS.

*Emcee Hernán Prado speaks on stage with Birmingham Mayor Bernard Kincaid at the Hispanic Festival.*



Hispanics/Latinos, in the United States are a diverse population, composed of people whose ancestors settled in the Southwest centuries ago, others who were incorporated into this nation at the beginning of the twentieth century, and still others who have immigrated more recently from Mexico, Central and South America and the Caribbean. <sup>1</sup>

Who



Are



The



Hispanic



People



Of



Alabama?



As the president of the Alabama Latin-American Association (ALAS), a statewide advocacy group for the Hispanic community of Alabama, I would like to provide a look at the Hispanic people in Alabama from my perspective. The picture of the immigrant phenomenon in Alabama and its economic impact is much clearer today than it was eleven years ago when I first began working with Latinos in the state. Even in 1998 when we began surveying Hispanic education needs in Collinsville, which had a 64 percent Hispanic enrollment in grades K-3, we knew immigration to the state was increasing rapidly, but the big picture was still unclear. Eight years later the government is saying we have 15 million immigrants from Latin America in the United States.



Teenage girls at a Cinco de Mayo festival in Gadsden.

Photo: Courtesy of ALAS.



Students at and adult English Language class at the Collinsville Public Library.

Photo: Courtesy of ALAS.

Through information gathered in surveys and studies that have been done all over the Southeastern United States, what we started seeing eight years ago is now a reality. Latinos in Alabama and throughout the South are working, raising families, benefiting from educational opportunities, and contributing to their communities in many ways, especially culturally and economically.

We witnessed the creation of the Collinsville Hispanic Health and Education Corporation in 1997, the first Hispanic non-profit group in the state. And we now see advocacy groups and non-profit groups being organized all over Alabama, which makes me believe that we are “grabbing the bull by the horns” and preparing the path that will improve the lives of American children born of immigrant families.

## Economic Backgrounds

The majority of the Latin American countries have a very high percentage of people that live in poverty. In many cases, a small percentage of the population owns most of the industry and businesses and, therefore, own most of the money in the country.

Some of the children of these wealthy families are able to afford to come to the United States and Europe to study at universities and other educational institutions. Their mission is to prepare their administrative and business skills in order to go back to their home countries and continue supporting and developing their families' economic empires.

On the other hand, the majority of the immigrants coming to the United States are from relatively poor, uneducated backgrounds. They come to America searching for better economic opportunities.

## Linguistic Backgrounds

Most of the new immigrants coming to the U.S. speak languages other than English, and in some cases they speak different dialects within the languages. It is important to mention that in most countries in Latin America, English language is studied in public and private schools from kindergarten until twelfth grade. Many of the immigrants come to the U.S. with intermediate knowledge of the grammatical component of the language, but with limited proficiency in conversational English.

## Ethnicity and Race

Most of the countries outside of the United States have an immense diversity of populations in their territories. In Latin America, much of the modern population is the result of the mixture between white Europeans and native Indians. This mixture is called “*mestizo*” and comprises the largest percent of the total population in most countries in South and Central America. The majority of new hispanic immigrants coming to the U.S. are *mestizos*. In certain parts of Latin America, especially the Caribbean, there are many people of African heritage.

## Immigrants Admitted to the United States

The number of immigrants coming to the U.S. has skyrocketed since 1980. According to the 2000 Census, the majority of new immigrants come legally to America through different immigration programs developed by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

However, census figures are very far away from what the reality is. In community meetings and focus groups developed by researchers in the state of Alabama, when a group of 100 new Hispanic immigrants was asked about

how many of them filled out the Census 2000 forms, no more than three or four answered positively.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, field research indicates that possibly 96 percent of the Hispanic population in Alabama is not counted and remains invisible.



Photo: Courtesy of ALAS.

Children of Hispanic immigrants playing in a park in Gadsden.

## Major Countries of Origin

An “Alabama Fact Sheet” published by the National Council of La Raza, a national Latino advocacy organization, gives these 2003 U.S. Census Bureau statistics for the Alabama Hispanic population by subgroups: Mexican (61.4 percent), Central and South American (11.8 percent), Puerto Rican (11.5 percent), Cuban (3.6 percent), Dominican (2.1 percent) and “Other Hispanic” (9.7 percent).<sup>3</sup> According to the 2000

Census, Mexico is the country that sends the biggest number of new immigrants to the United States. Census data tells us that the majority of immigrants are female. This may be true when we think about the population that filled out the census forms. Outreach experiences, as we mentioned before, tell us that this is not correct. This new immigration wave to the U.S. is going through its first stages of the process. It means that the newcomers are just starting to build and develop community. Typically, the first one to come and find a job is a man. Usually he is helped by a relative or a friend while finding a place to live by himself.

This first stage takes about two years, after which, the new immigrant is able to identify his community resources, become a little more familiar with the system, and save enough money in order to bring the rest of his family or relatives.

They will join the newcomer in the next three to five years. When children are able to join the family, the circle of community relations (home, workplace, grocery store, post office, laundromat, soccer field) changes and increases.

Now there will be a need to go to school, the health department, the drugstore, the park, the movie theater, the restaurant, the church, the library, and the circle of community relations continues to grow. However, after five years, new immigrants and their families are still fairly invisible to the rest of society.

## Hispanic Immigrants in the United States

The only way for immigrants to come to the United States with the proper documentation, is by requesting a visa permit in their country of origin prior to their departure. The United States, as any country in the world, has an embassy in almost every country.

Every weekday morning at American embassies overseas, it is very common to observe long lines of people, even wrapping around the building. They are waiting for their turn to present an application and have an interview with the consuls or official representatives in order to request a tourist visa, a student visa, a work visa or a business visa permit. While many hope to receive visas, only a very small percentage will be granted one and the rest will go back home with nothing.

An application for a visa costs \$100 or more, depending on the type. And many applicants will try three or four times until they are able to fulfill the requirements of the immigration officers or until they give up. Most of the immigrants who are able to obtain a visa, are able to visit the U.S. as tourists. Once they arrive in American territory, at the airport, immigration officers stamp a six-month permit to stay. After new regulations on immigration laws were implemented, due to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, tourists that come to the U.S. from Latin America and other regions were not allowed to stay for more than one month. Regardless of these obstacles, Hispanic immigrants are still arriving in large numbers.



Photo: Anne Kinzey.

Charlie Marin and José Cancio represent Puerto Rico at a Hispanic Festival in Birmingham.

People from South American countries that are not able to obtain a visa in an American embassy, pay smugglers up to \$15,000 for transportation to the U.S. People from Guatemala and other Central American countries make the trip through Mexico.

Once on the border between Mexico and the United States, finding these smugglers (*coyotes*) will be easier, and it will cost between \$2,000 - \$3,500 to be transported into the American territory and after that to Alabama.

## Occupation

New immigrants find work in a variety of fields. Many are service workers filling jobs with restaurants, cleaning services, nurseries and landscaping businesses. They find jobs as production workers in food processing plants and factories. They also provide labor for the construction industry in areas such as roofing, masonry, and carpentry. Hispanic immigrants in Southeastern states make an average of \$9.50 an hour.<sup>4</sup>

## Hispanic and/or Latino?

The terms “Hispanic” and “Latino” started to be widely known after the upsurge of a Chicano (Mexican American) movement in the wake of the civil rights movement. Before then, Hispanic/Latinos as a group were practically invisible in the U.S. In 1970, the Bureau of the Census used the label “Spanish” for the first time as an option that people could draw on to define their own identity. The term “Hispanic” was adopted as a decision of the federal Office of Management and Budget with advice from the Spanish government in 1978. The term “Hispanic” was used in the 1980 census and in all other official documents.<sup>5</sup>

We will use the Office of Management and Budget’s term “Hispanic” which is defined as, “a person of Mexican, Guatemalan, Salvadorian, Honduran, and other Latin-American culture or origin, regardless of race.” The term “Hispanic” can be used as an adjective directly preceding a noun or nominal phrase. And the term “Latino” (masculine) or “Latina”(feminine) is used as a noun. The adjective form is Latin-American.

## Growth of Immigrant Population

Rapid changes in the number and composition of immigrants to the United States in recent years have brought attention to some of the challenges immigrants face in adapting to the new country. Because of increases in immigration over the past three decades, there are more foreign-born residents in the United States today than at any other time in its history.<sup>7</sup> The composition of new immigrants has also changed dramatically over the past few decades. Since 1965, 28.4 million immigrants and refugees were admitted in the United States. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the majority of them (51 percent) came from Latin America and the Caribbean.

In the last fifteen years, Alabama’s population of Hispanic immigrants has grown rapidly, especially in the predominantly rural communities in the northeast region of the state in which the populations and cultures historically have been white, rural, and Appalachian. In small towns such as Collinsville (population 2,300), located in DeKalb County (population 58,454), the Hispanic group has grown 350 percent since 1992 and now accounts for 38 percent of the total population.<sup>8</sup>

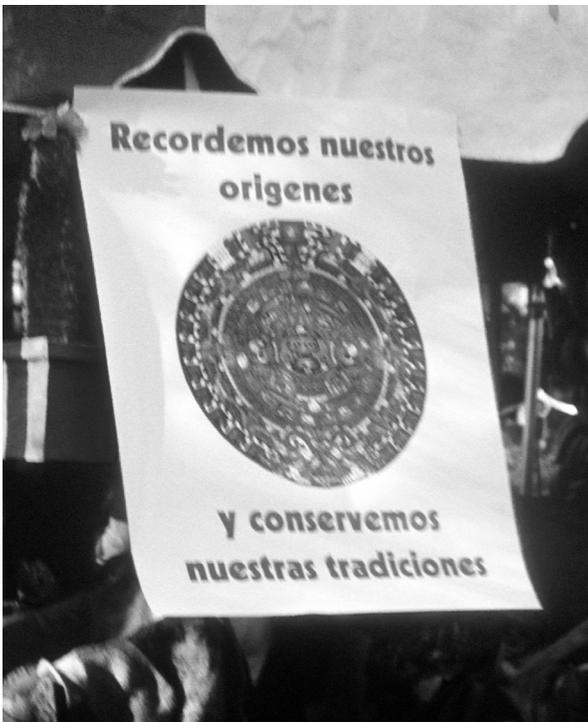


Photo: Anne Kinzey.

This sign reads, “Recordemos nuestros orígenes y conservemos nuestras tradiciones. (Let us remember our origins and keep our traditions.)”



*Glenda DeFeria Brzobohaty, Chela Rodriguez and Miriana DeFeria enjoy music together at a Venezuelan gathering in Birmingham.*

According to the U.S. Census 2000, the total population in the state increased from 4,040,587 in 1990 to 4,447,100 in 2000 (10.1 percent increase), while the Hispanic population increased from 24,629 in 1990 to 75,830 in 2000 (207.9 percent increase). Statewide the Hispanic population is 1.7 percent of the total population.<sup>9</sup>

This rapid rise has directly affected all sectors of the economy in the state. The largest percentage of the officially recognized 75,830 persons of Hispanic origin came to Alabama in search of jobs in the vast and growing industries of food processing, construction and

services. In general, these immigrants have found their job expectations fulfilled. To find employment in the region is not difficult even for people who do not speak English. The Hispanic workforce in Alabama is increasingly fulfilling the need for personnel especially in the service sector.

### **Demographics**

The demographic composition of the Hispanic community of Alabama is similar to other states in the South. Based on the observations in field research and grass roots outreach from 1998 to the present in communities such as Russellville, Fort Payne, Tuscaloosa, and Collinsville,<sup>10</sup> three distinct groups of Latinos were noted.

These migrants have moved from other states or countries to Alabama late in the last century. They are here searching for opportunities to work, stay, and develop. These groups are primarily divided by social, economic, and education characteristics, and are found with small variations throughout the Southeast. Most of them speak Spanish as their first or second language.

The first group comprises 1 to 5 percent of the total Latin-American population in the state. They moved to Alabama in the last sixteen years. These Hispanic Americans come mainly from the southwestern United States, primarily the states of California, Texas, and New Mexico. They are children of immigrants that came to the United States in the last century. Hispanic Americans born in the United States in the northeastern United States and Florida are also included in this group.

These newcomers to Alabama received formal education in English in American schools and are fully immersed in the American society, and they know how to navigate the system.<sup>11</sup>

Experience in community outreach and advocacy support has determined that most of these newcomers are bilingual, although they may not be proficient in Spanish, meaning they learned to speak Spanish from their parents or grandparents at home, but never had formal education in reading or writing. Proficiency in a language is acquired when reaching minimal levels on speaking, reading, writing, and comprehending. These individuals have reached some levels in speaking and comprehending, but probably none, or very low levels, in reading and writing. According to Dr. Anarella Cellitti, associate professor in the School of Education at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, "Many Hispanics did not receive their formal education in Spanish at home."<sup>12</sup>

These Hispanic American migrants from other parts of the U.S. are assisting newer immigrant communities with information, referral and other services such as translation and interpretation. In many cases, these groups are well received by Americans due to the fact that they are proficient in English and can communicate with outreach coordinators and public and private agency representatives. The second group of immigrants consists of 20 to 25 percent of Hispanic/Latinos that came to Alabama in the last 50 years, coming from all Latin American countries. They come from all sectors of society. There are upper class, middle class and lower social classes from Latin America.

The majority of these immigrants came to the United States with some type of visa, either a tourist, student, or fiancé visa.<sup>13</sup> Because of these visas, they were able to obtain access to education and many of them pursued professional fields. Today we can find Latinos working in fields such as engineering, medicine, law, and economics. Most of this group arrived in the United States with some formal education in Spanish.

A large percentage of this group, 65 to 70 percent, finished with a high school diploma and some years of college or university courses. These

immigrants have developed English language skills by studying and by immersion. The big majority of this immigration group has become bilingual, acquiring expertise in writing and reading English, ranging from intermediate to advanced levels.<sup>14</sup>

In the case of Latin-American immigrants that came as student or tourist visas, not all were able to gain permanent status as residents or citizens. Many are in the process of becoming permanent citizens. Puerto Ricans are already American citizens.

These immigrants are coming from all places in Latin American and we are finding that a large portion of Latin-American immigrants concentrated in Alabama, coming from Colombia, Venezuela, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Ecuador, Peru, and others. Puerto Ricans comprise the largest portion of this segment of the Hispanic community in Alabama.

