‘I Was a Stranger and You Welcomed Me’:
Latino Immigration, Religion, and Community Formation in Milwaukee, 1920-1990

By
Sergio M. González

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
(History)

at the

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

2018

Date of final oral examination: May 9, 2018

The dissertation is approved by the following members of the Final Oral Committee:
Cindy I-Fen Cheng, Associate Professor, History
William P. Jones, Professor, History (University of Minnesota)
Susan Lee Johnson, Professor, History
Armando Ibarra, Associate Professor, School for Workers
Colleen Dunlavy, Professor, History

© Copyright by Sergio M. González 2018
All Rights Reserved

To Laura – we finished this together.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements iii

Introduction 1
Community Formation and Religious Spaces in Latino Milwaukee

Chapter 1 30
"Juntos en el nombre de Dios": Milwaukee's Mexican Mission Chapel of Our Lady of Guadalupe, 1920-1939

Chapter 2 88
"An opportunity for brotherhood which we should not pass up": Mexican Agricultural Workers and Migrant Ministry in Wisconsin, 1942-1966

Chapter 3 160
"Milwaukee has proven it has a warm heart and does care": Religious Resettlement and the Politics of Integration Among Puerto Rican Migrants and Cuban Exiles in Milwaukee, 1945-1967

Chapter 4 225
"We will have fallen short of Christ's ideal if our love of neighbor does not go beyond an occasional prayer for them.": Milwaukee Religious Outreach and the Creation of Latino-Serving Institutions, 1960-1968

Chapter 5 280
"The priests said the church should not be used for political purposes": Latino Social Justice Movements and Milwaukee's Religious Communities, 1968-1980

Chapter 6 387
"We have the right in the name of God to protect these people": Milwaukee's Sanctuary Movement and Transnational Interfaith Collaboration, 1980-1990

Conclusion 464
Faith and Movement Building in Latino Milwaukee

Bibliography 474

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The encouragement, inspiration, and support of so many communities, individuals, and institutions made this project possible. This dissertation is filled with the voices of the millions of people of Latino descent who have come to Wisconsin to make the state their home, either temporarily or permanently, as well as the Wisconsinites who came to join them in fellowship. Because of the scarcity of preserved archival materials documenting Wisconsin's Latino history, oral histories have been vital for capturing the daily lived experiences of these individuals. I would like to specifically thank those who have taken the time to sit down and have their chronicles recorded: Jesus Salas, Joseph and Margarita Cárdenas, Ray Bacalzo, Arnoldo Sevilla, Graciela and Luis de la Cruz, Elvira Sandoval-Denk, Guadalupe Macias, the Gonzales family, the Rios family, Dr. Tony Baez, Francisco Urbina, Archbishop Rembert Weakland, Thomas Cannon, Ruth Chojnacki, Reverend Joseph and Joyce Ellwanger, Father Glenn Gessner, Carolyn Jackson, and Sister Barbara Kraemer. I'd like to especially note the support of Darlene Nicgorski, who patiently spent hours with me discussing her journey through the sanctuary movement, and unfortunately passed away before I could finish this project. Their voices enrich and enliven the narratives of this study.

My dissertation committee has offered immeasurable counsel, support, and inspiration during my graduate career. I was fortunate to receive mentorship from three superb advisors during my time at the University of Wisconsin-Madison – the late Camille Guerin-Gonzales, William Jones, and Cindy I-Fen Cheng – each of whom encouraged me to pursue the academic endeavors that I hold most dear to my heart. In their own ways, each advisor played a special role in my development as a scholar, pushing me to interrogate more deeply the connections between labor, working-class, and immigration history. Susan Johnson has offered a supportive

and critical eye as I developed not only as a writer and researcher, but as a future mentor of students as well. Armando Ibarra presented the model for scholar-activism, demonstrating how to remain engaged in the communities in which we study and work. Colleen Dunlavy, meanwhile, was a source of mentorship as both a graduate program director and final reader of this dissertation. I appreciate the time and effort each committee member has invested in me and this project. Whatever flaws remain are mine.

Along with the steady guiding support of my dissertation committee, I've been fortunate to receive the help of faculty and staff across the University of Wisconsin-Madison and academic communities across the country. The academic staff within the UW-Madison History Department are the best on campus. I'm eternally grateful for the help of the world's finest graduate advisor, Leslie Abadie, who always knew which doors to knock on, which courses to register for, where to find funding, and the surest path to graduation. Every graduate student in the department is lucky to have Leslie in their corner. Along with Leslie, Isaac Lee, Jana Valeo, Scott Burkhardt, and Abby Kennison are invaluable friends and keep our department humming smoothly every day – I appreciate your support and comradeship. Countless UW-Madison professors and instructors have left a mark on my development as a scholar both in my undergraduate and graduate career, including Steve Kantrowitz, Tony Michels, Jim Leary, Pernille Ipsen, Brenda Gayle Plummer, Alexander Shashko, Patrick Barrett, Tom Broman, Sarah Thal, Ben Marquez, Andrea "Tess" Arenas, Carolina Sarmiento, Michael Thornton, Troy Reeves, and so many others. Across the academy, scholars of U.S. immigration, labor, and religion have readily invited me into the fold and offered careful readings of my work, as well as readymade connections and kind words of encouragement, including Felipe Hinojosa, Tim Matovina, Mario Garcia, Deborah Kanter, Marc Rodriguez, Delia Fernández, Theresa

Delgadillo, Ben Johnson, Gerry Cadava, Mike Innis-Jiménez, Chantel Rodríguez, Jon Shelton, Joseph Rodriguez, Jim Marten, Steven Avella, Alison Efford, Laura Matthew, Bryan Rindfleish, and more. Thank you all for being a part of this team.

The work of any historian is made infinitely easier with the support of dedicated archivists and librarians, and I count myself lucky to have had knowledgeable guides during the writing of this dissertation. Thank you to archivists at the Wisconsin and Milwaukee County Historical Societies, the Milwaukee Public Library, the Archives of the Catholic Archdiocese of Milwaukee, the Catholic University of America's American Catholic History Research Center, Claremont University Consortium's Honnold/Mudd Library Special Collections, Marquette University's Department of Special Collections and University Archives, and the University of Notre Dame Archives. Each of you are masters of your realms who skillfully open doors for researchers every day.

Along with the immeasurable amount of scholarly, social, and emotional support I've received from my family, mentors, and community, I've been extremely privileged to have received a number of funding provisions through this process. I'd like to thank the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Department of History, Center for the Humanities, College of Letters and Science, Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Funding, and the Mellon-Wisconsin Summer Fellowship; Marquette University's Mitchem Fellowship; the Smithsonian Latino Museum Studies Program; the Pacific Coast Branch-American Historical Association; the University of Notre Dame Cushwa Center for the Study of American Catholicism; the American Catholic Historical Association; and, the American Association of Hispanics in Higher Education, Incorporated for the various fellowships and grants they've conferred upon me. The financial support from these organizations allowed me to stay up at night thinking and worrying about my

dissertation's theoretical arguments and historiographic contributions instead of where the next pool of money to support the project's completion might come from.

This project is ultimately a history of community formation, and I count myself blessed to have benefited from the support of a variety of communities as I worked to complete it. I've developed cohorts of colleagues and friends across a variety of academic spaces, including the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Chican@ & Latin@ Studies Program; the Smithsonian Latino Museum Studies Program (LMSP 2015, ¡siempre!); the Wisconsin Labor History Society; the Wisconsin Historical Society Press; the Commission for Historical Studies of the Church in Latin America (CEHILA); the Humanities Without Walls Latinx Placemaking in the Midwest project; the University of Wisconsin-Madison Center for the Humanities Graduate Public Humanities Exchange (HEX) program; and, the American Association of Hispanics in Higher Education. Each of these organizations fostered my academic curiosity and passion for public history. Community organizations and the individuals who empower them across Wisconsin, most importantly in Madison and Milwaukee, also allowed me to develop my work as a scholar-activist. I'll always be grateful for the comradery I found through working with the Dane Sanctuary Coalition, Madison Centro Hispano, Voces de la Frontera, Nuestro Mundo Community School, the Workers' Rights Center, and the Labor Council for Latin American Advancement. Thank you for always reminding me to ground my work in my community.

This dissertation was a labor of love and friendship, and a wide assortment of friends reminded me to keep the 'social' in 'social history' over the last six years. I was lucky to find an amazing group of people within my incoming cohort of graduate students in the first week of classes. I'm so grateful for Spring Greeney, Cori Simon, and Bridgette Werner, who have become lifetime pals. We've shared countless drafts of seminar papers, dissertation chapters, and

fellowship proposals, consoled each other over coffee and breakfast breaks, and groped for a semblance of a social life while pushing ahead in our academic endeavors. Along with those three great friends, I have appreciated thinking through historiographies, sharing book lists, and generally commiserating on balancing the tasks of being a graduate student and worker with my labor historian colleagues Naomi Williams, Jillian Jacklin, and Matt Reiter, as well as Brian Hamilton, Karma Palzom, Chong Moua, Dustin Cohan, Dylan Kaufman-Obstler, Jesse Gant, Faron Levesque, Elena McGrath, Lauren Ayers, Joy Block, Jeanne Essame, Brendon George, Daniel Guadagnolo, and so many others. I'd like to especially thank my union sisters and brothers in the Teaching Assistants' Association (AFT 3220). One the first things I did after enrolling in classes was joining the TAA, the oldest and perhaps most storied graduate worker union in the country. It has been an honor to organize and fight alongside my fellow co-president Cynthia Burnson, as well as Carl Sack, Michael Billeaux, Eleni Schirmer, Adria Brooks, Rob Timberlake, Charity Schmidt, Katie Zaman, Jake Carlson, the indestructible David Newby, and many more to make our university, and our worksites, more equitable spaces to labor, research, and teach in. Solidarity forever.

The stories of my own family are infused in every page that I've written, as their stories are the stories of Wisconsin's Latino community. My own migration story begins with my grandparents, Papá Javier and Mamá Pana (Martin) and Papá Pedro and Mamá Avelina (González), all from the state of Jalisco, Mexico, who made innumerable sacrifices to come to this country so their families could have a better life. My parents, Sergio Armando and Bertha, have likewise labored and overcome seemingly insurmountable barriers so that my brother Alejandro and I could reach summits they might never have imagined. I am forever indebted to

my wonderful wife Laura, who has graciously read draft upon draft of so much of my work and continues to encourage my academic and activist interests. I love you all dearly.

INTRODUCTION

Community Formation and Religious Spaces in Latino Milwaukee

"Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God."
Romans 15:7

On August 28, 1966, hundreds of parishioners from the Latino Catholic parish of Our Lady of Guadalupe on Milwaukee's south side embarked on a pilgrimage. Carrying a banner bearing the Virgin Mother's image in the lead, congregants walked the six blocks separating Guadalupe and Holy Trinity Catholic Church to join the two congregations into one shared parish. Years of white flight to surrounding suburbs and an aging congregation had reduced Holy Trinity to less than half of the population it had just a decade earlier. While most of Holy Trinity's German- and Slavic-descent population from the middle of the century had either moved away or died, its neighbor Guadalupe was grappling with its own issues. A booming Mexican and Puerto Rican population had of late forced the parish to add a fourth Sunday service in its cramped facilities at a repurposed telephone company building. In 1965, the archdiocese proposed a solution: merging these two parish communities into one under the leadership of its Latino laity under the title of Holy Trinity-Our Lady of Guadalupe Church.[1]

There was a certain poetry in that 1966 merger. Holy Trinity was originally established in 1850, just two years following Wisconsin's admittance into the union and at a time when the state was still considered "mission territory" by episcopal leadership. Catholics on the city's south side had found it inconvenient to travel downtown to Old St. Mary's parish, one of Milwaukee's original Catholic congregations. In 1849, the founders of Holy Trinity –

[1] In correspondence with Milwaukee Archbishop William Cousins, Our Lady of Guadalupe's pastor Reverend Bede Phelps expressed that Mexican and Puerto Rican parishioners would be very happy to move from their old, cramped confines to a "beautiful church worthy of [Guadalupe's] presence." Reverend Bede Phelps to Archbishop William E. Cousins, July 19, 1965, folder 1, Frank Gross Papers, Archdiocese of Milwaukee, Archives Department.

immigrants from southern Germany and Austria who had faced anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant bigotry in their settlement – had led their own procession from Old St. Mary's to the site of their new church to lay a cornerstone on South Fourth Street, making Holy Trinity just the third Catholic church in Milwaukee. Over the next century, Holy Trinity would serve as a foundational parish for area Catholics as Milwaukee became home to one of the largest Catholic populations in the United States.[2]

Just as their predecessors had transformed Holy Trinity into a communal space that celebrated their ethnic and cultural religiosity, Our Lady of Guadalupe's Latino community made its mark on the parish space and the very character of the congregation over the next four decades. Female members formed a devotional community called Las Guadalupanas that celebrated the patron mother of Mexico, la Virgen de Guadalupe. Parishioners introduced a feast of Guadalupe celebrated with an Aztec Dance during the Offertory of Mass, a fantastic display of twenty-four parish high school youths, dressed in colorful Aztec dress, who danced to ancient music as the sacramental gifts of wine and bread were presented at the altar. Parishioners introduced the Christmas custom of *las posadas,* as well as the Mexican tradition of *Viacrucis en los hogares*, a Lenten observance of the Stations of the Cross where parishioners would visit and celebrate Mass at fourteen homes within walking distance of the church. By the early 1970s, the congregation's favorite song to sing during Mass was "Misa Panamericana," a mariachi song accompanied by trumpets, a Mexican vihuela*,* and guitarrón that celebrated a growing pan-Latino identity across the national Catholic Church. [3]

[2] "Two Parishes Serving Spanish Speaking Will Merge Into One," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* August 8, 1966.
[3] "Holy Trinity – Our Lady of Guadalupe," (White Plains, NY: Monarch Publishing, 1975), from Archival Resources on Hispanics in Wisconsin, Wisconsin Historical Society.

The relationship between the parishes of Holy Trinity and Our Lady of Guadalupe did not begin in 1966, however. Their history has its origins with the arrival of *los primeros,* the original Mexican workers and families who settled in Milwaukee in the 1920s. During that decade, shared faith brought Milwaukee's Mexican and white Catholics together to found the original Mexican Mission Chapel of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The fellowship created in the establishment of this small Spanish-speaking parish created significant bonds between Milwaukee's Mexican and white communities in the decade, and in the years to follow. The mission offered Mexican families religious, social, and cultural experiences along with much-needed repose through a difficult settlement in the city. While facing racial discrimination in their places of employment and vigorous assimilation efforts from the city's settlement agencies, Mexicans found a cadre of partners among Milwaukee's Catholic clergy and white parishioners. The chapel they created together developed into a space where Mexican immigrants could negotiate their faith identities through familiar ethno-religious practices and native language, ultimately working to affirm a sense of belonging in their new homes in the U.S. Midwest.

