


LATINOS EN OREGÓN:

SUS VOCES, SUS HISTORIAS, SU HERENCIA

A LATINO/A COMMUNITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT



Madras, Oregon, community members & Juntos participants, April 2015

GATHERING, PRESERVING, AND SHARING THE STORIES OF OREGON'S LATINO/A COMMUNITIES

RBMS 2016 Conference
Short Papers Panel: Diversity and Cultural Communities

Natalia Fernández, Curator and Archivist
Oregon Multicultural Archives
Oregon State University

My name is Natalia Fernandez, curator and archivist for the Oregon Multicultural Archives (the OMA).

I will be sharing my experiences of the OMA's Latino/a community oral history project which I began last year.

THE OREGON MULTICULTURAL ARCHIVES



The OMA's mission is to assist in preserving the histories and sharing the stories that document Oregon's African American, Asian American, Latino/a, and Native American communities



The OMA was established in 2005 with a collection focus of four ethnic communities within Oregon.


There are gaps in the historical record in terms of people of color in Oregon and the OMA seeks to address the gaps and empower communities to share their stories.



The OMA is a part of the Oregon State University Special Collections & Archives Research Center.

It is physically housed within the university but is intellectually separated via its website.

OMA Collections Pertaining to Latino/a People and Culture in Oregon





Milagro (Miracle Theatre Group) Records, 1966-2014




Erlinda V. Gonzales Berry and Marcela Mendez



Braceros in Oregon Photograph Collection, circa 1940s



Colegio César Chávez Collection, 1965-2005



Erlinda Gonzales-Berry Papers, 1969-2010

The archive has a number of collections pertaining to Latino/a people and culture in Oregon (Milagro, a Latino theatre group; Braceros in Oregon photograph collection; faculty papers / research files re: Latino community, etc].

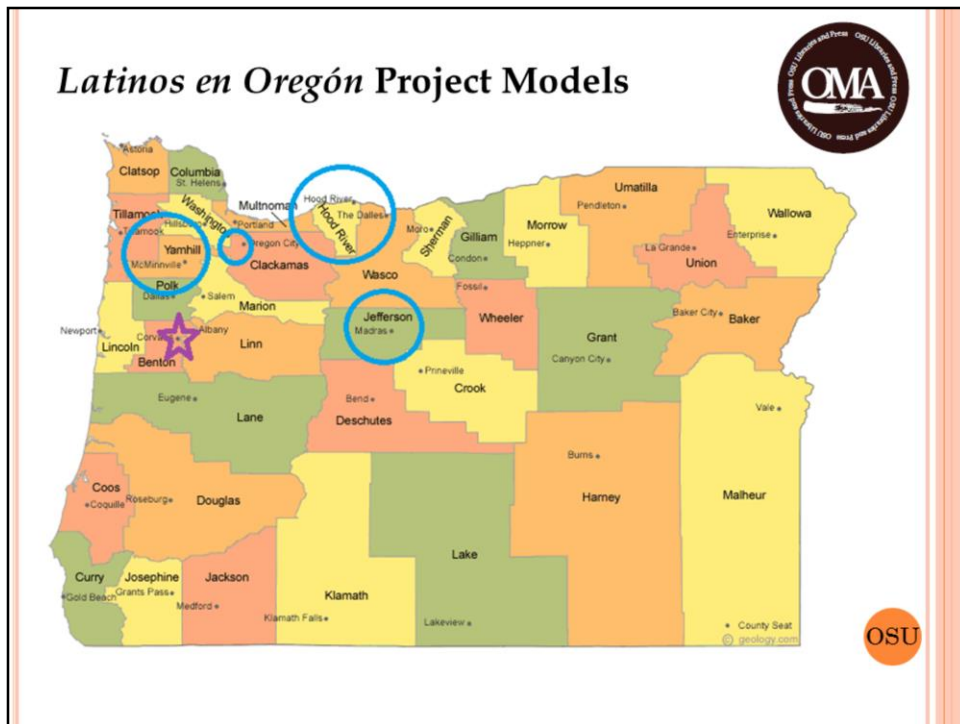
However, the Latino/a population has grown rapidly in the last few decades in the state and those stories are not yet not represented in the historical record, so I wanted to document the stories of everyday life – the family stories, traditions, and opinions – of Latinos in Oregon.



The challenges to beginning a oral history project can be 1) gathering the community together 2) getting an introduction to community members 3) building trust and developing a relationship with the community. With project partners and community liaisons, those challenges can more easily be overcome.