### **The New Hispanic Immigrants in Alabama**

The third and final group is the largest group of new Hispanic immigrants who have moved to Alabama in the last fifteen years. Once here, they have learned English in the school system or adult education programs. They are proficient in speaking Spanish, but their ability to read and write Spanish depends on the type of formal education they received.

According to a 2003 report from the Pew Hispanic Center in Washington, D.C., “The number of second-generation Hispanics in the United States is beginning to outpace the growth of new Hispanic immigrants, a development that has major public-policy implications.... Between 2000 and 2020, immigrants will no longer be the key source of population growth among the



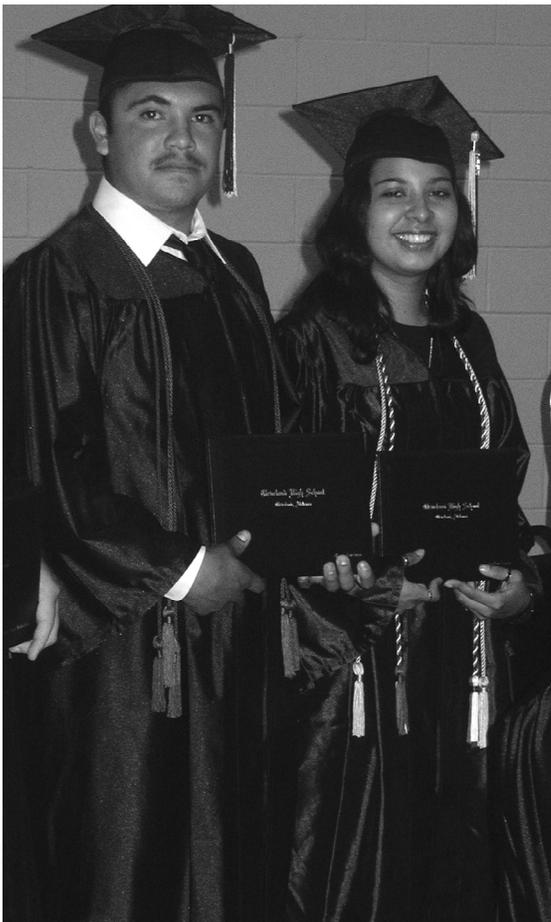
Photo: Anne Kinzey.

Sign advertises the Latin American Soccer League at a Hoover stadium.



Photo: Courtesy of ALAS.

Soccer players rest at a match in Birmingham.



César Luviano and Analou Lopez at Cleveland High School graduation in Cleveland, Alabama.

nation's Hispanics. Instead, second-generation Hispanics—the U.S.-born children of immigrants—will dominate growth.”<sup>15</sup>

“Given the very substantial differences in earnings, education, fluency in English and attitudes between foreign-born and native-born Latinos, this shift has profound implications for many realms of public policy, and indeed for anyone seeking to understand the nature of demographic change in the United States,” the Center said.<sup>16</sup> The economic prosperity of Alabama in all sectors marked a clear invitation to these new Hispanic immigrants searching for good places of work. This, along with other reasons, necessarily brings our analysis back almost sixty decades. In order to better understand the dynamics of the mobilization of Hispanic immigrants to Alabama and considering that the majority of the Hispanic work force in Alabama comes from rural, poor, isolated towns in Mexico and Guatemala, we need to define and divide this Hispanic work force group into three categories:

### 1. The Children of Construction

In order to introduce the concept of the Children of Construction and the next categories to which this report will refer, it is important to take a look at the history of Mexico, the major source of immigrants to the United States<sup>17</sup>.

In Mexico, villages traditionally practiced an Indian land use system of communal ownership. The *ejido* was land that was not part of the town, but would be cultivated or used as pasture. Although owned collectively, this was usually divided into family holdings that could not be sold but would be passed on to heirs.<sup>18</sup> In 1855, civil land ownership protections were abolished and eventually the land came under the control of landlords who operated large *haciendas* (plantations). The Indians lived in poverty as hired workers, often indebted to their landlords.<sup>19</sup>

The Mexican Revolution (1910-20) began, in large part, due to the dissatisfaction with the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz that favored the wealthy elite, such as the landowners. One of the revolutionaries, Emiliano Zapata led an uprising of the peasants of Morelos. They reclaimed the land from the local *haciendas*, redistributing it among themselves. In 1911, Zapata wrote his “Plan of Ayala” in which he proposed a method of land redistribution to the poor and adopted the slogan “Tierra y Libertad” (“Land and Liberty”).<sup>20</sup>

Land reform remained an issue throughout the revolution and a decree of 1915 called for restoration of illegally seized lands and the reestablishment of the *ejidos*. These provisions were reaffirmed in the constitution of 1917, but it was not until the efforts of President Lázaro Cárdenas and the Agrarian Code of 1934 that the reforms were effectively carried out.<sup>21</sup>

The creation of *ejidos* was crucial during the constitutional reform and development of Mexico. Fifty-five percent of the cultivated land in Mexico is found in *ejidos*, but there have been some economic challenges with this system. “The increasing fragmentation of the land caused by the family inheritance pattern has in some cases resulted in an inefficient scale of operation. The result, together with a lack of capital and limited educational attainment, has retarded progress in *ejido* agriculture.”<sup>22</sup>

With the improvement of the economy in Mexico, in part due to the exploitation and commercialization of oil, the majority of the agricultural workers living in the *ejidos* were attracted to the big cities where there were abundant opportunities for work. Although the cities were growing and improving their economies, rural areas were slowly left behind.

It was definitely easier to go to the cities and look for jobs than stay in the *ejidos* and suffer from the lack of opportunities for improvement. The majority of migrants going from rural areas to inner cities found jobs in the construction field. They became “experts” in masonry, molding, concrete operations, and related constructions skills. The construction workers developed a lifestyle in which they lived in the city Monday through Friday and went to their *ejidos* and rural homes every Saturday and Sunday. Some of these construction workers involved their whole families in the new “career opportunity.” That is how the construction business started seeing a number of female workers taking some jobs. Through the decades these migrant construction workers passed this life style on to their children. Their children were taught the same skills and continued contributing to the growth of the cities and urban development.

It was economically advantageous until the beginning of the 1990s. At that time, the opportunities for working in construction rapidly decreased and competition for work increased in the now big cities in Mexico.

The grandchildren of this new group of rural and *ejido* inhabitants tried to continue with what were the usual dynamics and mobilization of the work force until that time: living in rural areas and working in the cities. They were not successful in finding jobs in the cities and they returned to their rural communities. By that time, some “explorers” had returned to their *ejidos* with interesting news about abundant work opportunities in the United States, especially in those southern states that were not classically known as recipients of a Hispanic work force. That was how their grandchildren learned about Alabama, Georgia, Arkansas and other states.

It took only two to five years (starting in 1996) for these *ejido* “Children of Construction” to emigrate and to start populating our state. These newcomers (rural workers with construction skills) are basically continuing with the lifestyle of the ‘60s ‘70s and ‘80s. They work in cities like Birmingham, Huntsville, Tuscaloosa, and Montgomery from Monday through Friday and live with their families in rural locations in surrounding counties on Saturdays and Sundays. “The Children of Construction” are contributing to the economy in the fields of services, construction, and landscaping and dramatic increases in population are expected as the demand for labor rises due to the growing economic development of the state.

## **2. The Children of Agriculture**

At the same time that many *ejido* and rural workers migrated to big cities in Mexico, another group of that population decided to stay and develop their agricultural skills. The people who received land from the government educated their children in the skills and responsibilities required for an agrarian lifestyle. Their families grew and continued working the land for decades.

Considering that the *ejidos* are agricultural land provided for work but not for ownership, the grandchildren of the agricultural workers encountered difficulties in overcoming the years of economic crisis and instability. They couldn’t access loans to better work their agricultural fields; and furthermore, the Mexican government did not have the resources to develop an agrarian program. In addition many rural areas did not have access to educational opportunities in order to progress or access to other benefits. These barriers motivated the majority of “Children of Agriculture” to consider the possibility of emigrating to the United States. Many of these rural, poor, non-educated workers found job opportunities in Alabama.

These newcomers preferred to look for jobs in rural areas of the state. Therefore they are located basically in the northeast and northwest areas of the state and are moving into the southern areas of the state as well. In the majority of cases the “Children of Agriculture” are now working at food processing plants and related industries, and in nurseries and forest-related businesses. It is important to also note the large presence of Hispanic workers in nursing homes, especially females.

### 3. The Children of War

The majority of immigrants included in this group are originally from Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua and other Central American countries. They are part of the extensive wave of people that immigrated primarily to the southern states in Mexico during times of civil war in their countries.

In the case of Guatemala, a civil war between right-wing military regimes and leftist guerrilla resistance fighters lasted almost four decades, forcing thousands of indigenous communities to flee their homes and seek asylum in neighboring countries. Mexico hosted the greatest numbers of refugees, numbering more than 100,000.<sup>23</sup>

In this type of warfare the revolutionary groups based their strategy on fast, unpredicted strikes into military sites followed by rapid retreats to the mountains and isolated places. The indigenous communities were the most affected by this warfare. Located in the northern areas of the country, sometimes the Mayan villages suffered attacks from the military and revolutionaries at the same time. If one day a guerrilla group reached a small village at the mountains in Quetzaltenango, they asked the community for food and shelter. The people who did not want to help were tortured and killed. The following week the military, following the steps of the revolutionary group also reached the village. They questioned the people of the community, found them guilty of cooperation with the enemy, and killed them too.<sup>24</sup>

Cases of entire indigenous communities being killed and buried in one night are documented, particularly during the counter-insurgency campaign in the 1980s. "Guatemalans called it *la escoba* (the broom) because the army swept the country in a wave of terror, burning hundreds of villages, massacring thousands, driving hundreds of thousands of refugees across the Mexican border, and creating many more internally displaced.... Human rights organizations estimate that at least 30,000, mostly Mayan, Guatemalans were murdered by the army in the 1980s."<sup>25</sup> These and similar events continued for decades all along the mountains and rural areas in Central America until peace was finally reached in December 1996.

With the peace treaty, after years of exile some of the refugees returned home with new hopes.<sup>26</sup> Others remained in Mexico and some emigrated to North America to find places in which to settle that were flourishing economically, such as Alabama.

These "Children of War" coming primarily from Huehuetenango, are living in clusters, particularly in north Alabama. They work in the same places as the other Hispanic immigrants. In addition to Spanish, which they learned while living with their Spanish-speaking co-workers, they speak three different Mayan languages: *Mam*, *K'ichee'* and *Q'anjob'al*. The majority of people in this group speak English at the work site, Spanish in their neighborhood, and a Mayan language at home. A significant number of this Guatemalan workforce is employed in nurseries and forest related jobs.

#### Dynamics of Immigration

In 1996 Cagle's, the biggest food processing plant in DeKalb County, had close to 900 employees. Almost 300 of them were Hispanic. In 1999 the factory increased its production facilities, adding a new frozen food area. By January 2000 the factory had about 1,300 workers, including almost 800 Latinos.<sup>27</sup> In 1996 it was easier for Hispanic workers to find jobs in north Alabama. Competition for jobs was almost nonexistent. However since 2000, although the economy is growing in most of the small communities that shelter Hispanic immigrants, finding jobs became more difficult for a number of reasons. Most important is the fact that employers are becoming more aware of the use of false documentation for job applications, therefore requisites needed for work are more meticulous. Now Hispanic workers are moving to counties where they have not been before. Furthermore, counties in northeast Alabama will soon have more Hispanic workers than they need to fulfill the demand of the work sector. They will necessarily

start moving to other counties. In the last two years, larger cities in the state have seen an influx of Hispanic workers. Some of them are newcomers from outside of the state, and some are migrants from other counties in the state. The primary reason why the Hispanic newcomers move to Alabama is to find jobs. If these jobs are not available or if they start to decrease, it is predictable that a migration to counties where competition is minimal will take place. Now, according to ALAS estimates, there are close to 160,000 Hispanic people living in Alabama as of January 2004.

### **Economic Impact**

When a new Hispanic worker accepts a job, he or she helps the regional economy grow both by earning an income and by spending a portion of that income on housing, food, and other locally purchased goods and services. These expenditures help create even more jobs

Hispanic immigrants play an increasingly important role in the social life and regional economy of Alabama especially in rural communities. In Franklin County several small communities have been revitalized in the last five years thanks to the influx of a Hispanic workforce. In contrast, many other small communities have experienced a falling economy due to the depopulation of rural areas as residents move to cities in search of work.

It is interesting to observe that “ghost downtowns” in a number of small northeast Alabama communities are now thriving with new Hispanic stores, or “*tiendas*”<sup>28</sup> A store that provides goods, similar to an old fashioned general store and other businesses. In 1996, Main Street in Collinsville, Alabama was a three-block road with abandoned buildings, one local bank agency, one barber shop, a second hand clothing store, a hardware store, a branch of a sock mill, and a dollar general store.

One year later, the first Hispanic *tienda* opened for business attracting complementary service stores like a laundromat, and a tax preparation office. Four years later, the town also has an Hispanic-owned travel agency, an Hispanic-owned martial arts academy, an Hispanic-owned music store, an Hispanic church, and even another big *tienda*. This little Appalachian town has a population of 2,400 people, 38 percent of whom are Hispanic and contribute a new element of cultural diversity to the city’s schools, churches, and neighborhoods.



Photo: Courtesy of ALAS.

*Banco Hispano opens in Hoover.*



Photo: Steve Graubeger.

Tiendas are found wherever there are Hispanic customers. This one is near Talledega.

## Endnotes

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<http://cas.memphis.edu/isc/crow/crowlatino.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> field research developed by the Russellville Hispanic Community Center in late 2000.

<sup>3</sup> National Council of La Raza. "Alabama State Fact Sheet." <http://www.nclr.org/content/publications/download/32317> , [Accessed April 29, 2006]

<sup>4</sup> Dr. Remedios Gómez-Arnau, Consul General of Mexico (Atlanta). Presentation to the Alabama Latin American Association Forum, 2001.

<sup>5</sup> Mendoza, M. and D. H. Ciscel , B. E. Smith. 2001. *Latino Immigrants in Memphis Tennessee: Their Local Economic Impact* (Center for Research on Women, University of Memphis, Working Paper No. 15) p. 11.

