

## **Latinos in Oregon**

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### **CHRONOLOGY**

1850s: Mexican mule packers supplied the Second Regiment Oregon Mounted Volunteers during the Rogue River War who fought against Oregon's native peoples who were defending their territory.

1869. Mexican vaqueros bring up large herds of cattle that were driven up from California to eastern Oregon.

1910: By this year Oregon ranked seventh among states outside the Southwest with Mexican-born residents who came to work in farm production and on railroads

1910-1925: Mexican workers are contracted to work in Sugar Beats and on railroads in Portland, eastern Oregon and in other parts of the state. The first Mexican families settle permanently in the state.

1942-1947 More than 15,000 bracero workers come to the state to work in agriculture. Additional workers were employed on railroads.

1950s: Mexican and Mexican-American families settle in a several areas of the state

1955: Portland Catholic Archdiocese establishes a Migrant Ministry to serve the Mexican migrant population. In 1964 the name changes to Oregon Friends of Migrants

1964: First Fiesta Mexicana held by the Mexican committee Pro Fiestas Mexicanas in Woodburn, Oregon

1964: The Valley Migrant is formed. It is later known as Oregon Rural Opportunities (ORO) and ends in 1979

1971: The Commission for Chicano Affairs is established. In 1983, the group was renamed the Governor's Commission on Hispanic Affairs.

1973 Colegio César Chávez, the first Latino four-year college in the U.S. is created on the former campus of Mt. Angel College in Silverton, Oregon. It closes in 1983.

1977 Willamette Valley Immigration Project opens in Portland then moves to Woodburn to protect and represent undocumented workers.

1979 Salud de la Familia Medical Clinic established in Woodburn, Oregon

1981 El Hispanic News begins publication

1985 Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste (PCUN, Northwest Treeplanters and Farmworkers United) forms as Oregon's only farmworker union.

1995 The Chicano/Latino Studies Program is established at Portland State University.

1996 CAUSA, Oregon Immigrant Rights Coalition is formed

2005: Latinos are registered by the U.S. Census as 9.9 percent of the state's population. and Paul J. De Muniz is the first Latino Chief of Justice in the Oregon Supreme Court.

## **HISTORICAL OVERVIEW**

*Latino History in Oregon: Colonial Mexico to 20<sup>th</sup> Century U.S.*

Any discussion of Latinos in Oregon has to begin with a larger discussion of the history of Spanish colonialism, the emergence of independent Mexico, and the imperial expansion of the United States as it laid claim to a large chunk of the western North American continent in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As we move closer to contemporary times, the frame for our discussion moves to focus on U.S.-Mexico political, economic, and cultural relations as well as the migration of a

smaller number of people from other Latin American countries. In large part, however, the history of Latinos in Oregon is a history of Mexicans in Oregon.

Spanish colonial claims to what became known as “Oregon Country” date back to the Papal Bull of 1493 and the 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas which granted Spain the exclusive right to colonize all of the Western Hemisphere except Brazil, but including the west coast of North America. In 1513, the Spanish explorer Balboa Vasqu ez de Nu ez solidified Spain’s claim to the west coast of North America by claiming the Pacific Ocean and all of the lands its touches. Beginning in the 1700s, Spanish adventurers such as Juan P erez (1774), moved beyond exploration and settlement in California and began to explore the Northwest Coast., including what is now Oregon (Beals 1995: 27). Spanish explorers mapped what became Oregon Country and their work was reflected in the geographical details that guided the Transcontinental Treaty of 1819 in which the United States assumed all Spanish claims north of the 42<sup>nd</sup> parallel (now marking the California/Oregon Border). The treaty granted the U.S. rights to what was known as Spanish Florida as well and settled a boundary dispute between Spain and the U.S. along the Sabine River in Texas.<sup>1</sup>

Two year later, when Mexico became independent of Spain in 1821, the Oregon Country southern border became the U.S. territorial border with Mexico. After the U.S. government attempted to purchase parts of Mexico’s northern territory and were rebuffed, an armed clash between the U.S. and Mexican armies along the Rio Grande in 1846 provided the provocation for the U.S. to declare war on Mexico. With increased Anglo immigration to Oregon in the 1840s, confrontations with the native peoples of the area (see Douthit 2002), and U.S. President James Polk’s eye on Mexico’s northern territory, the Oregon border was of key importance. In the same year that the U.S. went to war with Mexico, it also settled the

boundary of the Oregon Territory with all land above the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel going to Great Britain (what now makes the Canadian Boundary of the state of British Columbia with the U.S.). At the conclusion of the U.S. - Mexican War in 1848, the two countries signed the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo which called for Mexico to give up more than half of its territory. This included the current states of California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas and parts of Colorado, Nevada, and Utah for which the U.S. paid \$15 million in compensation for war-related damage to Mexican land.

