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The "Re-Latinization" of New Orleans in the Twentieth Century: Multiple Waves of Hispanic Migration

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The “Re-Latinization” of New Orleans in the Twentieth Century:
Multiple Waves of Hispanic Migration

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
In partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
History

By

Carlos Manuel Martinez
B.S. Southern University at New Orleans 1998
May 2010

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Dedication

To my Parents Orialis Vidal y Carlos Manuel Martinez

Thank you for everything.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank several people without whose help this thesis would not have been possible. To Rachael Schultz, thank you for your tireless devotion and friendship. I appreciated the long times we have spent together. To Raymond and Patrick, who pushed me to finish. Thanks to the people who entrusted me with their stories - David Egudin, Nora Bustamente, Eunice Ferrer, Maria Gallegos, and Yamilet Yrma. Thanks to Dr. Mokhiber and Dr. Brown for their valuable insight. And special thanks to Dr. Michael Mizell-Nelson, whose patience and guidance was a great inspiration.

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Abstract

Latin Americans immigrating to New Orleans during the Jim Crow period found New Orleans to be a place where they could assimilate. Several factors produced a tolerant climate for Latin Americans. These included New Orleanians' tolerant attitude, which was possible since Latin Americans arrived in small numbers and different waves. Latinos also helped develop trade with Latin America. Also, unlike other areas in the country, immigrants that came to New Orleans came from all over Central and South America. They were a highly skilled group and acted as cultural and power brokers between Latin America and the city. In spite of the variety of racial mixtures, Latinos in New Orleans could claim social and legal whiteness. A pattern of immigration is revealed: small numbers, economic, cultural and educational diversity, a desire to assimilate rather than segregate, and social and economical mobility.

Keywords: Latin-American, Hispanic, Spanish-Americans, United Fruit company, Latinos, Marelitos, Mestizo, mulatto

INTRODUCTION

How Hispanics in New Orleans were able to be interpreted as legally and socially “white” throughout the Jim Crow era is a question that could be raised in only a few other cities in the United States. Most of the United States struggled with the definition of whiteness. In *Working Towards Whiteness: How America’s Immigrants Became White*, David Roediger chronicled how European immigrants dealt with race and finding their place in American society. This was especially hard for Southern Europeans that had to face the reality of being labeled not white. Italian immigrants in Louisiana faced being on the wrong side of the color line because of their work on plantations beside African-Americans.¹ In the case of the Jews, those that arrived from Eastern Europe were seen as “dark-complected and alien in customs” and their discussion of a Jewish race at times raised doubts regarding their race.² In *How the Irish Became White*, Noel Ignatiev argued that the Irish used race to their advantage, replacing regional differences and customs for a color-based racism that would allow them to exclude free African-Americans workers.³ The Latin Americans, especially Mexicans in the Southwest, claimed whiteness. Their claim was sanctioned by law in the treaty of Guadeloupe Hidalgo, which made Mexicans residing in the southwest citizens of the United States.⁴ This allowed Mexicans to naturalize. Since only whites could become citizens, in effect, the treaty claimed legal whiteness for Mexicans. In practice, however, they suffered discrimination in public spaces.⁵ The response from Mexican-Americans was a claim to “other whiteness” in legal cases involving Mexican

¹ David Roediger R. *Working Toward Whiteness How America’s Immigrants Became White The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs* Basic Books New York 2005 129.

² Roediger, 136

³ Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* Routledge New York 1996 96.

⁴ Steven Wilson H. “Brown over other white Mexican Americans Legal Arguments and Litigation Strategy in School Desegregation” *Law and History review*, Vol. 21 No 1 (Spring 2003) 151.

⁵ Wilson, 151-152

civil rights.⁶ Meanwhile, the city of New Orleans absorbed Hispanics of many colors into the white culture. While portions of the Latin Americans moving into New Orleans were white, the majority would still have been to some degree mestizo or mulatto. The majority of Latin Americans were able to avoid the worst aspects of racism and institutionalized discrimination in New Orleans and eventually become part of the Anglo-American community. For “Spanish Americans,” as they were called in New Orleans and New Mexico, the benefits included employment in many of the city’s leading businesses and enrollment of their children in New Orleans’ private and parochial schools. As with most New Orleans ethnic groups, Latinos were never confined to a section of the city, but were spread throughout New Orleans and, later, its suburbs. White New Orleanians exhibited a relaxed attitude towards intermarriage among the Latin newcomers and the various ethnic groups in the city. The social benefits of whiteness allowed Latinos to enjoy restaurants, amusement parks and other recreational activities reserved for those considered to be “white.” An analysis of the history of Latin Americans in New Orleans reveals that a combination of factors made assimilation easy for the new arrivals. The unusual three-tier racial makeup of the city, the small but continuously arriving number of immigrants, the similarities in religious worship, the paleness of the immigrants, the privilege of the class, educational level, employment and the heterogeneous nations of origin of Latin Americans all made it possible for Latin Americans to blend in with the Anglo Community of New Orleans. Even as the Latin immigration numbers increased in the latter half of the 20th century, New Orleans’ history of Latin inclusion continued, partially because a pattern of assimilation had already been established two centuries earlier.

HISPANICS IN NEW ORLEANS, PRE-WORLD WAR II

New Orleans has had a Hispanic presence for most of its history, whether they originated

⁶ Wilson, 151.

as settlers from Spain in the colonial period, Mexican immigrants in the early 20th century, or Central Americans and Cubans in the latter half. New Orleans has had a small but continuous Hispanic presence that has been largely neglected by historians and native New Orleanians alike. For example, Pierce Lewis in *New Orleans: The making of an Urban Landscape* only makes a passing mention of Hispanics, with a total of two pages discussing Latinos in New Orleans in a book that is 198 pages.⁷ The only time that New Orleanians and scholars seemed to notice the Hispanic presence was when a new wave arrives. This, of course, means that there are serious gaps in our knowledge of Latin Americans in New Orleans. Scholarly analyses following waves of Latino immigrants, there is a greater awareness of information by comparison. In the 20th century, the first scholarly writing was done by Norman Painter wrote in his master thesis for the Tulane sociology department in 1949, “The Assimilation of Latin Americans in New Orleans, Louisiana”. This was also the case in the 1970s when the Cuban population relocated to New Orleans in large numbers. In response, the city commissioned the William King report as a tool to better assist Hispanic immigrants. Various studies were conducted by Marina Khan, Roxanna Stein, and Dr. Manuel Caraballo. In “A Socio-Psychological Study of Acculturation/Assimilation: Cubans in New Orleans,” Caraballo’s PhD dissertation studied Cuban refugees coming into New Orleans from 1960 to 1970. Khan, a graduate student in the University of New Orleans, wrote “Immigration: Problems of Assimilation and Culturation of Latin in New Orleans”. Roxanna Stein wrote “Urban Latins: a Fictional Community in New Orleans.” In 1971, Luis Adam Nazario wrote a memoir about his life in the city of New Orleans. He moved from Puerto Rico to New Orleans to study at Tulane and Loyola Universities in the 1940s. He returned in 1970 to New Orleans for a college reunion and wrote *Mi Vida Estudiantil*

⁷ Pierce F. Lewis, *New Orleans: The making of an Urban Landscape*, Santa Fe, NM: The Center for American Places, Inc., 2003, 57.

en Neuvo Orleans.⁸

The other works written before Katrina were created by Eric Paul Faust and Mary Bracken. Faust's work was written as a B.A. thesis and Bracken's as a PhD dissertation. Faust's "Hispanics: A comparative study in diversity between 1970 and 1990," offers a comparative chronicle about the differences developing between the Hispanic community in Orleans and Jefferson parishes. Bracken's "Restructuring the Boundaries: Hispanics in New Orleans, 1960-1990," analyses how Hispanics in New Orleans had stretched racial barriers in New Orleans. Another important source was the interviews conducted by Beatrice Rodriguez Owsley who was an archivist in the University of New Orleans. Her interviews are important source of information from the 1950s to the early 1990s.

Post-Katrina, scholars have once again begun to write about Latinos in New Orleans. After Katrina, Mexicans arrived in New Orleans in large numbers for the first time since 1910. This produced a current wave of interest and writing on Hispanics and New Orleans, such as Elizabeth Fussell's "Constructing New Orleans, Constructing Race: A Population History of New Orleans" and Leo "Gorman's Latino Migrant Labor Strife and Solidarity in Post-Katrina New Orleans, 2005-2007". Both were written as a direct result of the influx of Hispanic workers after Katrina.

Similarly, renewed interest in the Latin American historical presence is also tied to the post-Katrina developments. Two recent University of New Orleans history theses have been written by two Hispanics who grew up as members of the New Orleans Latin American community. Rafael Delgadillo's University of New Orleans thesis "A Spanish Element in the New South: The Hispanic Press and Community in Nineteenth Century New Orleans" was completed in 2009. His work filled in the gaps between the end of the colonial period and the nineteenth century, creating a more complete picture for scholars studying the Latino presence in

⁸ Luis Adam Nazario, *Mi Vida Estudiantil En Nuevo Orleans* Editorial Edil Rio Pederas Spain ,1971, 201.

New Orleans.⁹

In order to understand the Latin presence in New Orleans, one must return to colonial times. In 1763, France, as a result of the Seven Year War, ceded Louisiana to Spain.¹⁰ The Spanish governor Ulloa in 1767 arrived with seventy-five troops to take possession of Louisiana.¹¹ These few soldiers were Louisiana's first Spanish inhabitants. They soon faced an insurrection in 1768 as the French inhabitants sought to return Louisiana to French sovereignty.¹² Spain then sent General Alejandro O'Reilly to reestablish control with 2,000 troops.¹³ These men were hardly settlers and Louisiana did not attract Hispanic immigrants in great numbers. The few that came to New Orleans arrived during the governorships of Bernardo Galvez and Miro. 1,582 Canary Islanders settled in Louisiana, and another 500 came from Malaga, Galvez's birthplace.¹⁴ They settled the area of Bayou Teche and founded the town of New Iberia. The smaller number of Spaniards soon started to intermarry with the local French population. Governor Galvez was among those who married into the Creole population, as did several Spanish officials, including governors Unzaga and Miro. Galvez's marriage to Felicite de St. Maxent was seen as a good way to reconcile the Creole population to Spanish rule.¹⁵ The Spanish population of Louisiana remained small during the colonial period up until the start of American rule. The small number of Spaniards was easily assimilated into the French Creole population.