During the span of the twentieth century, religious spaces like Our Lady of Guadalupe functioned as crucial locations for community formation and social activism for Milwaukee Latinos. In a 1999 interview, Mimi Soto, a lifelong parishioner and chairperson of the Holy Trinity-Our Lady of Guadalupe 150th Anniversary Committee, commented that the church had "been like a Rock of Gibraltar to the community" since its establishment. Soto noted that "the church is where the social action began" for many Latinos, a place where people of shared ethno-racial identity and common moral values could organize and fight for a cause. Throughout the century, that "social action" work encompassed a considerable number of initiatives, including

multilingual education, alcohol and drug abuse intervention, immigration activism, and campaigns for living-wage employment.[4]

Working at the intersections of immigration, working-class, and religious history, "I Was a Stranger and You Welcomed Me" explores the relationship between religiosity, Latinidad, and social justice movements fostered in spaces like Our Lady of Guadalupe and across Milwaukee during the twentieth century. It reveals how Latino immigrants of diverse national, ethnic, and class backgrounds turned to their religious faith and institutions to fashion new identities, combat discrimination, and fight for economic rights. What began in the late 1920s as a project to create a mission chapel for the city's fledgling Mexican community matured into aid programs for Mexican and Puerto Rican migrant workers in the 1950s, battles for social and economic justice through the Chicano and Young Lords movements of the 1960s, and ecumenical efforts to support Central American refugees through the Sanctuary Movement in the 1980s. Understanding the faith and political pursuits of Latinos in Milwaukee not only deepens considerations of race and immigrant settlement across the Midwest, but also lays the groundwork for conceptualizing how immigrant communities have defined belonging, political advocacy and mobilization, and religiosity across national and transnational boundaries.

This study of Latino Milwaukee argues that religiosity and sacred spaces have been foundational to shaping the experiences of Latino immigrants, not only in providing fellowship, but also in offering legitimacy for social justice movements. During the twentieth century, Latinos turned, in the words of cultural anthropologist Elaine Peña, to "the sacred to address the

---

[4] "Trinity-Guadalupe 150th Anniversary Celebrates Social Action Tradition," *Walker's Point Bulletin,* July/September 1999, Folder 1, Frank Gross Papers, Archdiocese of Milwaukee, Archives Department. By the end of the century, much of Guadalupe's activism was centered around their affiliation with the Milwaukee Inner-City Congregations Allied for Hope (MICAH), a multiracial, interfaith organization committed to addressing social justice issues in the city.

secular," crafting coordinated responses grounded in shared religious values and morals to address the racial discrimination and economic exploitation they faced in their daily lives.[5] The sacred spaces that Milwaukee Latinos constructed throughout the twentieth century became crucial locations for pan-Latino and pan-ethnic collaboration, and were vital for mitigating prejudice and social alienation, providing sanctuary from nativism and repression, and fostering local and transnational community building in the name of shared religiosity.

Building Community Through Faith: Bridging Latino History and Religious Studies

This study contributes to a burgeoning field within Latino history, one that has slowly begun to excavate the role of religion in Latino settlement. While historians of past generations were reluctant to engage with what historian David Gutiérrez has called the "intricate lacuna of religion" for fears that the more abstract and nebulous categories of religiosity, cosmology, and religious practice might be better left to scholars of religion, an emerging cohort of scholars have worked to better integrate the study of faith and religious communities into Latino history.[6] Historians such as Mario T. García, Timothy Matovina, David Badillo, Roberto Treviño, and Felipe Hinojosa have acknowledged religion as a vital component in understanding the experience of Latino immigrants to the United States, recognizing that by relegating religious faith to the status of a cultural artifact, historians run the risk of ignoring the powerful role it plays in the foundation of immigrant communities and the connections immigrants maintain across national boundaries.[7] This new scholarship in part draws from a rich decades-long

---

[5] Elaine Peña, "Beyond Mexico: Guadalupan Sacred Space Production and Mobilization in a Chicago Suburb," *American Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (September 2008): 740.

[6] David Gutiérrez, "The New Turn in Chicano/Mexican History: Integrating Religious Belief and Practice," in *Catholics in the American Century: Recasting Narratives of U.S. History*, ed. R. Scott Appleby and Kathleen Sprows Cummings (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012), 109-134.

[7] This study draws upon work that has emphasized the impact of Catholicism and religiosity on immigrant Mexican communities in the U.S. See: Timothy Matovina, *Latino Catholicism: Transformation in America's Largest Church* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); David Badillo, *Latinos and the New Immigrant Church* (Baltimore:

historiography within the larger field of immigration and ethnic studies, specifically that which studies European immigration to the U.S. and has included religion as a vital component of migration, settlement, accommodation, and conflict since its beginnings.[8]

"I Was a Stranger and You Welcomed Me" argues for the importance of faith and religious spaces as sites of individual and collective sustenance and growth for Latino communities in the United States. Within the study of Latino history, an extraordinary amount of scholarship on settlement in urban spaces has focused its attention on the development of ethnic enclaves such as barrios. In these settings, churches functioned as one of many institutions and spaces within which Latino immigrants could turn to in order to foster community. Unlike Latinos in Los Angeles's Boyle Heights, New York's Spanish Harlem, or Chicago's South Side, Latinos in Milwaukee didn't establish a defined barrio until decades after their original settlement in the mid 1960s; instead, they formed loose *colonias* in the neighborhoods surrounding their places of employment. With no defined geographic zones to call their own, Milwaukee Latinos turned to their churches as locations for community formation during the early-to-mid-twentieth century and continued to develop those spaces as the city's Latino population grew over subsequent decades. For those congregants, the church served as a place where people did more than just participate in worship rituals. The communities Latinos created within these sites offered ways of ordering and making sense of life through religious teachings

---

Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006); Roberto R. Treviño, *The Church in the Barrio: Mexican American Ethno-Catholicism in Houston* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Mario García, *Cátolicos: Resistance and Affirmation in Chicano Catholic History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010); Felipe Hinojosa, *Latino Mennonites: Civil Rights, Faith, and Evangelical Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014).

[8] The historiography here is plentiful, but see e.g. Randolph Miller and Thomas Marzik, ed., *Immigrants and Religion in Urban America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1977); Robert Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988); Jay P. Dolan, *The Immigrant Church: New York's Irish and German Catholics, 1815-1865* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992); Peter R. D'Agostino, *Rome in America: Transnational Catholic Ideology from the Risorgimento to Fascism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

and disciplines. Religious communities provided for economic and social needs, fostered relationships, reinforced traditional customs while creating new practices, and validated individual and communal identity, all the while promoting a sense of internal cohesion among Milwaukee Latinos. Within the contested terrain of the city, the community and fellowship Latinos created in these religious spaces offered a combination of culturally-attuned spiritual comfort and material support.

Milwaukee Latinos directed the path of their incorporation experiences within their parishes and the city's larger culture. This study disrupts a persistent paradigm within the study of Latino history, one that focus on the church as a space primarily for Americanization. Previous scholarship has disproportionally focused on assimilationist efforts initiated by American clergy and laity within Latino congregations. In their efforts to give voice to Latino immigrants who faced multiple barriers in preserving ethnic identities in America, these historians have at times oversimplified immigrants' relationship to their local parishes, clergy, and archdiocesan administrators. Sociologist Alberto López Pulido has described the incomplete binary understanding of the relationship between Latinos and churches previously detailed by scholars, one that posited religious communities as maintaining poles of oppression and marginalization or liberation and self-determination. These narratives generalize lay-clerical relationships, portraying church leaders – parish priests, nuns, and episcopal heads – as agents of Americanization while depicting congregants as either docile recipients or inflexible opponents. This form of analysis disregards a multifaceted experience across churches in the United States, ignoring points of partnership often fostered by shared religion.[9]

[9] Alberto López Pulido, "A Sociological Analysis of Latino Religions: The Formation of the Theoretical Binary and Beyond," in *Religion and Social Order: American Sociology of Religion, Histories*, ed. Anthony Blasi (Boston: Brill, 2007), 244.

While arguing against these constricted prior interpretations of interactions between Latinos and religious bodies, this study presents a complex understanding of church-community interaction. It furthers a nuanced interpretation of the church as a location with the *potential* for multiple forms of interactions. Latino Milwaukee's history provides us with a dynamic story, one that points to a dialogue within faith communities that was at times contentious and combative but also often cooperative. Within religious institutions, Latinos at times clashed with clergy and lay leadership to create spaces that would affirm their religious and cultural traditions. During the 1950s, for example, Wisconsin Catholic and Protestant episcopal leadership often framed their ministry to migrant workers as competitive efforts to proselytize to populations they feared might be lost to rival creeds, a form of paternalistic evangelism less interested in the needs of Latino congregants and more in maintaining denominational relevance. Churches, however, could also serve as partners in building responsive community and social justice initiatives, as they did by supporting migrant farmworker organizing in Wisconsin through the 1960s.

By examining how churches related to Latinos and how Latinos related to churches, this study aims to interrogate *why* and *how* church leadership and Latino communities modified their relationships across the century. Fundamentally, "I Was a Stranger and You Welcomed Me" thus argues that religious sites were always *contested spaces*. As institutions, churches were continually influenced by the individuals who created, maintained, and challenged them. During the twentieth century, Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Central American immigrants and migrants challenged the city's religious leaders to be ever more responsive to their communities' economic, social, and cultural needs. This study serves as a reminder that agreement on doctrinal tenets did not necessarily translate into obedience by laity or responsive leadership on issues

concerning ethno-racial discrimination, economic exploitation, or cultural isolation either inside or beyond the walls of the temple.[10]

Studies that incorporate the religiosity of immigrants along with their settlement experiences also reveal some of the most intimate social dynamics at work in the formation and long-term functioning of transnational migration streams and the social networks that sustain them. As Timothy Matovina argues, immigration historians must consider the "interconnections between faith expression and the social structures, cultural horizons, bodily existence, everyday lives, and local circumstances of their practitioners" to better understand the intricate connections that bind immigrants to their home countries and communities.[11] By delving into what religious historian Robert Orsi calls the "lived religion" of immigrants, historians of immigration to the United States contribute to our understanding of how immigrant communities create and recreate religious devotion and how migration, displacement, and settlement experiences affect religious practices both in origin countries and receiving nations.[12]

Churches are living, breathing spaces transformed by the individuals who constitute their membership. These sites are not staid locations where dogma is simply handed down from a distant hierarchy or where ritual is blindly repeated without thought or consideration. Orsi notes that "religion comes into being in an ongoing dynamic relationship with the realities of everyday life."[13] Religious institutions, especially those founded or managed by immigrants themselves, opened a space for immigrants "from which to engage North American society with a sense of

---

[10] This study draws heavily from the work of theologian Roberto Goizueta, who has argued that Latinos have historically used religious practices to delineate their sense of belonging and negotiate incorporation into a broader American society. Roberto Goizueta, *Caminemos Con Jesus: Toward a Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995).

[11] Timothy Matovina, *Guadalupe and Her Faithful: Latino Catholics in San Antonio, from Colonial Origins to the Present* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

[12] Robert Orsi, "Everyday Miracles: The Study of Lived Religion," in *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice*, ed. David D. Hall (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 7.

[13] Ibid.

purpose, self-confidence, and security."[14] By creating consecrated spaces through parish chapels, social service agencies, and sanctuaries for religious refugees, Milwaukee's Latino immigrants affirmed the value of their language, cultural heritage, and religious traditions. The churches Milwaukee Latinos entered were active institutions in constant flux. Latinos themselves were actors in the process of negotiating what type of space their church could and would become. Churches were not merely elite-controlled institutions, hostile to the voices (or desires) of their congregants; Milwaukee Latinos actively employed the church as a ground on which to navigate their settlement experience and maintain faith commitments in their countries of origin.

In order to better understand how Latino immigrants "lived" religiously and the communities they created, this study also considers the theological considerations that underpinned the creation of sacred spaces in Milwaukee. For decades, religious studies scholars have implored immigration historians to, as Fred Kniss and Paul Numrich write, "take religion seriously" not simply by studying churches and religious organizations as any other institution within a community, but also by contemplating the theological, doctrinal, and dogmatic questions that define the worldviews of the religiously devout.[15] Heeding this call, this study examines the institutions, beliefs, and ideas that Latino workers created and recreated in their adaptation to the harsh realities of their new lives in Wisconsin.

While attending to the belief systems of individuals and their inchoate efforts to reform theological understandings of the relationship between the sacred and the secular, this project is primarily a social history, one that analyzes Latino individuals and the communities they formed in Milwaukee. It is a study interested in how Latinos mobilized through their religion, and how

---

[14] Gerald E. Poyo, ""Integration without Assimilation": Cuban Catholics in Miami, 1960-1980," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 20, no. 4 (Fall, 2002), 92.
[15] Fred Kniss and Paul D. Numrich, *Sacred Assemblies and Civic Engagement: How Religion Matters for America's Newest Immigrants* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 8.

their faith served as a central component of their lived experience in the city. I've adopted an instrumentalist view of religion that does not deny the spirituality of Milwaukee Latinos but instead illuminates how religious belief enabled these communities to mobilize themselves and work towards social, economic, and cultural justice. Sociologist Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo states that "because religion is a human practice, it takes profoundly social forms, and these social constructions are involved in many pursuits and outcomes."[16] This study asks scholars to look beyond prayers and supplications practiced within churches and temples to comprehend the multiple ways Latinos understood their religious belief as integral to their efforts to seek social justice for their communities in Milwaukee.

This study also urges historians to understand faith as both a reflection and agent of political and social change. If the church was a possible refuge, it wasn't merely a place to hide from society – it also served as a location to embolden, reframe, and rally efforts to fight for a better present and future for Milwaukee Latinos. Beyond being a location for community formation, churches could be spaces for community activism. Here, African American history and disciplinary traditions that investigate the convergence between religiosity and social activism offer avenues for further study within Latino historiography. Historians such as David Chappell, Rosetta Ross, and Charles Marsh have demonstrated how churches and faith leaders were often the fount of action for civil rights movements within the African American community across the mid-twentieth century. These scholars have adeptly explored the internal logic of individuals' beliefs and actions, seamlessly incorporating religion into the history of protests against Jim Crow, voter suppression, and segregation. Their work asks historians to

[16] Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, "Religion and a Standpoint Theory of Immigrant Social Justice," in *Religion and Social Justice for Immigrants*, ed. Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 7.

envision how faith informs action, never separating the belief of individuals from their motivations.[17]

The church could be a place from which Latinos collectively assessed and respond to systems of discrimination and exploitation. Milwaukee Latinos turned to their religious faith to, in the terminology of sociologist Zareena Grewal, remap the "moral geographies" that defined their worldviews, creating social movements that respected not only their physical well-being but also social and emotional humanity.[18] This study thus interrogates how Milwaukee Latinos turned to what anthropologist Hilary Cunningham has referred to as "traditions of compassion for the destitute and disposed" during the twentieth century in their formulations of community development and calls for social, economic, and cultural justice.[19] Alliances within religious communities built around Chicano and Puerto Rican nationalism as well as interfaith coalitions like the Sanctuary Movement demonstrate how churches could serve, as historian Gina Marie Pitti has noted, as "site[s] and channel[s] of community activism."[20] Within religious spaces, activists structured their protests around a system of ethics and morality built upon their faith and

---

[17] David Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Rosetta Ross, *Witnessing and Testifying: Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2003); Charles Marsh, *God's Long Summer: Stories of Faith and Civil Rights* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008). See also Paul Harvey, *Freedom's Coming: Religious Culture and the Shaping of the South from the Civil War through the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

[18] Zareena Grewal, *Islam Is a Foreign Country: American Muslims and the Global Crisis of Authority* (New York: New York University Press, 2013).