The Oregon Territory (which still included the present-day states of Washington and Idaho) went from being the U.S. border territory with Mexico to sharing a border with the soon to be state of California (given statehood in 1850). Such shifting borders, however, did not greatly restrict the flow of people. According to the Oregon Historical Society, “for years, people moved freely along the open border between the Oregon Country and Mexico, trading supplies and cultural influences. Even before the Civil War, Mexican merchants, miners, soldiers, adventurers, shepherders, and *vaqueros* were in southern Oregon” (Nusz and Ricciardi 2003; Oregon Historical Society 2004).

Some of the earliest Mexican migrants to the state of Oregon were mule-packers, miners, and vaqueros (cowboys) who brought their trade from what was greater Mexico to the U.S. Mule packers moved supplies from northern California to areas as far north as the Illinois River Valley in Oregon. In the 1850s, Mexican mule packers supplied the Second Regiment Oregon Mounted Volunteers during the Rogue River War in Oregon who were fighting against native peoples of the southern coast area (Gamboa 1991). Two decades later, Mexican cowboys migrated to Oregon, coming to Oregon from California with California cattlemen who settled in remote locations in eastern Oregon. For example, California cattleman John Devine first

came to Oregon in 1869. He brought with him a crew of Mexican vaqueros to manage large herds that were driven up from California. According to historian Jeff LaLonde, the vaqueros “were Spanish-speaking Californios, Indians of central California who had grown up riding and herding on the Central Valley’s Mexican land grants” (2005). Other California ranchers also established themselves in Harney and Malheur counties in eastern Oregon developing some of the largest cattle-spreads in the state. The nation’s first transcontinental railroad, completed in 1869, passed across northern Nevada and the railroad’s shipping point of Winnemucca became “the main destination of many southeastern Oregon cattle drives, large and small” (LaLonde 2005). Mexicans, along with workers from China, Japan, and the Philippines, built railroads linking the East and West coasts, eventually making mule pack operations obsolete (Nusz and Ricciardi 2003; Oregon Historical Society 2004).

#### *The 1920s – 1940s*

Historian Erasmo Gamboa (1990) has written the most complete account of Mexican migration to Oregon in the early to mid-twentieth century. The development of commercial agricultural production in the Northwest facilitated by the completion of the northern transcontinental railroad and the development of public and private irrigation works were instrumental in furthering farm production. The fertile Willamette Valley in Oregon and the Puyallup and Skagit valleys in Washington as well as the tablelands of eastern Washington and Oregon were able to produce a rich abundance of specialty crops including a wide range of fruits, vegetables, nuts, berries, grapes, sugar beets, onions, hops, wheat, and many other crops. All of these crops, however, required an extensive—usually seasonal—labor supply in regions that were often sparsely populated. The need for labor led Oregon growers to recruit Mexican laborers away from the Southwest and from Mexico to work on area farms. By 1910, Oregon

ranked seventh among states outside the Southwest with Mexican-born residents (Gamboa 1990:7).

From 1910 through 1930, Mexicans came to Oregon during and after the upheaval caused by the Mexican Revolution. Approximately ten percent of the Mexican population—over a million people-- fled to the U.S. from 1910 to 1920, seeking refuge from the war and seeking economic opportunity (Sánchez 1993:36). While movement across the border was not strictly monitored before World War I, the creation of the Border Patrol in 1924 along with passage of quota laws in 1921 and 1924 quickly changed the nature of the U.S.-Mexican border from a porous, weakly defined demarcation to a multi-signified boundary which became a creator of the category “illegal immigrant.”

From 1917 to 1922, the first temporary worker program (part of the 1917 Immigration Act) allowed temporary workers who would be inadmissible under the 1917 Immigration Act to be contracted seasonally to work in the United States. This was enacted during World War I and extended until 1922. This temporary worker program served as a blueprint for the Bracero program begun during World War II in Oregon and other states. While the Immigration Act of 1917 established literacy and head tax requirements for Mexicans, within months of its implementation, the U.S. Secretary of Labor “authorized western sugar beet enterprises to recruit alien labor without enforcement of this restriction” (Gamboa 1990:9). This waiver, which was prompted by a World War I labor shortage, benefited western growers who used it to recruit Mexican workers to the Northwest. By 1924, Mexicans were contracted from the southwestern states to work in sugar beets at three dollars per day and Portland was a significant recruiting ground for Mexican workers (Gamboa 1990: 9). Railroad companies were another prime employer of Mexican workers, including several Oregon railroads (Taylor 1931).

Mexicans who came to Oregon to work in the sugar beet industry and as railroad workers in the earlier part of the twentieth century established roots in the state, particularly in eastern Oregon. Santiago Jaramillo, for example, came to eastern Oregon as a railroad worker in 1917 and settled in Ontario, Oregon where he and his children established deep roots and some of the first Latino businesses in the area (Maldonado1995: 6). Mexican anthropologist Manuel Gamio documented 445 money orders sent to Mexico from Oregon from 1900 to 1929, indicating a significant presence of Mexicanos in the state during the first decades of the twentieth century likely linked to recruitment of railroad, sugarbeet, and other agricultural workers (Gamio 1930: 24).

