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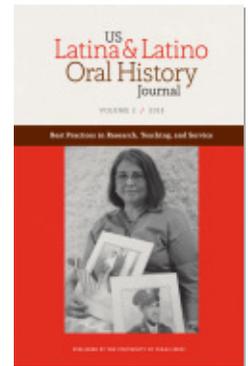
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## Editor's Note

Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez

US Latino & Latina Oral History Journal, Volume 2, 2018, pp. 1-3 (Article)

Published by University of Texas Press



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# Editor's Note

**MAGGIE RIVAS-RODRIGUEZ**

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**W**ELCOME TO THE SECOND ISSUE OF THE *US LATINA & LATINO Oral History Journal*. In this issue, we're engaging in the ongoing conversation about how oral history might be used to more fully document, explore, and investigate the US Latina/o experience. But more to the point, in this issue we underscore the transformative effect of oral history.

In Pathways, one of our standing features, we put a spotlight on a notable Latina oral historian, and in Notes from the Community, work related to oral history. In this volume we also include an essay by the daughter of a World War II veteran whose own interview with her father led her to reveal a family secret. We hope that essay will eventually become a permanent fixture in our journal in which an interviewer, or interviewee, lays out how the experience made a substantial difference in his or her life, personal or otherwise.

We begin this issue with a fascinating entry from veteran interviewer Julie Leininger Pycior, who details her own oral history journey, and traces the development of the field for Mexican American researchers. She begins with one of the earliest Latino practitioners, Alberto Camarillo, who interviewed nearly thirty people for his book *Chicanos in a Changing Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979). Camarillo's conclusion was that oral history afforded perspectives of the Chicano population that would otherwise be unattainable.

Pycior's historical retrospective reaches to her years as a graduate student at Notre Dame when fellow student Gilberto Cárdenas, founder of Centro de Estudios Chicanos, was able to secure funding to support her research on Chicanos in South Bend (Indiana) in 1976:

Centro de Estudios Chicanos also indirectly provided the subject for my book *LBJ and Mexican Americans: The Paradox of Power* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997). One of the work study students transcribing

the tapes for Chicanos in South Bend, Virginia Espinosa, mentioned that her father had worked on the LBJ Ranch. "Wouldn't it be interesting," I thought, "to analyze one of the most powerful modern political figures from the vantage point of Mexican Americans?" Moreover, this prominent president could serve as a "hook" to draw members of the dominant society in to the history of Mexican American organizing.

And again, Pycior used oral history to fill in the gaps in her study of LBJ's relationship to Mexican Americans that would otherwise have remained.

She acknowledges the maturation of oral history in the telling of the Latina and Latino story, noting that contemporary studies include new perspectives, including queer history, whiteness studies, and more: "Indeed, historians today can explore contradictory, even messy, chapters of the Mexican American story (e.g., crime) without fear of playing into a historical establishment that presented white males as the yardstick for significant contributions, as was the case forty years ago."

This editor also contributed a manuscript to this volume; mine is centered on an oral history methodology that addresses the challenge of conducting large-scale interviews in short time frames. Over a course of several years, the Voces Oral History Project, which I founded and direct, created a system by which as many as seven individual interviews can be conducted simultaneously, what we call a multiple individual interview session, or MIIS. With a morning session and an afternoon session, we can record as many as fourteen interviews in one day. This essay is largely a guide to coordinating and holding a MIIS. It also analyzes the advantages and disadvantages. I examine the downside of these somewhat "mass-produced" interviews, in which the comfort of a homier environment is exchanged for more impersonal locations, such as schools, that are briefly converted into studios. But one unforeseen benefit has been bringing together the interview subjects in one place prior to their interviews. We have seen how interview subjects, unified by a common experience and exchanging viewpoints at the MIIS location, may reinforce or, in other cases, prompt interview subjects to reassess their conclusions.

The MIIS may be incorporated into the oral history classroom. But it also lends itself to work with staff and trained volunteers as well. In the appendix of my essay, I offer a checklist of equipment and supply needs, and a course schedule that builds up to the MIIS.

This journal's editorial board and editors well recognize the power of an oral history interview to create change. And in this issue we present just such a case: Mary Alice Carnes demonstrates how one interview changed her world, as well as that of her family. Carnes outlines her own experience in 2001 interviewing her father, Luis Leyva, a World War II veteran. It was a bittersweet experience; he would pass away ten months later. But that interview would hold special meaning to her family—part

of it was played for loved ones at his wake. In the course of conducting the interview and since, Carnes became drawn deeply into her father's narrative, learning as much as she could about his military unit and finding records—even records that could be added to federal archives. Meanwhile, a journalistic treatment of Luis Leyva's interview was posted to the Voces website and found halfway around the world. What happened next is Carnes's story to tell.

Rina Benmayor, a renowned oral historian and author, is the subject of this issue's Pathways in Oral History. In her interview, Benmayor allows how she made her way to oral history by way of Spanish literature. Her initial work recorded ballads of Sephardic Jews. Most recently, she is researching Sephardic people who have gotten or are seeking Spanish or Portuguese citizenship under the 2015 laws of historical reparations in those two countries. She created the California State University–Monterey Bay Oral History and Community Memory Archive to house the work her students did over a nine-year period from 1995 to 2014. It can be viewed at the website <https://csumb.edu/hcom/oral-history-community-memory>.

Over the years, Benmayor says, she has continued to find deeper layers in oral history: “What has always intrigued me most is the construction of meaning, the workings of memory, and the possibilities of interpretation. Why do we remember something, how we remember it, and how we recount it.”

Finally, we draw attention to a community oral history effort being carried out in North Carolina. Its existence speaks to the changing demographics of our country. The New Roots/Nuevas Raíces Oral History Initiative is a collaboration of the Latino Migration Project and the Institute for the Study of the Americas and the Center for Global Initiatives at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Latino Migration Project Director Hannah Gill outlines the work of New Roots/Nuevas Raíces and describes the perspectives among the more than 180 recorded interviews:

The voices in New Roots are many and diverse, consisting of migrants from Latin America who have settled in North Carolina and other southern states, second-generation youth, Dream Activists, Latinx college students, teachers, public figures, business owners, and professionals.

The oral histories are archived with the Southern Oral History Program's collections in the University Libraries at UNC Chapel Hill.

We hope you enjoy this issue of our journal and look forward to hearing from you.