[19] Quoted in Hilary Cunningham, *God and Caesar at the Rio Grande: Sanctuary and the Politics of Religion* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), xvi. For more on the confluence of religion and social justice movements, see Thomas Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008); Virgilio Elizondo, *Christianity and Culture: An Introduction to Pastoral Theology and Ministry for the Bicultural Community* (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 1975); Eduardo C. Fernández, *La Cosecha: Harvesting Contemporary United States Hispanic Theology (*Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2000); Nestor Medina, *Mestizaje: Remapping Race, Culture, and Faith in Latina/o Catholicism* (New York: Orbis Books, 2009); Orlando O. Espín, *The Faith of the People: Theological Reflections on Popular Catholicism* (New York: Orbis Books, 1997); Orlando O. Espín and Miguel H. Diaz, *From the Heart of Our People: Latino/a Explorations in Catholic Systematic Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 1999); Jean-Pierre Ruiz, *Readings from the Edges: The Bible and People on the Move* (New York: Orbis Books, 2011).

[20] Gina Marie Pitti, "To "Hear About God in Spanish": Ethnicity, Church, and Community Activism in the San Francisco Archdiocese's Mexican American Colonias, 1942-1965," (PhD diss., Stanford University, 2003), 1.

Scriptural teachings. Religion, then, provided more than just a framework for understanding the material, secular landscape within which Latinos in Milwaukee interacted; it also supplied the structure to create a *moral landscape* from which to engage the world and petition for broader societal changes.

Latino Milwaukee: Faith and Belonging in the U.S. Midwest

But why study a Latino community in Milwaukee, an urban center in the upper Great Lakes region thousands of miles removed from the border region and other Latin American countries of origin? Histories of urban Latino studies predominate on southern California and southern Texas, as well as New York, but have paid insufficient attention to the creation of Latino communities in the Midwest. While situated within scholarship examining Latino settlement and belonging, this dissertation also occupies the historiographic space of urban, religious, and working-class history in the U.S. Midwest. This study is part of a broader historiographical corrective of Latino studies that have focused primarily on the U.S. Southwest and Northeast. In her recent study of Mexican and Puerto Rican communities in postwar Chicago, Lilia Fernández comments that Latinos have been severely underrepresented within urban history and have been especially absent in studies focused on the U.S. Midwest.[21] Scholarship on Latino faith and religious belonging has likewise been restricted to the U.S. Southwest and Northeast. Other than a handful of dissertations, articles, and chapters in edited volumes, no full-length study of religiosity in Latino communities has focused on the Midwest.[22]

---

[21] Lilia Fernández, *Brown in the Windy City: Mexicans and Puerto Ricans in Postwar Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

[22] The earliest of piecemeal studies of Midwest Latino religiosity came from David Badillo, who contributed a foundational chapter to Jay Dolan's study of Mexican Americans and the Catholic Church. See David Badillo, "The Catholic Church and the Making of Mexican-American Parish Communities in the Midwest," *Mexican Americans and the Catholic Church, 1900-1965,* ed. Jay P. Dolan and Gilberto M. Hinojosa (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 237-30. See also Deborah Kanter, "Making Mexican Parishes: Ethnic Succession in Chicago Churches, 1947-1977," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 30, no. 2 (2012): 35-58; Thomas G. Kelliher, Jr., "Hispanic

This study contributes to a growing trend within urban historiography that recognizes the long history of Latino settlement in Midwestern urban areas, as well as their capacity to develop communities that have endured across the twentieth century. Historians such as Zaragosa Vargas, Dionicio Nodín Valdés, Lilia Fernández, Gabriela Arredondo, Marc Rodriguez, and Michael Innis-Jiménez have shown that Latino experiences in the Southwest or Northeast cannot serve as stand-ins for understanding Latino communities in the Midwest, and demonstrate the importance of region and locality for interpreting Latino populations in the U.S.[23] These studies serve as a necessary corrective to what gender studies scholar Sujey Vega refers to as the "romantics of the Midwest," histories that depict an idealized white crossroads where communities of color are either erased or nearly completely subsumed within a whitewashed narrative.[24] Building on that narrative, I show that the region has been and continues to be a crucial crossroads and place of Latino settlement.

To better understand Latino settlement in the Midwest, "I Was a Stranger and You Welcomed Me" highlights the importance of local history and thus aims to more effectively interrogate larger regional, national, and international histories. As historians Vicki Ruiz and

---

Catholics and the Archdiocese of Chicago, 1923-1970," (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 1996); Malachy Richard McCarthy, "Which Christ Came to Chicago: Catholic and Protestant Programs to Evangelize, Socialize, and Americanize the Mexican Immigrant, 1900-1940," (PhD diss., Loyola University of Chicago, 2002).

[23] Some of the earliest historical treatment of Latinos in the Midwest came from the field of labor history in the late twentieth century. See Zaragosa Vargas, *Proletarians of the North: A History of Mexican Industrial Workers in Detroit and the Midwest, 1917-1933* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); and, Dennis Nodín Valdés, *Al Norte: Agricultural Workers in the Great Lakes Region, 1917-1970* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991). For more recent studies on Latinos in the Midwest, see Dennis Nodín Valdés, *Barrios Norteños: St. Paul and Midwestern Mexican Communities in the Twentieth Century* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000); Gabriela F. Arredondo, *Mexican Chicago: Race, Identity, and Nation, 1916-1939* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008); Marc Simon Rodriguez, *The Tejano Diaspora: Mexican Americanism and Ethnic Politics in Texas and Wisconsin* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Michael Innis-Jiménez, *Steel Barrio: The Great Mexican Migration to South Chicago, 1915-1940* (New York: New York University Press, 2013); Omar Valerio-Jiménez, Santiago Vaquera-Vásquez, and Claire F. Fox, ed., *The Latino Midwest Reader* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017).

[24] Sujey Vega, *Latino Heartland: Of Borders and Belonging in the Midwest* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 5.

George Sánchez have argued, I contend that Latino identity has historically been contingent on the complexities of local context.[25] Recognizing how individuals and communities developed, disordered, and employed identities through local spaces disentangles larger questions surrounding community formation, racialization, economic exploitation, grassroots activism, and a litany of other historiographic questions fundamental to the analysis of Latino populations across the U.S. This study thus furthers Marc Rodriguez's call for an analysis of the "translocal dimension" of Latino life, politics, and community formation, placing the history of previously-understudied Latino communities into conversation with earlier the analysis of Latino populations across the country.[26]

Wisconsin, and the city of Milwaukee specifically, are crucial locations for studying the importance of locality within Latino settlement in the U.S. Midwest. The state and city's long histories as places of settlement for immigrants from across the world serves as a primary consideration.[27] Originally home to the Menominee, Fox, Mascouten, Sauk, Potawatomi, Ojibwe, and Ho-Chunk, the area abutting Lake Michigan now known as Milwaukee was initially reconnoitered by French Catholic missionaries in the late seventeenth century. Nearly a century of European conquest and violent confrontations with indigenous populations transformed the region into a key site for settler colonialism by the early nineteenth century. Following the establishment of white settlements in southeastern Wisconsin, early European immigrants –

---

[25] Vicki Ruiz, *Cannery Lives, Cannery Women: Mexican Women, Unionization, and the California Food Processing Industry, 1930-1950* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987); George Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

[26] Rodriguez, *The Tejano Diaspora,* 2.

[27] The historiography surrounding Milwaukee is vast, stretching across studies of its socialist, religious, and industrial history. For general studies surveying the city's history, see Bayrd Still, *Milwaukee: The History of A City* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1948); Kathleen Neils Conzen, *Immigrant Milwaukee, 1836 – 1860: Accommodation and Community in a Frontier City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976); La Vern J. Rippley, *The Immigrant Experience in Wisconsin* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1985); Margo Anderson and Victor Greene, ed., *Perspectives on Milwaukee's Past* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009).

foreign born and of various faiths – came to the region not as intruders, but as welcomed guests during the second half of the nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth century. From the state's founding, Wisconsin legislators sought to encourage settlement from Europe; the state's 1848 constitution, for example, made it one of the first to bestow the franchise to foreign-born inhabitants after only one year of residency, a form of hospitality not readily offered to indigenous or African-American residents.[28] Milwaukee served as the point of entry for many immigrants and migrants arriving to the state, and quickly became the home of one of the most heavily-concentrated foreign-born populations in the country. Upon settlement in the city, immigrants developed communities that at times existed as separate ethnic enclaves. European incomers from Germany, Poland, Italy, and Ireland, and an assortment of eastern European regions, did not follow a simple or straight-line assimilation process into the larger Milwaukee community – their histories were varied, complicated, and marked political, economic, and cultural clashes with the city's dominant American population. The labor provided by European immigrants arriving after the turn of the century transformed the city into a "mature metropolis, one that stood as one of the most industrialized urban centers in the nation."[29]

Promises of better-paying positions in tanneries, foundries, and factories brought Mexican immigrants to the state beginning in the 1920s, while the draw of seasonal agricultural labor in surrounding rural areas prompted the migration of Mexican-descent Texans as early as the 1930s. Puerto Rican workers, searching for better prospects than those found on their native island, travelled to Milwaukee following World War Two with similar dreams in mind. Despite

---

[28] Kate Asaphine Everest, "How Wisconsin Came By Its Large German Element," Wisconsin Historical Society Proceedings, *Collections* XII (Madison, 1892), 314; Louise P. Kellogg, "The Alien Suffrage Provision in the Constitution of Wisconsin," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 1, no. 4 (June 1918): 422-425.

[29] Still, *Milwaukee,* 433. Milwaukee was catapulted into national prominence as it outpaced averages in iron and steel production and set standards in the leather and brewing industries in the early decades of the twentieth century.

settling in one of the most ethnically diverse American cities of the early twentieth century, however, Milwaukee Latinos experienced a much different settlement experience from that of their European-origin predecessors, marked less by growing access to political and social power and more by racial discrimination, economic exclusion, and social isolation.

Most Latinos who made their way to Milwaukee in the twentieth century did so as workers in search of better employment and lives for their families. For those who considered themselves devout, the sacred and the secular were not two disparate or separable ideas – they existed in constant conversation and informed their daily lives and interactions with other workers, communities, and institutions. To better understand how Latinos in Milwaukee understood their identity as workers and as religious devotees, this study also works at the juncture point where labor and working-class, immigration, and religious histories meet. It draws in part from renowned labor historian Herbert Gutman's call for scholars to interrogate the relationship between religion and working-class communities. As early as the mid 1960s, Gutman reminded historians that "the many functions of religion" could not be understood merely "by analyzing what leading clergymen said and what social philosophy religious journals professed." Instead, Gutman called upon labor historians to study religion through the "varieties of working-class community life," a broad spectrum that includes the social and economic structures that shape communities, voluntary associations (including places of worship, benevolent societies, and trade unions), their connections to a larger community, and their particular and shared values.[30] Labor historians, much like those scholars of Latinidad described above, have been guilty of ignoring religion as a critical component of working peoples' lives and their worldviews. Despite what Joseph McCartin identifies as "abundant evidence suggesting

[30] Herbert G. Gutman, "Protestantism and the American Labor Movement: The Christian Spirit in the Gilded Age," *American Historical Review* 72, no. 1 (October 1966), 79.

the importance of religious influence on the lives, work, and struggles" of workers in North America, labor and working-class historians have yet to study fully the importance of faith, religious institutions, and religiosity amongst workers and working-class communities.[31] Where labor scholars have engaged with religion, they have tended to make "religion a prop, ignoring belief in the supernatural that is at the core of American religiosity," focusing on how groups "use" religion, rather than attempting to understand how faith functions as an integral component of working people's lives.[32] This study contributes to a recent turn within the field that understands the sacred as a vital component of analysis for studying working and immigrant communities in the United States.[33]

Latino workers who settled in Milwaukee found within religious institutions alternative avenues for political, economic, social, and cultural resistance and empowerment. Similar to the ethnic Irish, Italian, and French Canadians in Evelyn Savidge Sterne's study of turn-of-the-century Providence and its Catholic communities, religion functioned for many Milwaukee Latinos as a form of network for working-class immigrants and their children.[34] While discrimination in their workplaces may have prevented many Milwaukee Latinos from engaging in union leadership, and citizenship status may have complicated their ability to engage in city politics, churches and lay organizations became laboratories for political empowerment and

---

[31] Joseph A. McCartin, "The Force of Faith: An Introduction to the Labor and Religion Special Issue," *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 6, no. 1 (2009): 1-4. Another prescient call for the marriage of religious and labor history can be found in Leslie Woodcock Tentler's 1993 article identifying religious history's (in this case, Catholic histories) marginality in working-class studies. See Leslie Woodcock Tentler, "On the Margins: The State of American Catholic History," *American Quarterly* 45, no. 1 (March 1993): 104-127.

[32] Elizabeth Fones-Wolf and Ken Fones-Wolf, *Struggle for the Soul of the Postwar South: White Evangelical Protestants and Operation Dixie* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 2.

[33] For recent efforts to incorporate religion into labor and working-class history, see Evelyn Savidge Sterne, *Ballots and Bibles: Ethnic Politics and the Catholic Church in Providence* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2008); Richard J. Callahan Jr., *Work and Faith in the Kentucky Coal Fields: Subject to Dust* (Bloomington: University of Illinois Press, 2008); Jarod Roll, *Spirit of Rebellion: Labor and Religion in the New Cotton South* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010); Erik S. Gellman and Jarod Roll, *The Gospel of the Working-Class: Labor's Southern Prophets in New Deal America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011).

[34] Sterne, *Ballots and Bibles*.

platforms to redefine engagement with the city's power structures. Catholic and Protestant parishes provided the space for Latinos to resist Americanization efforts, create employment networks, and even petition through formal and informal political networks for refugee status for Latino believers abroad. Where traditional engines of economic or social justice were absent or unavailable, religious institutions became the vehicles for genuine protest and change.