Mexican immigration decreased in the 1930s because there was a lack of employment in the U.S., but also because of U.S. policies of deportation and exclusion. During the Great Depression, local authorities through the West and Midwest repatriated over 400,000 Mexicans during the early 1930s. By the Great Depression the population of Mexicans in the U.S. was over 1.4 million.

While the deportations of the Depression returned about 20 percent of this population, a vast majority remained and their labor was still needed. Some crop sectors expanded, such as hops which grew significantly after the repeal of Prohibition in Oregon in 1932. Sugar beet cultivation continued to increase in the 1930s as growers received subsidies. While a general tide of poor workers flowed into Oregon and the Northwest, there is evidence to suggest that Mexicans were among them as growers, sugar companies, and other continued to recruit Mexican laborers. Paul Taylor noted in 1937 that Mexican migrants traveled from the Imperial Valley of California to Oregon's Hood River and Willamette valleys (1937, Gamboa 1990:13).

Gamboa has also suggested that migrant laborers from Texas traveled from there to Oregon and Washington for work as well as to Midwestern states (1990:14).

Continued growth of the Mexican population in Oregon was spurred in the 1940s by three related factors: continuing growth in agriculture and a subsequent need for labor, the onset of World War II, and the existence of the Bracero program which was designed to recruit Mexican laborers to replace those who either entered the U.S. armed forces or who left farm labor to work in industry. The demand for food production plus expansion of irrigation and electrification boosted commercial acreage, while the war pulled much of the existing labor force into war production. The demographic shift of workers from rural to urban areas resulted in a labor shortage in Oregon and other parts of the Northwest by 1941.

Northwest farmers complained directly to the U.S. government about a lack of labor. While growers wanted the federal government to help them to recruit laborers, most did not want it to impose any conditions on them about the circumstances of employment. The U.S. government was bombarded by requests to import workers from Mexico. Commercial agricultural interests made a decision to contract Mexican laborers. In the Northwest, the forthcoming availability of Mexican workers was evident before the ink dried on negotiations between the Mexican and U.S. governments (Gamboa 1909:41). Sugar beet farmers led the way in the northwest in contracting Mexican laborers under the Mexican Farm Labor Program (MFLP) or Bracero program (referring to *brazos*, arms of helping hands) which had its northwest headquarters in Portland, Oregon (Gamboa 1990:41).

The Bracero program existed in the state of Oregon from 1942-1947 (see Gamboa 1990). Approximately 15,136 braceros were contracted as farm laborers in the state of Oregon from Mexico during this time (Gamboa 1995:41). Additional bracero workers were also employed on



Oregon railroads from 1943-1946. While the agreements signed by the U.S. and Mexican government specified particular conditions to be met in terms of worker living conditions, food, hours worked, transportation, and pay, once braceros were turned over to farmers, employers had full say and could often do as they pleased with workers and their contracts. In Oregon, bracero workers thinned and harvested sugar beets, thinned and picked apples, thinned and packed pears, harvested asparagus, onion, cucumbers, and peas. They were also put to work constructing fire lanes during fires and planted pine seedlings in reforestation projects for the National Forest Service (Gamboa 1990: 57-59). Workers were widely praised as skilled with excellent performance indexes. But once the war was over, returning Anglo workers and their families began protests against Mexican workers. In 1946, public demonstrations took place in many northwestern communities. Erasmo Gamboa documents in great detail the very difficult conditions braceros worked under including being forced to stay in fields despite freezing temperatures, lack of healthcare, lead poisoning from orchard work, job related injuries, transportation accidents, substandard housing and food, and more (1990:65-73). Workers responded with work stoppages and strikes with the support of Mexican government officials. Workers resisted as best they could in conditions where employers often had absolute control over all aspects of their lives.

In 1947, PL-45 which had sanctioned the wartime phrase of the Bracero program expired and was superseded by PL-40. The terms of agreement of PL-40 called for workers' contracts to be negotiated directly between employer and bracero and called for employers to pay for the screening, selection, and roundtrip transportation of workers from Mexico to the Northwest--previously paid for by the U.S. government. Northwest growers were shocked at the terms of the agreement and along with growing anti-Mexican sentiment and anxiety about the protests

mounted by braceros, decided to no longer contact braceros. Thus the program ended in Oregon in 1947, with the advent of PL-40.

*1950s – 1970: Settlers and a Second Generation*

Northwest growers led by the larger commercial agricultural interests soon found a new source of labor—Mexican-American migratory laborers recruited from California, Texas, and other areas of the Southwest. During the war, new canneries and packing companies were opened in the northwest increasing the acreage of crops. For example, before the war, Oregon raised 21,000 acres of processing peas and after the war that acreage increased to 50,000 (Gamboa 1990:125). Other crop acreage increased as well making places such as Woodburn known as “the berry capital of the world” in the mid-1950s.