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<sup>6</sup> Mendoza, M. and D. H. Ciscel , B. E. Smith. 2001. *Latino Immigrants in Memphis Tennessee: Their Local Economic Impact* (Center for Research on Women, University of Memphis, Working Paper No. 15) p. 11.

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<sup>7</sup> Gibson, C. and E. Lennon. 1999. *Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-born Population of the United States: 1850 to 1990* (U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division Working Paper no. 29) p.94. <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0029/twps0029.html>

<sup>8</sup> "Collinsville Community Census Survey," 1999. A project of Collinsville High School, DeKalb County Board of Education, The City of Collinsville, and PACERS Hispanic Program and others.

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000; 1990 Census, "Population and Housing Unit Counts"

U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File 1 "Hispanic or Latino by Race"; 1990 Summary Tape File 1, "Persons of Hispanic Origin." <http://www.census.gov>

<sup>10</sup> "Collinsville Community Census Survey," 1999. A project of Collinsville High School, DeKalb County Board of Education, The City of Collinsville, and PACERS Hispanic Program and others.

<sup>11</sup> Black, Martha, Alabama Department of Public Health.

<sup>12</sup> Cellitti, Dr. Anarella, University of Alabama at Birmingham: Hoover Alabama School Summer Program for Hispanic children. Out of the Hispanic children tested, 61 percent were Spanish language delayed up to two or three years below level in Spanish.

<sup>13</sup> Culver, Mari. "How to Apply for Legal Residency Workshop Covers Critical New Information for Immigrants." Advocacy Skills Development Program, Birmingham, Alabama. 2003.

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- <sup>15</sup> Sturiale, Jeanne. "Second-Generation Hispanics Soon to Outnumber Immigrants, Study Finds." Winston-Salem Journal, N.C. Knight Ridder/Tribune Business News, October 15, 2003. [http://www.highbeam.com/library/doc0.asp?docid=1G1:111748862&refid=ink\\_d6&skeyword=&teaser](http://www.highbeam.com/library/doc0.asp?docid=1G1:111748862&refid=ink_d6&skeyword=&teaser) .
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- <sup>19</sup> "land reform." *Encyclopedia Britannica* from Encyclopedia Britannica Online. <http://library.eb.com/eb/article-61986> [Accessed March 31, 2006]
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- <sup>23</sup> O'Kane, Trish, *Guatemala in Focus: A Guide to the People, Politics and Culture* (New York: Interlink Books, 1999) 35.
- <sup>24</sup> Six years ago, when I visited rural community centers in Northern Guatemala, the people gave many oral accounts of violence and persecution they faced during the war.
- <sup>25</sup> O'Kane, Trish, *Guatemala in Focus: A Guide to the People, Politics and Culture* (New York: Interlink Books, 1999) 27.
- <sup>26</sup> O'Kane, Trish, *Guatemala in Focus: A Guide to the People, Politics and Culture* (New York: Interlink Books, 1999) 35.
- <sup>27</sup> "Collinsville Community Census Survey," 1999. A project of Collinsville High School, DeKalb County Board of Education, The City of Collinsville, and PACERS Hispanic Program and others.
- <sup>28</sup> A store that provides goods, similar to an old fashioned general store.



# Maintaining



# Mexican



# Identity



# In



# Birmingham



# Alabama



Temporary Mexican immigration to the United States for supplementary income can be traced back as early as the 1880s and has occurred at fluctuating rates up to the present day. The 1920s and 1930s brought the first signs of discord over Mexican immigration as the American economy started to stall. After the Great Depression and continuing to the present, “Mexico’s emigration policy traditionally has been predicated on attempting to protect the rights of its citizens abroad... ; maintaining a sense of patriotism among expatriates by sponsoring observances of national holidays in ethnic Mexican communities in the United States; and encouraging, and at times actively fostering, the eventual repatriation of Mexican nationals abroad” (Gutierrez xii). After the Great Depression, Mexico began to stabilize both socially and politically causing the flow of Mexican immigrants into the United States to decline sharply.

Beginning in the early 1990s, the traditional trickle of Mexican immigration began to rapidly accelerate. According to U.S. census reports the population of foreign-born Mexicans residing in Alabama rose from 1,155 in 1990 to 27,103 in 2000, with the only other significant Hispanic population in the state in 2000 being 3,163 foreign-born Guatemalans. The current Mexican population in Alabama is estimated at around 50,000.

## Two Groups

I was first introduced to the Mexican immigrant population in Birmingham in 1999 by Fernando, who had just recently arrived in Birmingham from Pachuca, Hidalgo; his first job was at the restaurant where I was working. I was attempting to learn Spanish and he had a desire to learn English so we began to talk in broken English and Spanish. I spent most weekends at his apartment talking to him and his roommates, eight other men of similar age, about their life in America and of things they missed about Mexico. I found out that all of the roommates were from Hidalgo and that they all had relatives or friends in common.

Their favorite topic was to tell how they immigrated. They all shared the common experience of traveling to a border town and crossing the border by foot in the desert. Once across the border, they had contact information for people that gave them work identification numbers and they all had the locations of their relatives or friends who would help them get set up in their new life in the United States.

Four and a half years later, none of that original group that I met is still in the United States and there is a new group of seven guys that live in the same apartment. All are either younger or older brothers of the original group of guys and have come to Birmingham in the last one to two years. As I began to talk with this new group, I learned that the original group had either given their siblings money for a car or a car itself to help them get a job and to start earning money right away. This arrangement was completely different from what had met Fernando when he first arrived. He had an apartment arranged for him but he didn’t have a car. All the original guys in the apartment shared one car, which caused two problems: first Fernando was limited to having one job because there wasn’t any transportation available to him in the mornings, and, second, it took him five months before he could send any money back home because he was saving up to buy a second car for the guys in the apartment also discovered that two of the eight new guys had immigrated via a different method. Juan told me about how his brother, the secretary for the local municipal president, had arranged for Juan to receive a 120-day tourist visa which allowed him to enter the country comfortably on a plane with two suitcases full of his belongings and his favorite guitar. The fact that he had a guitar before the others in the apartment made Juan the unofficial house musician and he spend most nights after work playing and singing. On many occasions he has talked about forming a group with the other roommates but no

one has taken him seriously or is interested. Another of the new guys had immigrated in a similar fashion with a family member securing some kind of official documentation that allowed him to fly here for an extended period of time.

The easier immigration and better starting economic basis brought about by the prearrangement of an apartment and the car allowed the second group of guys to find higher-paying jobs because their lack of urgency caused them to be more selective in their job search. The higher-paying jobs enabled the second group to work fewer hours and still meet their weekly financial quota that kept their goal of returning to Mexico after two or three years. In practical terms this meant that while the first group worked morning and night Monday through Saturday the second group rarely worked more than nine shifts a week with two, Luis and Eduardo, only working six shifts a week.

Luis, 17, and Eduardo, 18, had different goals for their stay in Birmingham because they were younger than the others. and did not have spouses or children in Mexico that they were providing for. Eduardo had told me several times that the purpose for him immigrating was mainly to experience new things and to learn English. Luis has not given me any clear reason for immigrating preferring to say “just because” each time that I ask him.

### **Immigration**

As I began interviewing the group of immigrants I most closely work with, I learned that five were from the town of Pachuca, Hidalgo, which is about two hours north of Mexico City. One of the Pachuca men, Eric, told me that most of the people his townsmen who come to the United States come to Atlanta or Birmingham with the majority coming to Birmingham. Eric told me how his family began coming to Birmingham, “My oldest brother was working in Mexico City and he met a man at his job that had just come back from Birmingham . . . He told him he wanted to go to the United States. The man told him Birmingham had plenty of jobs and his cousin was still there. My brother left two months later and stayed for two years. That was twelve years ago.”

The numerous Pachucans living in Birmingham have influenced the way that the local residents perceive Hispanic culture. Central-Mexican customs are overwhelmingly more common in the Birmingham area than the customs of other parts of the Hispanic world. In Pachuca, customs are being changed to accommodate the large portion of their population that now lives some part of their life in Birmingham. Local customs such as neighborhood fiestas are being modified to include the members of the neighborhood that are in the United States.

The central part of the celebration is the lighting of a *castillo*, a large wooden tower with fireworks attached. Usually one *castillo* per neighborhood and is funded and sometimes built by the residents in that neighborhood. During the past three years, many neighborhoods in Pachuca have made two *castillos*, one funded by and for their neighborhood and one funded by and for the residents of that neighborhood that are in Birmingham. As a show of financial power, the Pachucans in Birmingham send enough money to build a *castillo* twice the size of the regular neighborhood *castillo*.

The people in Pachuca recognize that there are established friends and family constantly available to them in Birmingham. Since the first Pachucan began arriving in Birmingham, each following wave has relied on the previous one to find them employment, make living accommodations, and teach them the small details of life in Birmingham. Because of this gradual build up of knowledge, each successive group has become more successful and the transition to a new life has been less severe.

Eric told me, “Now that I don’t have to worry about where I can go to find a job or where I’m going to make the money that I need, I can start worrying about other things like when my favorite soccer team will be playing and when I can find a guitar so that I can play.” With this extra free time, the immigrants are allowed to practice and display their culture, bringing unique culinary, musical, and artistic traditions to Birmingham. Slowly these traditions are becoming assimilated into the local cultural repertoire.

Each time I go with Hispanic acquaintances to a *tienda* or *taqueria* with Hispanic acquaintances I see more and more locals participating in activities solely associated with Hispanic immigrants just a few years prior. When I see an American enjoying *tacos al pastor* or buying dessicated fish in a *tienda* I become increasingly aware of the impact of

Hispanic culture, its assimilation into American culture and the acceptance of Americans to become a little Hispanic. Americans have redefined their self-image as a result of the importation and assimilation of a foreign culture, a process that has been repeating itself with each new wave of immigration since the founding of America and the conception of a national identity.

Often the very first aspect of a foreign culture to be accepted in America is its culinary styles. Hispanic food has received assistance from the predominance of the hybrid food style of Tex-Mex. Tacos, Enchiladas, and Tamales have been common in the United States for decades while other traditional foods such as sopas, tortas and moles have only recently become known to Americans. More traditional Mexican restaurants have opened to cater to the growing Hispanic population and those restaurants are being

visited increasingly by Alabamians. The exposure has brought about a certain level of acceptance and even incorporation of Hispanic cuisine into what is seen as “normal” in Alabama.

The latest advances of Hispanic culture have been the appearance of large *tiendas* and local flea markets that are supplying the Hispanic population with the products needed to construct home altars and to decorate their houses in a style similar to what they would have in their home towns. The *tiendas* had been small tucked-away shops with little signs written exclusively in Spanish that catered to the small population of Hispanics in the immediate area. Now, the *tiendas* are large businesses in highly visible strip malls on the main highways. The signs are now usually in Spanish and English in an attempt to bring in more business. These places are exposing Alabamians to traditional products and are giving them a higher understanding of traditional Hispanic culture.



Photo: Courtesy of ALAS.

Mexican cuisine has become well accepted in Alabama.

## Murals

Jose Clemente Orozco, Diego Rivera, and David Alfaro Siqueiros are considered “Los Tres Grandes” of Mexican Mural painting. All three were born in the 1880s and began prolific mural painting in the early 1900s, a time of great social change and unrest in Mexico. “Mural paintings operated as sign vehicles articulating ideas generated by the social context of the post-Revolution. As they were mostly found on the walls of official buildings and were accessible and very large, they operated within the semiotic social system of the day as symptomatic of the paternalizing generosity of the patron:

the government” ( Folgarait pg. 12). Though the early principles that guided the genesis of Mexican Murals are not the sole influence on Mexican muralists of today, there is still strong pressure on the artist to reproduce the social impact of “Los Tres Grandes.” “The Mexican muralists have been turned into saints... The walls are not painted surfaces but fetishes that we must venerate. The Mexican government has made muralism a national cult and of course in all cults criticism is outlawed.” (Weinstein pg. 75-6 ).

The muralists feel that if they want to follow in the footsteps of these “saints” they must copy them stylistically. The muralist in the group I studied, Luis, echoed the concern of many: “In Mexico I felt like everything I painted had to be a statement of protest about what was wrong with my life or I could paint something religious like the Virgin of Guadalupe. All

of the murals that I saw around my neighborhood all had to deal with the problems in our neighborhood or were of the Virgin. Both were examples of national pride and were accepted themes. [My Mural] wasn’t always a political statement but I always wanted to show my problems to everyone else. [Here] the problems of my neighborhood are completely out of my mind. I want to paint things that honor my heritage. I want to paint things that honor the past of my people. I am doing well here. I do not have those problems anymore.”

While in Birmingham, Luis finally felt free to paint on topics that were close to his heart. After being in Birmingham for about a month, Luis began to search for opportunities that would allow him both to proceed with his passion to paint and also to make money. About this time I had heard that two brothers were about to open up a restaurant and wanted a mural done, and I immediately told Luis about the job.

He got in contact with the owner of the restaurant and the owner said that he wanted a mural that was at least nine feet wide and six feet high and that the subject could be whatever Luis wanted as long as it was obviously Mexican. The owner Gave Luis \$200 and said he would get another \$200 when the Mural was completed. Luis asked me if I knew of an art supply store so that he could get some equipment. I took him to a supply store in the South side of Birmingham where he spent \$53 of his first payment. He and I went to the restaurant to check the space and to come up with an idea. Within a minute he told me his vision for the barren wall. He wanted to draw two Aztec warriors, a male and a female, encircled by an Aztec calendar, and after thirty minutes he had sketched a study of the mural on a piece of paper.

The Aztec calendar was standard to the many small copies that I had seen before, but when I saw the Aztec warriors I was completely astonished by his romanticized vision. The man was ripped with muscles with only a small loincloth obscuring the view of his body, and he had a large obsidian sword in his hand raised high and ready for action. The woman was slender yet muscular and had long flowing hair. She was as scantily clad as the man and had the air of innocence. The reason for my shock was that I had seen pictures of several of his murals from Mexico and was rather unimpressed by the rigid lack of creativity and style shown in his works.



Photo: Anne Kimzey.

Restaurant mural in Birmingham.

I went to the restaurant periodically over the next three weeks to see the progress of the mural and found him either staring blankly at the wall or intensely painting. He finished the mural in twenty-two days and received his other \$200. The mural ended up an exact match of the earlier drawing plus he had added some pyramids in the background at the urging of the owner. We calculated that he had put in 54 hours of work on the mural and received \$3.47 after expenses for a total of \$6.52 an hour. He seemed quite disappointed when I told him his hourly wage but that quickly faded as he began to take several pictures of his mural.