The story of religious life for Latinos in Milwaukee also reveals points of collaboration and inclusion among different ethnic and racial groups, a story that differs sharply from the social and economic circumstances Latinos faced in their workplaces and in other parts of their daily lives. Within Milwaukee churches, where Latinos at times intermingled with their white American working-class counterparts, religious devotion became a vehicle to foster what Elaine Peña calls a "culture of inclusion."[35] In the context of religious celebration, Milwaukeeans of different ethnic backgrounds could join together to pray, eat, and organize, and in the process, create associations and relationships that blurred racial, citizenship, and class divisions. Through collaboration within Latino and other Milwaukee communities, these immigrants and subsequent second- and third-generation communities "reconfigure(d) and reconstitute(d) community in the face of physical and cultural dismemberment."[36] Latinos and other Milwaukeeans alike engaged with new partners in mobilizing for social movements, and in the process generated a political discourse espousing innovative forms of social solidarity constructed upon shared religious identities and ideals.[37]

---

[35] Peña, "Beyond Mexico: Guadalupan Sacred Space Production and Mobilization in a Chicago Suburb," 721-747.
[36] Josef Barton, "Borderland Discontents: Mexican Migration in Regional Contexts, 1880, 1930," in *Repositioning North American Migration History: New Directions in Modern Continental Migration, Citizenship, and Community*, ed. Marc S. Rodriguez (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester, 2004), 141-205.
[37] Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, Genelle Gaudinez, Hector Lara, and Billie C. Ortiz, "'There's a Spirit that Transcends the Border': Faith, Ritual, and Postnational Protest at the U.S.-Mexico Border," *Sociological Perspectives* 47, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 133-159.

Recognizing the shared cultural, linguistic, and religious traditions among these Latino communities, this study pushes against the boundaries that define subsections of Latino history, revealing the connective tissue that has bound Latino communities in Milwaukee. A term like *Latino* can be notoriously difficult to define. It often serves as a broad category that includes a wide diversity of backgrounds and identities, including linguistic heritage, cultural and historical customs, legal residence and documentation status, and religious belief. These identities are rarely ever stable – they are constantly shifting in relation to external forces (be they political or other) or internal identifications. Scholar of urban spaces Mike Davis notes, however, that if there is no "reducible essence to Latinidad," or at least one that is defined solely along lines of language, history, or religion, "it does not necessarily follow that there is no substance."[38] Milwaukee's Spanish-speaking population, which first began with the arrival of Mexican workers in the 1920s, grew to include Puerto Ricans and Cubans in the postwar years and Central American immigrants in the last decades of the twentieth century. Milwaukee community member Ray Bacalzo, a second-generation Mexican American whose parents settled in the city as members of *los primeros,* noted that social isolation, language, and shared work experiences often served as the impetus for collaboration and cross-national community building between Latin American-descent communities. During the mid twentieth century, Bacalzo noted that a "sense of Hispanicity, and Latinoism" developed among Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Central Americans, an identity that recognized distinctions in national heritage, customs, settlement experiences, and documentation status while acknowledging a shared reception by Milwaukee society.[39]

---

[38] Mike Davis, *Magic Urbanism: Latinos Reinvent the U.S. City* (New York: Verso Books, 2000), 15.
[39] Ray Bacalzo interview, conducted by author, June 12, 2015.

Bacalzo's account thus calls for an understanding of Latinidad that acknowledges both internal identity development *and* external reception and perception. This study borrows from Omar Valerio-Jiménez, Santiago Vaquera-Vásquez, and Claire F. Fox's definition of the term "Latino," one that understands the identity as a "racialized and politicized concept, produced through everyday experiences and social interactions in specific historical and geographical settings."[40] Latinos in Milwaukee shared a unique process of identity formation influenced by an interconnected history of migration and record of ethno-racial discrimination by other Milwaukeeans. Their histories were tied by external, racialized categorization and representation, as well as social rejection. Latinos in Milwaukee could at times develop what political scientist Feline Freir refers to as a sense of "panethnic groupness" that subsumed national identification while also incorporating the particularities of each group's linguistic, cultural, and religious practices.[41] Borrowing from Tomás Summers-Sandoval, Jr.'s exploration of "panethnic solidarity" in twentieth-century San Francisco, this study examines the various expressions of pan-Latin community that, though fluid and historically contingent, had the ability to cut across lines of difference defined by categories of nationality or immigration status.[42] In Milwaukee, members of the Latino community envisioned and enunciated a pan-Latin identity through religious institutions and then expressed it in movements for social and economic justice, as demonstrated in the Chicano and Young Lords organizations of the 1960s and 1970s and the Sanctuary Movement of the 1980s. In response to a variety of economic, social, and cultural pressures, Milwaukeeans of various Latino backgrounds at times united under a shared banner of

---

[40] Omar Valerio-Jiménez, Santiago Vaquera-Vásquez, and Claire F. Fox, "Introduction: History, Placemaking, and Cultural Contributions," in *The Latino Midwest Reader,* 11.
[41] Luisa Feline Freier, "How Our Lady of Guadalupe Became Lutheran: Latin American Migration and Religious Change," *Migraciones Internacionales* 5, no. 2 (July-December 2009): 153-190.
[42] Tomás Summers-Sandoval, Jr., *Latinos at the Golden Gate: Creating Community and Identity in San Francisco* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 2.

Latinidad, a form of solidarity responsive to institutional imperatives and political opportunities. The panethnic formations they created through cross-Latino social and religious movements had the potential to recast preexisting social configurations while demonstrating the fluidity of racial, ethnic, and social identities.

Tracing Milwaukee's Latino Religiosity Across the Twentieth Century

"I Was a Stranger and You Welcomed Me" unfolds between the years of 1920 to 1990 because this time frame forms a discrete part of the history of Milwaukee's Latino community in two key ways. During this period, Milwaukee's Latino community grew from small *colonias* of itinerant Mexican industrial and migrant workers first recruited by employers in the early decades of the twentieth century into a diverse assortment of communities with representation from multiple Latin American countries. Immigrants from Mexico began arriving to the state in the 1920s in large numbers, often as supplemental labor brought by industries to break strikes initiated by the city's heavily-unionized workforce. By the late 1940s and early 1950s, a growing community of ten thousand Mexican-descent and second-generation families were joined by more than five thousand Puerto Rican migrants, likewise recruited by Milwaukee industries with the intent of supporting a booming industrial economy. As both communities continued to grow at mid-century, nearly a thousand Cuban refugees fleeing their country's communist revolution arrived in Milwaukee in the 1960s. Just two decades later, the city received another group of refugees from Latin America – Central American exiles from Guatemala and El Salvador – who settled into a Latino community that had grown to more than seventy thousand residents.[43]

[43] University of Wisconsin-Madison Applied Population Laboratory & University of Wisconsin Extension, "Latinos in Wisconsin – A Statistical Overview," (Madison: University of Wisconsin-Madison Applied Population Laboratory, 2014), 2.

For many of the Latino immigrants and migrants who arrived in the city after the 1920s, the church served as a vital space from which to form community and engage the oftentimes uninviting social and economic landscape of Milwaukee. The city's white clergy and laity witnessed a distinct transformation in the ethno-racial make-up of those congregations originally established by European immigrants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, as many Catholic priests on the city's now predominantly Spanish-speaking south side adopted the saying, "We bury in Polish, we baptize in Spanish."[44] Every subsequent generation of Latino immigrants arriving to Milwaukee's parishes in the twentieth century encountered churches altered – or, as religious historian Timothy Matovina has coined, "Latinized" – by preceding Spanish-speaking communities of religious devotees from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Central America.[45] These transformed religious communities became critical sites from which Latinos could draw upon moral teachings and their faith to create social movements.

While documenting and analyzing the diversification of Milwaukee's Latino community from 1920 to 1990, this study ends at the precipice of dynamic demographic shifts in the state of Wisconsin and across the U.S. Midwest. In the final decades of the twentieth and initial decades of the twenty-first century, the Midwest has witnessed outsized growth in its Latino-descent communities. Between 2000 and 2010, while the overall Latino population in the country grew by 43 percent, in the Midwest it increased by 73 percent, more than twelve times the growth of the overall population of the region.[46] In Wisconsin, the state's population has nearly quadrupled since 1980. Of late, Latino residents have increased from 193,000 in 2000 to 336,000 in 2010, a

---

[44] John Gurda, *Cream City Chronicles: Stories of Milwaukee's Past* (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2006), 62.
[45] Matovina, *Latino Catholicism,* 28.
[46] Beyond the U.S. South, the Midwest maintains the fastest-growing Latino population in the country. "Census 2010," Pew Hispanic Research Center, accessed January 1, 2018, http://www.pewhispanic.org/census-2010/.

growth of 74 percent that has constituted the largest numerical increase in the state between U.S. censuses and has made Latinos the largest minority group in Wisconsin.[47] This study places these recent demographic changes within a larger historical perspective, providing scholars with the necessary context for understanding *how* and *why* Latinos made community in Milwaukee across the twentieth century.

Methodologically, "I Was a Stranger and You Welcomed Me" details the priorities and agendas of broader religious orders, parishes, and ecumenical organizations while also lending particular consideration to the voices of individuals who constituted Milwaukee's faith communities. This project's archival base begins with the records of faith-based social agencies, congregational registers, and the personal papers of Milwaukee clergy, laity, and activists who worked within the Latino community. It delves into the records of city, county, and state agencies such as the Milwaukee International Institute, the Wisconsin Governor's Commission on Human Rights, and the Wisconsin Governor's Committee on Migratory Labor, as well as the papers of social justice organizations such as the Latin American Union for Civil Rights (LAUCR) and the Milwaukee Sanctuary Coordinating Committee (MSCC), to better understand the interplay between grassroots activism, religious outreach, and local and state intervention in Latino communities. Newspapers, including the Milwaukee *Journal* and *Sentinel,* the two papers of record for the city, and the Catholic press, specifically Milwaukee publications like the *Catholic Herald Citizen,* the diocese's Spanish-language *El Mensajero Católico,* and the local Knights of Columbus *Compass*, provide information on how religious institutions received the city's Latino immigrants and their growing communities. Finally, several periodicals published

[47] Latinos' share in Wisconsin's overall population has grown from 2% in 1990 to 3.5% in 2000 to 6.34% in 2014. University of Wisconsin-Madison Applied Laboratory & University of Wisconsin Extension, "Latinos in Wisconsin," v.

within the Latino community, including *El Mundo*, *El Mutalista*, and *La Guardia*, provide insight into important events within Spanish-speaking communities and serve as a barometer for assessing the cultural and political engagement among Latinos in Milwaukee.

Community formation and activism within religious spaces, however, cannot be fully comprehended by studying institutions and their documents. To understand the personal histories of individuals, I have conducted oral histories among Latino and white clerical and lay leaders, activists, and community members that reveal the customs, observances, and ideas that have colored the daily lived experience of community formation, advocacy, protest, and faith in Latino Milwaukee. Recovering the historical presence of Mexicans means turning to oral histories and the memories the individuals and families of Latino descent that made Milwaukee their home. Wisconsin's Latino communities have been critically under-archived, creating large silences within the traditional documentation of personal papers and governmental records often found in state historical societies and libraries. Oral history offers one of the only true portals into the social and personal lives of those who made Milwaukee home. Historian Gary Y. Okihiro reminds scholars that oral history serves not only as "a tool or method for recovering history," but also as "a theory of history which maintains that the common folk and the dispossessed have a history and that history must be written."[48] By moving beyond institutional documents like denominational publications and records, oral history also serves as a way of avoiding a top-down history that focuses merely on leaders, institutions, and major denominations.[49] Historian Vicki Ruiz argues that oral history "fosters an understanding of

[48] Gary Y. Okihiro, "Oral History and the Writing of Ethnic History," in *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, ed. David King Dunaway and Willa K. Baum (Walnut Creek, C.A.: AltaMira Press, 1996), 209.
[49] Tracy E. K'Meyer, ""I Just Felt Called…": Oral History and the Meaning of Faith in American Religious History," *The Journal of American History* 86, no. 2 (September 1999), 724-733.

individual lives within the worlds of family, community, and nation."[50] This study adds the category of faith to that list, better allowing scholars to investigate the private and public aspects of personal belief.

This study examines the secular and sacred lives of Latinos in Milwaukee through six chapters. Chapter One examines how shared religious faith served as a bridge between Milwaukee's Mexican and white communities in the late 1920s. With the onset of Mexico's Cristero War in 1926, Milwaukee Catholics' efforts to construct a chapel for the Mexican community became part of an interethnic transnational "modern crusade" to protect and invigorate Catholicism across the United States and Mexico. White Catholic superiors, clergy, and laity explicitly tied the preservation of religious liberty abroad to the growth of Milwaukee's Mexican Catholic congregation, emphasizing the ties of Catholic fellowship that united all true believers across national boundaries. After the successful establishment of the chapel in late 1926, members of the white and Mexican Catholic communities discussed the persecution of Catholics abroad during their gatherings at Our Lady of Guadalupe, turning the religious space into an international center for political engagement. Through this fundraising process and the formation of the Mexican Mission Chapel of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the chapel became an interethnic transnational project that brought these two previously disparate groups into closer collaboration and communion and served as a crucial space for community formation through the mid-twentieth century.

Chapter Two expands the geographic scope of this study by moving into the rural spaces of central Wisconsin, analyzing the creation of migrant ministry programs by Catholic and Protestant organizations in response to the rise in Mexican-descent immigration to Wisconsin in

---

[50] Vicki L. Ruiz, "Situating Stories: The Surprising Consequences of Oral History," *Oral History Review* 25, no. 1/2 (Summer-Autumn 1998): 79.

the decades following the Great Depression. Christian organizations of various denominations engaged in religious outreach to Texas-born Mexican Americans, or Tejanos, while expanding educational and healthcare initiatives, and petitioned state legislators for protections for migrant workers. Migrant ministers' interactions with agencies such as the Governor's Commission on Human Rights and growers' lobbying firms revealed a complicated interplay between efforts to better the temporal living conditions of Tejano migrants while also competing for the souls – or rather, the denominational allegiance – of Latino congregants.

The subsequent chapters of this dissertation analyze an increasingly diverse Latino community across the state of Wisconsin stretching into the early 1960s, and efforts by religious organizations to connect with these new arrivals. Chapter Three studies the arrival and reception of Puerto Rican migrants and Cuban exiles in Milwaukee in the middle decades of the twentieth century. Both populations navigated questions of belonging and citizenship in their new home city within the context of an unstable and ever-changing Cold War landscape, shouldering and discarding political affiliations and political allegiances. As they had for Mexican immigrants beginning in the 1920s, religious organizations played a key role in receiving these Latin American emigres and helped define the social and political parameters by which the newest Spanish speakers would be integrated into their new communities.

Chapter Four bridges the histories of Latino settlement in the urban spaces of southeastern Wisconsin with the rural agricultural communities of the state's central counties, detailing an accelerated spirit of engagement stirring within Milwaukee's religious spaces towards a quickly-growing Latino community. As the city's Mexican-descent, Puerto Rican, and Cuban community boomed during the 1960s, the city's Catholics and Protestants committed thousands of dollars and spiritual support to the creation of three new permanent institutions –

the Spanish Center, the United Spot, and the United Migrant Opportunity Services – that aimed to close the economic, social, and cultural gaps that persisted between white and Latino residents. These organizations consolidated many of the migrant and urban ministry initiatives initiated by these religious groups over the previous two decades, at times doing so in the spirit of ecumenical collaboration. In petitioning for resources for the growing Spanish-speaking community, Mexican and Puerto Rican communities and their white clerical allies for the first time adopted a pan-Latino identity, doing so not as a culturally-unifying marker but as an amalgamating title from which to petition for institutional resources for the broader community.