Like California growers, some Oregon farmers recruited undocumented laborers in the 1950s, but also continued to recruit laborers from the Southwest. Some of the first Mexican-origin families settled permanently in the Woodburn, Hubbard, and St. Paul area in the 1950s. Many went from states in Mexico like San Luis Potosi, Sonora, Hidalgo and, Nuevo Leon to small towns close to the Texas border such as Progreso and Mission in the 1940s and 1950s. From there they came to form the first population of permanent Mexican families in Woodburn and the surrounding area in the early 1950s, building on deeper roots in communities such as Nyssa, Ontario, and Independence which has Mexican settlers from as early as the second and third decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Many of these families came originally as farmworkers, but began to settle and worked in local canneries, on the railroad, in construction and continued to carry out seasonal harvesting work.

The 1950s in Oregon and elsewhere were also marked by AOperation Wetback,@ a program focused on preventing undocumented people from entering the U.S. and on rounding up

and deporting undocumented people already here. The city of Woodburn and other places where Mexican workers live were punctuated by the presence of sweeps through local farms and roads that picked up undocumented workers. A newspaper article in the Oregonian on May 15, 1953, ran with the headline, “Agents Sweep Rising Tide of Mexican Illegals South to Border.” The paper reported “Most of Portland’s deportees are flown to Los Angeles. The immigration service used to fly them from there to Guadalajara, about 1500 miles south of this border, just to discourage them from returning so quickly. Now the flood of wetbacks is so great they are being swept back just to the border” (Richards 1953). The culture of immigration raids and the right of INS agents to detain Aforeign-looking@ workers in any location became entrenched in Woodburn and other areas where Mexican migrants worked and lived.

Mexican and Mexican-American families who settled in Oregon in the 1950s and 1960s were often able to eventually purchase small homes and their children attended local public and Catholic schools. A few settlers opened local businesses such as small stores or restaurants. Their children and grandchildren now speak English as a first language. Some speak Spanish, but others have left it behind. Some of the Tejano migrants who grew up along the Texas migrants’ long-haul crop circuit route (Texas, California, Idaho and Oregon) and settled in Oregon towns and cities have become local civic activists and leaders who bridge different generations of Mexican migrants. A group of such immigrants who also include Mexican-American families who came to the state from the Southwest began the Fiesta Mexicana as well as the Mexican Committee Pro Fiestas Mexicanas in Woodburn (Woodburn Latin American Club 2007).

In the 1970s, a second wave of migration came to Oregon from Mexico including migrant farmworkers from the state of Michoacán and the first indigenous Oaxacans who were brought up by labor contractors from California (see Stephen 2004, 2007). The 1960s and 1970s

also brought other kinds of Latin American immigrants to Oregon, primarily to the Portland area who arrived by way of a variety of avenues. For example Armando Laguardia, who “was sent to Portland with five other black Cuban kids,” was brought up by a Cuban couple and went on to become a college professor (Laguardia 1995: 137). María Luisa Baragli de Beington arrived in Portland in the 1960s as part of an Argentinian family and became a high school teacher (Baragli de Beington 1995:138). Others came later as students, on tourist visas and stayed, or moved to Portland from other west coast locations. The Latino population became more complex because of different origins and histories in the state and was a part of the context for some of the first Latino cultural and political institution-building in the state.

*Latino Political and Cultural Organizing in Oregon: 1950s-1980s*

Religious organizations initiated some of the first Latino organizing in the state of Oregon. The Portland Catholic Archdiocese established a Migrant Ministry in 1955 to serve the Mexican migrant population. The Ministry provided mass, sacraments, and other services to the Catholic Mexican community. In 1955, the Oregon Council of Churches took on the problems of the growing number of migrant workers and formed its own Migrant Ministry Committee.

In 1956, the Oregon Council of Churches requested that the Oregon legislature investigate the serious problems of the 40,000 migrants who come to Oregon each year (The Oregonian 1956). At the time, Oregon was reported to be seventh in the United States in the numbers of migrants needed each year to plant and harvest crops and work in canneries. This figure is almost double that of one published a year later by the Interim Committee on Migratory Labor. In January of 1958, the Oregon state labor commissioner established a migrant farm labor division, indicating a formal recognition by the state of the significance of the farmworker population. That same year, a legislative interim committee on migratory labor

carried out an extensive study that examined recruitment, transportation, wages and earnings, housing, health, sanitation, education, and public welfare (Legislative Interim Committee on Migratory Labor 1958). The report revealed what *The Oregonian* called "shocking conditions" in some of the state's migrant labor camps (Bianco 1958).