### **Home Altars**

During his free time, Eduardo worked on several paintings, the first of which was a painting of the Virgin of Guadalupe to be put in the apartment's altar. Eduardo explained to me one day, "If you understand the Virgin you understand why I do anything . . . When I was young, the Virgin of Guadalupe was everywhere. There were pictures of Her everywhere in the house and in the streets. It was the first image I could close my eyes and see every detail and it was the first image that I drew over and over again. My mother said that She protected me and I wanted to honor Her by drawing Her everywhere. I drew the Virgin on our door when I was young, maybe 10, and I thought it was really good but my mom didn't. The Virgin is the reason why I create anything; even if it is a picture of a dog, She's still why. This is the way it is for most Mexicans." Eduardo took few stylistic liberties and produced a painting very similar to every image of the Virgin of Guadalupe that I have seen before.

The making and maintaining of home altars have long been considered the work of women. Homes with only male residents are very common in the Mexican immigrant community and in these homes there either is no home altar or they are made by the men. The men in the group explained to me that their altar and most of the altars made by men are extremely less ornate than those made by the women. Eric told me that they used the altars only on rare occasions and that the women that he knew used them almost daily for up to an hour.

The men's altar consisted of a small table in the corner of the living room. The table has four votive candles on the right side of the table and four more on the left side. The votive candles are about seven inches high and are glass cylinders with depictions of the Virgin Mary on them. There is a small box with a slit cut into the top and behind the box are four or five plastic flowers in a short vase. Behind the table on the wall was originally a picture of the Virgin of Guadalupe that hung about a foot higher than the top of the table. That picture was replaced by the painting done by Eduardo, and the painting was edged by white Christmas lights that encircled it and went down along the edge of the table. They had placed a pillow next to the altar to cushion the knees while kneeling.

Eric guided me through the differences between their altar and those that would be more commonly constructed by a woman ("altarista" was the exact word Eric had used). He said that in more ornate altars there are pictures of the Virgin as well as other saints and even pictures of relatives on the wall behind the table, and the picture of the Virgin is often framed. The flowers on the table are real and are replaced every other day with fresh flowers. The votive candles are usually more ornate and are in greater numbers.

Eric told in great detail about altars one night as we consumed a great number of beverages and had talked for hours on varying subjects. From the great insight he gave me I knew that he had put a lot of thought into the uses of the altar. "In Mexico there are altars everywhere. There near bridges, roads, parks, bus stops, buildings, everywhere. I never thought much about them until I came here and I didn't see any altars anywhere. I am not religious at all but I felt like there was something missing; there was something not right without the altars around."

I then asked him what he thought about the altar in his own home. “Like I said before, I’m not that religious and I don’t use it at all but it felt really empty and odd without one in the house. So, all the guys in the apartment got together one day and listed the items we needed to make an altar. They weren’t that happy about making one but I told them that it was worth our time. When Eduardo came, I think he’s more religious than we are, he wanted to do something special for our altar and he made us a Virgin.”

Eduardo’s dedication to the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe caused me to seek more information on a common inspiration for Mexican artists and the focal point of every altar in Mexican dwellings. To me, Eduardo’s finished painting of the Virgin of Guadalupe was just another copy of the original image but, for the occupants of the apartment, Eduardo’s work was a moving display of faith and a generous gift to the entire household. I wanted to know how this symbol had been incorporated into the lives of most Mexicans and how it was such an inspiration to Mexican artists.

### **The Virgin**

The origins of the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe start in December 1531 in Mexico City when the Virgin Mary appeared four times to a Christianized indigenous boy named Juan Diego. On his way to mass, the poor boy was greeted by the Virgin Mary enveloped in a body halo. Juan heard the music of many songbirds as the Virgin remained still and in the air.

The songbirds quieted and the Virgin spoke to Juan. She said, “I am the Entirely and Ever Virgin, Saint Mary” and she assured Juan that she was his “Compassionate Mother” and that she had come to protect and love “all folk of every kind.” She requested that a temple in her honor be erected at that spot, Tepeyac Hill, on the eastern edge of Mexico City a site previously occupied by the temple of the Aztec goddess Tonantzin.

Juan Diego went to the Bishop of Mexico, Zumarraga, and told him of this glorious event. He was skeptical of the story and dismissed the Juan Diego. Juan then returned to the hill and begged Mary to find a more important person who could request the erection of the temple. The Virgin Mary urged him to return to Zumarraga and “indeed say to him once more how it is I Myself, the Ever Virgin Saint Mary, Mother of God, who am commissioning you.” Juan returned to the bishop and made the request again. The bishop demanded that there be a sign from the “Heavenly Woman” to confirm her true identity.

The next day Juan was attending to his gravely ill uncle Juan Bernadino who asked Juan Diego to fetch a priest so that the last rites may be performed before his death. Juan Diego hurried along trying to avoid the Virgin Mary so that he could grant his uncle’s wish expediently. Despite his efforts the Virgin intercepted Juan who told her of his ill uncle. She assured him that his uncle had been healed and that she had visited his uncle separately.

On December 12, 1531, Juan Diego had his last contact with the Virgin Mary in which she told him to go to the top of Tepeyac Hill and to pick “Castilian garden flowers” from the barren hillside. Once Juan was at the hilltop, the Virgin helped him gather up the flowers by folding them into his Maguey fiber cloak, the now famous Tilma. Juan Diego set off to show Zumarraga the sign. Upon arrival, Juan unfolded his Tilma and the flowers spilled at the feet of the Bishop and the bishop noticed that on the Tilma was the image of the Virgin Mary. Today, the “Miraculous Portrait” hangs in the Basilica of Guadalupe in Mexico City (Dunnington 1996).

The Virgin of Guadalupe was an image of the Virgin located in the town of Tepeyac in 16<sup>th</sup> century Mexico. It was said by Miguel Sanchez in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century that the Virgin of Guadalupe was a miraculous copy of the image of Mary seen by St. John the Evangelist. Its symbolism of the mixture of humanity and nature was used as a tool to help the transition from local polytheistic beliefs to the monotheistic import of Europe and to teach the indigenous peoples about the principles of Christianity in a way



Altar for the Virgin of Guadalupe.

that was most familiar to them. Tepeyac was also the home of the native god Tonantzin, the mother of the gods. Also, the native name of the Virgin Mary was Tonantzin.

This helped smooth the conversion of native peoples to Christianity, which enabled Spain to control and pacify the indigenous population. A large cathedral was erected to hold the image in 1709. By the early 18<sup>th</sup> century the cult of the Virgin of Tepeyac or Guadalupe was so influential and widespread that when in 1737 Mexico City and the surrounding area was devastated by an epidemic the city council convened, and it was suggested that the Virgin of Guadalupe be named the Patron of the entire Kingdom of New Spain in order to end the epidemic.

In the Early 19<sup>th</sup> century, spurred by the parish priest of Dolores, Miguel Hidalgo, the rural masses started a rebellion against Spanish rule and the Virgin of Guadalupe transformed into the symbol of Mexican nationality. Mexican insurgents marched to the cry of “ Long live Our Lady of Guadalupe” and their flag had the image of the Virgin. Once Mexico earned its independence from Spain the leadership of Mexico was split between those who wanted a strong church presence in the government and those who supported a system resembling the separation of church and state of the United States. These differing ideologies led to a civil war, and the leaders of the church sought refuge in Rome.

A middle ground was accomplished and the civil war ended several years later. The leaders of the church returned and, with the help of the papacy fully recognizing the miracle of the Virgin of Guadalupe, established a strong church presence in the new Mexican government. During the Mexican Revolution of 1910 and the subsequent Civil War (1926-29) the Church lost its power in the government as socialist ideals were spreading throughout the Americas.

Even though the institutional church lost power, Catholicism greatly strengthened among masses of mestizo commoners and the story of the Virgin received a new focal point, Juan Diego. Juan Diego served as an icon to the common Mexican and when the importance of Mexican Catholicism became apparent in Rome he was beatified in 1990 ( Brading 2001).

The image of the Virgin of Guadalupe helped convert the peoples of the new world. The Virgin being linked to roses and other flowers connected the Virgin to the land just as native gods shared strong ties with features of the earth. Also, Catholicism’s many saints helped as well by making easy parallels with native gods, for example, the maritime patron saint St. Elmo matched up to the local god of the sea. The indigenous peoples were accustomed to incorporating ruling peoples major gods into their belief system, just as the Tlaxcalans accepted major Aztec gods. The Virgin of Guadalupe also helped give Catholicism a legitimate claim in the new world by having a miracle happen there. Similar images of the Virgin were seen in Europe in the cathedrals of Montserrat, Loreto and Seville. It helped entice European Catholics to relocate or make a pilgrimage

to the new world and gave a manifest destiny-like right for the Catholicism-bearing Spaniards to occupy and rule over the peoples of the New World and it later served as a icon that promoted identity and civic pride for the people of Mexico.

## Conclusion

For the past ten to fifteen years Alabama has been undergoing cultural changes brought about by a large, unprecedented wave of Hispanic immigration. Alabamians are confronted with the new cultural phenomena brought with the new immigrants on an increasingly more common basis. In Birmingham, changes are easy to spot throughout the city and outlying suburbs. More stores that cater specifically to Hispanic clientele, such as apparel stores, supermarkets and restaurants, have opened recently all over the metro area. There are Spanish-language newspapers, radio stations and television shows that rely on the increasing Hispanic population of the area. Most car dealerships, insurance agencies and banks offer someone who speaks Spanish and target the Hispanic population.

Churches have begun to offer Spanish-language services and have created outreach programs that are helping the Hispanic community both financially and logistically. Schools have created ESOL classes and are giving assistance to Spanish speaking students for them to succeed in their classes. Learning Spanish is becoming a more essential part of the typical education of an Alabama student and Spanish is being taught at younger ages than in the past. Also, speaking Spanish is now an advantage in acquiring jobs and increasing the earning potential of a person entering the workforce.

Alabama is at a point that other states with earlier influxes of Hispanics have previously experienced. Most states in the Southwest, the West, the Midwest and the Northeast have already experienced a sudden, sizeable increase in their Hispanic population and a subsequent alteration in the cultural identity of the area. The immigration in these areas has been followed by changes in the operation of businesses, churches and government. State and local governments have had to adjust to the change in demographics by adding programs to schools and by creating agencies that deal with the unique concerns of the immigrant population.

Alabama has the great advantage to be one of the last places in America that has experienced a large Hispanic immigration and is able learn from the successes and failures of the programs initiated by other states in response to the change in population. The previous attempts to cope with the population change by other states can serve as a model for Alabama to preemptively create the necessary infrastructure to effectively handle its new citizens.

A significant step to reach the majority of the new Hispanic population would be the creation of a group or organization capable of identifying and giving support to practitioners of Hispanic arts. The arts touch the majority of the Hispanic community and are an essential component of the culture. Being able to recognize and assist the artist in the community is a great first step in understanding and incorporating the many aspects of Hispanic culture.

The establishment of an infrastructure to assist Hispanic artists is important to recently arrived immigrants but is more important for those who stay in America and have children. The second generation of Hispanic artists is presently and will be in the future creating a hybrid art form from the mixtures of cultures they have experienced. The opportunity to record and study this new art phenomenon is a huge benefit from the establishment of a supporting infrastructure and will allow future generations of art lovers the complete history of this exciting time.



Photo: Courtesy of ALAS.

*The traditional arts keep the children of immigrants in touch with their cultural heritage.*

Immigrant artists such as Luis, the muralist, have the potential to significantly affect the regional or U.S. wide art community if he is given the support, both logistical and financial, to thrive. Luis has found a very limited range of job opportunities that have been offered to him. These jobs have been limited to restaurants or *supermercados* who have Hispanic owners and Hispanic Clientele. Luis has expressed on several occasions that he wants to broaden his range of jobs to include non-Hispanic themes in areas where he has a larger appreciation for his work. The barriers from advancing his career that Luis faces mainly deal with language and cultural difficulties. Luis, like many immigrants, has acquired a limited vocabulary in English in a very short time. His vocabulary allows him to buy items at convenience stores, eat at restaurants and communicate with his boss or co-workers but fails him in other unfamiliar situations. He is too intimidated by the language barrier to go to English-speaking restaurant or bar owners to see if they are interested in his artwork. Even if Luis can navigate the language barriers, he still has to name a price for his work. He has told me that he does not know what value non-Hispanic employers would place on his artwork and, hence, he has doubts on whether he can successfully negotiate a deal.

Other than going door to door to ask owners for work, Luis knows of no other way to secure employment as an artist. He is not aware of any organizations either governmental or private that he can utilize to help further his artistic career in America. Luis would never think of asking a private organization for funding of his work nor does he have the understanding of the lengthy application process required for access to those funds. Luis also has an inherent fear of governmental agencies regardless of the stated purpose of that agency. The Hispanic arts community residing in Alabama urgently needs an organization that can foster the aspiring artist and also have the outreach capabilities needed to reach that artist.

Overall, this is an exciting period of American cultural evolution, a period of great metamorphosis and reinvention similar to past waves of immigration. We have the great advantage of learning from the successes and mistakes previously committed by the people in our position during past eras. We also have decades of good ethnographies previously unavailable to our predecessors to help understand and incorporate foreign cultures. We now have the opportunity to ease the transition of the Hispanic community from an outsider minority group to a mainstreamed part of American society. The best first step for incorporation in the state of Alabama and the Birmingham area is the understanding and acceptance of Hispanic art.

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New music genres are increasingly being introduced to Alabama’s traditional music soundscape with the influx of immigrants from Mexico, Central and South America. While many of these people are transient there are quite a few who have put down roots in various communities in the state. Three such music traditions are: mariachi, conjunto norteño, and Guatemalan marimba.

# Three



# Music



# Traditions



# In



# Alabama



## Mariachi

Of the Latin American music traditions, among the most popular and accessible is mariachi.

Mariachi bands are in demand for a variety of community-based functions, both secular and religious, continuing traditions typically known in Mexico. Besides playing in Mexican restaurants, a mariachi band may perform for parties, marriage ceremonies, baptisms, funerals, Mexican patriotic holidays such as Cinco de Mayo, and even for specific masses in the Catholic Church. Most noted is the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, customarily on held on December 12. The mariachi is often integral to the worship service. The author attended this event in Tuscaloosa where the mariachi was a centerpoint in the proceedings.