The final two chapters chart a rising political consciousness within Milwaukee's Latino community in the final decades of the twentieth century. Chapter Five examines the contentious relationship between Milwaukee religious organizations and Chicano and Puerto Rican activists in the 1960s and 1970s. Following an infusion of federal funds from the Office of Economic Opportunity, white and Latino community leaders clashed over the delegation of leadership positions within Latino-serving organizations founded in the early 1960s. Seizing upon a rising social movement consciousness sweeping across the nation, Milwaukee Latinos of distinct national backgrounds and generational cohorts adopted a pan-Latino identity as a form of political solidarity. Protesting that churches and religious spaces were neither open to the public nor responsive to the Latino community's needs, activists demanded monetary and institutional backing to support economic, social, and educational programming for Spanish speakers across the state.

The sixth and final chapter examines the development of the interfaith sanctuary movement in Milwaukee in the 1980s. The movement was an interfaith, interracial, and interclass effort to support Central American refugees who had fled destruction in their

homeland and sought legal asylum in the United States but found an American government unwilling to follow international human rights law and properly adjudicate their cases. Milwaukee religious congregations and organizations of nearly every faith, heeding a moral calling to welcome the stranger, joined together to open their doors to places of sanctuary for refugees, often in defiance of federal immigration law.

This study concludes with insights on the continued importance of faith, religious institutions, and social movement building within Latino communities. Turning to the resurgent sanctuary movement of the early twenty-first century, this final section reiterates the importance of studies that incorporate analyses of Latinidad, religion, and community formation to better understand historical and contemporary issues of belonging in the United States.

CHAPTER 1

"Juntos en el nombre de Dios": Milwaukee's Mexican Mission Chapel of Our Lady of Guadalupe, 1920-1939

In October of 1926, the Milwaukee Pere-Marquette Council of the Knights of Columbus placed a call for "immediate individual action" from all "Brother Knight[s]" in their monthly periodical, *The Compass*. The full-page announcement implored all members of the Wisconsin Catholic fraternal association to contribute to the national organization's efforts to support Catholics in Mexico, who were currently engaged in armed hostilities with the anticlerical Mexican government. Along with this request came a petition for support for Milwaukee's own Mexican Catholic community and their efforts to construct a local mission chapel.[1] For nearly two years, members of the city's white and Mexican Catholic communities had been feverishly engaged in an interethnic community project to provide for the spiritual, physical, and social needs of Milwaukee's growing Mexican community. In 1926, the Mexican situation took on a much larger and deeper significance for the city's faithful, as the Milwaukee Knights council portrayed the dual fundraising efforts as part of a "modern crusade" to defend and strengthen Catholicism, religious liberty, and civilization itself at home and abroad. According to the advertisement, each Knight's three-dollar quota played an individually small but collectively significant role in the protection of Mexican Catholics both in Mexico and in Milwaukee. The donations collected by the Milwaukee Brothers, albeit small (the final total raised amounted to

[1] "Have You Sent Your Subscription to the Knights of Columbus Mexican Fund?" *The Compass* (Milwaukee), October 1926. Each American Knights of Columbus council was tasked with collecting money to be used for the "National Knights of Columbus Fund for the Educational Campaign to give the American public the truth about the persecution of the Church in Mexico," a million-dollar operation that would create propaganda to be distributed across the United States. See "Knights of Columbus," *Catholic Citizen*, October 16, 1926; Supreme Knight James Flaherty to U.S. Knights of Columbus Councils, August 26, 1926, Box 149, Folder 3, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Office of the General Secretary, The American Catholic History Research Center and University, The Catholic University of America (hereafter referred to as ACHRU).

$1,500, well short of the projected $9,000 goal), made a sizable impact in strengthening the bonds between the city's white and Mexican Catholic communities.[2]

Shared religious faith, manifested in the defense of Mexican Catholics and the establishment of a Catholic mission chapel attuned to the needs of the city's Spanish-speaking community, served as a bridge between Milwaukee's Mexican and white communities in the 1920s. For the laborers and families that had travelled from the central states of Mexico and from Texas, the religious experiences the mission offered served as an escape from the difficult adjustment to a new life in the Midwestern urban industrial city. Despite settling in one of the most ethnically heterogeneous American cities of the early twentieth century, Milwaukee Mexicans experienced a much different settlement experience from that of European-origin immigrants, marked less by growing access to political and social power and more by ethno-racial discrimination, economic exclusion, and social isolation. Mexicans, who had been recruited for use as strikebreakers in the early 1920s, often found themselves embroiled in tensions with the city's established European-origin communities. Despite facing difficulties in their workplaces and neighborhoods, including shop floor discrimination, police harassment, and assimilationist efforts by the city's settlement agencies, Mexicans found partners in Milwaukee's Catholic laity and clergy, who actively tended to the newly-arrived immigrants' spiritual and temporal needs. Leaders within the white Catholic community invited members of the expanding Mexican *colonia*, or colony, into Milwaukee parishes in the mid-1920s, creating the beginnings of an interethnic community joined under the banner of a common faith. By early 1926, white and Mexican Catholics began planning for the construction of an independent chapel that would grow into a space where Mexican community members could practice their faith in their own

[2] Frank Gross interview by Arnoldo Sevilla, Milwaukee Mexican-American interviews, 1974-1977, sound recording, tape 854A, Wisconsin Historical Society [hereafter referred to as WHS].

language and through familiar ethno-religious practices. It would become a welcome respite from the rigors of backbreaking labor, cultural isolation, and racial discrimination.

With the onset of the Cristero War in the spring of 1926, Milwaukee Mexican and white American Catholics' efforts to construct a chapel for the Mexican community became intimately connected as part of a "modern crusade" to protect and invigorate Catholicism across the United States and Mexico. Historian Anne Martínez has identified the Cristero War as a crucial period in American-Mexican religious relations in which U.S. Catholics felt "a responsibility to sustain the faithful in these historically Catholic lands." This study furthers Martínez's call for historians to understand as intertwined those Mexican and U.S. narratives that investigate the religious lives of people who crossed national borders across the twentieth century.[3] In Milwaukee, Catholic superiors, clergy, and lay leaders connected the preservation of religious liberty abroad with the growth of the city's Mexican Catholic congregation, insisting that religious fellowship united believers across national and ethnic boundaries.

The creation of the Mexican Mission Chapel, and the political organizing that Milwaukee's burgeoning Mexican community engaged in through the Cristero War, offers historians a case study in cross-border political mobilization within religious spaces. Tomás Summers Sandoval notes how the transnational institution of Catholicism animates community formation among Latinos of disparate national backgrounds and immigration status across borders.[4] Milwaukee Mexicans constituted a faith community within the church's walls in their new urban home, but also used the resources provided by their religious sponsors in the local Catholic archdiocese to maintain community abroad. Tracking closely the Mexican state's efforts

---

[3] Anne Martínez, *Catholic Borderlands: Mapping Catholicism onto American Empire, 1905-1935* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), 2-4.
[4] Tomás F. Summers Sandoval Jr., *Latinos at the Golden Gate: Creating Community and Identity in San Francisco* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 7.

to suppress church power in the late 1920s, the city's Mexican Catholics kept abreast of political machinations back home, monitoring what Donna Gabbacia has referred to as "immigrant foreign relations."[5] Milwaukee's newest immigrants were not alone in binding their personal faith with these "foreign relations," as white Catholics connected the conservation of religious liberty abroad to the development of the city's new Mexican congregation. Fraternal organizations such as the Knights linked the local and the international in their fundraising efforts to help provide political and financial support for Mexicans living in both countries. Following the establishment of the chapel, Mexican and white Catholics gathered at Our Lady of Guadalupe to discuss the continued persecution of Catholics across Mexico, transforming the religious space into a location for interethnic and transnational political engagement.

The case of Milwaukee's Mexican community also offers avenues for historians of Latino immigration to better understand the church as a social space of possible cultural interaction. Scholars of Latino Catholicism have disproportionally focused on integrationist efforts initiated by American clergy and laity within Latino immigrant congregations, ignoring the points of collaboration that shared religion fostered. Mary Odem notes that scholars of Latino immigration to the U.S. have not viewed the Catholic Church as a major source of community empowerment, instead pointing towards a "history of insensitivity, discrimination, and assimilation efforts" on the part of American Catholic clergy and institutions.[6] Past scholars have proposed that, with the exception of Americanization campaigns and funding for catechistic schools, Catholic parishes in the United States neglected their Spanish-speaking brethren before

[5] Donna Gabaccia, *Foreign Relations: American Immigration in Global Perspective* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 3.
[6] Mary E. Odem, "Our Lady of Guadalupe in the New South: Latino Immigrants and the Politics of Integration in the Catholic Church," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 24, no. 1 (Fall 2004): 28.

the large influx of Mexican immigrants after World War Two.[7] The case of Milwaukee, however, offers a study in shared religiosity, cross-ethnic community cooperation, and cultural negotiation. Catholicism and the development of an independent mission created the physical and spiritual space for an immigrant Mexican community to affirm its religious and cultural traditions in the face of attempts to deprive it of its identity in other arenas, such as the workplace.[8] This study thus reorients our understanding of white-Mexican relations in the first decades of the twentieth century, presenting a more nuanced understanding of how these two communities coexisted, interacted and, at times, even collaborated.

Unlike the experiences of Mexican-descent populations in places like Texas and California, where Spanish-speaking communities drew upon centuries-long histories of existence and settlement, the early arrival process of Mexican immigrants to Wisconsin in many ways paralleled the stories of European immigrants who had preceded them decades before. Despite facing a less upwardly-mobile economic position than older European immigrant groups, Milwaukee Mexicans did share a common experience of faith-based community development in the early decades of the twentieth century. In a city defined as much by the steeples of its ethnic parishes as by the factory smokestacks that drew workers to its growing industries, Mexican families followed their predecessors in centering the development of their *colonia* on their faith

---

[7] Robert Lint Sagerena, "Migration and Mexican American Religious Life, 1948-2000," in *Immigration and Religion in America: Comparative and Historical Perspective*, ed. Richard Alba, Albert J. Raboteau, and Josh DeWind (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 56-70. For more early scholarship on the American Catholic Church's reception of Mexican immigrants in the early twentieth century, see George J. Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican-American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 151-170; Zaragosa Vargas, *Proletarians of the North: Mexican Industrial Workers in Detroit and the Midwest: 1917-1933* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 70-75; Moises Sandoval, *On The Move: A History of the Hispanic Church in the United States* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1990), 51-55.

[8] David Gutiérrez, "The New Turn in Chicano/Mexican History: Integrating Religious Belief and Practice," in *Catholics in the American Century: Recasting Narratives of U.S. History*, ed. R Scott Appleby and Kathleen Sprows Cummings (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012), 121; Mario T. Garcia, *Católicos: Resistance and Affirmation in Chicano Catholic History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 18-20.

by creating a network of religious organizations and parishes across the city. Within the context of histories of Mexicans in the Midwest, however, the case of Milwaukee is exceptional in its explicit transnational religious character, as the formation of Our Lady of Guadalupe linked the local and the international in the efforts to help provide political, financial, and spiritual support for Mexicans living in both countries.[9]

Perhaps most importantly, this chapter calls upon historians of Latino settlement in urban U.S. centers to conceptualize the church as a cultural landscape and a location for possible spatial cohesion and political mobilization. While historians of Latino immigration have focused their analysis of settlement in urban spaces upon studies of the formation of ethnic enclaves, this chapter argues that religious spaces, and specifically the church, functioned as crucial locations for spatial resettlement for new arrivals, where Mexican-descent populations could create social networks, maintain cultural practices and language, and interact with the city's well-established European-descent communities. For Milwaukee's early Mexican settlers, neighborhood churches provided more than simply religious succor – they became sites of social and political organization and provided meaning to a new urban life structured by racialized geographies and regimented by the priorities of employers. A shared religiosity refashioned neighborhood parishes into ambiguous spaces of ethno-racial interaction, as older generations of white Catholics came to accommodate and support Mexican Catholicism. This is not to suggest that the neighborhood parish in Milwaukee was ever a blank slate – historian Jay Dolan notes that among

[9] This study contributes to a rich historiography on Mexican immigration to and settlement in the U.S. Midwest. See Zaragosa Vargas, *Proletarians of the North: Mexican Industrial Workers in Detroit and the Midwest, 1917-1933* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Dionicio Nodín Valdés, *Barrios Norteños: St. Paul and Midwestern Mexican Communities in the Twentieth Century* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000); Juan R. García, *Mexicans in the Midwest, 1900-1932* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2004); Gabriela Arredondo, *Mexican Chicago: Race, Identity, and Nation, 1916-1939* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008); Michael Innis-Jiménez, *Steel Barrio: The Great Mexican Migration to South Chicago, 1915-1940* (New York: New York University Press, 2013).

diverse immigrant communities that settled in urban spaces across the U.S., the parish church often served as "the most enduring and important cultural institution in the neighborhood" – but rather that it opened the door for possibilities of interaction across racial lines on the grounds of shared moral values and theological understandings.[10] Milwaukee Mexicans followed their European predecessors in structuring political and social life around their congregation during the 1920s. In a city where physical space was oftentimes determined by the boundaries of race, the Mexican Mission Chapel served as a location where Mexicans themselves could determine their own futures. Religious studies scholar Robert Orsi notes that religious devotion, and specifically the creation of churches, can allow marginalized communities to "remap" their cities and create new "urban religious cartographies."[11] Within their mission chapel, Milwaukee Mexicans found a place to assert their agency as well as nurture and house their political beliefs and aspirations, giving significance to lived experiences in a new environment that often marginalized them.

This study of Milwaukee's Mexican immigrant community and their efforts to construct Our Lady of Guadalupe offers historians an opportunity to explore cultural and ethnic identity through a community-driven institution. It is a case study instructive for uncovering and understanding Mexican immigrant and white collaboration under the auspices of a shared faith that resulted in the creation of a parish capable of meeting the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of the Mexican community. Rather than Americanization and assimilation, the Catholic Church in Milwaukee became a transnational space within which the Mexican community could

---

[10] Jay P. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present* (Garden City, NY: Galilee Trade, 1987), 204. This was certainly the case among Milwaukee's European immigrants, where John Gurda has noted that "churches served as anchors of community" among transplanted central and eastern Europeans. See John Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee* (Milwaukee: Milwaukee County Historical Society, 1999), 178.
[11] Robert Orsi, "Introduction: Crossing the City Line," in *Gods of the City: Religion and the American Urban Landscape,* ed. Robert Orsi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 51.

maintain their ethnic, cultural, and linguistic traditions, ultimately allowing Mexican immigrants to negotiate religious and ethnic identities on their own terms.

"Among the most unassimilable": *Los Primeros* and Milwaukee's Early Mexican Colonia

Arriving amid an impassioned national debate over immigration policy, and often recruited to the city as strikebreakers, Milwaukee's early Mexican immigrants confronted a series of barriers in the early-to-mid-1920s that placed them in a tenuous position within the city's ethno-racial hierarchy. Reviled by many of Milwaukee's older generations of European immigrants, who had only recently established themselves politically and socially, *los primeros* struggled to survive economically and socially. Contemporary debates about the racial desirability of Mexican immigrants further complicated their standing in Milwaukee, as social organizations portrayed the city's newest immigrant group as unassimilable. Although aspects of the Mexican settlement story shared similarities with those of older European-origin immigrants, their perceived ethno-racial identity ultimately placed them in perilous social and economic standing in 1920s Milwaukee, resulting in discrimination in the workplace and segregation within the city's public spaces.