In 1964, the Catholic-Church based Migrant Ministry changed its name to Oregon Friends of Migrants and formed a coalition of clergy, legislators, farm-labor employers and Mexican-American residents, which became known as the Valley Migrant League (Gamboa 1995:48). The organization applied for a federal grant to provide adult education, vocational training, day care, health services, and summer school for migrant workers and their families, and eventually received a \$680,000 grant from the Office of Economic Opportunity as well as eighty VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) volunteers to carry out the programs. In 1970, Mexican farmworkers took control of the Valley Migrant League by amending by-laws to raise board membership requirements from 51 to 100 percent migrant representation. After that date, labor contractors, crew leaders, and growers had no say in the administration (Gamboa 1995:49). The Valley Migrant League (later known as Oregon Rural Opportunities--ORO), played an important role in establishing farmworkers clinics, such as *Salud de la Familia* (Family Health) in Woodburn. Although ORO collapsed in 1979 when the federal government revoked its funding after audits uncovered many irregularities, the *Salud* clinic continued and the Oregon Human Development Corporation emerged to claim the job training and other government-funded programs previously run by ORO (Kleinman n.d.).

In the mid-1970s, Mexican workers began to work in greater numbers as tree planters and thinners in the reforestation industry--work that was previously done primarily by Anglo workers. They worked through contractors and in the off-season looked for jobs in farmwork,

nurseries, and canneries--often through the same contractor. The number of Mexican laborers in agriculture also continued to grow as the industry did. This growth in the population of laborers created the necessary conditions for the birth of the United Farm Workers (UFW) in California, and while the UFW was gaining momentum in that state organizing Filipino and Mexican workers, the United Farm Workers of Oregon emerged in 1968.

Unlike the UFW in California, however, the United Farm Workers of Oregon was not a formal union, although they did work to protest substandard conditions in farmworker housing, grower policies denying access to labor camps, and inadequate field sanitation. United Farm Workers of Oregon worked with other organizations to pressure the state government to investigate migrant housing conditions, even once taking a governor's aid on a housing tour. Their activities continued into the 1970s. By 1976 there was an office in Portland and support committees in various places throughout the state.

In 1970, the Chicano United Farm Workers of Oregon also emerged to work for farmworker rights. The initiatives of this group as well as the United Farm Workers of Oregon did not fully develop, but helped to pressure other groups such as the Valley Migrant League to support the boycott of California table grapes and lettuce promoted by the United Farm Workers. These farmworker organizations were political and also began to promote a model of worker-controlled organizations, as well as advocating for the goal of farmworkers= collective bargaining rights.

In 1973, a novel experiment in higher education began in Mt. Angel, Oregon. Colegio César Chávez was begun by a group of Chicano activists and educators who took over the failing Mt. Angel College and proceeded to develop the only independent, accredited, and degree-granting institution for Chicanos in the country. Colegio César Chávez operated a G.E.D. (high

school equivalency) program, an Adult Basic Education Program, a childcare center, and a migrant summer school. The language requirements for graduation were unique, including knowledge of the English language, knowledge of the Spanish language, and Aa working knowledge of Pocho Spanish in oral and written form,@ according to a recruitment brochure. In 1983, after a long struggle to pay an inherited debt to the Department of Urban Housing and Development the Colegio was shut down.

During the late 1960s and the early 1970s there was a marked increase in INS activity targeting immigrant Latino workers in Oregon. At this time, Cipriano Ferrel, Ramón Ramírez, Larry Kleinman, Juan Mendoza, and others began talking together about organizing an immigration project. In May 1977, the Willamette Valley Immigration Project (WVIP) opened its doors in Portland, Oregon to provide confidential legal advice and representation for undocumented workers with immigration problems. By the end of 1977, the WVIP had seven bilingual staff members and a summer office at the Colegio César Chávez.

The building of the cultural and political space that WVIP began in the 1970s continued with the formation of Pineros Y Campesinos del Noroeste or PCUN (Northwest Treeplanters and Farmworkers United), in 1985. From 1985 to 1986, the union began to build a constituency among farmworkers and forestry workers. During the 1990s, the union engaged in a series of actions aimed at opening up political and cultural space for immigrant Mexican farmworkers, raising farmworker wages, and achieved its first contracts with small organic growers. During the summer of 2002 the union was finalizing negotiations with NORPAK, a large cooperative of growers that had been the focus of a ten year boycott. (See Stephen 2001, for a general history of PCUN).

*IRCA and the settling of a third and fourth generation of Latinos in Oregon*

By the 1980s, the Latino population in Oregon included a significant number of indigenous Mexicans and Guatemalans many of whom became legal residents through the 1986 Immigration and Reform Act (IRCA) and the accompanying Special Agricultural Workers Program (SAW). The majority of the agricultural workers granted legal residences through the Seasonal Agricultural Workers program (S.A.W.) were men. In the state of Oregon, 23,736 Mexicans and some Guatemalans received permanent residency under the SAW program. While this statistic reflects the number who applied and completed the SAW program in Oregon, the figure of between 40,000 and 50,000 may be more realistic because many workers who now reside in Oregon completed the SAW program in California.