A good example of this process during the American period was Dr. Rudolph Matas, a

⁹ Elizabeth, Fussell "Constructing New Orleans, Constructing Race: A Population History of New Orleans" *Journal of American History*, 94 (Dec. 2007), Leo Gorman's "Latino Migrant Labor Strife and Solidarity in Post-Katrina New Orleans 2005-2007" M.A. thesis University of New Orleans. Rafael Delgadillo "A Spanish Element in the New South: The Hispanic Press and Community in nineteenth Century New Orleans" M.A. thesis University of New Orleans December 2009.

¹⁰ Bennett H. Wall, *Louisiana A History* Harlan Davidson Inc Wheeling, Illinois 2008, 66.

¹¹ Wall, 69.

¹² Wall, 72-73.

¹³ Wall, 73.

¹⁴ Jose Montero, *The Spanish in New Orleans and Louisiana* (Pelican Publishing company Gretna 2000), 49.

¹⁵ Montero, 23.

famous surgeon who was born in Bonnet Carre, Louisiana, to Catalan immigrants 1860.¹⁶ Narciso and Tereas Matas had immigrated to Louisiana in 1856 from Barcelona, Spain.¹⁷ Dr. Matas was born on the Louque plantation in Saint John the Baptist Parish where his father worked as the plantation doctor.¹⁸ Dr. Rudolph Matas was, however, christened in New Orleans in the Church of the Immaculate Conception on Baronne Street.¹⁹ An analysis of Dr. Rudolph Matas' life reveals how rapidly assimilation occurred in New Orleans. His baptismal certificate records his name as Rodolphe instead of Rodolfo. His parents' names were also changed to reflect the lingering Franco-American cultural presence. His father Narciso became Narcisse and his mother Teresa became Therese.²⁰ It seems that Rudolph Matas' parents and the people in the parish register came to an agreement. Both decided that they preferred assimilation to seeing the Matas family as a separate ethnic group. In later life, his name would be Anglicized to Rudolph Matas, which is how he is remembered today. Dr. Matas, like Dr. Alton Oschner later, would build links and connections to Latin America and New Orleans, such as his sponsorship of the Latin American fraternity Phi Iota Alpha.²¹

The pattern of assimilation found in the 20th century had developed in the previous two centuries. New Orleans and the state of Louisiana would continue to receive small numbers of Latin immigrants through the 19th and 20th centuries, small enough to be easily assimilated. New Orleans would not see a significant number of Hispanics arrive until the start of the twentieth century, and they mostly came from Latin America instead of Spain.

“SPANISH AMERICANS” AND THE THREE TIER SYSTEM

¹⁶ Isidore Cohn, *Rudolph Matas: A Biography* Double & Company Inc Garden City, New York 1960, 20.

¹⁷Cohn, 17.

¹⁸Cohn, 19-20.

¹⁹Cohn, 20.

²⁰Cohn, 21-22.

²¹Tulane yearbook 1940, Jefferson Parish special collections Dept. East Bank Regional Library.

To fully understand the situation of the Latin community, one needs to comprehend the larger racial landscape of New Orleans. The city of New Orleans, unlike the rest of the south, which was characterized by a two-tier racial system, had a long history of a three-tier racial system that Spanish Americans would have to navigate. The three tiers in New Orleans were the white or Anglo-American community, the Creole mixed race inhabitants, and the African-American community.²²

To Latin Americans, the existence of racial caste or stratification would not have been strange, but they were shocked by the extremely harsh circumstances that the latter two groups had to live under. Many Latinos were surprised to see Creoles of color who were extremely fair-skinned frequently being treated by the Anglo community as though they were African-Americans. Adam Nazario and Maria Gallegos both confronted this form of racism, Nazario in the 1940s and Gallegos in the late 1950s. The city had segregated public transportation and schools. Hispanics managed to be included in the Anglo-American tier, despite the fact that most would have some racially mixed background. Latin Americans in the forties enjoyed being able to move freely around New Orleans. A student remembers that when he arrived the other students came to his room and, despite the language barrier, he knew that they wanted to be friends.²³ In downtown New Orleans, most shops had signs that said “A qui se habla Espanole.”²⁴ When questioned about discrimination in New Orleans, most Hispanics spoke of discrimination in terms of white/African American antagonism. Some had been victims of racism in other parts of the country but found no such discrimination against them in New Orleans. Norman Painter went as far as to assume that in New Orleans Latin Americans rarely

²² Fussell, 846.

²³ Norman Wellington Painter, “The Assimilation of the Latin American in New Orleans,” M.A. Thesis Tulane University Jones Hall, 1949 31.

²⁴ Painter, 71.

even had to think about being discriminated against.²⁵ Maria Gallegos remembers that in New Orleans she could sit in the front of the bus. The African-American girls that went to Xavier Prep, while some were lighter in skin color than her, would go straight to the back of the bus.²⁶ Luis Nazario had a similar experience when riding home on a streetcar. He “didn’t understand why blacks had to sit in the back of the street car.” He was also surprised that “women who would have passed in Puerto Rico for white with their light green eyes, beautiful faces, and light complexions would have to sit in the back of the street cars.”²⁷

Assimilation did not always mean full acceptance. Maria Gallegos’ brothers played mostly with Italian boys. Her brothers were part of their gang, and they were always fighting with the Irish boys. “My brothers chose to associate with the Italians because they were similar to us. We had no other Mexican-American families back then in the Irish Channel. Italians were similar to us in complexion and culturally. I dated mostly Italians back then. It seemed natural.” Maria Gallegos’ experience was not unique. When Mexican-Americans first started moving to Chicago in the early 1920s, Jane Addams, the founder of Hull-House, noted that the Italian immigrants welcomed the Mexicans as long-lost brothers. The young men of both nationalities joined her Latin club. A Mexican-American sociologist noted that the Italian and Mexican boys’ conflicts were mostly with the Poles. The good relations did not last as long between the two Latin groups as Italians realized that Mexicans were not viewed as white socially and began to distance themselves from them.²⁸ Because of the small number of Latin Americans in New Orleans, the Italians and Mexicans have to experience the division as others had in Chicago. Maria Gallegos also remembers racial discrimination, but in Texas.

²⁵ Painter, 54.

²⁶ Maria Gallegos, interviewed by author Metairie, La April, 5 2009.

²⁷ Nazario, 90.

²⁸ Thomas Guegillmo, *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago 1890-1945* (Oxford University Press 2003), 47-48.

I, however, remember that it wasn't the same way everywhere. When we would visit my family in Texas you could feel something had changed as you crossed the state boundary into Texas. People looked at you differently and you felt a strange hatred towards you for being Mexican-American. I guess that's why my parents moved from Houston to New Orleans. I remember that my older brother was a sailor and he told my father what a nice city New Orleans was. Plus, he was always stopping in New Orleans. My father came to see for himself and liked what he saw, so we moved to New Orleans. He worked in a pool hall in the Irish Channel and later started a Mexican restaurant on St. Charles. He was able to support the family. The worst that I ever got in New Orleans was people would ask me if I was Philippine. I was more amused than anything else by the question.²⁹

Some of the men interviewed by Painter also spoke about the harsh conditions in Dallas, Texas. One man remembers that he went to get a shave, but the barber would not shave him. "The people all over Dallas are ignorant. There is widespread prejudice. They class all Latin Americans together and judge them by the worst examples. I asked the barber where the Mexican quarter was. I wanted to get some Mexican food. The barber replied, 'See that nigger over there? Ask him. Ask him, he can tell you'."³⁰

In the Southwest and in Texas, Mexican-Americans suffered from Jim Crow. While the laws clearly stated that Mexicans were white, local customs dictated how Mexicans were treated. In some cities, Mexicans were served at restaurants; in others, they were set apart from other tables or simply denied service.³¹ In Houston, and San Antonio, segregation was also practiced in the Catholic Church. The Archdiocese in San Antonio erected two churches for Catholics. One was a mission style church for the Mexicans and the other was a modern one for Anglo Catholics. In Houston those Mexicans that crossed the racial line and went to Anglo Catholic

²⁹ Maria Gallegos, interview.

³⁰ Painter, 55.

³¹ Gregory Rodriguez, *Mongrels Bastards Orphans and Vagabonds: Mexican Immigration and the Future of Race in American*, Pantheon Books New York, 2007, 174.

churches, such as one nun's father, were removed and humiliated. In some cases, pews that were erected in the back were marked as Mexican pews. In Houston, Catholic Mexican churches were built to accommodate the Mexican population.³² This racism in the Catholic Church was also seen outside of the Southwest. In Gary, Indiana, Mexicans had to attend a Mexican church. The problem was that the priest was not Mexican and took a dim view of his Mexican parishioners.

New Orleans also tried to open a church for Mexicans, though they did not take the same hard-line attitude as people did in Texas and Gary, Indiana. In New Orleans in 1918, Archbishop Shaw created a new church to serve New Orleans' Mexican population. Called Our Lady of Guadalupe,³³ the church had been used as a funeral mortuary during the colonial period because it was outside the city walls.³⁴ The church was later used to serve Italian immigrants and renamed Saint Anthony. The church remained Italian until Archbishop Blenk in 1915 closed it because it was located next to Storyville and the train terminal.³⁵ The Italian congregation was moved to Saint Mary's Italian Church in the French Quarter and a new Saint Anthony's was built. The Church remained in a state of disrepair until work began in 1918. The first English and Spanish masses were started in 1921, yet they failed to attract a Mexican congregation.³⁶

In other parts of the country, Latin Americans found similar problems. Mexican immigration to Gary, Indiana, started in 1919. Gary saw its Mexican population rise from 1,746 to 9,007 by 1930.³⁷ Anglo-Americans and more established Eastern European immigrants harassed the Mexican immigrants. Racism based on the new group's color was a factor as light-skinned Mexicans were able to access better housing, especially if they claimed to be "Spanish."

³² Trevino Roberto, "Facing Jim Crow: Catholic Sisters and the Mexican Problem" in Texas", *Western Historical Quarterly* 34 (Summer 2003) 139-164, 142-143.