There are many opportunities for project partners; mine include:

- 1) The Oregon State University Juntos Program: a program that partners with schools to provide Latino/a families across Oregon with the knowledge and resources to gain access to higher education; my community liaisons are the program coordinators and facilitators.
- 2) Another partner is a public librarian at the Canby Public Library who I met through REFORMA OR; she works with her local area Latino community (plug for public librarians and REFORMA chapters – get connected with them!)
- 3) I am partnering on a county wide oral history project, in Yamhill County, Oregon, in which I have partnered with the county cultural trust, the local historical society, and a Latino community organization - together we have volunteers who then have their own community connections



To give you a sense of scope of the project, Oregon is a big state. The purple star is the OMA and the four blue circles are the geographic areas I have worked with so far. I realized early on I needed to build project capacity and sustainability so while in some areas I conduct the interviews, in others I am training local community members to conduct the interviews.

At the Canby Public Library, the librarian with community contacts conducts pre-interviews and does the scheduling; I just conduct the interviews


With the Juntos program coordinators and facilitators, I meet with families, attend all the Juntos program sessions, and conduct the interviews; and, I have trained Juntos staff to conduct interviews as well

For the Yamhill County project, I am acting as an oral history consultant and am training local area volunteers to conduct the interviews

Latinos en Oregón
The Oral History Interviews

Las Preguntas (The Questions)

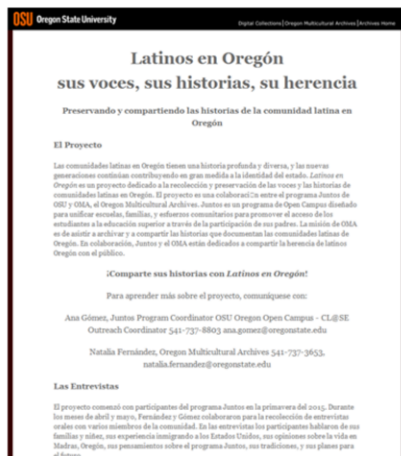
- ❖ La familia / los antepasados
- ❖ La inmigración a los Estados Unidos
- ❖ La vida en Oregón
- ❖ Temas y tradiciones
- ❖ Conclusión ~ planes para el futuro



For project consistency, with community collaboration I developed a set of questions that can be modified based on each community's or individuals needs; but overall, there are 5 main sections: family, immigration, life in Oregon, topics/traditions, and plans for the future.

The vast majority of the interviews are in Spanish but I have conducted some interviews in English.

Latinos en Oregón Project Website



Interviewee Bios and Summaries

Available Online
via the Project
Website

<http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/oma/latinos.html>



The interviews are made available online – with bios/summaries/transcripts – so far we have about two dozen

As of now, the content is all in Spanish – I have plans to work with OSU Spanish classes with a focus on translation work to have the content translated into English

Latinos en Oregon Lessons Learned



- ❖ Working with community liaisons and volunteers
- ❖ Accepting and addressing project subjectivity
- ❖ Understanding a lack of community connection and/or timing with communities
- ❖ Securing administrative and institutional support



Working with community liaisons and volunteers

- Share your story with them
- They need training/an understanding of archives to better advocate for the project
- Remember that it's not their job; they are giving their time
- Need to set and communicate boundaries re: roles within the community

Accepting and addressing project subjectivity

- You as an individual have bias in terms of your connections
- Community liaison contacts
- Who volunteers to be interviewed; not all community members will participate
- Reflect and analyze, then brainstorm solutions

Lack of community connection and/or timing with communities

- I am Latina and speak Spanish; I am not a native Oregonian and I am Cuban – very different experience
- Sometimes a community is not ready, needs more time; need a different community liaison
- Building relationships and trust takes time; the community may be interested in the idea of the project but not ready to commit
- Document what works and what doesn't work to communicate this with your administration

Securing administrative and institutional support

- You have to prove to them that it works, that it's worthwhile, that it takes time – results are not immediate or in some cases, you have no tangible results
- The relationship building is the most important part; document what you do!

Next Steps for *Latinos en Oregón*



Expand the Project to More Communities

- ❖ Collaborate with Juntos communities across the state; connect with pre-existing networks
- ❖ Develop training opportunities for community members to more actively participate in the project
- ❖ Collaborate with OSU programs, professors, and students as well as community organizations

Showcase and Celebrate the Stories Shared

- ❖ Encourage research & curate an exhibit
- ❖ Create art, literature, performance, etc.
- ❖ Engage the Latino/a community with its history



Contact Information



To learn more about the project, contact:

Natalia Fernández, Oregon Multicultural Archives
541-737-3653, natalia.fernandez@oregonstate.edu