Following those who were legalized by IRCA was another wave of primarily Mexican immigrants who came either as the immediate family members of those who were legalized in 1986 or through larger social networks they had established in their home regions. For the period spanning from the late 1980s to the mid-1990s, the Mexican immigrant population changed significantly in two ways in Oregon. First, many of the men who became legal permanent residents sent for their wives and children. Secondly, once their families arrived, they settled more permanently and in communities like Salem, Woodburn, East Portland, Gresham, Medford and elsewhere came to form significant clusters of people from the same community, often built around sibling groups who came to either form or bring their nuclear families with them from different parts of Mexico and other places in the U.S., particularly from California.

While undocumented relatives of established Mexican immigrant families continue to come to the state of Oregon, during the past four to five years, a new wave of young men have come to occupy an important niche in the seasonal berry and other harvests in the state. The trend of family settlement and female migration has slowed considerably, and increasingly



seasonal workers are again lone men, often young (see McConahay 2001). They are found primarily in labor camps and are brought by labor contractors who work them through a circuit encompassing California, Oregon, and Washington. Some of them continue to be Mixtec, but recruiters are reaching into Triqui communities and into the state of Veracruz as well. Kissman, Intili, and García (2001). . Later in the 1990s, unattached younger females and males also began to migrate attaching themselves to older relatives already in Oregon such as siblings, aunts and uncles.

The importance of undocumented Mexicans in key sectors of the Oregon economy is not an isolated case. By March of 2005, the undocumented population of the U.S. was nearly 11 million. Approximately six million or 54.5 percent were from Mexico. In 2004, it was estimated that there were between 100,000 and 150,000 undocumented Mexican immigrants residing in the state of Oregon out of a total of 260,095 counted by the U.S. Census office in 2002 (Passel, Capps, and Fix 2004:6 ).

During the past four decades, the number of Latinos has steadily increased in Oregon with more than four different generations settling in many different parts of the state and representing an increasingly diverse set of ethnic and national origins, although the majority continues to be of Mexican origin. When Latinos or “Hispanics” were first counted in the census in Oregon in 1970, their numbers were small, 32,000 or less than 2 percent of the population. In 1980, Latinos were reported as about 2.5 percent of the total population or 65, 847. From 1990 to the year 2000, the Latino population in Oregon more than doubled from 112,707 or four percent of the state population to 275,315 to about 8 percent of the population.

From the late 1980s to the present, indigenous Guatemala and Mexican immigrants began to make up an increasing number of workers in Oregon, concentrated primarily in agriculture

and related businesses. The 2000 census was also the first time that indigenous Mexicans, Guatemalans, and others could make their presence known through two distinct census categories. One of the racial options, “American Indian or Alaska Native,” left a space to indicate a specific “tribe.” The 2000 census showed a significant growth in the number of people who self-identified as American Indian *but also* in the number of people who identified themselves as both Hispanic and American Indian. Self-identified Latin American indigenous migrants could identify both ethnically as Latinos and racially as American Indians. In the 2000 census, 407,073 people reported themselves as both “Spanish/Hispanic/Latino” *and* American Indian and Alaskan Native. This was 1.2 percent of the total Hispanic population (U.S. Census 2001:10, table 10). While the official number in the census given for “Hispanic American Indians” in Oregon is 5081, it is quite likely that the number is much higher. Community outreach workers from the Oregon Law Center have documented the presence of 14 different indigenous ethnic groups and languages found among Mexican and Guatemalan immigrants in Oregon (Oregon Law Center 2007).

#### *Current Demographic Overview of Latinos in Oregon*

By 2005, Latinos were the second largest population group in Oregon, about 9.9 percent of the total population of 3,700,758 (U.S. Census Bureau 2006a). Latino children were about 15 percent of the population under age 18 of the state in 2005, but that is likely to increase (Kaiser Family Foundation 2005a). During 2005, Latino births were 20 percent of the total births in Oregon (Oregon Vital Statistics County Data 2005). The growth of the Latino population has been sustained since the 1990s, particularly in rural areas, where census undercount is more prevalent. Although Oregon’s urban population is growing, a quarter of all Oregonians still live in non-metropolitan areas.

In some counties, the Latino population increased more than 100 percent in the past decade (see Table 1 below). Many of these Latinos are foreign-born, mostly from Mexico. The resultant demographic and cultural impacts have been enormous. For example, in 2007 Hood River County schools were 39 percent Latino (Hood River County School District 2007) and 70 percent of the students in Woodburn School District are Latino (Oregon School Board Association 2007).

As of 2005, Latino workers in Oregon find year-round employment in the agriculture and also in construction, manufacturing, and the service sector (League of Women Voters 2000, Turner and Wood 1998). Many are quite mobile within a very narrow band of occupations—something that mirrors the situation of the Latino workforce in other states. At the same time, by 2002 Latinos owned 2.1 percent of Oregon firms (up from 0.5 in 1997) (US Census Bureau 2002).