³³ Leonard Huber, *Our Lady Of Guadeloupe Church The International Shrine of St. Jude 1826-1976 New Orleans Louisiana* Custombook Inc. Hackensack New Jersey, 28.

³⁴ Huber, 28-29.

³⁵ Ibid,

³⁶ Huber, 31.

³⁷ Neil Betten, and Raymond A. Mohl, "From Discrimination to Repatriation : Mexican Life in Gary, Indiana, during the Great Depression", *The Pacific Historical Review* Vol. No 3 (Aug 1973) 370-388, 371.

One manager admitted that he chose the lightest in skin color for work. He claimed they both worked as hard, “but the darker ones are like the niggers.” In the steel mills, the best jobs, such as foremen positions, usually went to people of European ethnicity. Meanwhile, the mills gave the hardest and most poorly paid positions to the Mexicans.³⁸

Thus, New Orleans proved to be a respite from more jarring experiences with race discrimination. “In Missouri, I was referred to as a foreigner. I had a problem getting a job, but here in New Orleans, I have had no such difficulty.” Another man easily felt at home in New Orleans. “From the first I felt more at home here than I did in New York. I liked the atmosphere here and the way of the people - their education, their religion, and their hospitality.”³⁹ The difference here was that Latin Americans arriving in the early to mid 1900s were included in New Orleans’ white community and their skills and educational levels insulated them from the worst cases of poverty in the area. Painter believed the condition of the “Negro tends to force other races, sub-races or mixture into one of the two established castes and the Latin Americans in New Orleans are accepted in the dominate white caste as far as is known.”⁴⁰ The whiteness of most of the early Latin American immigrants made distinction harder and shielded those that were not white from racial stigmatization.

Another way that Latin Americans in New Orleans, New Mexico and the Southwest exhibited their whiteness was by emphasizing their European roots. The Mexican consulate to New Orleans, Armando Amador, promoted the view that Mexico was a Europeanized nation. While Amador himself was a *mestizo*, he nonetheless championed the idea that Mexicans were white. Any traits and traditions that would contradict this were reconstructed to suit his policy. In a speech on native art he gave at Tulane’s Latin American Center, he said Mexico was “philosophically and ethically European, but aesthetically influenced by the ancient civilizations

³⁸ Betten, 377

³⁹ Painter, 49.

⁴⁰ Painter, 117-118.

of the Indians.” He continued with this line of thought. In 1930, during a party to celebrate Mexico’s independence, a jarocho dance was performed. The song and dance performance was of Afro-Mexican origins, a fact Amador failed to mention to his guests. He simply stated that it was from Veracruz, a Mexican port with important trade connections to New Orleans.⁴¹ Thus, while Amador was in New Orleans, he proclaimed Mexican whiteness while burying Mexicans’ Indian and African ancestry. It was a similar situation in the Southwest, where the terms “Latino” or “Latina” were preferred over “Mexican.” New Mexicans claimed pure Spanish ancestry from the first settlers of the territory. Thus, they popularized the term Spanish-Americans.⁴² The Anglo-American leaders of New Mexico were willing to recast Mexicans as Spanish-Americans because they felt it would help them attract capital. Thus, a term once used for wealthy ranchers was applied to all Mexicans in the territory.⁴³ Well into the 1980s, many New Orleanians used the term “Spanish-American” to describe all Latin Americans.⁴⁴ Latin Americans in New Orleans must have come to the same conclusion in order to be seen as white and not endure the effects of Jim Crow they witnessed in New Orleans.

LATIN AMERICAN ELITES

In the late 1800s, the proximity of the port to the whole of Latin America made commerce a major connection point between the two cultures, a fact that was obvious to both the businessmen of New Orleans and of Latin America. New Orleans became the meeting place for Latin Americans from every republic. The native New Orleanians became used to seeing wealthy “Spanish Americans” in their city. For the newly arriving Latin immigrants and visitors, the city

⁴¹ Julie Weise, “Mexican Nationalism, Southern Racisms: Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the U.S. South, 1908-193, (American Quarterly Volume 60 #3): September 2008 763-764.

⁴² Charles Montgomery, “Spanish –American Race and Rhetoric in New Mexico politics 1880-1928”, Journal of American Ethnic History, Vol 20 No 4 (summer, 2001), 59-84 University of Illinois 60-61.

⁴³ Montgomery, 70

⁴⁴ Interview with Dr. Michael Mizell-Nelson 03/08/2010

provided a place to purchase products and enjoy services that could not be found back home. This would include medical services considered more advanced in the United States. The Latin American presence provided jobs for bilingual sales staff, physicians, and other professionals. The shipping companies in New Orleans drew these individuals from their various countries and in some cases relocated them to New Orleans. The relationship that developed could be seen in almost neocolonial terms.

New Orleans was the metropolis that housed the capital, technology, and expertise. The Central American republics of Honduras, Guatemala, and Nicaragua sent back produce and minerals that, while not used in manufacturing in New Orleans, were generating money for the port by being distributed to other parts of the United States. Thus, a symbiotic relationship developed between New Orleans and Central Americas' elites, and the former funneled capital and technology to the Central American Republics. New Orleans became the market place where Latin American products were sold and distributed. Also, expanding import-export companies, needing bilingual workers to deal with the consuls and trade in the various Central American countries could draw upon this group of immigrants to fill the necessary jobs. Such economic advantages allowed Latin Americans to be treated with much more deference in New Orleans than in other parts of the United States.

The influx of immigrants in the early twentieth century can be traced to a single company, the United Fruit Company. Based in Boston, the United Fruit Company operations were managed from New Orleans. Their holdings included plantations in Nicaragua, Honduras, Columbia, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, and Jamaica, ultimately employing fifteen thousand workers worldwide.⁴⁵ The company owned eleven steamships, leased twenty to

⁴⁵Lester D. Langley, and Schoonover Thomas, *The Banana Men: America Mercenaries And Entrepreneurs in Central America 1880-1930* (The University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 35.

thirty more, and operated an extensive railway system linking its various plantations and ports.⁴⁶

The United Fruit fleet gave the company a foothold in passenger services connecting New Orleans to Central America.⁴⁷ The company continued to grow, and the United Fruit Company absorbed its competitors, among them Cayamel Fruit. The founder of Cayamel Fruit was a Russian-Jewish immigrant named Samuel Zemurray. Cayamel operated only in Honduras, but the company had extensive numbers of plantations and railways.⁴⁸ The 1929 merger of the two companies made Zemurray the largest shareholder in United Fruit.⁴⁹ During the Depression, he took full control of the company and personally directed operations.⁵⁰ Under his steerage, the United Fruit Company workers traveled to New Orleans for health visits, and soon the upper-class citizens in those countries also started to come to New Orleans for medical treatment. The elites started sending their sons to schools in New Orleans, ranging from high school through undergraduate and graduate university. Some of these children found work in their chosen professions in New Orleans.

One of the United Fruit Company's ports was Puerto Cabezas in Nicaragua, a company town through which most of United Fruits' products were shipped to New Orleans. Many of its citizens moved back and forth between Puerto Cabezas and New Orleans, tightening the connection between the two cities. One Puerto Cabezas native, Norma Bustamente, moved to New Orleans in 1952.

She remembers that there was a lot of contact in Puerto Cabezas between New Orleans and her hometown because of the United Fruit Company.⁵¹ Her father had come to New Orleans

⁴⁶ Stacey May, *The United Fruit Company in Latin America*, Ayer Co Pub November, 1976, 18.

⁴⁷ May, 18-19.

⁴⁸ Langley and Schoonover, 163.

⁴⁹ Langley and Schoonover, 164-165.

⁵⁰ Thomas McCann, *An American Company: The Tragedy of United Fruit* (New York: Crown Publisher's Inc., 1988) 21-22.

⁵¹ Norma Bustamente, Beatrice Rodriguez Owsley collection, Earl K Long Library of New Orleans

The Owsley collection is a series of interviews done by Beatrice Rodriguez Owsley, an archivist who worked for the University of New Orleans. Owsley interviewed members of the local Hispanic community as well as Anglo

to study dentistry here. She and her family also came to vacation here, and they had many friends.⁵² She liked the American city because she knew many people from Nicaragua who were now living in New Orleans. Simultaneously, she and her family were able to make American friends through the United Fruit Company. For Nora Bustamente, there was very little cultural clash moving from Puerto Cabezas to New Orleans. American United Fruit Company workers, stationed in Puerto Cabezas, had built homes that resembled those in New Orleans' uptown area, especially the Shotgun style. The company commissaries looked like New Orleans' grocery stores, and when her family moved to New Orleans, her diet hardly changed at all. She did not feel any discrimination for being Latina.

The area that the Bustamentes lived in was upper middle-class, underlining the point that Spanish Americans were not segregated to a single section of the city and were able to make a successful living. Her family lived uptown on Napoleon and General Pershing. The neighborhood back then was mostly white and had few Latinos.⁵³

Like Norma Bustamente, many of the natives shared a common religion with the Spanish newcomers - Catholicism. Latin Americans in New Orleans only found one Spanish-language mass, which was at Saint Teresa of Avila Church, located at 1404 Erato Street. According to Norma Bustamente, in the 1950s everyone who spoke Spanish went there. This made Saint Teresa a meeting place for Latin immigrants, from all nationalities and classes.

The Latino acceptance of Saint Teresa of Avila Church in the 1950s is in stark contrast to the rejection of Our Lady of Guadalupe in the early part of the twentieth century. Maybe the reason for the lack of interest in Our Lady of Guadalupe in 1918 is connected to where the Hispanics were traveling from. The majority of Latin Americans in New Orleans from 1910 to

New Orleanians who work with Hispanics. The Files include photos, correspondence, transcripts, and miscellany.

⁵² Norma Bustamente, 2.

⁵³ Bustamente, 3-4.