“Mariachi began in the nineteenth century in the Mexican state of Jalisco – according to popular legend, in the town of Cocula. The mariachi was the distinctive version of the Spanish theatrical orchestra of violins, harp and guitars, which developed in and around Jalisco. In other areas such as Veracruz and the Huasteca region in the northeast, the ensemble evolved differently. By the end of the nineteenth century, in Cocula the vihuela, two violins, and the guitarrón (which had replaced the harp) were the instruments of the Mariachi.”<sup>1</sup>



*Mariachi Garibaldi.*

Photo: Steve Graubinger.

Mariachi is, overall, a popular genre and has developed over the years from its rural beginnings into a national tradition viewed now as primarily urban. The contemporary form is derived from the Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán, founded by Gaspar Vargas in 1898. After the Revolution of 1910, however, modest uniforms began to appear.

When, for the first time, mariachis could afford to outfit themselves elegantly, they chose the suit of the horseman or *traje de charro*. The gala version of this suit worn by contemporary mariachis, with its tightly-fitting, ornamented pants, short jacket, embroidered belt, boots, wide bow tie, and sombrero, was once the attire of wealthy hacienda owners.

Mariachi bands are now found not only in Mexico but also throughout Central America and in North America. The group Mariachi Garibaldi, based in Montgomery, has a leader from Nicaragua while his musicians are primarily from Mexico.

## Conjunto Norteño

Another Latino musical genre documented in Alabama is the conjunto, sometimes called Conjunto Norteño or Tex-Mex Conjunto. Manuel Peña writes:

*One of the most enduring musical traditions among Mexicans and Mexican Americans is the accordion-based ensemble known as “conjunto” (and as “musica norteña” outside of Texas). Popular for more than one hundred years, especially since its commercialization in the 1920s, this folk ensemble remains to this day the everyday music of working-class Texas Mexicans and Mexican “norteños” (northerners).*

*Although nowadays it is patronized by many ethnically sensitive, middle-class Mexican Americans, conjunto continues to represent an alternative musical ideology, and in this way it helps to preserve a Mexican, working-class culture wherever it takes root on American soil. Endowed with this kind of symbolic power, conjunto has more than held its own against other types of music that appear from time to time to challenge its dominance among a vast audience of working-class people.<sup>2</sup>*

“So far, we have documented only one conjunto group in Alabama, named Bravía Norteña (Grupo Musical). They are based near Oneonta north of Birmingham. The origin of the band exemplifies the preservation of working class ideals stated above. It fills a demand for this type of entertainment for certain Latin-American communities in Alabama. None of the members makes his living wholly with the band. The instrumentation of Bravía Norteña is somewhat non-traditional as the electric guitar substitutes for the *bajo sexto* but basically plays the same rhythmic accompaniment. Also, the accordion used is more elaborate than the customary Tex-Mex button variety. The band includes trap-set drums and electric bass.

The diatonic, button accordion integral to the conjunto made its first appearance in northern Mexico and South Texas sometime in the 1860s or '70s and by the 1890s was the instrument of preference for working-class celebrations on both sides of the Texas-Mexico border. A strong regional style developed by the turn of the century, as the accordion became increasingly associated with a unique Mexican guitar known as a “*bajo sexto*.”

Bravía’s repertoire fits that normally played by contemporary conjuntos, made up of the traditional genres; corrido, waltz, huapango (a regional genre from Tamaulipas, Mexico), mazurka, cumbia (originally Colombian), schottische, polka, and the redowa. It was explained that people in the community sought out conjunto music for community events but it was difficult to find a band locally. Bravía Norteña was formed to fill that demand.

Similar to mariachi, conjunto music is performed at many events, and especially for social dancing. Mariachi tends to be more listener-oriented and not necessarily danced to.



Grupo Musical Bravía Norteña.

Photo: Steve Graubinger.

## Guatemalan Marimba

Although Mexican cultural traditions are the most dominant among the Latino immigrants in Alabama, due to the size of the population, there are also indigenous ethnic groups of Mexican and Central American in the mix. One such community in Alabama uses the marimba in their cultural events.

There is a small ensemble of musicians in Birmingham, originally from the mountainous district of Huehuetenango in northern Guatemala. Three to four people play a single eight-foot marimba with the addition of acoustic or electric bass accompaniment, as is common in Guatemala. The leader of this group speaks Spanish and his native Mayan language, *Kanjobal* (Q'anjob'al), is spoken in San Pedro Soloma, San Juan Ixcay, Santa Eulalia and Santa Cruz Barillas areas.

The marimba is found throughout Mexico, Central America and in areas of South America. In Guatemala it is of special significance. In 1821, during the Guatemalan independence celebration, the marimba became the official national instrument.

Besides playing for local Guatemalan audiences the marimba group in Birmingham is known within the whole Latino community as a musical asset for events featuring Latino culture and Central American culture by extension. Similar to the conjunto genre, the music of the marimba group fills a cultural void in the communities it serves, as it is a reminder of an individual's heritage.

## Conclusion

All three genres, mariachi, conjunto and Guatemalan marimba are seen as specific cultural emblems. Mariachi has a wider appeal and tends to be more universally popular in Latino communities in Alabama and in mainstream North American culture because of its commercial popularity.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> [www.mariachi.org/history.html](http://www.mariachi.org/history.html), "History of Mariachi," excerpted from "Mexico, the Meeting of Two Cultures," 1991, Higgins and Associates, New York, NY for The 7-Eleven Hispanic Arts Festival (Arts for Business)

<sup>2</sup>

[www.smithsonianeducation.org/migrations/bord/tmxcon.html](http://www.smithsonianeducation.org/migrations/bord/tmxcon.html), "The Texas Mexican Conjunto" by Manuel Peña.



José “Evaristo” Hernandez, leader of Mariachi Garibaldi, loves Montgomery, Alabama and has made it his home. Born in Nicaragua, he had a formal music education at the National Conservatory in Managua. He played double bass and clarinet in the national orchestra and worked as a music transcriber and arranger.

His personal introduction to the music of mariachi came after he finished his education when he encountered a well-known mariachi group called Cocibolca (ko-si-bol-ka). He found out that this group was looking for someone to write parts and arrange songs as well as play guitar. Since he had little knowledge of the huge repertory of mariachi he was allowed 30 days to practice guitar before he auditioned. Although his knowledge of the song repertory, which numbers in the thousands, was weak, he was hired for his skills as an arranger and music scribe.

He played with the group for several years in the mid 1980s in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Ecuador. In 1988 he immigrated to New York City where he started his own mariachi group called Mariachi Garibaldi. This name pays homage to the mecca of mariachi, Garibaldi Square in Guadalajara, Mexico.

From New York, Hernandez moved to Miami briefly in 1990, and then to Austell, Georgia (near Atlanta) where he lived almost ten years before relocating to Montgomery, Alabama in 1999.

Since his arrival in the state, the Alabama State Council on the Arts and its division, the Alabama Center for Traditional Culture, have worked with Hernandez and Mariachi Garibaldi. The group was first featured in 2000 on the CD recording *Traditional Musics of Alabama: Volume 1*, which is a compilation of various traditional music genres found in Alabama. Since then the Mariachi Garibaldi has played for arts awards receptions and performed at the State Arts Council’s “Sounds of the Season” concert series in the state capitol building during December. A videotaped performance of Mariachi Garibaldi at the Governors’ Mansion aired on Alabama Public Television. Hernandez has also received teaching grants through the Folk Arts Apprenticeship program in 2000, 2003 and 2004.

Mariachi Garibaldi is a professional group that performs six days a week. Most performances are regular jobs at Mexican restaurants, but they are also in demand for

José



Hernandez



Leader



Of



Mariachi



Garibaldi



*José Hernandez of Mariachi Garibaldi.*

Photo: Steve Graubinger.

Hispanic cultural and religious events such as Cinco de Mayo and the festivities for Our Lady of Guadalupe. A typical month includes travel to Mariana, FL, Warner Robbins GA, and several Alabama cities, including: Tuscaloosa, Troy, Luverne, Birmingham and Daphne. Saturdays are often reserved to play private parties.

Hernandez plays the *vihuela* and sings. He often has other band members take lead roles during performances. While certain group members are permanent there have been a number of substitutions of musicians over the years. In many performances Hernandez announces his love for Montgomery and Alabama. One of Garibaldi's mainstay songs is "Sweet Home Alabama" played in their signature style. While Mariachi Garibaldi uses only four to five musicians, Hernandez wants to be able to expand the size of the group to include the full range of 10 to 15 musicians needed for concert style performances. The repertoire of the group is large and overlaps musical genres of American popular as well as regional Latin styles, such as *conjunto norteño*, while using mariachi instrumentation.

Evaristo Hernandez and the Mariachi Garibaldi have found a niche in the musical culture of Alabama by understanding and playing to the musical tastes of a variety of audiences.



Mariachi Garibaldi performing at Landmark Park in Dothan.

Photo: Steve Graubeger.



Holguer Pimiento is a Colombian guitarist and singer who has lived in Birmingham for three years. He performs regularly at local restaurants: Chez Lulu and the Highland Coffee Company. Often percussionist Greg Hendrick accompanies him on conga drums.

Pimiento was raised in Bucaramanga, Colombia and later lived for 25 years in Medellin, where he worked as an architect. But he kept up his music, playing on the radio for six years, working with other musicians, and forming many music groups in his forty-year musical career. “All the time I was playing in different groups in Colombia. All the time.” He said. “I think I made the foundation of 20 or 25 groups in Colombia around the country.”

He also directed the Latin American musical touring group “Up With People,” (*Viva La Gente*), which, according to Pimiento was “a really spectacular show” representing 15 or more countries. The group presented Latin-American folk music and culture to South American audiences. “I was in Peru, I was in Ecuador, in Venezuela and Columbia, different cities around these countries,” he explained.

Pimiento grew up in a musical family. His father was a concert guitarist, he said, and he learned from him and other musicians in Bucaramanga. Two of his brothers played music also, one of whom has a Latin American music show in New York. Holguer Pimiento especially loved the traditional music of his country and other cultures. “All the time it is my investigation about folklore. When I was young, I really enjoyed all the songs around the world. It is my interest to learn about different countries, about music.”

Another of Pimiento’s interests is to share his music with others, “to show American people important music around Latin America. My interest is to teach.” In addition to his regular weekend gigs, he has given presentations and performances at universities, colleges and at Birmingham cultural events, and he teaches vocal technique and “folklore guitar,” to about ten students.

His repertoire, which he describes as “tropical music,” covers a variety of musical styles from Latin America, including: the *cumbia*, from his native Colombia; *tango* from Argentina; *meringue*, which originated in the Dominican Republic; and the *guajira* and the *bolero*, both of which evolved in Cuba.

**Sources:**

Holguer Pimiento, Personal interview, October 3, 2005.

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Holguer Pimiento.

Photo: Anne Kinzey.



Despite the use of the term “Hispanic” to describe all Latin Americans in the U.S., some groups speak languages other than Spanish. Many of the Guatemalans in Alabama are Mayans from the highland areas of their country. Here they live primarily in Mobile and Baldwin County in south Alabama, and Collinsville, Blount County and Birmingham in north Alabama.

## Mayan



## Languages



## And



## Groups



Languages are used to identify cultural groups among the Mayan peoples of Guatemala. Although the official language of Guatemala is Spanish, spoken by 60 percent of the population, there are 21-23 Mayan languages recognized by the government. The most widely spoken Maya language in Guatemala is *Quiche* (*K’iche’*) which has nearly a million speakers. *Quiche* is only spoken in Guatemala.

*Kanjobal* (*Kan’hoba*, *Q’anjob’al*) is spoken by approximately 100,000 people in Guatemala. There are also *Kanjobal* speakers in Chiapas, Mexico. In Guatemala, one half million people speak *Mam*.

In Alabama those three languages are spoken as well as small populations who speak *Chuj* and *Poptí*. According to Miriam Arqueta, a Mayan interpreter who works for the Walker County health department, if adult Mayans have a second language in Alabama, it is usually Spanish instead of English. She said that *Quiche* and a few other Mayan languages can be written but that most of the adults are illiterate.

### Sources

Personal communications with: Gail Bergeron, Amy Burgamy, Allen F. Burns, Miriam Arqueta

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[www.langlink.com/plfm/mayan\\_languages](http://www.langlink.com/plfm/mayan_languages)



*Miriam Arqueta speaks her native language of K’iche’, as well as Spanish and English. She and her daughter Paula are displaying traditional textiles from Guatemala.*

Photo: Anne Kinzey.



# Mexican



# Day



# Of



# The



# Dead



Before the evening worship service on November 2<sup>nd</sup>, members of Iglesia Episcopal de la Gracia in Birmingham made the final additions to their *ofrenda* (offering) placed on an altar honoring deceased family members of this church community. As they decorated the long table at one end of the parish hall with candles, bowls of fruit, bottles of beer, and candy skulls, they carried on a Mexican tradition, the celebration of *Dia de los Muertos*, or Day of the Dead.

The holiday, which coincides with the Catholic All Souls' Day, is thought to have its roots in an older Aztec ritual. On this day, it is believed, the spirits of the dead return to visit the earth. Families in Mexico set out *ofrendas* in their homes and cemeteries, welcoming back the souls of

their departed ancestors. In Birmingham, the graveside rituals are left to family members back in Mexico. But, here, Carmen Salazar could be found lighting glass-encased candles labeled with names of grandparents, parents, aunts and uncles. Paper skeletons and whimsical skeleton figurines decorated the wall and altar. A cross made of orange flowers, or *sempazuchil*, had a prominent place on the carpet in front of the altar.

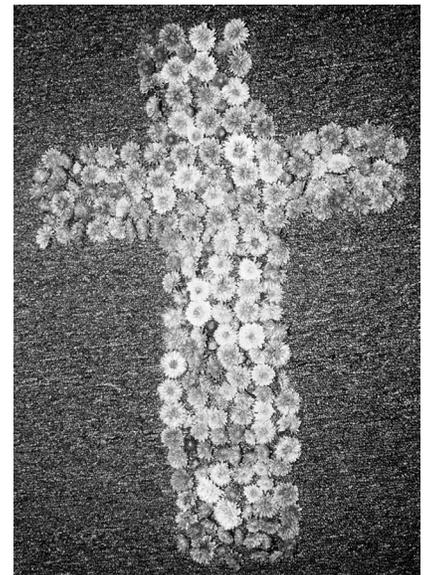
The mass began at 7:00 p.m. and the priest, the Rev. Hernan Alfanador-Kafuri, conducted the service in Spanish. Afterwards, the congregation gathered in the parish hall to socialize and partake of the food and beverages from the altar, including the traditional *pan de muerto* (bread of the dead), the round, sugary loaves topped with a doughy "X" representing cross-bones.