The poverty rate for Latinos in Oregon is 34 percent (compared to 14 percent for non-Latino whites) (Kaiser Family Foundation 2005b). For example, Latino workers earn 64 percent of the average non-Latino white workers' earnings in Multnomah County (Leachman, Thompson and Gould 2001). Latinos are younger and less educated than non-Latino whites—the median age of Latinos in Oregon is 22.8 years, compared to 38.3 years of non-Latino whites. Many live in low-income households—the median family income is \$31,355, compared to \$50,079 median family income of non-Latino white households (U.S. Census Bureau 2006b)

Despite having one of the country's best economies and the second highest minimum wage, Oregon has a high percentage of hungry people. In 2002, an estimated 40 percent of Latinos in Oregon lived in food insecure households. Food insecure households are sometimes on the verge of running out of money for food. Help from other resources, such a family, friends,

food banks and government assistance is not available or is not enough to assure that these individuals and families would avoid hunger. However, 72 percent of working-age Latino adults in food insecure homes were employed in 2001 and 2002, compared to 56 percent of the non-Latino adults in food insecure homes (Leachman 2003).

In Oregon, Latino children are more likely to live in low-income families: 71 percent of Latino children live in low-income families, compared to 34 percent of white children (nationally, 62 percent of Latino children live in low-income families) (National Center for Children in Poverty 2004). Similarly, 68 percent of children of immigrant parents in Oregon live in low-income families, compared to 36 percent of children of native-born parents. Almost half of all children in low-income families live in rural areas. Particularly for the poor, the availability of infant and toddler care, and care for children with special needs is very limited in communities throughout the state (Weber and Okuyama 2002).

#### **NOTABLE LATINO-AMERICANS IN OREGON**

**Susan Castillo** (1951-) is the Oregon Superintendent of Public Instruction at the Oregon Department of Education, elected in 2003 and reelected to a second 4-year term until 2011. Castillo is Oregon's first Latino woman elected to a statewide office. Prior to entering public office, Castillo pursued a career broadcast journalist, first for Oregon Public Radio and latter as an award-wining television reporter for KVAL-TV in Eugene, Oregon. As the first Latino woman in the Oregon Legislative Assembly, Castillo served from 1997 to 2002. She was the chair of the Senate Education Committee, dealing with issues of charter schools, teacher tenure, and school reform. She was also elected as Assistant Democratic Leader for the 1999 and 2001 legislative sessions. In 2004, Castillo was named one of the 100 Most Influential Hispanics in

America by the Hispanic Business Magazine (Oregon Department of Education,  
<http://www.ode.state.or.us>

Oregon Blue Book, <http://bluebook.state.or.us>)

**Clara Padilla Andrews** (1941 -) is owner and publisher of El Hispanic News. This newspaper, founded in 1981 by Juan Prats, is the oldest bilingual publication in the Pacific Northwest, and an important source of information for the Latino community. Padilla Andrews bought the newspaper in 1995 and turned it the largest bilingual weekly newspaper in the region. Her company also publishes the bilingual bi-weekly magazine Más devoted to Latino arts and culture in the Portland metro area. Before moving to Oregon in 1987, she served as Secretary of State for New Mexico from 1983-86. In Portland, she was Hispanic Services coordinator and supervisor for Community and Family Services Integration of Services for Multnomah County. She was president of the Metropolitan Portland Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. She was also president of the National Association of Hispanic Publications. She founded the Susana Maria Gurule Foundation, in honor of her granddaughter, who died of cancer. Today Padilla Andrews is one of the most influential women in Portland's Latino community. The Hispanic Business Magazine named her one of the 100 Most Influential Hispanics four times

Source: El Hispanic News, <http://www.elhispanicnews.com>

**Ramón Ramírez** (1955-) helped to organize Oregon's union of farmworkers, nursery, and reforestation workers, Piñeros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste (Northwest Treeplanters and Farmworkers United). PCUN is the largest Latino organization in the state. The union empowers farmworkers to understand and take action against labor exploitation. PCUN was founded in 1985 by 80 farmworkers and has since grown to include more than 5,000 registered members,

98% of which are immigrants from Mexico and Central America. Ramírez became president of the union in 1995, after the sudden death of Cipriano Ferrel, PCUN's first president. Ramírez was born and raised in East Los Angeles. At the age of 15, he was inspired by the work of César Chávez and Dolores Huerta, and became active in the Chicano movement's opposition to the Vietnam War. He later joined the farmworker cause. In 1991, Ramírez led the first-ever union-organized strike in Oregon agriculture, and in 1998 he signed collective bargaining contracts with three different growers—a first in the state's agricultural history. Under Ramirez's leadership, the Farmworker Housing Development Corporation (FHDC) has built 108 units of affordable housing and also the Cipriano Ferrel Education Center, which provides a Head Start and multi-purpose education facility for FHDC's Nuevo Amanecer project. Ramírez has also worked to develop a strong immigrant rights coalition (CAUSA), which has defeated anti-immigrant proposals in the Oregon State Legislature. In 2003, Ramírez received the Leadership for a Changing World award from the Ford Foundation.