1920 were Mexicans.⁵⁴ The Mexican revolution of 1910 and the chaos that followed forced many Mexicans to emigrate.⁵⁵ As a result, Mexico's elite immigrated to New Orleans because of its various shipping links to the Mexican ports Veracruz, Tabasco, and Campeche.⁵⁶ They mostly had arrived on ships from Mexico's coastal cities, but a fair number could have arrived from the Southwest, where the Mexican population had to endure segregation even in Catholic churches. In contrast, the majority of the Latin community in the 1940s and 1950s had been Central Americans whose contact with the United States, due to business interests through the United Fruit Company, had been more positive. They also would have felt easier navigating New Orleans' racial climate. They had no fear of being segregated and were comfortable associating with other Latin Americans.

By the forties and fifties, a small Hispanic community in New Orleans had formed that looked drastically different from those found in other parts of the United States. The New Orleans Latin American community was small. The census for 1940 showed a total population of 1,643 Latin Americans. Since the census only listed foreign-born residents, it undercounted the actual Latin population. Central Americans made up the majority with 818 people, Mexicans numbered 587 and Cuban and other West Indians were 238.⁵⁷ The cultural and business climates of the city fostered the Latin community's growth since it helped New Orleans' increasing trade with Latin America. Thus, for the Hispanic community in New Orleans, the forties and fifties were prosperous years as middle-class to upper-class Latin Americans settled in New Orleans. As a result, a small but prosperous colony of Latin Americans developed. Being such a small community with jobs that did not interfere with Anglos' employment opportunities meant that the Spanish Americans were able to live peaceably alongside the larger New Orleans' society.

⁵⁴ Painter, 157.

⁵⁵ Weise, 754

⁵⁶ Ibid,

⁵⁷ Painter, 157

Most of what we know about Latin Americans in New Orleans during the forties and fifties' sociology stems from the thesis research of Norman Painter. Norman Painter had previous contact with Latin Americans in Texas and was a member of the National Honorary Hispanic Society. He came to New Orleans to study at Tulane and presented this study as his thesis for his masters in sociology.⁵⁸ It currently is the oldest academic study on Hispanics in 20th century New Orleans. He concluded that New Orleans society was very open to the Hispanic presence. Thus, we know that the economy placed little to no restraint on Latin Americans, regardless if they were professionals or blue collar workers. For example, one of Painter's interviewees stated that "the first job I had was clerical as were the others. It was offered to me by an American friend. I have had three jobs and each time I left of my own will to take a better job."⁵⁹ The man interviewed went through several jobs, such as selling magazines, working as an export manager for a wholesale drug company, working with a shipping company, and ultimately opening his own freight business. Another interviewee did consular work for a shipping company and also ultimately opened his own export business. Both gentlemen were able to work and move up the business ladder with little to no restraint.⁶⁰

Easy access to jobs in the export trade or their relative freedom in establishing their own businesses meant that the Latin Americans in New Orleans did not displace native workers, and the small numbers of Latinos allowed them access denied other minorities in New Orleans or Latin Americans in other parts of the United States. Painter observed this as he said of the Latin American community in New Orleans in the forties, "They are not an economic threat to any native occupational category. On the contrary, they are themselves an economically diversified group. They are not a class but are members of many classes. They enter the economic hierarchy

⁵⁸ Painter, 174.

⁵⁹ Painter, 93.

⁶⁰ Painter, 95.

in New Orleans at all levels.”⁶¹ Not being limited to a class or a section of the city meant that Latinos and Anglos mixed and there was a high rate of intermarriage between Spanish Americans and native New Orleanians. Painter found the number of intermarriages as high as “thirty-eight percent.”⁶² The intermarriage between Hispanics and the native ethnic groups in New Orleans is nothing new. Since colonial times, intermarriage between various Hispanic groups has allowed New Orleans to absorb its Latin population. Rafael Delgadillo’s thesis rightly compares the disappearance of Buenos Aires’ black community to the routine absorption of Latinos into New Orleans population.⁶³ In both cases, a small minority population is absorbed through intermarriage into the larger population. Once the minority population is completely assimilated, it is soon forgotten and its historical role is also largely forgotten. This easy assimilation meant that Latin Americans identified with the “white rather than the colored element in New Orleans.”⁶⁴

An example of intermarriage was David Egudin. He benefited from living in New Orleans in more than one way. Besides functioning as a liaison between the Latin and Anglo communities, he also benefited from being able to attend universities in the United States. David Egudin himself was the product of assimilation. His father, an Anglo-American, worked for the Panama Canal Company and married a Panamanian woman. He wanted his son to have an American education and found it easiest to send him to New Orleans because of the shipping lines which linked Panama and New Orleans. Latinos were also assimilating in New Orleans’ schools and universities. Hispanic students like David Egudin had graduated from schools in New Orleans. Egudin went to New York University and received a master’s in Spanish and Portuguese languages, but since he already had connections with New Orleans he returned and

⁶¹ Painter, 99.

⁶² Painter, 127.

⁶³ Delgadillo, 24.

⁶⁴ Painter, 54.

got a job at Oschner Hospital as a translator. Oschner attracted a lot of wealthy people from Latin America, including presidents, entertainers, and businessmen.

Egudin remembered that one weekend a man came in without an appointment. The man did not speak English, and Egudin was called in to interpret. Upon realizing that the patient, Carlos Andres Perez, was the President of Venezuela, David quickly called Dr. Alton Oschner and had the president admitted right away. Egudin later received Venezuela's medal of Miranda third class. Dr. Oschner and the surgeons attending the President received the order of Miranda first class. Egudin also was promoted to head interpreter at Oschner hospital. At that time, Oschner had a staff of seventeen translators to help with the patients coming from Latin America. David also helped another patient, the wife of a Colonel in the then-military government of Panama, who was happy to see a fellow Panamanian. When Egudin returned to Panama a year later to see his parents, he contacted the Colonel, who received him and made him Honorary Consul of the Republic of Panama to New Orleans. He received his appointment at the Cabildo and the Lt. Governor of Louisiana and other consulates were there.⁶⁵

While Egudin's experiences are somewhat unique, they represent the fact that many people in New Orleans' Latin American community gained status and prestige by placing themselves as brokers between the wealthy in their native regions and the American system. This also showed that in the late seventies New Orleans still benefited by providing services to Latin America's elite. This relationship in some ways still lingers.

David Egudin is but one of many children of these professional Latin individuals who needed schools that could teach their children English as well as important technical services lacking in Latin America, such as medicine, engineering and various other graduate programs. Thirty-six percent of Latin immigrants who came to New Orleans in the 1940s stated that it was for educational reasons. One respondent said, "I came here because of the superior ranking of the

⁶⁵ David Egudin, interviewed by author February, 2 2009.

Tulane medical school.”⁶⁶ Luis Adam Nazario had the same motivation, coming to New Orleans from Puerto Rico to study at Tulane’s School of Social Work in 1943.⁶⁷ The children of these professional individuals either stayed in New Orleans and found work in the import and export trade or returned to Latin America with a favorable impression of New Orleans. From the forties to the seventies, Latinos continued to travel to New Orleans for educational reasons. They even had their own fraternity.

Apparently, both white Anglos and Hispanics in the mid-20th century preferred to interpret Hispanics as white. It should be obvious why the Matas family would prefer to enjoy the rights that white people experience. But why did the New Orleans whites also prefer assimilation? It should be noted that most of the Latinos that arrived in New Orleans in the 1940s and 1950s were educated, pale-skinned,⁶⁸ and arriving in small numbers from multiple countries. They were also overwhelmingly Catholic. Since they could easily be assimilated in such small numbers and many already spoke English, white New Orleans really could see few differences between the Hispanics and themselves. However, even with white skin, if they had arrived in large numbers and from only one country, it would have been much easier to see them as a separate ethnic group. The Latinos’ diversity also kept them from clustering together.

Besides being culturally diverse and small in number, Latin Americans in New Orleans in the 1940s and 1950s were also a remarkably well-educated group. Their college life was a microcosm of the Hispanic immigrant experience from the forties and fifties. A perfect example is Phi Iota Alpha, a Latin fraternity founded at Tulane in 1932. The organization’s numbers were small, merely thirteen. The majority were medical students, but one was a law student, a natural consequence of the Latin professional class immigrating to New Orleans. One also finds

⁶⁶ Painter, 15.

⁶⁷ Nazario, 12.

⁶⁸ Photos in the Tulane yearbooks and Dr. Julie Weise also had photos that showed that they were rather fair 749-750.

assimilation among the students. The Latin American fraternity lasted until 1955, with ten to thirteen members only. After 1955, the fraternity was no longer listed on Tulane's student handbooks or yearbooks.⁶⁹ Latin students now appeared as members of the traditional fraternities, such as Pi Kappa Alpha and Delta,⁷⁰ implying that assimilation was the reason for the demise of the Latin fraternity. The disappearance of the fraternity at Tulane showed that the Latin Americans in New Orleans were becoming socially accepted in the city's best schools. In spite of the city's open attitude to the Latin arrivals, many were homesick and appreciated being able to form organizations such as Phi Iota Alpha, where they could speak Spanish and associate with people with similar backgrounds.⁷¹ But, ultimately, they merged with the larger community, leaving homesickness behind.

These new immigrants spread out across the entire city. The small size of the Latin American population and its relative prosperity meant that they could live in various neighborhoods. The Latin American population remained spread throughout the city rather than cloistered into tiny neighborhoods. This was because they were not limited to a single economic class or nationality.

In this early period, Latin Americans lived in areas they could afford, which varied according to the jobs they held. Latin Americans were too few in numbers then to create an enclave. One student, Adam Nazario, found a large house on 924 Broadway, and the lady who owned the house had no problem renting to him and his family. Nazario and his family were surprised by how cheap the house was and were able to pay for it by taking in boarders, both Anglos and Latinos, from the University. Their house became a meeting place for American and Latin American students from Loyola, Tulane, and even Louisiana State University.⁷² The house

⁶⁹ Tulane yearbook 1955, Jones Hall special collections.

⁷⁰ Tulane Handbook University Archives Jones Hall Special collections

⁷¹ Tulane yearbook 1940.

⁷² Nazario, 85.

became a stomping ground for Puerto Rican students in the Tulane School of Social Work as well as Latin American soldiers going off to Europe to fight in World War II.