On the table, foot-tall, bride and groom skeletons sang and bobbed their heads to the Sonny and Cher song "I Got You Babe." A man joked, "Back in my country they are not mechanical. They are more happy here!" Church member Delfina Cuevas explained that the skeleton bride and groom is a popular image, symbolizing eternal love. "It means, 'I love forever, even after death,'" she said.



Isis Rodriguez holds the chocolate skulls she made to celebrate the Day of the Dead.

Photo: Anne Kinzey.



Cross of flowers.

Photo: Anne Kinzey.

She discussed some of the other images around the altar. A skeleton with a fancy hat is La Catrina, “a woman of the city with a lot of money.” Another female skeleton represents Santa Muerte (St. Death). “She is very fair. She doesn’t care if you are rich or poor. If you pray to her you might have a little more time, or it won’t be so bad when you die,” said Cuevas. “She is a messenger. She is not good or evil but in the middle, neutral.

She doesn’t send you to hell, she just picks you up.”

Her teenaged daughter Isis Rodriguez showed off some chocolate skulls she had made. One had her grandfather’s name, Teodoro, on a little piece of paper stuck to it and another bore her grand mother’s name, Salome. The chocolate skull was decorated with sequins for eyes. She described how she melted chocolate, poured it into a mold and froze it. Later she added the sequins and names.

Delfina Cuevas’s son, Juan Antonio Rodriguez, said that in Mexico his family would stay overnight in the cemetery cleaning the graves, singing and celebrating that the dead were coming to visit. They would put food out on November 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>. The food is supposed to change flavor, he said, once the dead have eaten and “taken the essence from it.”



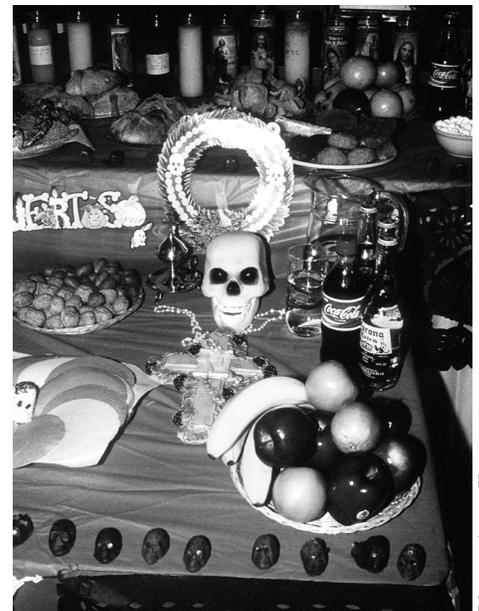
Photo: Anne Kimzey.

Carmen Salazar lights candles on the altar.

To Rodriguez celebrating the Day of the Dead shows acceptance of death. “They are happy because they are not afraid of it. We make fun of it,” he said, indicating the cartoon skeletons. “It’s not something you have to be afraid of. It’s like another step, another phase of eternal life.”

Cuevas said that the holiday is also important as an opportunity to teach children about their traditions and their ancestors. “In the cemetery they are talking, talking about good times they had with them,” she explained. “Old people talk to children and young people about their relatives that they didn’t know.” She said someone might compare a child to a grandfather. “The children are curious. They say, ‘Really? I walk like him? I talk like him?’ and that makes the family bound together more and more.”

In the U.S., she said, “it is really important to keep the traditions especially for those little kids. Most of them have never been to Mexico. They were born here.”



Fruit, candy skulls, and soft drinks are placed on the altar.

Photo: Anne Kimzey.



# Daughters ..... Of ..... America .....

Daughters of America (*Hijas de América*), a dance group based in Dale County, celebrates the diversity of Hispanic culture in Alabama by performing the dances of Latin-American countries primarily to non-Hispanic audiences. They have participated in cultural events around the state in such varied venues as an the Birmingham Museum of Art, numerous outdoor festivals, the Ozark-Dale County Public Library, Fort Rucker, Enterprise State Junior College, the Boys and Girls' Club of Southeast Alabama, and a Hispanic youth conference at NASA in Huntsville.



Photo: Anne Kinzey.

The dancers here represent Nicaragua, Spain, Dominican Republic, Cuba, Panama, Colombia, and Puerto Rico.

The group, which is sponsored by Arbol de Vida (Tree of Life) Pentecostal Church in Ozark, formed in December 2001 during the aftermath of the tragedy of September 11 in a climate of heightened concern about immigration and security. Church member and Daughters of America co-founder Awilda Gonzalez explained, “After September 11<sup>th</sup> everything was so going crazy. We wanted the kids to understand what happened and that we need to get together to make things better.” Promoting cross-cultural understanding seemed like a good idea. “We show our ways and we accept their ways. Understanding that problems are going to come, but we’re going to try to keep the peace in between all of us, stay together, make us strong.”

The specific idea for the dance group came as a result of a series of community meetings. The other co-founder, the Rev. Sarah Matias, pastor of Arbol de Vida was already active locally, ministering to her more than 300 Spanish-speaking church members, providing translation services, English classes, information about laws, and other assistance. Because of her community involvement, she was invited to an October 2001 meeting by the Dale County Children’s Policy Council to discuss ways to address the needs of local youth. Inspired by her desire for Hispanic youth to be able to live the American dream, she became part of a local chapter of America’s Promise – Alliance for Youth. She and Gonzalez then decided to organize a group of girls from their church to perform at a meeting in Birmingham designed to educate state and local officials about the Hispanic population in Alabama.

They saw education as a means to greater acceptance and the dance performances are a way of sharing culture. “It is kind of hard for them to welcome us sometimes, accept us. Because we live here and we don’t want to hurt [others], we just want to be part of it,” said Gonzalez. Often Latinos in the community do not feel accepted. “It’s kind of hard for them to be accepted and welcomed. So like that, everybody enjoys the program and they kind of get interested to know more, understand more. You know, where we come from, what we do.”

Matias, a native of Chicago, is of Puerto Rican ancestry. Awilda Gonzalez, moved to Alabama from Puerto Rico about ten years ago. Gonzalez is the choreographer for the group. She taught the girls the *plena* and *danza*, traditional dances of Puerto Rican. “*Plena* is real movements and showing off the body and dresses, and the *danza* is more elegant,” she said. There are different costumes for the two dance styles. Gonzalez also knew some traditional Mexican dances, but relied on the mothers of girls from other countries to teach their dances. “We had a couple of girls from Panama and I learned from them, because we wanted to have everybody, somebody from each country,” she said.

The membership of the group fluctuates as girls graduate from high school and others join. But there are about 20 in the group from the Wiregrass communities of southeast Alabama, including: Enterprise, Clio, Ozark, Daleville, Eufala, Dothan, and Slocumb. Most are from the church, but a few are non-Hispanic friends who were asked to participate by girls in the group.

Each girl learns the dances of the country she represents plus several others. The countries presented in the past few years have been: Cuba, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Panama, Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, Costa Rica, Chile, Argentina, Ecuador, Peru, El Salvador, Uruguay, Venezuela, Paraguay, Bolivia and Spain. The Rev. Matias sews most of the traditional dresses. And each girl carries the flag of the country she represents. The girls are conscious of their role as cultural ambassadors. "I love representing my culture," said Cristie Avila Gonzalez, the daughter of founder Awilda Gonzalez. She has been with the group from the beginning. Now a senior in high school, she was seven when she and her family moved from Puerto Rico. I feel it's important to do that because being here in the United States, we are a united nation, meaning there's all kinds of cultures here," she said. "There are a lot of cultures and we want to represent ours too. And I don't think, especially down South, a lot of people know the difference between a Mexican and Cuban. They kind of think everybody's the same. But we like expressing our different cultures. Even though we speak the same language, it's all still different cultures, different foods, different traditions that we all do."

Cristie believes that the performances and sharing of culture creates better understanding and greater respect between groups. "They respect us and they enjoy everything we do. They enjoy the dresses, the dances and they love having us there. You know, it's a good feeling for us to kind of feel welcome actually, for the first time. So it's really nice."

In a region of Alabama, where the girls may be the only Latin-Americans or immigrants in their classes, they enjoy getting together with others who share a common experience. "The group has brought a lot of us together. We've met each other in church, but we got really close through Daughters of America," said Cristie. "It's been real good, because being here and thinking I'm the only Spanish girl here. It's good to know there's a lot more going through the same things I've been through."

One of the challenges many of the girls share is living in two cultures, what Cristie calls her "double life." She said, "At home I can be my Puerto Rican self, you know, the Puerto Rican food and talking and everything. And then at school I have to be accepted by everybody and kind of go with whatever the thing is, styles and everything like that. So, you switch back and forth and I've been kind of used to that."

Participation in the Daughters of America has helped Brittany Lockhart connect to her cultural roots. She moved to Enterprise, Alabama from Hawaii when her father was transferred there through the military. "My mom is Panamanian, so I'm half Panamanian," she explained. "That's why they encouraged me to be in Daughters of America." She said her family goes to Panama once a year to see her family "because all my Spanish-speaking family is down there on my mom's side. I used to know Spanish, but I forgot. I'm trying to revive it. I'm in Spanish II now."

Keeping the younger generations in touch with their cultural heritage is important to the parents involved in the Daughters of America. "We don't want them to forget. When you love your country, and there are so many beautiful things in it, you just can't move away and forget things like that. Me? I believe in my culture a lot. It's like a celebration," said Awilda Gonzalez. "Like food. You just don't change completely when you move away. You take that with you. So I want my kids to do the same." She described how her son still listens to Latin music, as do his children. "It's like a chain we're going to keep taking, taking to the next generation."

#### **Sources:**

Sarah Matias, Awilda Gonzalez, Cristie Avila Gonzalez, Brittany Lockhart, personal interviews, November 23, 2005



In many Latin-American countries a girl's fifteenth birthday is often celebrated as a significant rite of passage, denoting the transition from being a child to becoming a young woman in the eyes of society. This celebration is known as *la quinceañera*, a term that also applies to the fifteen year-old girl being honored.

When they turned fifteen, sisters Kristine and Jennifer Martinez of Montgomery, Alabama both had *quinceañeras* in keeping with their family and cultural traditions. Their mother Melissa is from Panama and their father Arturo is from Texas and is of Mexican descent. The couple met and married in Panama when Arturo was serving there in the military. Daughter Kristine was born in Panama and was six months old when the family relocated to the United States. Jennifer was born about a year later.

"In my country the *quinceañera* is a big, big thing," said Melissa Martinez. But due to a family tragedy, she was not able to have hers. "My father passed away when I was almost turned fifteen," she explained, "so we cancelled the party." Daughter Jennifer believes that missing out on that important ritual made it all the more compelling to her mother that her two daughters have theirs.

Kristine looked forward to her *quinceañera* having enjoyed those she'd attended previously. "Almost all my friends that are Hispanic, they had it," she said. "And I was in four different *quinceañeras*, so I was their *dama* [lady in waiting]. And if they got one and I didn't get one? That wouldn't happen," she laughed.



Kristine Martinez begins her celebration in the church.

Photo: Courtesy of the Martinez family.



Arturo, Melissa, Jennifer and Kristine Martinez look at a photo album. Kristine is holding her "last doll."

Photo: Anne Kinzey.

¡Viva  
.....  
La  
.....  
Quinceañera!  
.....



The quinceañera is crowned at the party following the church ceremony.

She planned a traditional *quinceañera* with fourteen attendants (seven boys, seven girls) in her court of honor, a ceremony at St. Peter's Catholic church, and a dinner dance that evening at the Maxwell Airforce Base NCO Club complete with mariachi band. They began preparing six months ahead and she and the other participants learned and practiced the various dances every weekend for four months. "It's a lot of stress. Practicing. And we made our own decorations. Just making that and preparing everything is a lot of stress, so after it's done you're pretty happy that it's over," she said.

Jennifer was not as enthusiastic, initially, after seeing how much work went into the planning and preparation for her elder sister's party. "To me it was a little extravagant for a birthday party, but I see how important it is to young girls now that I've had it," she said. She opted for a less elaborate event with fewer attendants and fewer rehearsed dances. Afterwards she was happy about her experience. "Whenever people have theirs, they're just the complete center of attention and hugs, pictures, everything is for them for that whole day. It's like the world revolves around you. It's a great feeling," she said. "It's a good family bonding experience too because you think back to all the years before and how you grew up with your siblings and you reflect on pictures and just, it's just a really huge birthday party it's probably the most important birthday party that we'll have."

While every *quinceañera* is a little different, there are many common elements. "A *quinceañera* is basically like a sweet sixteen or a debutante party, said Kristine Martinez. "Basically introducing a girl to society at the age of fifteen." Unlike the more secular coming-of-age parties, however,

the *quinceañera* typically involves a ceremony in a church, usually a Catholic mass, in thanksgiving for the *quinceañera's* fifteenth birthday. But protestants also celebrate with a presentation in the church.

Months ahead of time, the family notifies the priest or minister and the ceremony is set for a weekend close to the girl's fifteenth birthday. The *quinceañera* might be honored at the regularly scheduled worship service, or she may have a private ceremony. She would also select the participants well in advance, especially her court of honor. In a large, traditional event the *quinceañera* would have fourteen *damas*, or ladies in waiting, one representing each of her fourteen previous years. They are accompanied by male escorts, or *chambeláns*, sometimes called *caballeros*. The *quinceañera* is the fifteenth and she has her *chambelán* also.

If expense is a concern, or the community is small, the number of attendants may be fewer. Kristine had seven *damas* and *chambeláns*, plus her escort, and Jennifer went even smaller, with two each plus her *chambelán*. Their mother Melissa explained, "It's very hard to find people that decide to participate. We can just do seven and seven, because it's seven girls plus seven boys is fourteen and she's going to be the fifteenth. So people do it with seven and seven."