Early itinerant Mexicans sojourners to Milwaukee ventured to the upper Midwest spurred by similar motivations as their European predecessors: employment and opportunity. Like other large cities in the region, Milwaukee had grown from a small indigenous settlement to a sizable trading post in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth centuries, before rising to its status as an industrial powerhouse in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Situated along Lake Michigan and with access to river tributaries and a harbor on the city's east side, Milwaukee challenged Chicago's claim as the country's Midwestern metropolis in the early and middle decades of the nineteenth century. Hundreds of thousands of the city's workers, hailing

originally from nearly every European country, produced leather goods at the Pfister and Vogel and Trostel Tanneries, brewed beer at the Miller, Schlitz, and Pabst breweries, and manufactured machine equipment at Allen-Bradley, Falk, Harnischfeger, and Bucyrus-Erie. Active labor and socialist movements, nurtured by the city's large German and Polish immigrant populations, also facilitated vibrant interethnic working-class political cultures.[12]

Milwaukee served as the point of entry for nearly all immigrants settling in Wisconsin. In an area originally inhabited by Menominee, Fox, Mascouten, Sauk, Potawatomi, Ojibwe, and Ho-Chunk, subsequent generations of European immigrants transformed the city's cultural and political landscape. The state's first census in 1848 found that immigrants constituted half of the city's populace, while every subsequent tally traced a growing foreign-born population, reaching its peak of 111,456 in 1910.[13] Germans immigrants, who preserved their cultural traditions through robust Protestant and Catholic parishes, German-language press, fraternal organizations, and parochial schools that maintained their native language, constituted the earliest and largest immigrant community in Milwaukee, and enjoyed a certain political and social power in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.[14] Southern and eastern Europeans, who began immigrating to the city in the late nineteenth century, were initially disparaged by the city's older native born and German communities for perceived cultural and economic differences, but successfully created and maintained their own religious, ethnic, and social institutions. Through

---

[12] Margo Anderson and Victor Greene, "Introduction: Milwaukee in Perspective," in *Perspectives on Milwaukee's Past,* ed. Margo Anderson and Victor Greene (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 1-16; John McCarthy, "Introduction: Labor and Industry," in *Milwaukee Stories,* ed. Thomas J. Jablonsky (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2005), 277-281.

[13] Kathleen Neils Conzen, *Immigrant Milwaukee, 1836 – 1860: Accommodation and Community in a Frontier City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976); La Vern J. Rippley, *The Immigrant Experience in Wisconsin* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1985), 2-27; Roger D. Simon, "The City-Building Process: Housing and Services in New Milwaukee Neighborhoods, 1880-1910," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 86, no. 6 (1996): 31.

[14] Paul Woehrmann, "Milwaukee German Immigrant Values: An Essay," in *Milwaukee Stories*, 211-228; Anke Ortlepp, "*Deutsch-Athen* Revisited: Writing the History of Germans in Milwaukee," in *Perspectives on Milwaukee's Past*, 109-130.

the turn of the century, these immigrant groups lived in fairly established insular communities defined by ethnic and cultural difference.[15]

The outbreak of war in Europe in the mid-1910s changed immigration patterns to Milwaukee and unsettled the racial hierarchy that had existed in the city in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The industrial expansion of World War One and the immediate post-war years prompted a 22 percent growth in the city's population in the 1910s. While the war disrupted transatlantic travel from Europe, reducing the number of immigrants who settled in Milwaukee in the late 1910s to their lowest levels since the founding of the city, an increased demand for labor to meet rising war production pushed Milwaukee industrialists to look to the American South to supplement their workforce.[16] Companies employed hundreds of Africa American workers as strikebreakers against the city's growing labor unions, a pattern that had begun with the arrival of eastern and southern European immigrants and would continue with the recruitment of workers from Mexico just a decade later.[17] Wartime nationalism also disrupted the ability of Milwaukee's ethnic communities to live in separate ethnic enclaves. Historian Thomas August argues that Americanization efforts initiated by organizations such as the Milwaukee County Council of Defense and the Loyalty Legion in 1917 created a "domestic offensive against immigrant culture" that disrupted the ethnic pluralism that allowed Germans and

---

[15] Tom August, *From Assimilation to Multiculturalism: Managing Ethnic Diversity in Milwaukee* (New York: AMS Press, 2013), 6-9; Donald Pienkos, "Politics, Religion, and Change in Polish Milwaukee, 1900-1930," *The Wisconsin Magazine of History* 61, no. 3 (Spring, 1978): 178-209; Dorota Praszalowicz, "The Cultural Changes of Polish-American Parochial Schools in Milwaukee, 1866-1988," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 13, no. 4 (Summer 1994): 23-45; Ripley, *The Immigrant Experience in Wisconsin,* 23.

[16] Gerd Korman, *Industrialization, Immigrants, and Americanizers: The View From Milwaukee, 1866-1921* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1967), 15-40.

[17] As part of the initial waves of the Great Migration to the city, African Americans filled the lowest-paying occupations Milwaukee's companies had to offer, replacing many European-origin workers at the backbreaking work of filling blast furnaces, slaughtering packinghouse animals, and drying hides in tanning rooms. Many European-origin workers united in their opposition to the importation of these strikebreakers during the war, couching their arguments in racialized attacks against African American workers. Joe William Trotter, Jr., *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915-1945* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 39-79.

southern and eastern Europeans to live in relative isolation from each other, and rearranged many of the political dynamics that allowed Germans to dominate cultural and political institutions.[18] The result was the creation of a more integrated cultural character throughout Milwaukee, as city and social service agencies engaged these diverse ethnic communities in order to create a more unified, American national identity during the war. By 1920, the federal census counted Milwaukee's total population at 457,147, with a broad mix of foreign-born whites (110,068, or 24 percent), whites of foreign-born and mixed parentage (213,911, or 47 percent), American-born whites (130, 845, or 29 percent), and a small but growing community of African Americans (2,229, or 0.4 percent of the total population).[19]

Changes in federal laws reduced already diminished immigration from Europe to Milwaukee to a near standstill in the postwar years and furthered the process of creating a less balkanized city community. The Emergency Quota Act of 1921 and the Immigration Act of 1924 limited the absolute numbers of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe allowed entry into the country. Drawing on nativist concerns of an increasing number of "hyphenated Americans" during World War One, immigration quotas established by these acts defined desirability and assimilability upon racial and ethnic distinctions to maintain a preferred national American identity. Immigration restriction drew support from American eugenics, a social and scientific

---

[18] August, *From Assimilation to Multiculturalism*, 37-58. With Germany engaged in hostilities with American troops abroad, and public opinion turning against anything that smacked of sympathy for the Central Powers, Milwaukee's German-American population was forced to prove its national allegiance to the U.S. Thousands of Milwaukee Germans rushed to prove that they were "100% American," changing the name of their social clubs (as the Deutscher Club became the Wisconsin Club), halting theatre production that written by German playwrights, and even changing the name of sauerkraut, a staple of German cuisine, to "liberty cabbage." The German experience differed greatly from that of the city's Slavic immigrants. Milwaukee's southern and eastern European immigrants, who supported their countrymen's efforts abroad against Germany and the Central Powers, celebrated America's entrance into the war with patriotic parades. For more on campaigns to create a more unified American character in Wisconsin during World War I, see Lorin Lee Cary, "The Wisconsin Loyalty Legion, 1917-1918," *The Wisconsin Magazine of History* 53, no. 1 (Autumn, 1969), 33-50; Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee*, 222-226.

[19] *Fourteenth Census of United States, vol. 3: Population 1920* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1922), 1131.

movement of the early twentieth century that touted biological determinism and supported selective breeding and forced sterilization. In lobbying for a reduced and recalibrated immigration system, proponents of restrictionism warned that less desirable immigrants from Europe and South and East Asia threatened the American ideals of cultural, racial, and ethnic homogeneity.[20]

While the Quota Acts restricted immigration from southern and eastern Europe and halted all migration from East and South Asia, Congress protected agricultural needs by exempting immigrants from the Western Hemisphere from the new restrictive limits. Farmers in the Southwest, who had for decades relied on immigrants from Asia to till their fields and harvest their crops, demanded access to importable labor that would be inexpensive and easily accessible. Alexandra Filindara notes that southwestern growers and their congressional advocates fashioned the rhetorical trope of the "temporary Mexican," a migratory worker who wouldn't attempt to settle, assimilate, or integrate into American society, to offer a palatable labor solution that complied with early twentieth century eugenic sensibilities.[21] Due to Mexico's proximity to the United States, legislators portrayed Mexican immigrants as "birds of passage" who would be less likely to attempt to remain permanently in the country and thus would pose a minimal threat to national cultural and racial homogeneity.[22] Presenting Mexicans as biologically disposed to docility and pliability while also displaying a natural predilection for manual labor,

---

[20] Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 21-37. The Emergency Quota Act of 1921 restricted the number of immigrants admitted from any country to three percent of those already living the United States according to the 1910 census, while the Johnson-Reed Act restricted entrants from each nation to two percent of that nationality's presence in the U.S. as documented in the 1890 census.

[21] Alexandra Filindra, "The Emergence of the 'Temporary Mexican': American Agriculture, the US Congress, and the 1920 Hearings on the Temporary Admission of Illiterate Mexican Laborers," *Latin American Research Review* 49, no. 3 (2014), 94.

[22] Camille Guérin-Gonzales, *Mexican Workers and the American Dream: Immigration, Repatriation, and California Farm Labor, 1900-1939* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 25-55.

companies across the U.S. Southwest and Midwest looked to these workers to replace southern and Eastern Europeans as the most heavily recruited immigrant labor force in the mid-1920s.

Milwaukee industrialists worried that the newest set of immigration reforms would disrupt the economic gains they had made during World War I and the immediate postwar years. By the early 1920s, Milwaukee had established itself as one of America's leading industrial urban centers in the nation, due in large part to a record rise in production brought on by wartime reorganization. The list of Milwaukee corporations at the front of industrial production was long and varied, and included organizations such as Allis-Chalmers (heavy machinery), the Harnischfeger Corporation (cranes and hoists), Harley-Davidson (motorcycles), Bucyrus (steam shovels and dredges), and A.O. Smith (automobile frames). Historian John Gurda notes that between 1914 and 1919, Milwaukee's manufacturing production increased from $223.56 million to $576.16 million, an overwhelming 158 percent increase in just five years. Following a short recession in 1921, the city's manufacturing output rose to $700.76 million in 1929.[23] As postwar industrial expansion in the city accelerated the demand for labor, corporations sought to control this fluid and rising component of their cost margins.[24]

Faced with declining immigration from Europe and rising labor needs, many Milwaukee companies also looked south for new workers. Milwaukee's tanneries were among the first companies to recruit labor from Mexico in the spring of 1920. The Pfister and Vogel Leather Company, locked in a bitter strike with their European-origin workers, sent labor recruiters to the middle states of Mexico to find laborers to replace their unionized workforce. The recruiters,

---

[23] Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee,* 241-243.
[24] Avelardo Valdez, *Economic Integration of Mexicans and Puerto Ricans in Milwaukee* (Milwaukee: The Spanish Speaking Outreach Institute, Division of Student Affairs, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 1988), 15, Series 3, Box 17, Folder 4, Marc S. Rodriguez Papers, Julian Samora Library at the Institute for Latino Studies, University of Notre Dame (hereafter referred to as JSL).

known in Mexico as *enganchistas*, promised Mexican men, many of whom were single and young, the opportunity to travel to the U.S. to find stable employment. The Mexican workers, many of them recruited from rural villages in the states of Michoacán and Jalisco, signed contracts for limited-term employment, but were never informed that they would be used as strikebreakers against the city's unionized labor force.[25]

Milwaukee employers' recruitment of Mexican workers as scab labor earned the city's newest immigrant group the ire of their white peers. While the *Milwaukee Journal* described with curiosity the arrival of the "swarthy Fracescos [sic] and Juans," designating them members of Mexico's "peon" class, striking tannery workers met *los primeros* at the Milwaukee train station ready to confront the newest recruits with violence to protect their employment. Afraid to allow their newly recruited Mexican workers to leave the tannery, management from Pfister and Vogel hired instructors from the Milwaukee Young Men's Christian Association (Y.M.C.A) to lead weekly English classes and provide recreation inside the factory, while threats of violence from European-origin workers forced the men to sleep on cots in makeshift dormitories in the factory. Resigned to living within the walls of their workplace, these early Mexican immigrants did not interact with the Milwaukee community beyond antagonistic workplace exchanges.[26]

Milwaukee companies in several industries, both industrial and agricultural, continued to recruit Mexican laborers throughout the 1920s, looking to the central states of Mexico and the American Southwest for workers. Many laborers brought directly from Mexico signed six-month contracts written by their country's consulate but received little information regarding contract

---

[25] Juan Arenas interview by Arnoldo Sevilla, Milwaukee Mexican-American interviews, 1974-1977, sound recording, tape 857A, WHS; John Gurda, *The Latin Community on Milwaukee's Near South Side* (Milwaukee: Milwaukee Urban Observatory, 1976), 5.
[26] "Habla Usted Ingles? Mexican Newcomers Anxious to Learn," *Milwaukee Journal*, May 15, 1920.

stipulations beyond their wage levels.[27] Immigrants arriving directly from Mexico came from several states, including Guanajuato, Jalisco, Aguascalientes, Michoacán, Zacatecas, and Nuevo Leon. Agriculturalists also recruited Mexican workers as seasonal labor to the rural areas surrounding Milwaukee, where thousands worked in the sugar beet harvest. Following the end of the harvest season, many of these *betabeleros* trekked to urban centers in southeastern Wisconsin in search of employment for the winter. Hundreds of these workers settled in Waukesha, a town adjacent to Milwaukee, where they established one of the first Mexican communities in Wisconsin in the late 1910s.[28]

As the number of workers recruited from Mexico grew, laborers ventured beyond their factory quarters to find more permanent homes in the city. While fewer than fifty foreign-born Mexicans called Milwaukee home in 1910, by 1927 over three thousand immigrant Mexican laborers and their families had migrated to the city in search of work in the city's growing industries.[29] Because of their limited economic resources, nearly all of the new arrivals rented apartments on the city's near south side close to the factories and tanneries where they worked, specifically in the Bay View factory district and the Walker's Point neighborhood of the Fifth Ward. Their neighbors included the established ethnic communities of earlier German and Polish immigrants as well as more recently arrived Norwegians, Czechs, Ukrainians, Greeks,

---

[27] While most workers were recruited to work in the most dirty, backbreaking positions in the city's tanneries, factories and foundries, a small number of college-educated men were brought to Milwaukee by corporations like the Harley-Davidson Motorcycle Company. These men served as engineers and translators in companies interested in expanding into Spanish-speaking markets in Latin America. Joseph Rodriguez, Sarah Filzen, Susan Hunter, Dana Nix, and Marc Rodriguez, *Nuestro Milwaukee: The Making of the United Community Center* (Milwaukee: Wisconsin Humanities Council, 2000), 8-10.