CUBAN REFUGEES AND THE COLD WAR

However, the Latin American presence in New Orleans would not always be so well hidden. A new group would broaden the scope of the Latin American community in New Orleans. This time frame would also see the start of Hispanic neighborhoods, but these areas could hardly be called Hispanic enclaves, since they were checkered with Latin stores and homes, intermingled with Anglo American businesses and houses. These changes began with the arrival of Cuban refugees after the 1959 Cuban Revolution. In some ways, the arrival of the Cubans was similar to the arrival of other Latin Americans in New Orleans. The early Cuban émigrés were middle to upper-middle class and were mostly white. In his study of the early Cubans arriving in New Orleans, Dr. Manuel Caraballo in “A Socio-Psychological Study of Acculturation/Assimilation: Cubans in New Orleans” found that most Cubans that settled in New Orleans between 1960 and 1970 were from the country’s provinces of Camaguey, Las Villas, or Pinar Del Rio.⁷³ This meant that the refugees were used to smaller towns and cities. New Orleans was comparable in size to what they had been accustomed to. The other factor was their high level of education. Thirty-nine percent had attended a university and another twenty-two had some technical or formal training.⁷⁴ This would help the exiles adjust to New Orleans. The difference was this group was newly destitute and had no connection to the business environment in New Orleans. They also presented as a large group of people outside of the Central American sector arriving in large numbers in a short period of time. Plus, as a Catholic priest said of the

⁷³Manuel Caraballo, “A Socio-Psychological Study of Acculturation/Assimilation: Cubans in New Orleans”, (PhD dissertation). University of New Orleans Library, 1970 129.

⁷⁴ Caraballo, 134.

Cubans, “they had a trip with no return,”⁷⁵ and thus for the foreseeable future were going to be a part of New Orleans. In 1960, 8,419 Latin Americans settled as immigrants in New Orleans. The figures for Cubans are harder to find though Mrs. Elise Cerniglia, Executive Director of the Catholic Cuban Center, stated that there were over twelve thousand Cubans living in New Orleans in 1970.⁷⁶ Other figures on Latin American immigrants were collected by William King, who was commissioned by the city of New Orleans to study the needs of the city’s Spanish speaking population. This report was entitled “You thought New Orleans was French Guess Again! Spanish Is Heard all Over” and was the most complete study of that time.⁷⁷ It also offered suggestions on ways the city government could improve the Latinos’ situation. The report suggested that the city should hire bilingual police officers and City Hall employees. It was also suggested that the regulations and services should also be available in Spanish. Sadly, however, few to none of the recommendations of the report were permanently placed into effect. The King report, however, remains valuable in that it gives later generations an idea of how large the Latin community was, how spread out, and how culturally diversified it was.

William King interviewed community leaders and those working with the Hispanic population in New Orleans. The King Report documents Latinos coming to New Orleans from all over Central and South America. His report showed that, while Latin Americans made up an estimated fifteen percent of the population of Orleans Parish, the larger Latin community was still not a homogenous group. Hondurans were the largest group and Cubans were the second largest group as a result of the United States federal resettlement program resulting from the Cuban Revolution. While the King Report is a valuable picture into the Latin community in

⁷⁵ Roxana Saa Stein, “Urban Latins A Fictional Community in New Orleans, M.A. Thesis,” University of New Orleans, May 1976 58.

⁷⁶ William King, “You thought New Orleans was French Guess Again Spanish is heard all over: A report on the Spanish speaking community in New Orleans,” A special report of the Human Relations committee, New Orleans December 1970, 1.

⁷⁷ King, 24.

1970, the estimates were collected before the results of the 1970 census were published. The results of the 1970 census were much lower than King had anticipated; the census placed the number of Latin Americans at 26,408 and 12,294 in Jefferson Parish⁷⁸

Estimate of Latin American Population in the New Orleans Area, 1970

| <i>Country of Origin</i> | <i>Consulate Estimate</i> |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Honduras | 28,000 |
| Cuba | 15,000 |
| Puerto Rico | 7,000 |
| Guatemala | 7,000 |
| Nicaragua | 6,000 |
| Panamá | 1,200 |
| Other | 1,210 |

⁷⁹

Comparison of Estimate of Latin American Population by Parish with 1970 Census records

| <i>Parish</i> | <i>Latin American Population</i> | <i>1970 Census</i> |
|---------------|----------------------------------|--------------------|
| Jefferson | 8,900 | 12,294 |
| Orleans | 97,600 | 26,408 |

⁸⁰

Cubans had some unique problems to contend with, especially when compared with earlier Latin immigrants in New Orleans. Earlier groups were able to quietly blend in. However, the Cubans who arrived in the 1960s and later 1970s needed government aid in order to reestablish themselves. This drew a negative response from citizens of New Orleans who did not want Cuban children in their schools, which led to the establishment of ESL programs. The Cubans, especially during the Mariel boatlift in 1980, received a great deal of press, some of which was negative. The problem with the Marelitos was the growing reputation that they were

⁷⁸ Faust, 23-24.

⁷⁹ King, 3.

The Estimates by the King Report were obtained from a mixture of the Catholic Cuban Center, consular estimates, and radio station WMJR New Orleans first Spanish radio station . The King report was done before the 1970 census was available. According to the 1970 census there were only 26, 408 Hispanics in Orleans and 12, 294 in Jefferson Parish.

⁸⁰ King, 4.

all either criminals or mentally ill. Those Marelitos with family members in New Orleans found the adjustment easier, but those who came to New Orleans without anyone to take them in soon found themselves facing a suspicious Cuban as well as Anglo community, suspicious of these new arrivals as possible criminals.⁸¹ The Marelitos group would be the last major arrival of Latin Americans en masse to New Orleans until after Katrina in 2005.

The next twenty-five years saw little to no growth in the Hispanic population in metropolitan New Orleans. The economic malaise of the eighties and nineties in New Orleans, caused by the drop in oil prices to ten dollars a barrel,⁸² slowed and reversed the flow of Hispanics moving in the metropolitan area. The most optimistic development during this time period for the Hispanic community was that it was a time of consolidation and assimilation.

These new arrivals, predominantly Cuban but other Latin nationalities as well, needed help adjusting to a new language, as did their children. This created a new situation for the city of New Orleans. The city's educational institutions tried in a haphazard way to deal with the needs of the new students. The views of the teachers and administrators can be summed up by a member of the central administration for the Orleans public school system. He said, "It is true that we have to do something for these people but we have to do something for our own people."⁸³ Orleans Parish School Board started English as a Second Language programs in seventeen schools, spread throughout the parish. The figures for the 1970-71 school year stated that a thousand students were enrolled in the Orleans Parish ESL program.⁸⁴ There were two hundred students in Bienville, a school that served the Parkchester area, and one hundred and thirty children who attended Bradley. In both cases, the majority of the students were Cubans. The main points of entry for Central American school-age children were Laurel-McDonogh No.

⁸¹ David Gutierrez, *The Columbia History of Latinos in the United States since 1960*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004, 164-165.

⁸² Lewis, 122.

⁸³ King, 19.

⁸⁴ King, 17.

1, Live Oak, and Andrew Jackson schools, which served the Irish Channel area.⁸⁵

The growth and visibility of a Latin American community in New Orleans that needed social services such as bilingual education resulted in racial and ethnic friction. The Latin American population began to be viewed with suspicion if not outright antagonism. The Anglo population was resentful of the Cuban children in the Bienville school, as well as increasingly hostile to the growing Cuban population in New Orleans.⁸⁶ However, even at its worst, the city of New Orleans was not a site for much discriminatory treatment of Latin Americans, and it also did not experience many Latino civil rights protests, as many other cities in the United States experienced in the sixties and seventies. Something of the positive relationship between the two ethnic groups remained from the forties, and the Latinos and Anglos were able to live alongside each other, even when they were irritating each other.

The question arises, again, as to why the city of New Orleans was so accepting of Spanish Americans. Using the figures in the King Report, the community of Latinos in the seventies had grown to fifteen percent of the population, so it can no longer be argued that the group was small enough to be ignored. So what made New Orleans unique? First, Latinos in New Orleans already had a history of identifying with white Anglos. The new arrivals, to a certain extent, continued this. This is one of the reasons why when whites fled New Orleans for Jefferson Parish, Latinos joined them, which leads to a second point. Latinos, who chose not to identify with African-Americans, saw how African-Americans were treated and saw their own situation as being comparatively better and thus easier to accept. Initially, the Cuban refugees were housed alongside the African-Americans. Since most of the Cubans were newly destitute, federal programs and Catholic services aided the Cuban exiles in New Orleans. Many of the Cubans were settled in lower-income apartments called the Parkchester on 4336 Paris and

⁸⁵ King, 18.

⁸⁶ King, 9.

Mirabeau. The Parkchester thus became a starting point for many of the early Cuban refugees. The Parkchester apartment complex resembled a low-income housing project more than a private housing complex.⁸⁷ The complex had 1,250 apartments and was made up of twelve percent or between one hundred or a hundred and twenty-seven Cuban families and the rest were African-American.⁸⁸ It was here that the Cubans learned of the extent and nature of racism in New Orleans.

The Cubans housed in the Parkchester did not want to be linked to African-Americans. One Cuban family only stayed a month in the Parkchester because the man's wife had her bag stolen while she was waiting at the bus stop. They were able to borrow money from a relative who had arrived later, and the family moved out of the Parkchester to an apartment in Mid-City.⁸⁹ Tom Higgins, an NOPD officer, when questioned by William King, had responded, "Parkchester was a rapidly deteriorating area with high incidence of petty crimes. Presently about one-half of the apartments are livable. In another year, it will be totally substandard."⁹⁰ The situation became bleaker as New Orleans received a record two hundred Cubans a month for most of 1970 due to federal resettlement efforts.⁹¹ The Cubans, once in New Orleans and in the Parkchester, were left mostly on their own. Sister Carla, a Catholic nun working with newly arriving Cubans, described the Cubans in the Parkchester as on "welfare and after paying rent. They have little money for other living expenses. The rent is high; maintenance is poor."⁹² Mr. Uribe, a resident of Parkchester, said the only assistance was twenty-five dollars a week from the Catholic Cuban Center. Mrs. Cerniglia has reported that the Catholic organization spent between four to five

⁸⁷King, 25.

⁸⁸King, 10.

⁸⁹ Marina Khan M, "Immigration: Problems of assimilation and Acculturation of Latin's in New Orleans", M.A, thesis University of New Orleans Earl K Long library 1977, 72.