Pineros and Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste (PCUN) [www.pcun.org](http://www.pcun.org)

### **Cultural and Political Organizations**

The cultural and political landscapes of Oregon are quite different in this new century than they were fifty years ago. Today, the Mexican and Latino American presence is well established throughout the state. *Supermercados* (markets), *panaderias* (bakeries), and *tortillerias* (tortilla factories) can be found wherever there is a population of Mexican descent (Nusz and Riccardi 2003). Other Mexican restaurants and taquerias attract mainstream Oregonians almost everywhere. Latino influence and products are evident in cultural celebrations like the Fiesta Mexicana, an annual event in Woodburn since 1964; the annual Cinco de Mayo Fiesta in Portland, organized by the Portland-Guadalajara Sister City Association since 1984;

and the annual Latino Fiesta of Eugene-Springfield that started in the mid-1980s. Latino themed murals are found in Portland, Woodburn, and other cities, and many of these murals adorn Latino social service agencies. Latina artists are featured in art galleries in Portland. Latino music, dance, and theater groups perform around the state, like the Miracle Theater Company (Teatro Milagro) in Portland, and La Grandeza Azteca in Nyssa. Begun in June of 2006, Latino Gay Pride marked its second celebration in 2007 with more than 500 people in attendance. It featured a combination of speakers and performers including Multnomah County Commissioner Maria Rojo de Steffey and the folk dance troupe Baile Folklorico from Forest Grove High School and the band Lo Nuestro of Eugene.

Spanish language and bilingual communication media have proliferated in Oregon's largest cities, such as El Hispanic News (published since 1981), El Latino de Hoy (published since 1991) and Noticias Latinas. La Campeona in Dallas (KWIP-AM 880) was the first Oregon radio station to go 24-hour in Spanish, also LaX, is a Spanish language radio network broadcasting in Portland and Eugene. Seven stations broadcast full time in Spanish between Portland and Eugene (among them La Pantera in Salem and KPCN-LP La Voz del Pueblo, PCUN's own 96.3 FM radio station in Woodburn) and two other radio stations broadcast in Southern Oregon. La Voz del Pueblo broadcasts in Mixteco, Zapotec, and occasionally other indigenous languages of Mexico as well. Portland has one Spanish language television station.

Latino soccer leagues and other sports teams (such as the Oregon Basketball Tournament that started in Woodburn in 1986, and the Latinos of Oregon Golf Association) have proliferated with the growth of the population. Soccer leagues are now well established in most communities. A number of towns have Mexican-style rodeos with the participation of *charros* (cowboys). Mexican music, food and entertainment as major components of these events.

Latinos have made and continue to make significant contributions to the state. They are starting new businesses, are joining the Hispanic Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce, are getting law degrees, entering local politics as elected officials (two Multnomah County Commissioners are Latino), and are getting appointed to the judicial system (two circuit judges are Latino). In 2005, Paul J. De Muniz was elected as the first Latino Chief of Justice in the Oregon Supreme Court.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Latinos struggled to ensure that as citizens they could carve out their space in Oregon's civic and cultural life. In 1971, Governor Tom McCall created the Advisory Committee on Chicano Affairs (now Hispanic Affairs). Those struggles resulted in new social programs, educational opportunities for children of farmworkers and laborers, and laws against discrimination based on national origin, language, and race. In the 1980s, several non-profit organizations were established that provide culturally specific services to Latino children and adults, such as the Oregon Council for Hispanic Advancement and Catholic Charities' El Programa Hispano in the Portland metro area, Centro Cultural in the Forest Grove/Cornelius area, and Centro Latino Americano in the Eugene-Springfield area. CAUSA is a statewide grassroots coalition based in the Latino community that defends and advances the rights of immigrants in Oregon. Formed in 1986, CAUSA uses a combination of mobilization, strategic research, popular education, actions, media campaigns and policy formulation to advance immigrants' rights. Portland VOZ is a worker-led organization whose membership organizes to secure and promote their rights through organizing, leadership development, and community education. The mission of VOZ is to empower immigrant workers, particularly day laborers. Voz Hispana Causa Chavista is a community-based organization in Woodburn comprised of Latino parents, workers, students, small business owners and community



organizers working to register new voters and encourage them to participate in the electoral process. Latinos Unidos Siempre (LUS) is a youth-led organization that works for educational, cultural, and political development of Latino youth. LUS empowers youth to resist negative societal and peer pressures while advocating for social and political change, combating racial discrimination through grassroots organizing, and building coalitions with other youth of color. The Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MeCHA) has now representation in most universities and community colleges of Oregon. In 1995, the Chicano/Latino Studies Program was established at Portland State University.

#### **NOTES.**

1. From 1819 to 1848 Oregon Country included part of the present day Canadian province of British Columbia, all of the U.S. States of Oregon, Washington, and Idaho, and parts of Montana and Wyoming.

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