[28] George Edson, *Mexicans in our North Central States* (1927), 14, Folder 23, Box 13, Paul Taylor Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley; "Beets Retard Sugar Prices," *Milwaukee Journal,* November 20, 1927. Mexican immigration and migration to Milwaukee was part of a larger immigration stream to the American Midwest in the late 1910s and 1920s. See Gilbert Cárdenas, "Los Desarraigados: Chicanos in the Midwestern Region of the United States," *Aztlán* 7, no. 2 (Summer 1976): 153-186; Dennis Nodín Valdés, "Betabeleros: The Formation of an Agricultural Proletariat in the Midwest, 1897-1930," *Labor History* 30, no. 4 (September 1989): 536-562; Vargas, *Proletarians of the North,* 13-55; García, *Mexicans in the Midwest, 1900-1932*.

[29] "Where Mexico Has Invaded Milwaukee," *Milwaukee Journal*, August 14, 1927.

Bulgarians, Serbs, and Slovenians.[30] One researcher noted in 1927 that Mexicans in Milwaukee lived "engulfed by people of many other nationalities."[31] While these areas were known throughout the city for having distinct ethnic characters – so much so that the *Milwaukee Sentinel* described the neighborhoods as locations for a "captivating study of concentrated nationalism" – Mexicans failed to develop a distinct ethnic community anchored by religious institutions, mutual aid societies, or business akin to those developed by European-immigrant counterparts in the early years of their arrival.[32]

While some single Mexican men made their way to Milwaukee in search of employment, others brought their families to the Midwest in the mid-1920s as political refugees. Fleeing the violence and economic disaster caused by the Mexican Revolution, which had begun in 1910 and continued into the 1920s, families like the Sánchezes found in Milwaukee stable work, a small Mexican community, and most importantly, relative political peace.[33] Brothers Juan and Francisco Sánchez recalled their parents' stories about the war-ravaged ranchos of Zacatecas, which had witnessed multiple clashes between the Federal Army and the revolutionary units led by Francisco "Pancho" Villa throughout the 1910s. Their father, Jesus Sánchez, had been fortunate enough to escape the draft of able-bodied men during the revolution by Villa's army, and counted himself most blessed to have escaped losing an ear as retribution for his refusal to enlist in armed service. Recalling Milwaukee in the 1920s in an interview in 1975, the Sánchezes somberly remembered men walking the streets of the south side with only one ear, daily

[30] Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee*, 180; John Gurda, "The Cohesiveness of the Latin Community on Milwaukee's Near South Side," May 24, 1976, 4, Cristobal Berry-Cabán Papers, Microfilm Collection, WHS.
[31] George Edson, *Mexicans in Wisconsin* (1927), 2, Folder 37, Box 13, Paul Taylor Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley.
[32] "Colony Brings Life of Spain to Milwaukee," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, December 8, 1929.
[33] "Milwaukee Has a 'Little Mexico'," *Milwaukee Journal*, August 18, 1926.

reminders of the turmoil they had left behind in Mexico.[34] Despite the racial discrimination many Mexican immigrants faced throughout the city, refugees like the Sánchez brothers considered Milwaukee a safer alternative to the war-ravaged country they had left behind.

With a growing Mexican presence in the city grew in the 1920s, Milwaukee settlement agencies developed programs to facilitate the Americanization of the newly arrived immigrants. Many of the social service agencies tasked with supporting the city's immigrant communities operated under a Progressive Era framework that reinforced and accelerated the assimilation process that had been begun by older settlement societies in the late nineteenth century.[35] Agencies like the International Institute, an organization associated with the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) whose founding predated the arrival of Mexicans to Milwaukee, were intent on promoting what Milwaukee historian Bayrd Still called the "wholesome assimilation" of immigrants to the general American community. The International Institute, which had worked with southern and eastern European groups in the 1910s and early 1920s, endorsed a "softer" form of Americanization that ostensibly recognized cultural differences while attempting to inculcate civic and social values within immigrants.[36]

While social service institutions had initially worried whether Mexican immigrants could adapt culturally or socially to their new homes, the larger obstacle became whether Mexicans would be *racially* fit to become Americans. The immigration and settlement of tens of thousands

---

[34] Juan and Francisco Sánchez interview by Arnoldo Sevilla, Milwaukee Mexican-American interviews, 1974-1977, sound recording, tape 859A, WHS.

[35] Otis L. Graham, Jr. and Elizabeth Koad, "Americanizing the Immigrant, Past and Future: History and Implications of a Social Movement," *The Public Historian* 15, no. 4 (Autumn 1993): 24-49.

[36] These reformers concentrated on creating American citizens by stressing English language education, citizenship classes, and American cuisine, all the while "celebrating" aspects of immigrant culture through celebrations like folk fairs and dances. Bayrd Still, *Milwaukee: The History of a City* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1948), 471. See also Victor Greene, "Dealing With Diversity: Milwaukee's Multiethnic Festivals and Urban Identity, 1840-1940," in *Perspectives on Milwaukee's Past*, ed. Margo Anderson and Victor Greene (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 285-316; August, *From Assimilation to Multiculturalism,* 49-50.

of Mexicans in the U.S. disrupted agricultural interests' promises of Mexicans being temporary sojourners and "birds of passage," creating what contemporary media referred to as the "Mexican Problem." Across the country, Americans wrestled with the prospect of integrating into their communities Mexican immigrants they perceived to be culturally and socially inferior.[37] In Milwaukee, as in other midwestern cities like Chicago, Detroit, and Minneapolis, nativists, eugenicists, and newspapers portrayed Mexicans as lazy, under-educated, unscrupulous, and ultimately, undesirable as citizens.[38] Thousands of miles removed from the U.S.-Mexico border, Milwaukee social reformers and city organizations incorporated this racialized discourse in viewing Mexican immigrants as an imminent threat to American culture and society.

Published reports from Milwaukee's immigrant settlement agencies stoked fears of a growing permanent Mexican settlement in the city that ultimately could not be integrated into American society. In a 1930 report prepared by the YWCA's Institute, researcher and social worker Agnes Fenton wrestled with Mexican immigrants' distinct racial place within Milwaukee. Comparing Mexicans to Native Americans, a racial group with which Milwaukeeans were more familiar, Fenton remarked that the "Mexican peons" who had made their way to the city were undoubtedly "among the most unassimilable" of all immigrants, as many Mexicans were functionally still slaves in Mexico. Decrying the high levels of illiteracy within the Mexican community, Fenton commented that this racial group was darker-skinned, more "Indian," and of lower intelligence than past immigrants to Milwaukee.[39] Early twentieth-century

---

[37] Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 52-53; Clare Sheridan, "Contested Citizenship: National Identity and the Mexican Immigration Debates of the 1920s," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 21, no. 3 (Spring 2002): 3-35.
[38] Arredondo, *Mexican Chicago*, 80-109; Innis-Jiménez, *Steel Barrio,* 11.
[39] Agnes M. Fenton, *The Mexicans in the City of Milwaukee* (Milwaukee: Y.W.C.A International Institute, 1930), 18-29.

opponents of Mexican immigration, as Natalia Molina has demonstrated, emphasized Mexicans' indigenous background to mark them as culturally nonwhite and inferior, and place them in a subordinate racial position.[40]

Through her survey of members of the white community on Milwaukee's near south side, which included interviews with police officers, teachers, and medical professionals, Fenton had discovered an immigrant group that threatened to disrupt the cultural and social character of the city. Fenton asked Milwaukeeans the question, "Do you know how intimate an American problem the Mexican has become?" According to Fenton's research, Mexican men were prone to idleness and drunkenness, an issue that became apparent in the winter when "Mexican men [would] flock into town to hibernate until their money is gone." Fenton blamed Milwaukee corporations for recruiting a racial group that had become a "drain on the community," which had forced the city and social aid organizations to subsidize the industries' cheap labor.[41] Fenton supported her surveys with academic articles by Wallace Thompson and Robert McLean, eugenicists who further emphasized the "Indian character" of Mexicans in order to demonstrate their racial incompatibility with the general American public.[42] The International Institute's report, based on pseudoscientific research and anecdotal accounts from the city's white community, slotted Mexican immigrants into the lowest rung of the city's racial hierarchy and disparagingly framed many of the interactions between Mexican immigrants and the city's native born and older immigrant communities.

---

[40] Natalia Molina, *How Race is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 23.
[41] Fenton, 22
[42] Ibid., 31. For a description of Wallace Thompson and Robert McLean's scholarship, as well as the relationship between eugenics and Mexican immigration in the U.S., see Gilbert G. González, *Culture of Empire: American Writers, Mexico, and Mexican Immigrants, 1880-1930* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 128-152.

Surveys and accounts like those prepared by the International Institute also emphasized the perceived inherent criminality of Mexican immigrants, casting doubt on their legal standing in the city. Drawing from conversations with local law enforcement, Fenton claimed that some Mexican workers had illegally "bootlegged" their way into Milwaukee and would eventually use deportation as a cheap way to return to Mexico.[43] The *Milwaukee Journal* reported that despite the legal barriers in place to restrict immigration such as a literacy test, medical exams, and a head tax, Mexicans were able to cross the loosely policed 1,800-mile-long border along the Rio Grande as "wet back[s]." The newspaper estimated that legal entries equaled undocumented arrivals, a claim that was almost impossible to verify.[44] In editorial after editorial published from 1927 to 1930, the *Milwaukee Journal* advocated extending the immigration quotas set on Europeans and Asians to Mexicans as well, stating that it was "ridiculous for us to leave the door from Europe only slightly ajar, if we are to leave the doors from the other countries of this hemisphere wide open." The newspapers' editors believed that Mexican immigration was "above all a racial complication," as the hundreds of thousands of Mexican "peon laborers" entering the county were "entirely unassimilable." They further questioned whether Mexicans, who they called "if not full blooded Indians, at least largely of Indian blood," were even eligible for American citizenship. According to contemporary immigration law, only "free white persons and aliens of African nativity or persons of African descent" could apply for naturalization, a distinction the *Milwaukee Journal*'s editors believed would ultimately exclude Mexicans, who they referred to as "half-breeds," from eligibility for citizenship.[45]

---

[43] Ibid. The *Milwaukee Journal* noted apprehensively in 1925 that the "illegal smuggling" of "alien" workers from Mexico had become a "new American industry," taking its place with the illegal trafficking of liquor and narcotics. See "'Bootleg' Immigration Real Menace to U.S.," *Milwaukee Journal*, May 24, 1925.
[44] "When Mexican Decides to Cross the Rio Grande," *Milwaukee Journal*, October 10, 1929.
[45] "Hurting the Pocketbook Nerve," *Milwaukee Journal,* July 30, 1927; "A Picture of Mexico," *Milwaukee Journal,* August 11, 1928; "The Leaks at the Border," *Milwaukee Journal,* November 30, 1928; "Halt the Border Influx,"

Local press and social service agencies were not the only Milwaukee institutions worried that Mexicans were incapable of attaining the requisite cultural and linguistic attributes needed to join the city community. Mexican children encountered resistance from public school teachers who complained that the city's newest immigrants were failing to assimilate. Federico Herrera, who arrived in Milwaukee in 1925, recalled the story of a young Mexican boy who attended Vieau Elementary School in the Walker's Point neighborhood. The student, like many Mexican children who came to Milwaukee in the 1920s, did not speak English, and struggled to keep up with his American peers. Unable to communicate with the student, the classroom teacher demanded that he return home until he learned English, at which point he would be allowed to rejoin his class.[46] The educational experiences of Mexican children differed greatly from those of German and Polish students in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Germans and southern and eastern Europeans had successfully petitioned public and parochial schools to use native language instruction in conjunction with instruction in English, elevating the cultural and linguistic heritage of these immigrant groups. Despite a national reputation for their progressive language immersion programs, Milwaukee schools did not extend the same recognition of language or culture to Mexican immigrants, as teachers perceived their Spanish-speaking students' linguistic aptitudes as indicative of larger educational and cultural failings.[47]

Beyond social services and city institutions, Mexicans also faced exclusion and segregation in their search for recreational activities in the city. Juan Arenas, who arrived in

---

Milwaukee Journal, December 13, 1928; "Control of Mexican Immigration," *Milwaukee Journal*, December 15, 1929.

[46] Federico Herrera interview by Arnoldo Sevilla, Milwaukee Mexican-American interviews, 1974-1977, sound recording, tape 853A, WHS; "Patriarch hewed trail for others," *Milwaukee Journal,* July 25, 1983.

[47] William J. Reese, "'Partisans of the Proletariat': The Socialist Working Class and the Milwaukee Schools, 1890-1920," *History of Education Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (Spring 1981): 3-50; Praszalowicz, "The Cultural Changes of Polish-American Parochial Schools in Milwaukee, 1866-1988," 35-38; Barbara J. Miner, *Lessons from the Heartland: A Turbulent Half-Century of Public Education in an Iconic American City* (New York: New Press, 2013), 138-141.

Milwaukee in 1927, recalled in a 1974 interview that Mexicans were not allowed inside the near south side's Gem Theater, the neighborhood movie house. On the rare occasion that Mexicans attempted to buy a ticket and enter the establishment, white patrons would run them out, yell racial invectives, and physically assault them. Mexicans also learned to be wary of the city's police, who would arrest Mexicans after dances or outside of bars on trumped-up charges of drunkenness.[48] Interactions between single Mexican men and white women of Milwaukee's south side also served as a point of contention between the two communities, as fears of miscegenation led white men to confront Mexican men in social settings. Porfirio González described in a 1975 interview how white American men took offense when Mexican men had white girlfriends, exclaiming that Americans "*los bajaban mucho*" (would belittle them). At community dances held on the city's south side, where ethnic groups would oftentimes intermingle, Mexicans and whites sometimes came to blows over arguments of racial mixing on the dance floor. González remembered socials at the Wisconsin Roof, an establishment in the Walker's Point neighborhood, where members of different European-origin groups and Mexicans "*se agarraban*" (got into fights) over dances with white women.[49] Mexican men, many of them either single or living away from their wives, thus found it difficult to engage in social activities in any public area in the city.