⁹⁰King, 24.

⁹¹ King, 26

⁹² Ibid,

hundred dollars in assistance to each family.⁹³ While newly arriving Cubans were struggling in the Parkchester, Hondurans, Ecuadorians and Cubans who had arrived earlier settled in the Irish Channel, where living conditions were better than the Parkchester. Yet, housing was still rundown or in need of repair. The rent for most homes was seventy, eighty, or ninety dollars per month.⁹⁴ This, however, represented a step forward as most renters had previously lived in the St. Thomas housing project. Donald Levy of Total Community Action responded that the “Latin Americans moved out of the St. Thomas housing project because they don’t want to live with blacks because they feel it would be a social stigma.”⁹⁵

“I lived with my uncle and aunt by Melpomene and Carondelet,” a man identified only as Jose reported. He thought the neighborhood was horrid, and stated that “I was a little disappointed because I had heard so much about the United States.”⁹⁶ The other parts of New Orleans that had a large Latin American presence were the Elysian-Gentilly and Mid-City areas. The Elysian-Gentilly area was one of the earliest places where Cuban exiles settled in the early 1960s. They lived in apartments, which they called Paillet-Land after the name of the owners of the complex. Mid-City also featured a mixture of Latin American businesses and residents. The difference between the two areas is that Mid-City was not a starting point for new arrivals. Rather, it was for established Latin American residents in the area. In the seventies, the Mid-City area was middle to lower class and filled with various nationalities.

The Latin American presence in areas throughout the city helped shape New Orleanians’ attitudes toward Latinos. Likewise, the temporary “ghetto-ization” of the more desperate arrivals among poor blacks meant that New Orleans’ white community received less exposure to the poorest of the Latin immigrants. The latter group’s experience being housed among the city’s

⁹³ King, 24.

⁹⁴ King, 10.

⁹⁵ King, 24.

⁹⁶ Khan, 98.

poorest, residents provided these Latin Americans extra incentive for moving into other neighborhoods. Even when the Latin people moved out of Orleans Parish to the suburbs, they gathered around the church, a concept fully comprehensible to white Anglos who were also leaving Orleans Parish.

SPANISH AMERICAN SUBURBANIZATION

The sixties and later the seventies saw no protests or creation of civil rights groups for Latin Americans. This was unlike New Mexico, where armed conflict arose over land grants lost by Spanish-Americans to Anglo landowners. In the same year, 1967, the Mexican American Youth Organization was founded to foster cultural pride and militancy “against the gringo.”⁹⁷ Two years later, the members in the movement began to call themselves the Chicanos instead Mexicans, or Spanish-Americans.⁹⁸ The charismatic leader of this new movement, Cesar Chavez, inspired thousands of students to take pride in their heritage.⁹⁹

The truth was that Latin Americans in the sixties and seventies were still, as Painter said in 1949, a part of the “dominant white caste in the city of New Orleans.”¹⁰⁰ Yet, as more Latin Americans entered the city, the relationship between Anglos and Latinos grew strained. David Egudin noticed that Latin American clerks in downtown stores would not speak Spanish unless they knew their customers were Latin. Even the King report recognized the strained relationship, explaining to its readers that “it should be realized, however, that the Latin American population in New Orleans is not just an immigrant group or recent refugees, but is also second, third and fourth generation residents long assimilated throughout the community.”¹⁰¹ Thus, we had multiple waves in New Orleans’ Latin American community. It included the students and

⁹⁷ Rodriguez, 202-203.

⁹⁸ Ibid,

⁹⁹ Rodriguez, 206.

¹⁰⁰ Painter, 118.

¹⁰¹ King, 10.

wealthy to middle class individuals from Central America, the Cuban émigrés, and numerous individuals from other countries.

The median income for Orleans and Jefferson Parishes were 7,445 and 10,235 dollars, respectively. In the 1970 census, the Latin American community exceeded the median income in Orleans and Jefferson Parishes. The Latin American community had prospered. When compared to national levels, the Latin Americans in New Orleans had incomes higher than national levels for Latin Americans in the country.¹⁰² This needs to be clarified as it surprised people when the census came out in the early seventies. The results showed a prosperous community in an area of the country that most people did not believe contained any Latinos. The 1970 census showed that Latin Americans in New Orleans had an educational level higher than those in Los Angeles, Miami and New York City. The results could have been tainted by the fact that in those locations the questionnaires were sent in Spanish. This confirms the impression that New Orleans had few Latin American residents, since the federal government did not feel the need to provide census forms in Spanish to the people of the city. Only English language questionnaires were distributed in New Orleans. Thus, the results most likely only reflect those Latin Americans who were more established.¹⁰³

In order to buy a home, a major status symbol in the Hispanic community as with many other immigrants coming to the United States, they would have to do so in Jefferson Parish. The chance of having a new home outweighed the inconvenience of leaving Orleans Parish. Latinos, like Anglos, were leaving the city for the surrounding suburbs. The reasons Latinos gave for leaving New Orleans for the suburbs were similar to those that Anglo-Americans would have given for moving to Jefferson Parish. Both groups found affordable homes in better conditions

¹⁰² Eric Paul Faust, "Hispanics in New Orleans: A comparative study in diversity between 1970 and 1990", B.A. thesis Tulane Jones Hall 1993, 37.

¹⁰³ Roxana S. Stein, "Urban Latins A Fictional Community in New Orleans, M.A. Thesis.," University of New Orleans, May 1976 61-62.

than they could in New Orleans. The Hispanic community had largely abandoned the old areas in Orleans Parish and resettled in Jefferson Parish. Yamilet Yrma, “Yami,” a Cuban-American teacher, had lived with her family in a house in Orleans Parish. The area was around the Lakefront, close to the University of New Orleans. They sold their home and moved to Jefferson after her father retired. The reason she gave for moving was that Jefferson Parish had become safer.¹⁰⁴ The only Hispanics coming in from outside the metropolitan area were those who already had family connections to the metropolitan area and because of the population shift, they tended to settle in Jefferson Parish. The area around Redwood and Bobbi Village in Kenner became the most concentrated area of Hispanics in the metropolitan area.

The area around Redwood spawned home ownership as residents of the apartments tended to save money to either open businesses in the area or save for a home. The rise in home ownership was centered on Loyola Drive in Kenner and parts of Metairie. The homes were modest, yet the residents were able to improve on older homes largely abandoned by Anglo-Americans. This population was able to support businesses largely catering to their needs, such as beauty shops and grocery stores. The majority of the businesses owners were from various Hispanic nationalities.

What has not been clear is to what extent racism also fueled the move. It has been well documented that many groups of whites participated in what is now known as white flight, leaving the cores of the cities across the nation to avoid living by African-Americans. It is not clear to what extent Latinos in New Orleans followed the exact same pattern, because it is not clear they agreed with some white Anglos’ racist attitudes or if they merely made a practical decision to distance themselves from poor black neighborhoods, expensive housing as did most whites. It is clear, however, that other groups throughout the country have made conscious decisions to distance themselves from African Americans. The Cubans in Miami did just that, as

¹⁰⁴ Yamilet Yrma “Yami”, interviewed by author, May 15, 2009.

did the Chinese in Mississippi and the Mexicans in Texas. In the case of Miami, a group of Hispanics moved into a southern city, displacing the African-American population.¹⁰⁵ Cubans drastically altered the economy of Miami. In doing so, African-American entrepreneurship steadily declined. This could be measured in the amount of SBA loans given in Miami-Dade County. From 1968 to 1980, Cubans received forty-six percent of those loans compared to six percent for African-Americans. As of 2001, ninety percent of SBA loans in Miami-Dade County go to Cubans. An African-American who recently had moved to Miami noted that “Cubans in Miami have adopted a southern mentality.”¹⁰⁶ The case of the Mississippi Delta Chinese shows how other groups in the 1970s felt about racial segregation. A small minority of Chinese in the Mississippi Delta chose to follow whites and enrolled their children in private academies when public schools were desegregated.¹⁰⁷ Both groups identified with whites and made real efforts at maintaining a racial distance from African-Americans.

Regardless of how New Orleans’ Hispanics felt about African Americans, the Latin American community sought growth and prosperity, and Jefferson Parish seemed to be a natural outlet from the confines of New Orleans. Jefferson Parish in the 1950s had decided to drain the swamplands and enclose the parish within its own levee system. Then they expanded Moisant Airfield (which became New Orleans International Airport) and developed the region’s most important commercial district along Veterans Memorial Highway.¹⁰⁸ The influx of people into Jefferson Parish also contributed to the change in economics as people naturally spent their

¹⁰⁵ McCain Paula, Niambi M. Carter, Victoria M. DeFrancesco Soto, Monique L. Lyle Jeffery D. Graynaviski, Shala C. Nunnally Thomas J. Scotto, J. Alan Kendrick, Gerald F. Lackey, Kendra Davenport Cotton “Racial Distancing in a Southern city Latino immigrants view of Blacks Americans”, *The Journal of politics* Vol 68 No 3 Aug 2006 571-584 Cambridge University Press on behalf of the Southern political Science Association.

¹⁰⁶ Mohl Raymond, “On The Edge: Blacks and Hispanics in Metropolitan Miami since 1959”, *The Florida Historical Quarterly* Vol 69 No. 1 (July 1990), 37-56 Florida Historical Society.

¹⁰⁷ McCain Paula, Niambi M. Carter, Victoria M. DeFrancesco Soto, Monique L. Lyle Jeffery D. Graynaviski, Shala C. Nunnally Thomas J. Scotto, J. Alan Kendrick, Gerald F. Lackey, Kendra Davenport, 571-584.

¹⁰⁸ Lweis, 78.

money close to where they lived.¹⁰⁹

Jefferson Parish grew at an amazing rate. Kenner, Jefferson's largest city, grew from 5,535 in 1950 to 17,037 in 1960, a two hundred and seven percent rate of growth. In 1970, Kenner had grown to 29,858 people and Jefferson Parish had become associated with prosperity and was seen as a place where one could enjoy the amenities of the city without its major problems.¹¹⁰ One of the factors was that African-Americans were discouraged by social and economic measures, including suburban housing developments that were "restricted." That is, the houses could only be sold to buyers classified as "white."¹¹¹ The censuses of 1980 and 1990 show that Jefferson Parish's Hispanic community also grew, much to the detriment of New Orleans.