Another way to include members of the community and to share the costs is to invite relatives and friends to be godmothers (*madrinas*) and godfathers (*padrinos*). "In Panama," Melissa said, "we just invite the godmother and godfather that was for their baptisms." But as she observed and participated in *quinceañeras* in the Mexican-American community in Alabama, she learned "what they do is ask for godmothers and godfathers to pay for different parts of the party. Because it is kind of expensive to plan a *quinceañera*."

"So you can call your closer friends and ask them if you want to participate as a godmother," she explained. "We had a godfather for the limousine, so he paid for the limousine. We had a godmother for the glasses. We had a godmother for the knife. We had a godmother for the necklace, and what else? Oh, we had a godmother for the Bible.

And one godmother decorated the church with flowers. We didn't have too many, but we have been in different *quinceañeras* where they pay for everything.

They have a godmother for the band, the cake, the shoes and the *quinceañera* family, they don't pay for anything. So, it depends on how many close friends you have." At the party, the godparents are thanked publicly and are listed in the printed program for the event. The *quinceañera* selects her formal dress and those of her *damas*. Pastel colors are often preferred, especially pink, but both the Martinez girls wore white bridal gowns because, "that's what we could find here," said Kristine. "In other states they have stores that have specific *quinceañera* dresses. But here you have to work with wedding dresses," said Jennifer.

Shoes are also an important part of the rite of passage. "When she goes to church she has to go with slippers and she goes to the reception with slippers," said Melissa. At the party, "the father changes the slippers for heels. And after he gives her the shoes they start the first dance." Kristine explained that the pair of shoes is "her first pair of high heels, most of the time, to represent her walking into society." It is a symbol that she is no longer a child but a young woman. There are other gifts that have symbolic value. "He also gives her a ring, which represents his love for her, his never-ending love for her," she said. The ring is usually the young woman's birthstone. "The mother gives her the tiara, because she's a princess in her eyes."

Another feature of a *quinceañera* is the cake, which is much more spectacular in design than a simple birthday cake. Commercial bakeries make special, multi-level *quinceañera* cakes often topped with a figurine of the *quinceañera*, or even her court. Or, there may be someone within the Hispanic community who develops a reputation as a good cake maker, and families will make arrangements with her.

"We had a humongous cake," said Kristine. "It had stairs that went up to the middle to the very top and there were dolls that were placed on the stairs that represented our *damas* and *caballeros*. There was a fountain in the middle. And you could get a special dye that was the color you picked that was the decoration colors. So, she [Jennifer] had a green fountain and I had a pink fountain."

On the day of the *quinceañeras* for the Martinez girls, the party started at home where the honoree and her court gathered for pictures and a limousine ride to the

church. At the mass the *quinceañera* made a special entrance with her court, similar to a wedding procession. During the service the young woman received a Bible and a special pillow to kneel on when receiving her blessing.

At the reception that evening, guests brought birthday gifts and gathered at the club. The *quinceañera* entered with her court and the presentation began. The family had prepared a slide show and script. Melissa arranged for a bilingual friend to be the emcee. As the slides flashed and the speaker told the *quinceañera's* life history in two-year increments, each *dama* and escort representing those years came forward and took their places on the dance floor. Once the honoree herself was presented, she was crowned and given her new high-heeled shoes. She danced with her father until her *chambelán* asked and received permission to dance with her. Then she and her court performed a series of well-rehearsed ballroom dances.

Each dance held a certain significance. Kristine explained, "I had a song that we had to dance to that was Mexican. And one that was kind of Panamanian. It shows our different heritage, you know, our culture. That we come from two different countries because we are Panamanian and Mexican." There was also a dance in which she



Photo: Courtesy of the Martinez family.

Kristine's 15<sup>th</sup> birthday cake has stairs connecting the layers and a fountain underneath. The dolls on the stairs represent her court with the *quinceañera* figure on top.

distributed fifteen roses to her mother's friends. And the "Last Doll" dance, in which she received a doll, dressed as a *quinceañera*, which was to be her last doll, signifying the end of her childhood.

Then her father gave a toast to his daughter and gave her a ring. The *quinceañera* responded with a speech thanking everyone, but both girls said they were crying after their father's very loving toast, so they could not say much.

Dinner, dancing and cake followed the formal presentations. Kristine had a mariachi band, which roamed from table to table during dinner, and both had a deejay who provided continuous dance music in mostly Latin styles, such as salsa, merengue, and reggaetone.

Melissa said, "I was afraid the Americans wouldn't like the music, so I was talking to the disc jockey and telling him to mix the music, put more American music than Spanish music. But when he started playing the Spanish music, everybody went to the floor, so he keeps going putting just Spanish music and they enjoy."

The girls enjoyed being able to share their culture with their friends. Jennifer said, "None of my friends had ever been to a *quinceañera*, so they were really excited just to be able to go. And they made

a pretty big deal about it all the weeks before it happened. They were just like, 'I can't wait 'til your party,' and when I was there, people shower you with gifts and attention and love."

This message of love is the important thing, according to Melissa. She compared the *quinceañera* with American coming of age customs. "For Sweet Sixteen, what I see here is that Americans spend money and buy the car. But when you grow up, you can buy your own car, but you can't have a special party like that. For me it is more important to have the party with the family and friends than have a car," she said. "The real meaning is just to introduce the girl to society and show from the parents they love them."

### Sources:

Cantú, Norma Elia. "La Quiñeanera: Towards and Ethnographic Analysis of a Life-Cycle Ritual." [http://www.louisianafolklife.org/LT/Articles\\_Essays/la\\_quinceanara.html](http://www.louisianafolklife.org/LT/Articles_Essays/la_quinceanara.html). [Accessed February 5, 2006].

Melissa Martinez, Jennifer Martinez, Kristine Martinez. Personal interviews. January 4, 2006.

Sarah Matias. Personal interview. November 23, 2005.

Nancy Mijangos. Personal interview. December 5, 2005.



Photo: Courtesy of the Martinez family.

Arturo Martinez toasts his daughter Kristine on her 15<sup>th</sup> birthday.



# Directory



# Of



# Alabama



# Hispanic



# Related



# Organizations

### Alabama Hispanic Association

Margaret Rotger  
1580 Sparkman Drive  
Suite 211  
Huntsville, AL 35816  
256/325-4242  
Web: [aha@alabamahispanicassociation.org](mailto:aha@alabamahispanicassociation.org)  
Info: Provides networking and leadership in the Hispanic community

### Alabama Latin American Association

Hernan Prado  
P. O, Box 13607  
Birmingham, AL 35202  
E-mail: [hprado@alasalasweb.org](mailto:hprado@alasalasweb.org)  
[www.alasalasweb.org](http://www.alasalasweb.org)  
Info: Provides advocacy and support to Hispanic coalitions in Alabama

### Be Latino Corporation

529 Leighton Ave., Suite 1A  
Anniston, AL 36303  
256/741-8713  
E-mail: [belatinohelps@belatinocorporation.org](mailto:belatinohelps@belatinocorporation.org)  
[www.belatinocorporation.org](http://www.belatinocorporation.org)  
Info: Offers programs designed to help Hispanics and Americans overcome the barriers of culture and language.

### Brazos Abiertos

Kara L. Bernal, LGSW  
Tuscaloosa City Schools  
PO Box 038991  
1210 21st Ave.  
Tuscaloosa, AL 35403  
205/759-8341  
[kbernal@tusc.k12.al.us](mailto:kbernal@tusc.k12.al.us)  
Info: Annual community service fair, Hispanic advocacy and services to the Tuscaloosa area.

### Coalition for Hispanic Community-Russellville and Franklin County

515 College Avenue NW  
Russellville, AL 35653  
256/331-2552  
E-mail: [hispanic@hiwaay.net](mailto:hispanic@hiwaay.net)

### East Coast Migrant Head Start Project

Teresa Johnson  
4484 Chandler Mt. Road  
Steele, AL 35987  
256/570-0710  
Web: [www.ECMHSP.org](http://www.ECMHSP.org)



*Dancers at a Hispanic Festival in Birmingham.*

*Photo: Courtesy of Alabama Latin American Association (ALAS).*

### **Hispanic Business Council**

Jamika Kirk  
505 20<sup>th</sup> Street N, Suite 200  
Birmingham, AL 35203  
205/241-8125  
FAX: 205/364-2384  
E-mail: [jkirk@birminghamchamber.com](mailto:jkirk@birminghamchamber.com)

Info: Provides resources for economic development and professional opportunities for Hispanic-owned businesses and individuals in the Birmingham area

### **Hispanic Interest Coalition of Central Alabama (HICA)**

Isabel Rubio  
P. O. Box 190299  
Birmingham, AL 35219  
205/942-5505  
E-mail: [irubio@hispanicinterest.org](mailto:irubio@hispanicinterest.org)  
Info: Serves as a coordinating resource for the Hispanic Community

### **Hispanic Outreach Latinos Adelante (HOLA)**

Michael Garber  
3128 Johnson Road  
Huntsville, AL 35815  
256/527-2991  
FAX: 256/881-4928  
E-mail: [mgarber@buildingapplications.com](mailto:mgarber@buildingapplications.com)  
Info: An initiative of Interfaith Mission, HOLA provides Hispanic information and referral

### **Hispanic Professional Women's Association (HPWA)**

Blanca Taylor  
6 Office Park, Suite 100  
Birmingham, AL 35223-2540  
205/527-9116  
E-mail: [blanca@hpwa.org](mailto:blanca@hpwa.org)  
Web: [www.hpwa.org](http://www.hpwa.org)  
Info: Professional development organization for Hispanic women

### **Latinos Unidos de Alabama (LUDA)**

Helen Rivas  
2723 Niazuma Avenue S  
Birmingham, AL 35205  
205/320-0490  
E-mail: [hhrivas@earthlink.net](mailto:hhrivas@earthlink.net)



Photos: Courtesy of ALAS.

Performers at a Cinco de Mayo Festival in Gadsden.

### **Multicultural Resource Center**

Kristin Coombs  
850 Municipal Drive  
Birmingham, AL 35216  
205/824-5046  
Info: Social services to Hispanics and other immigrants through educational, social, and cultural activities

### **Project Mi Futuro**

Jorge Bartholomew  
Oakwood College, Huntsville  
256/726-7423  
E-mail: [jbartholomew@oakwood.edu](mailto:jbartholomew@oakwood.edu)  
Stillman College, Tuscaloosa  
Stephen Jackson  
205/366-8858  
E-mail: [sblack@stillman.edu](mailto:sblack@stillman.edu)  
Info: Helps students to stay in school, graduate and go on to college

### **SAFE Latino**

Alba McEwen  
900 Avondale Avenue  
Sylacauga, AL 35150  
256/245-4343  
E-mail: [albam@avondalemills.com](mailto:albam@avondalemills.com)

### **Tuscaloosa Hispanic Provider Network**

867 Redmont Drive  
Tuscaloosa, AL 35404  
205/462-1000

### **MEDIA-PRINT**

#### **EnLace Latino**

502/584-6800  
FAX: 502/584-5088  
E-mail: [sales@elenlancelatino.com](mailto:sales@elenlancelatino.com)  
Info: Spanish language phone book

#### **Latino News**

P. O. Box 28  
Gadsden, AL 35902  
1-866-512-0252  
256/442-8914  
256/650-1084  
E-mail: [sales@latino-news.com](mailto:sales@latino-news.com)  
Web: [www.latino-news.com](http://www.latino-news.com)  
Info: Produces Latino Newspaper, Latino Web, and marketing and consulting services

#### **La Voz Latina**

Alba Hernandez  
205/854-1300

#### **Paisano**

Editor  
1240 1<sup>st</sup> Street N  
Alabaster, AL 35007  
205/621-8822  
E-mail: [visionhm@hotmail.com](mailto:visionhm@hotmail.com)  
Info: Spanish language newspaper

### **MEDIA-RADIO**

#### **Hola Alabama**

5533 Hunters Hill Road  
Irondale, AL 35210  
205/951-0255  
FAX: 205/951-0255  
E-mail: [hprado@holaLatino.com](mailto:hprado@holaLatino.com)

**WZGX – 1450 (Birmingham)**

La Doble X  
3300 Jaybird Road  
Bessemer, AL 35020  
205/428-0146  
Info: All Hispanic programming

**WGTX – 620 AM**

La Doble X  
Moises Gomez  
1426 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE  
Decatur, AL 35601  
256/353-5959  
Info: All Hispanic programming

**WWGC – 1090 AM**

La Doble X  
Juan Manuel Vargas  
Radio WWGC  
330 Norman Road  
Albertville, AL 35950  
256/894-6294  
Info: All Hispanic programming

**WCRL –1570 AM**

La Onda Latina  
P. O. Box 490  
Oneonta, AL 35121  
205/625-3333  
Info: Hispanic programming Mon.-Fri.  
6 –11 a.m.

**WPSB – 1320 AM**

Radio Centro (Cox Radio)  
950 22nd Street N, Suite 1000  
Birmingham, AL 35203  
205/951-0255  
E-mail: [hprado@holalatinos.com](mailto:hprado@holalatinos.com)

**WROC – 1010 AM**

La Que Buena  
Cordova  
Contact: KPI Latino  
205/ 951-0255  
E-mail: [info@kpilatinos.com](mailto:info@kpilatinos.com)  
Info: All Hispanic programming

**WWPG – 1280 AM**

La Guadalupana  
601 Greensboro Avenue  
Tuscaloosa, AL 35401  
205/345-4787  
Info: Hispanic programming, 1-4 p.m.  
Sunday

**MEDIA-TELEVISION****Hola Amigos**

5533 Hunters Hill Road  
Irondale, AL 35210  
205/951-0255  
FAX: 205/951-0255  
E-mail: [hprado@holaLatino.com](mailto:hprado@holaLatino.com)  
Info: Public affairs television show  
geared to Hispanics

**MEDIA-WEB****AlabamaLatinos.Com**

Ana & Jenny Castenada  
P. O. Box 550098  
Birmingham, AL 35255  
205/322-8492  
E-mail: [amigos@alabamalatinos.com](mailto:amigos@alabamalatinos.com)

**Alasweb.Org**

P. O. Box 13607  
Birmingham, AL 35202  
205/951-0255  
FAX: 205/951-0255  
[mculver@alasalasweb.org](mailto:mculver@alasalasweb.org)  
[www.alasalasweb.org](http://www.alasalasweb.org)  
Info: Alabama Hispanic information  
on the web

**HolaLatino.Com**

5533 Hunters Hill Road  
Irondale, AL 35210  
205/951-0255  
FAX: 205/951-0255  
[hprado@holaLatino.com](mailto:hprado@holaLatino.com)  
[www.holaLatino.com](http://www.holaLatino.com)  
Info: Internet Hispanic information

**ENTERTAINMENT****KPI Latino**

5533 Hunters Hill Road  
Irondale, AL 35210  
205/951-0255  
FAX: 205/951-0255  
[hprado@holaLatino.com](mailto:hprado@holaLatino.com)  
[www.holaLatino.com](http://www.holaLatino.com)  
Info: Hispanic musicians and artists

**Daughters of America**

Sarah Matias  
Ozark, AL  
(H) 334/598-2060  
(Cell) 334/498-0212

**Grupo Musical Bravía Norteña**

Eloy Sanchez  
205-274-7657  
Marco Lopez  
205/456-0122  
(H) 205/446-3258

**Mariachi Garibaldi**

Jose Evaristo Hernandez  
Montgomery, AL  
(H) 334/244-0611  
(Cell) 334/324-0692

**Holguer Pimiento**

Birmingham, AL  
205/822-5162  
[holguerpimiento@yahoo.es](mailto:holguerpimiento@yahoo.es)



Performers at a Cinco de Mayo Festival in Gadsden.