Hispanic Presence in Orleans and Jefferson Parishes, 1980-1990

| | 1960 Census | 1970 Census | 1980 Census | 1990 Census |
|------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Jefferson Parish | 545 | 12,294 | 21,772 | 26,611 |
| Orleans Parish | 3,964 | 26,408 | 19,226 | 17,238 |

¹¹²

The census as well as interviews demonstrated that Latin Americans started to regard Orleans Parish as economically stagnated and preferred the possibility of home ownership in Jefferson Parish. Orleans Parish from 1970 to 2000 lost eleven percent of its Hispanic population while Jefferson Parish gained fifteen percent at the same time. Orleans Parish's overall population declined by 10.9 percent in the eighties, while Hispanic population declined by one hundred and three percent.¹¹³ Jefferson Parish saw an overall population decline of one percent, but a Hispanic increase of twenty-two percent.¹¹⁴

Hispanics in Jefferson Parish had spread throughout the entire parish. Latin Americans

¹⁰⁹ Lewis, 85.

¹¹⁰ Faust, 22.

¹¹¹ Lewis, 79.

¹¹² Faust, 23-24.

¹¹³ Faust, 24.

¹¹⁴ Faust, 61.

were still mirroring Anglo-Americans views and mobility, both economically and socially. This caused dual Latin American communities, one in Orleans Parish and the other in Jefferson Parish. Those that lived in Jefferson Parish at first returned to the old neighborhoods to buy groceries in the Union Supermarket on Tulane Avenue, to eat at the Cuban restaurant Garces in Mid-City, and shop at the Latin record store on Magazine Street. Eventually, as the Orleans Parish Latin American population began to shrink, Latinos did their shopping in Jefferson Parish. Currently, Orleans Parish has only monuments, such as the statue to Jose Marti on the corner of Jefferson Davis and Banks Street and a stained glass window of Our Lady of Charity, the Patroness of Cuba, in the church of Our Lady of Guadalupe, that serve as reminders that Latin Americans had once lived in large numbers in Orleans Parish. North Rampart Street, are statues to Benito Juarez, the first Indian president of Mexico, Simon Bolivar, and Francisco Moran, a President of Honduras. These are the reminders of the Central American and Mexican populations of Orleans Parish. The Latin American businesses and restaurants have either folded or, in the case of the Union Supermarket, the branches in Kenner and the West bank have become the thriving part of the business.

The center of the new Jefferson Parish community would be based around two large apartment complexes called Redwood and Bobbi Village. The Redwood apartments became the new starting ground for many Hispanics. They were low-income housing that became a magnet for the Hispanic population leaving Orleans Parish and those just arriving. The apartments held a majority of Hispanic people who were Hondurans, Guatemalans, Cubans and other various nationalities. These apartments, until Katrina destroyed them in 2005, served as a stepping stone for many Hispanic families as they moved toward their American dream. Eunice Ferrer lived in the Redwood Apartments:

I came to New Orleans in 1970. I left Cuba in 1967. The reason we came to New Orleans was that my husband lost his job in 1969. A friend told him that Avondale was

hiring. The company then was recruiting workers in Miami. He applied for a job and he got it. He went on ahead and sent for us. He found an apartment in Kenner in a place called Redwood. Those apartments back then were nicer than they were in the eighties. They are here no longer. They got demolished due to the storm. But back then the place was nice. It had some Cubans, Guatemalans, Hondurans, and Americans living side by side without any problems. Kenner in the early seventies was a small town. The people were nice if you told them you were from Cuba or another place like that. It was like saying you were from Mars or something.¹¹⁵

They lived in Redwood for a while. The girls grew up surrounded by friends from other parts of Cuba and Central American children. They bought their home in Kenner on California Street in 1978 with the help of the government. “My daughter called it a HUD home. It was small and very inexpensive. We had to fix it up. We had help from our neighbors and friends who either had bought a home or still lived in Redwood.”

Eunice and her family attended St. Jerome Catholic Church, which now has two Spanish masses.

When we arrived in Kenner, we had no Spanish masses said. Me, my husband, and several other Cuban couples asked the priest if there was someone that could say mass for us in Spanish. The priest was a good man and, incredibly, he learned Spanish so he could we could have a mass in Spanish. He still says mass in Spanish in St. Jerome. He is not the only one. We have a father from Puerto Rico who says mass but for the longest time he was the only one who said mass in Spanish. I couldn’t believe that he was able to learn Spanish well enough to say the mass. This priest from St. Jerome, Father Dan, was an American.¹¹⁶ He saw that something had to be done for the Hispanics in the area. There were ten to twelve people that started to get together and pray in people’s homes. Then we started to get together in the church hall and when he saw us he decided to help us. We started to grow and attract Hispanics from all over Kenner and Metairie and as a result the congregation grew to five hundred members.¹¹⁷ St. Jerome church has also brought the American and Hispanic community together as we try to include Americans in our church events.

By the late seventies, a few more churches had Masses in Spanish, especially in the growing suburbs in Kenner and Metairie. Norma Bustamente had moved to Kenner in the late seventies and had become, along with Eunice Ferrer, a founding member of the Hispanic

¹¹⁵ Eunice Ferrer, interviewed by author, December 2008.

¹¹⁶ Bustamente, 10.

¹¹⁷ Bustamente, 10-11.

congregation of Saint Jerome. She remembers when St. Jerome started a festival as a way to raise money so the church could reach out to a Hispanic community that was dispersed and in transition in the metropolitan area. Father Pedro, a Cuban Priest who had graduated from LSU with a degree in communications, was in charge of the festival, called the Mensaje Festival.¹¹⁸ He was placed in charge of all communications related to Hispanics in the metropolitan area. This included radio, television and other forms of outreach for Hispanics, including the *Mensaje* magazine, a Catholic outreach magazine, which was just starting out. Norma remembers that,

In 1981, the archbishop wrote to the congregation that we had to contribute some monies to the programs. We had an idea of having a fair to raise the money needed for the programs.¹¹⁹ We went to New Orleans for assistance, but we really didn't get the help we needed. Eventually, we contacted Pura Cana who was working in Kenner's City Hall. She got us in touch with Mike Yenni and later with Aaron Broussard, who was then the Mayor of Kenner. We got the permits we needed and had the first fair in Butch Duhe Park.. The fair was the first of its kind in the metropolitan area. People from all over came and it was a success. Five thousand people attended.¹²⁰ We raised close to ten thousand dollars for Mensaje. Mensaje Festival's real success, however, was that it united the Hispanic community of New Orleans like never before. We were also able to show Americans our culture, music, and food. The success of the event forced us to move and again with the help of God and the politicians in Kenner we were able to get Jefferson Downs and we have been there for four years.¹²¹

In Nora Bustamente's words, the Mensaje Festival became a meeting place to see old friends and people who had moved to different parts of the metropolitan New Orleans area.¹²² The Mensaje Festival provided a focal point for a community that was dispersed and needing to hear its music and taste and smell the foods they left behind. The festival at its peak had four hundred workers and between ten to fourteen thousand attendees. The Festival also brought musical groups from Guatemala, Costa Rica and Honduras.¹²³ Mensaje had operating expenses of seventy thousand dollars and a few workers were employed for ten months out of the year.

¹¹⁸Bustamente, 11-13.

¹¹⁹ Bustamente, 13-14.

¹²⁰Bustamente, 11-13

¹²¹ Bustamente, 13-14.

¹²² Bustamente, 14.

¹²³ Bustamente, 15.

Special clubs used fundraising dinners to sponsor musical groups from their respective countries.¹²⁴ The Mensaje Festival promoted unity across national, class and regional lines. In later years, the festival was moved to Kenner's St. Jude Hospital. The festival sadly became a victim of its own success. The festival began to have gang¹²⁵ involvement and the prices that the food vendors charged were raised. In its last years, the Festival was moved to Airline Highway in Metairie and charged a fee to keep gangs out. The fear of gangs, admission costs, and higher food prices turned people away.¹²⁶ Katrina, however, caused its eventual demise.

Orleans Parish was well aware of the changes in the population and the relocation of Hispanics in Jefferson Parish. In their efforts to hold on to the Hispanics, however, the Orleans Parish government became aware of how much more Jefferson had to offer. The only lure Orleans could offer was government jobs. Beginning in the 1970s, New Orleans city government was, for the first time, electing African Americans into office. This new black-run government wanted to become truly multicultural and opened its doors to the Hispanic community. Mayor Ernest "Dutch" Morial was the first to try to bring Hispanics into public office. All politicians had ignored the Hispanic community in the past. The eighties would see overtures by both the new African-American political power structure in Orleans Parish and later the Anglo-American base in Jefferson Parish. Dutch Morial appointed Hispanics to largely symbolic offices, but, nonetheless, the overture was appreciated. The first appointment was Cuban-American Tony Naranjo to the newly created Office of Hispanic Affairs. In his second term, Morial created the Latin American Task Force, whose job was to increase awareness of city services for Hispanics.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Bustamente, 19.

¹²⁵ Chris Gray "Gang Expert Tells Of Kenner Problem," *Times-Picayune*, Thursday 15, 1996.

The gangs were located at the Redwood Apartments.

¹²⁶ Eunice Ferrer, interview.

¹²⁷ Bracken Mary Karen, "Restructuring the Boundaries: Hispanics in New Orleans, 1960-1990." Phd diss., University of New Mexico 1992. 149.

The nineteen members of the Task Force were a mixture of different Hispanic nationalities, races and political views. The report of the committee published in 1985 was similar to the King report in stating that the Hispanic community had been ignored for the past twenty years. Also, as with the King report, it was suggested that the city of New Orleans hire bilingual or Hispanic police officers. The city departments still lacked bilingual workers and adult ESL classes, The King report in 1970 had come to the same conclusion, and nothing was done with its recommendations. The Task Force's recommendations in 1985 were similarly ignored or soon forgotten. Dutch Morial blamed the failure of the recommendations being put into place on the Hispanic community.¹²⁸

Barthelemy continued Dutch Morial's trend in reaching out to Hispanics. He appointed Andres Garcia as his first Director of the Office of Hispanic Affairs and Romualdo "Romi" Gonzalez to head the International Committee of the city. Businessman Jose Sierra came to head the utilities office. The major difference between Dutch Morial and Sidney Barthelemy was that Morial tried to appoint Hispanics from different countries. Barthelemy appointed only Cubans. The last appointment, Jose Sierra, had to resign in 1988 following allegations that he mismanaged some of the city's investments.¹²⁹

In spite of these efforts, Orleans continued to lose Hispanics to Jefferson Parish. The twilight of the 1980s saw a major Orleans Parish voter drive headed by Sidney Barthelemy with its slogan: "Su voto es su voz."¹³⁰ The drive had the dual purpose of gaining a stronger base for Sidney Barthelemy and preparing for the 1990 census. In the last two previous censuses, the Hispanic community believed that people had been miscounted. In Jefferson Parish, the political activity was minor, especially given the fact that the Hispanic population had been rising since the seventies. The only political appointment of a Hispanic in Jefferson Parish was David

¹²⁸ Bracken, 151.

¹²⁹ Bracken, 165.

¹³⁰ Bracken, 171.

Figueroa, to the parish's Economic Development Commission in 1988.¹³¹ Regardless, the Latinos from Orleans Parish continued to flood Jefferson. The question, of course, is why? Orleans failed to understand what the Latino community wanted. The city government assumed they wanted political power. Actually, what the Latin community was looking for was economic opportunities, which were more available in Jefferson Parish.

While Orleans Parish struggled to help Hispanics make inroads into the political establishment, officials at the city and state levels sought to use the Hispanic community to reestablish New Orleans as the Gateway to the Americas. The New Orleans Hispanic community took up the idea and had some successes as well as failures. The first success was the convention Encuentro 88. It brought four hundred foreign and domestic companies to New Orleans.¹³² The second convention in 1989 was larger, with five hundred thirty-five conventioners and was followed by Carnival Interamericano. Those events were overshadowed by the tenth convention of the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. The national convention was addressed by then-President George Bush Sr. and left a favorable impression on important Hispanic business owners and leaders across the nation. *The Times-Picayune* wrote that "at a time when New Orleans finds itself approaching bankruptcy and oil, real estate and retail sales have plunged, Hispanics are selling New Orleans as a place to do business."¹³³ As the eighties came to a close, the preparations were made for the 1990 census. Community organizers and leaders said that the Hispanic population had increased in numbers in the metropolitan New Orleans area. Estimates produced by the International Trade Center had already put the Hispanic population in New Orleans as high as one hundred and fifty thousand inhabitants.¹³⁴

¹³¹ Ibid,

¹³² Bracken, 159.

¹³³ Bracken, 160.

¹³⁴ Bracken, 139.

NEW ORLEANS AND JEFFERSON PARISH

The results of the 1990 census were not what the city officials of New Orleans or the Hispanic community expected. In 1989, *The Times Picayune* published an article that said that, nationally, the Hispanic population was rising.¹³⁵ The results of the 1990 census showed that the Hispanic community in the greater metropolitan area of New Orleans was fifty-three thousand. The city of New Orleans was among several cities that demanded a recount, citing that larger percentages of Hispanics and African-Americans were not counted. While the Hispanic population increased nationally in the eighties by fifty-three percent, The New Orleans area lost people and made a modest gain of only six percent for Hispanics. This was in sharp contrast to the rest of the south that for the first time started to feel the influx of Hispanic immigrants. In Raymond Mohl's article about the 1990s, entitled "Globalization, Latinization and the Nuevo New South," he shows that the first time in its history, large numbers of Hispanics were moving into the South. The city of Atlanta saw its Hispanic population increase 370 percent, from 57,169 to 268,851 in ten years.¹³⁶ A surprising feature of this new immigration trend was that the destinations were not always the big cities in the south like Atlanta, but also smaller towns and cities where they previously had little to no Hispanic presence before, such as Huntsville and Decatur, Alabama.¹³⁷ The South's need for cheap labor and its low unemployment rates helped to fuel the immigration. Meanwhile, the only minor increases in the metropolitan New Orleans area were made in the suburbs. The Cuban population during this time also began to relocate to Miami. While many have stayed and become part of the local community, large numbers of Cubans moved to Miami to be closer to relatives and friends or for financial reasons. Cubans migrating to Miami was a national trend. As one study concluded, Cubans in Miami rarely move

¹³⁵ Joan Treadway, "Mid-City Mingling offers Latin Flavor," *Times-Picayune*, Monday August 26, 1991.

¹³⁶ Raymond Mohl "Globalization Latinization, and the Nuevo New South *Journal of the American Ethnic History* Vol. 22, (Summer 2003), 31-66, 39.

¹³⁷ Mohl, 41.

out. Those who did settle in different regions and cities are constantly on the move, and most return to Miami.¹³⁸ The factors for this migration to Miami, according to the study, are older Cubans who wanted to retire to Miami, lower income Cubans hoping to become successful in the Cuban enclave, and Cuban-Americans seeking to reconnect with their cultural heritage. The cities most affected were Chicago, Union City, New Jersey, and Los Angeles, but New Orleans had a higher rate of out-migration than those cities percentage-wise. This migration tended to shrink the cities' entire Hispanic communities.¹³⁹

Besides showing the loss of Hispanics in New Orleans, the 1990 census estimated that ten percent of the population of Kenner was Hispanic. Kenner had grown from a small town to a city of seventy-two thousand people. Its concentration of Hispanics resembled all previous ones in Orleans Parish. It was a mixture of nationalities and the majority of the people were Hondurans, followed by Mexicans, Cubans, Nicaraguans, Guatemalans, Puerto Ricans, Ecuadorians and Salvadorans.¹⁴⁰ While initially confined to the Redwood apartments and University City, the Hispanic population in Kenner had spread to all sections, including the wealthier neighborhoods of Kenner.¹⁴¹ A typical example would be a Honduran family in which the husband and wife worked two jobs for ten years to save up to buy their first home in University City for fifty-three thousand dollars. Then they would bring their older children from Honduras.¹⁴² When asked about Kenner's attraction for Hispanics, most people would be honest and tell you "they know Kenner is not glamorous, but they believe it's a good place to live."¹⁴³

The 2000 census showed the Hispanic population in the metropolitan area had declined further. Orleans Parish had a Hispanic population of three percent, having fallen from a high of

¹³⁸ Kevin McHugh, Ines M. Miyares and Emily Skop "The Magnetism of Miami: Paths in Cuban Migration" *Geographical Review*, Vol 87 NO. 4 Oct, 1997).

¹³⁹ Kevin McHugh, Ines M. Miyares and Emily Skop 510-511.

¹⁴⁰ Ana Ester Gershanik, "Hispanic Population in La. Decreased in 1990 census" *Times-Picayune* Sunday May 5, 1991.

¹⁴¹ Coleman Warner, "Hispanics in N.O. A Blend of Cultures," *Times-Picayune*, Sunday August 25, 1991.

¹⁴² Joan Treadway, "Casa Kenner" *Times-Picayune* Thursday April 21, 1994.

¹⁴³ Treadway. Casa Kenner.

fifteen percent in 1970.¹⁴⁴ The 2000 census established the number of Hispanics in Jefferson at seven percent.¹⁴⁵ Jefferson Parish had benefited from the shift in Hispanic population, but its growth was fueled at the expense of Orleans Parish. There was no major influx of Hispanics from outside the metropolitan area into Jefferson.

CONCLUSION

The Hispanic experience in New Orleans has been different from those in other parts of the United States. New Orleans in some ways represents a middle ground between the extremes of exclusion and oppression in the southwest and the meteoric rise and transformation of South Florida. The Hispanics in New Orleans adjusted to the needs of the city's economic and racial caste system. The adjustment was easy in some ways. Well into the mid-eighties, the majority of Hispanics coming from Central America to the United States originated in a region heavily populated by *mestizos*, a mixture of Spanish and Indian. Those who immigrated to New Orleans were primarily of European descent or were light-skinned Mestizos or mulattos. While there were cultural differences between white New Orleanian and Latinos, these did not interfere with the two groups intermarrying and pursuing their business interests. The economic interests of both groups were complementary in that the city benefited from trade with Central America. New Orleans was nations the entry point for most of the goods coming from the region.

This beneficial relationship, while strained and altered at various times, has never been broken. The first Latin Americans coming to New Orleans had a comparatively easy time, especially when compared with other areas such as the Southwest. They were affluent and had links to the city, either because of business interests or educational opportunities in New Orleans. Hispanic immigrants coming to New Orleans in the early sixties and seventies had a harder time,

¹⁴⁴ 2000 Census DemographicsNow Jefferson Parish library databases
<http://library.demographicsnow.com/AllocateOnline.srct>.

¹⁴⁵ 2000 Census DemographicsNow,

since they were political refugees with few connections to New Orleans. While they needed more services and assistance than previous Latin Americans coming into New Orleans, they still were allowed to live and pursue their business dealings and work unhindered. The rise of African-Americans' prominence in the city of New Orleans' government created change in that their conscious efforts to create political patronage and opportunities for Hispanics. These attempts at inclusion were dashed by the failure to follow the recommendations of both the Human relations Committee known as the King report and later The Latin American Task force. The failure to implement the recommendations can be blamed on both the city and the Hispanic communities, as the latter preferred assimilation to creating a separate ethnic group.

However, the Latin Americans did not want to assimilate with the same fervor as earlier groups. This was most evident in the Hispanics' attitude toward Spanish-Language masses. The earlier arrivals did not want to be segregated. As more Hispanics were drawn to the suburbs of Kenner and Metairie, the influx of Hispanics, mostly Cubans, were not bilingual. They clustered together and from this group a small congregation developed around St. Jerome's church and Redwood apartments became the nucleus of the Hispanic community in Kenner. This community was responsible for creating Mensaje, which was for a long time the most visible sign that the metropolitan area had a Latin American presence. Louisiana and metropolitan New Orleans will continue to see a gradual increase of Hispanics. Yet it will be at a far slower rate than the rest of the nation and the south. The post-Katrina influx of Mexicans as well as Central Americans and even Brazilians reminds one that spikes in Latin American population are not so extraordinary when viewed in historical terms.

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