Photos: Courtesy of ALAS.

## HISPANIC MINISTRIES

### **Arbol de Vida**

Rev. Sarah Matias  
6 Marnette Drive  
Ozark, AL 36322  
334/445-4303  
FAX: 334/598-2060

Info: A church that provides support to the Hispanic Community in the Wiregrass region. Sponsors of the Daughters of America dance group.

### **Centro Guadalupano**

Mercedes Verjan  
610 Chesnut Street  
Gadsden, AL 35901  
256/543-7474  
E-mail: [centroguadalupano@yahoo.com](mailto:centroguadalupano@yahoo.com)

### **Catholic Diocese of Birmingham Hispanic Ministry**

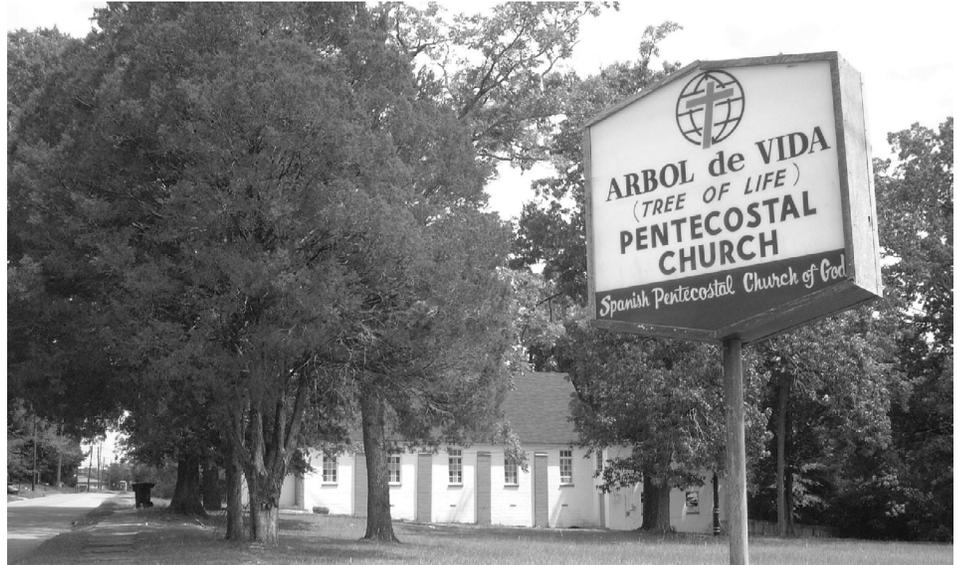
Sister Candelaria Hernandez  
P. O. Box 12047  
Birmingham, AL 35202  
205/838-8308  
E-mail: [bullock@bhmdiocese.org](mailto:bullock@bhmdiocese.org)

### **Corpus Christi Church Hispanic Ministries**

Yolanda Torres  
32015 State Hwy. 75  
Oneonta, AL 35121  
205/625-6078  
E-mail: [yolandat@hopper.net](mailto:yolandat@hopper.net)

### **Dawson Memorial Baptist Mission Hispana**

Byron Mosquera  
1114 Oxmoor Road  
Birmingham, AL 35209  
205/871-7324  
FAX: 205/870-7029  
E-mail: [bmosquera@aol.com](mailto:bmosquera@aol.com)



*Arbol de Vida Church, Ozark, Alabama.*

Photo: Steve Graubinger

### **Episcopal Diocese of Alabama Hispanic Ministry**

Rev. Dr. Hernan Afanador-Kafuri  
Iglesia Episcopal de la Gracia  
901 Kingman Road  
Birmingham, AL 35235-1237  
205/837-2565  
Cell: 205/837-4251  
E-mail: [hernan\\_afanador@yahoo.com](mailto:hernan_afanador@yahoo.com)

### **Good Shepherd Catholic Church**

1700 N. Jackson Russellville, AL 35653  
256/332-0095  
E-mail: [frbruce@bellsouth.net](mailto:frbruce@bellsouth.net)  
Info: Mass in Spanish

### **Hispanic Ministry – St. Paul's**

Maria A. Taylor  
1900 Highway 72W  
Athens, AL 35613  
256/232-4191  
FAX: 256/313-6629  
E-mail: [maria.taylor@redstone.army.mil](mailto:maria.taylor@redstone.army.mil)

### **Holy Spirit Church Hispanic Ministry**

Francisco Reyes  
Box 870303  
Tuscaloosa, AL 35487  
205/348-1773  
FAX: 205/348-9170  
E-mail: [freyes@bama.ua.edu](mailto:freyes@bama.ua.edu)

### **Holy Spirit Church Hispanic Ministry**

625 Airport Road, SW  
Huntsville, AL 35802  
256/881-4781  
E-mail: [hschurch@hiwaay.net](mailto:hschurch@hiwaay.net)  
Info: Mass in Spanish

### **Iglesia Cristiana Carismatica**

Pastor Jorge Pereira  
123 Austinville Road-Jiffy Plaza  
Decatur, AL 35601

### **Iglesia de Cristo**

Rafael Barrantes  
999 Lawrence Street E  
Russellville, AL 35653  
256/331-2722

### **Iglesia de la Palabra Viviente**

Jim Hattaway  
757 Hattaway Drive  
Lineville, AL 36266  
256/396-2578

### **Iglesia Metodista U-Ministerio Hispano**

Rev. Rosendo & Esperanza Cedillo  
204 Madison Street  
Albertville, AL 35950  
256/878-4651, Ext. 1000

**Immaculate Conception Catholic Church**

1256 Main Street  
Roanoke, AL 36274  
334/863-4418

**Mignon Baptist Hispanic Outreach**

Judy McMurphy  
401 W. 10<sup>th</sup> Street  
Sylacauga, AL 35150  
256/249-4303  
E-mail: [j36mcmurphy@earthlink.net](mailto:j36mcmurphy@earthlink.net)

**Our Lady Lake Catholic Church**

Sonia Dale  
4609 Martin Street S  
Cropwell, AL 35054  
205/525-5161  
E-mail: [soniadale@lycos.com](mailto:soniadale@lycos.com)

**Our Lady of the Valley Hispanic Ministry**

Sister Deborah Kennedy  
2910 Gault Avenue N  
P. O. Box 681446  
Fort Payne, AL 35968  
256/845-4774

**Our Lady Queen of Mercy Hispanic Ministry**

4421 Narrow Lane Road  
Montgomery, AL 36116  
334/288-2850

**Prince of Peace Hispanic Ministry**

Jose Vazquez  
4600 Moss Creek Blvd.  
Hoover, AL 35226  
205/822-9125  
FAX: 205/822-9127  
E-mail: [princeop@bellsouth.net](mailto:princeop@bellsouth.net)

**Resurrection Catholic Church Hispanic Ministry**

302 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue & 3<sup>rd</sup> Street N  
Clanton, AL 35045  
205/755-5498

**Riverside Baptist Church Hispanic**

925 Depot Street  
Riverside, AL 35135  
205/338-7832  
E-mail: [RiversideBaptist1@juno.com](mailto:RiversideBaptist1@juno.com)

**Sacred Heart Catholic Hispanic Ministry**

Director, Mary Merritte  
P. O. Box 1085  
Cullman, AL 35055  
256/734-3730  
E-mail: [shchurch@HIWAAY.net](mailto:shchurch@HIWAAY.net)

**Sacred Heart Church Hispanic Ministry**

Leonardo Gomez  
1301 Golden Springs Road  
Anniston, AL 36207  
256/237-3011  
E-mail: [father@sacredheartanniston.org](mailto:father@sacredheartanniston.org)

**St. Francis Xavier Hispanic Ministry**

2 Xavier Circle  
Birmingham, AL 35213  
205/871-1153

**St. John the Baptist Hispanic Ministry**

1709 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Tuscaloosa, AL 35401  
205/759-2861

**St. Joseph Hispanic Ministry**

1111 E. College Street  
Florence, AL 35630  
256/764-3303

**St. Jude Catholic Church**

Laura Page  
17201 Highway 35  
Scottsboro, AL 35768  
256/259-2520

**St. Jude Church Hispanic Ministry**

Rausch Sr. Rose  
310 West Bay Street  
Sylacauga, AL 35150  
256/245-7741  
E-mail: [stjudecch@sylacauganet.com](mailto:stjudecch@sylacauganet.com)



*A blindfolded man takes a swing at a piñata while children wait for the candy to spill out.*

*Photo: Anne Kimzey.*

**St. James Hispanic Ministry**

P. O. Box 38  
Gadsden, AL 35902  
256/546-2975  
E-mail: [stjames@microxl.com](mailto:stjames@microxl.com)

**St. Paul Catholic Church Hispanic Ministry**

1900 Highway 72 West  
Athens, AL 35611  
256/232-4191

**St. John the Apostle Hispanic Ministry**

454 N. Central Avenue  
Alexander City, AL 35010  
356/234-3631

**Wales Goebel Ministry**

Octavio Samper, Outreach Minister  
2908 Pump House Road  
Birmingham, AL 35243  
205/967-4888

**Catholic Archdiocese of Mobile**

356 Government Street  
Mobile, AL 36022  
251/432-2737

**Catholic Diocese of Mobile/Hispanic  
Pastoral Ministry**

Rev. Jose J. Paillacho  
219 Adams Avenue  
Montgomery, AL 36101  
334/262-7304

Rev. Fr. Christopher Viscardi, SJ  
712 Dauphin Island Parkway  
251/478-3737

Rev. Carlos Zacarias Lopez  
2700 West Main Street  
Dothan, AL 36301  
334/702-7229

**SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS**

**Alabama Cooperative Extension  
Services (ACES)**

P. O. Box 1088  
Normal, AL 35762  
256/372-5710  
Info: Working on a Hispanic Initiative  
Project to provide extension education  
to Hispanics

**Cahaba Valley Health Care, Inc.**

Edwina Taylor, Executive Director  
5099 Caldwell Mill Road  
Birmingham, AKL 35242  
205/991-8771

**Catholic Center of Concern**

Adelangelita Paita  
712 4<sup>th</sup> Court West  
Birmingham, AL 35204  
205/786-4388  
Info: Emergency relief assistance

**Catholic Family Services**

Tom Cook  
2164 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue South  
Birmingham, AL 35205  
205/324-6561  
Info: General services

**KPI Latino**

Vivian Mora Gossett  
2829 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue S  
Suite 200  
Birmingham, AL 35233  
205/328-9334  
E-mail: [vmore@kpilatino.com](mailto:vmore@kpilatino.com)  
Info: Hispanic Multimedia Company

**NA Conference Center Hispanic  
Ministries**

United Methodist Church  
Rev. Gene Lankford  
215 S. Valley Avenue  
Collinsville, AL 35961  
256/524-2385



*Selling t-shirts at a festival in Hoover.*

*Photo: Anne Kinzey.*



# Writers' ..... Profiles

**JOEY BRACKNER** is the director of the Alabama Center for Traditional Culture, a division of the Alabama State Council on the Arts. As director of the Center, he oversees the Folklife project grants program, which supports efforts by Alabama organizations to present the state’s folk traditions as well as the Folk Arts Apprenticeship grants program supporting master folk artists who teach. His research interests include Alabama folk pottery, traditional graveyard decoration and southern horticultural traditions.

**STEVE GRAUBERGER** is a folklife specialist working for the Alabama Center for Traditional Culture, a division of the Alabama State Council on the Arts. He graduated from the University of Hawaii at Manoa with a Masters degree in ethnomusicology. He did thesis research on a student Fulbright Scholarship in the Philippines concerning the organology of Filipino diatonic harp. He currently produces the Traditional Musics of Alabama Millenium CD Series and edits the weekly Alabama Arts Radio Series programs for local public radio WTSU.

**CHARLES KELLEY** is a teacher in Atlanta and anthropologist with close ties to the Hispanic community of Birmingham. Charles is a Graduate of the University of Alabama-Birmingham where he studied abroad in the Mexican states of Guerrero and Michoacan. He is Filmmaker and is currently working on several projects including a film on Ghost Hunters and one on Blues Musicians. His interests include volunteering in community outreach programs and Video Art.

**ANNE KIMZEY** is a folklorist at the Alabama Center for Traditional Culture, a division of the Alabama State Council on the Arts, where she coordinates the Folk Arts Apprenticeship grants program. She received her B.A. in Journalism from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill where she also pursued graduate studies in Folklore. For the past 17 years she has researched and documented a variety of Alabama’s folk traditions and produced projects, such as a radio series on Alabama folk culture and two traveling exhibitions, *Water Ways: the Traditional Culture of Alabama’s River Systems* and *In the Garden: Traditional Culture and Horticulture in Alabama*.

**HERNÁN PRADO** is the founder and director of the Alabama Latin American Association and the president of KPI Latino, a media/communications company that works with public and private agencies developing strategies to inform and educate the new immigrant community. He is a native of Ecuador and received an M.A. in Architecture from the Central University of Ecuador in Quito. He has been in Alabama since 1995 and worked six years for the University of Alabama Program for Rural Services and Research as the Hispanic Programs Coordinator.



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Alabama Latin American Association

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