Despite the discrimination Mexican laborers faced in their workplaces and in public spaces throughout Milwaukee, married men who had initially come to the city alone began calling their families to join them by the mid 1920s. According to a 1927 survey of upper Midwestern states, the median age of Mexican communities trended relatively young, as half of

[48] Juan Arenas interview by Arnoldo Sevilla, Milwaukee Mexican-American interviews, 1974-1977, sound recording, tape 855A, WHS.
[49] Porfirio and Margarita González interview by Arnoldo Sevilla, Milwaukee Mexican-American interviews, 1974-1977, sound recording, tape 855A, WHS.

adult Mexicans in the region were under the age of thirty. While most male Mexican workers initially arrived in the region unaccompanied, many eventually were joined by their wives and families still living in Mexico and the U.S. Southwest.[50]

Like the *solos* (single men) who had preceded them, Mexican women arriving in Milwaukee found their own niches in the city's sprawling industrial economy. Many young wives opened the doors of their homes to the city's transient Mexican worker population. Ramona Duran, for example, arrived in Milwaukee with her three daughters from San Antonio, Texas, in 1924. Her husband Carlos had signed a series of six-month contracts with the Pfister and Vogel Tannery beginning in 1923 and had called for the family only after moving from the company barracks into a nearby apartment. Upon landing in Milwaukee, Ramona found little hospitality for newly-settled Mexicans. Seeking to extend a welcoming hand to her fellow countrymen and contribute to the family's meager income, she established a boarding room for Mexican arrivals, many of whom appeared at the family's doorstep in carloads manned by the local St. Vincent de Paul Society.[51] Margarita González recalled her family offering similar hospitality to young Mexican laborers on temporary work contracts. Her mother, María Lara, took charge of the family's ad hoc boarding house, which often housed ten men at a time.[52] Besides housing, women's culinary expertise also proved an invaluable skill in a city with little access to Mexican cooking. Soledad Renteria, widowed and needing to support four sons in Milwaukee, expanded her dinner table every night, selling meals of tamales and frijoles to young Mexican men pining for food, and memories, of their homeland.[53]

---

[50] Edson, *Mexicans in our North Central States*, 7.
[51] "They Pioneered for Mexicans," *Milwaukee Journal,* January 3, 1974.
[52] Margarita González interview.
[53] Guadalupe Renteria interview by Arnoldo Sevilla, Milwaukee Mexican-American interviews, 1974-1977, sound recording, tape 855A, WHS.

As the number of Mexicans in Milwaukee grew, a loose *colonia* developed as the city's newest immigrants gradually created their own social and cultural institutions. Arturo Morales, one of the first Pfister and Vogel Company recruits who had arrived in the early 1920s, managed to save and borrow the $2,150 need to open Milwaukee's first Mexican grocery in 1925.[54] Laborers also sought out places of recreation that would serve Mexican patrons. After work, Mexican workers gathered at El Cinco de Mayo, a poolroom on Kinnickinnic Avenue, which was operated by a Mexican *paisano* who had arrived in the late 1910s.[55] Others would play billiards and enjoy a cool drink at the bar of the Randall Hotel on Fourth Street and Wells Avenue, which welcomed the patronage of Milwaukee's various immigrant groups.[56]

While some Mexican workers had successfully found locations to escape from the discrimination they faced in the workplace and in public spaces, many others still felt isolated in Milwaukee. Recalling his arrival to Milwaukee in 1926, Felix D. González remembered finding not a full *colonia*, but instead "*grupitos de tres o cuatro familias*" (little groups of three or four families) that lived on Grove Street and Kinnickinnic Avenue.[57] Devout Mexican Catholics, however, would soon help establish what would become the center of Milwaukee's Mexican community: the Mexican Mission of Our Lady of Guadalupe. As they had for other European immigrant groups that had preceded them, the religious beliefs, customs, and practices that Mexicans brought with them from their home country would serve as anchors for the development of a community in a city that seemed to scorn and reject them in every facet of their

[54] "The Latin Corner," *Milwaukee Journal*, September 21, 1977.
[55] Rodriguez, et. al., *Nuestro Milwaukee,* 8-10.
[56] Juan Santos Herrera interview by Arnoldo Sevilla, Milwaukee Mexican-American interviews, 1974-1977, sound recording, tape 852A, WHS.
[57] Felix D. González interview by Arnoldo Sevilla, Milwaukee Mexican-American interviews, 1974-1977, sound recording, tape 852A, WHS.

lives. Catholic faith would also function as a bridge to resolve many of the ethnic tensions between Milwaukee's older European immigrants and the newly arrived Mexicans.

"A real Mexican Catholic Community": Interethnic Cooperation and Milwaukee's First Spanish-Language Missions

Despite facing racial antagonisms on the shop floor and in the streets of the Milwaukee's near south side, Mexicans found common ground with the city's white community through a shared Catholic faith and the creation of Spanish-language "pioneer missions" in the mid-1920s.[58] Beginning in 1924, Mexican immigrants worked with white clergy and laity to establish these missions, each of which included a set of masses, a celebration of sacraments, and liturgical instruction, to help meet the cultural, spiritual, social, and linguistic needs of the Mexican community. Mexican and white collaboration through the development of these religious events, and the establishment of an independent parish that followed in 1926, became a bridge that offered the potential of transcending ethno-racial tensions between the two communities. The missions, while not a panacea for the tumultuous relationship between the Mexicans living on the city's near south side and their white neighbors, functioned as sites for interethnic cooperation and created public space where Mexican immigrants could develop and express their own ethno-religious identity.

The influx of Mexicans to Milwaukee in the 1920s coincided with the culmination of a changing political structure within the city's Catholic archdiocese. Through the turn of the century and the early decades of the twentieth century, Milwaukee ranked among the most Catholic of U.S. metro areas in the nation. While Protestant congregations across denominational

[58] David Badillo has called the initial missions established by Mexicans in the Midwest in the 1920s "pioneer parishes," a term that speaks to the fundamental groundwork laid by Mexican Catholics in constructing ethnic and religious communities. Badillo, "The Catholic Church and the Making of Mexican-American Parish Communities in the Midwest," 241.

affiliations claimed the broadest membership of the city's 274,620 residents in 1926, the Catholic Church maintained the single largest population in Milwaukee, counting 145,375 among its faithful.[59] Like archdioceses across the Midwest in the opening decades of the century, Milwaukee's Catholic hierarchy was in the process of moving away from a parish model of "national" or "ethnic" parishes built around specific nationalities. Milwaukee's Sebastian G. Messmer, archbishop since 1903, had over the preceding two decades pursued a rigorous policy of Americanization of the city's German and Polish Catholic parishes, intentionally de-emphasizing ethnic self-consciousness to unite and mobilize Catholics for social and political action. Aware of the changing ethno-racial demographics of the city, Messmer worked to fortify the archdiocese's executive power by creating an "American" Catholic character within the city's ethnic parishes. Milwaukee's archbishop ended German language instruction in parish schools and resisted the Polish community's demands to institute a Polish auxiliary bishop in order to combat "excessive" ethnicity demonstrated by the city's Germans and Poles.[60]

Holy Trinity Church, the south side parish where Milwaukee Mexican Catholics would first venture in 1924, was undergoing a series of transformations consistent with the archdiocese's abandonment of the ethnic parish model. Established as a German parish in 1850, Holy Trinity was the oldest of all the south side Catholic churches. By the 1920s, the church still

---

[59] *Religious Census of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1926), 66. Catholic presence in southeastern Wisconsin extends as far back as the seventeenth century, when Frenchmen Louis Joliet and Jacques Marquette first surveyed the region. Catholic French Canadians were among the first European-descent traders to settle in the region, developing economic relationships with indigenous peoples throughout the century. See Frank Zeidler, "Catholicism and Political Life in Milwaukee," in *Milwaukee Catholicism,* ed. Steven M. Avella (Milwaukee: Knights of Columbus, 1991), 35

[60] Regarding the ethnic parish controversy in Wisconsin, see Anthony J. Kuzniewski, *Faith and Fatherland: The Polish Church War in Wisconsin, 1896-1918* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981). For coverage across the Midwest and the broader U.S., see Robert D. Cross, *The Emergence of Liberal Catholicism in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 162-224; Victor Greene, *For God and Country: The Rise of Polish and Lithuanian Ethnic Consciousness in America, 1860-1910* (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 1975), 122-142; Joseph J. Parot, *Polish Catholics in Chicago, 1850-1920: A Religious History* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois Press, 1981), 161-214; Edward R. Kantowicz, *Corporation Sole: Cardinal Mudelein and Chicago Catholicism* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 65-83.

retained much of its German character, but had also become home to newer Slovenian and Croatian immigrants.[61] Reverend William Haberstock, who had been baptized at Holy Trinity and had attended the parish school as a young boy, was keenly aware of the social and linguistic changes that accompanied the gradual decline in attendance by the older immigrant families. To connect with a growingly diverse community, the parish discontinued German language instruction in the parish school and invited a Slovenian priest who spoke several Slavic languages to help minister to the new Slovenian and Croatian congregants. Haberstock intended to create an environment welcoming to all Catholic parishioners, regardless of their ethnic or linguistic heritage. While not promoting a coercive form of Americanization, Holy Trinity's community did encourage a more inclusive form of Catholicism not dependent on a specific ethnic identity.[62]

Prominent white lay members of the Holy Trinity parish initiated the first outreach efforts to Mexican Catholics in 1924. Parish leaders such as William C. Bruce recognized that Spanish-speaking congregants struggled to understand and engage with the church's masses, and brought the presence of the Mexican immigrants to the attention of the local Knights of Columbus branch, the Milwaukee-Pere Marquette Council.[63] The Knights of Columbus, a Catholic fraternal service organization originally founded in 1882 in New Haven, Connecticut,

---

[61] "Holy Trinity – Our Lady of Guadalupe: 150th Anniversary Booklet," box 1, Church Pamphlet Collection, Milwaukee County Historical Society.

[62] "The Story of Holy Trinity Parish, 1850-1950," box 19, folder 2, City of Milwaukee Parishes – Holy Trinity/Our Lady of Guadalupe-Hyacinth Collection, Archdiocese of Milwaukee, Archives (hereafter referred to as AMA); William George Bruce, *Holy Trinity Church: 1850-1925* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Company, 1925), 60-63.

[63] The Bruce family had been leaders in Milwaukee's south side since the late nineteenth century. Bruce's father, William George Bruce, was a noted publisher and civic leader who had served on the Milwaukee School Board, the Milwaukee Harbor Commission, and the Milwaukee County Historical Society, and had run unsuccessfully as the Democratic candidate for mayor of Milwaukee in 1906. The Bruce family was also active in the Holy Trinity Parish, where the younger William and his brother Frank served on fraternal and social organizations, including the Knights of Columbus and the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. William George Bruce, *I Was Born in America: Memoirs of William George Bruce* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1937), 103-136.

was born during a time of fluctuating waves of anti-Catholicism and nativism, and held as a central tenet the defense of their faith in spiritual and political realms. Amongst European-origin immigrants, according to historian Christopher Kauffman, the Knights formulated a "universalized notion of Catholic citizenship, one to which all ethnic groups could identify."[64] A multinational and multicultural organization, the Knights touted a vision of lay involvement that connected Catholicism with cosmopolitan brotherhood.[65] Within the Milwaukee Knights local, members believed supporting the Mexican community coincided with the organization's mission of Catholic charity and brotherhood. As council president, Bruce formed a committee in the spring of 1924 tasked with assisting Milwaukee's Mexican Catholics, enlisting Robert Wittig, a Spanish-speaking south side business owner, as committee chairmen. As many Knights members had never interacted with the south side's Mexican immigrants, the committee hosted several informal meetings in the early months of 1924 to introduce affiliates of the council to members of the community.[66]

Beyond their efforts to organize social events to promote interethnic camaraderie, the Knights also worked to expand the Mexican community's access to Catholic liturgy and instruction. After consulting with Mexican congregants who attended Holy Trinity, the Knights committee agreed to sponsor a Spanish-language mission during Holy Week. In need of a

---

[64] Christopher J. Kauffman, "The Knights of Columbus: Lay Activism from the Origins through the Great Depression," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 9, no. 3 (Summer 1990): 263. The Knights of Columbus established their first council in Milwaukee in the early twentieth century. The Knights had developed several charitable programs for Catholics in Wisconsin by the early 1920s, including an aid program for the Oneida Reservation near Green Bay, multiple council-sponsored lectures, church development funds, and insurance policies for its members. See also Christopher J. Kauffman, *Faith and Fraternalism: The History of the Knights of Columbus* (New York: Simon and Schuster Publishing, 1992), 1-29; Knights of Columbus – Wisconsin State Council, *Fifty Golden Years: The History of the Knights of Columbus in Wisconsin, 1902-1952* (Oshkosh, Wisc.: Castle-Pierce Printing, 1952), 43-128.

[65] James R. Barrett and David R. Roediger, "The Irish and the 'Americanization' of the 'New Immigrants' in the Streets and in the Churches of the Urban United States, 1900-1930," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 24, no. 4 (Summer 2005): 3-33.

[66] Gross interview.

Spanish-speaking priest to conduct services, the Knights looked to Chicago, which by 1924 had one of the larger and more established Mexican communities in the Midwest.[67] The committee contacted Father Emmanuel T. Sandoval, a Jesuit priest who served as pastor for the Chicago mission chapel of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Chicago, who agreed to visit Milwaukee during Holy Week to celebrate a mass and administer sacraments to the city's Mexican Catholic community. Wittig and Bruce contacted Reverend Mark Pakiz of St. John the Evangelist Church, a Lithuanian parish that had been established in 1916, who gladly offered use of his chapel for the mission.[68]

The Knights hoped that the ready-made bridge of shared Catholicism, along with attention to the linguistic needs of their Mexican coreligionists, might establish connections between white and Mexican Catholics in the city. Their efforts were ultimately successfully, as several hundred Mexican men, women, and children who had not previously set foot in Milwaukee's churches attended the Holy Week Mission in April of 1924. Mexican Catholics were moved to learn that a Spanish-speaking priest would deliver a Holy Mass, administer sacraments, and talk with them in their native language. Reverend Louis Fusz, a white Jesuit Spanish-speaking priest who served at Milwaukee's Gesu Church, assisted Father Sandoval during the mass and the administration of sacraments. The *Catholic Citizen*, a Milwaukee Catholic periodical, reported that although the Catholic Church to date had paid "no attention to

---

[67] Thousands of Mexicans came to Chicago during and immediately after World War One and had established a community of over thirty-five thousand by 1926. Religious organizations including Catholic parishes and Protestant settlement houses were instrumental in assisting Mexican settlement and provided both spiritual and temporal assistance for the growing community. See Arredondo, *Mexican Chicago*, 39-40, and Innis-Jiménez, *Steel Barrio*, 91-93.

[68] Steven M. Avella, *In the Richness of the Earth: A History of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, 1843-1958* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2002), 343.

the Mexican community," efforts by the Knights had established the groundwork that might eventually lead to the formation of a church for Mexican Catholics.[69]

The first Spanish-speaking missions generated connections between Mexican congregants and white parish leaders. In attendance at the Holy Week Mission was Frank Gross, a parishioner from Holy Trinity and an active member in the Knights of Columbus and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. An accountant who sometimes travelled to Latin America as an employee of various Milwaukee banks, Gross had learned about the Mexican mission through meetings at the Knights' hall, and attended the Holy Week mission out of curiosity, mostly to "see how much Spanish [he] still remembered." Gross's interest in the Spanish language and Mexican culture, combined with his passion for Catholic charity and brotherhood, spurred his interest in working with Milwaukee's Mexican immigrants. Reflecting on the early Mexican missions, Federico Herrera recalled Gross's curiosity about all things Mexican, calling him "*muy mexicanizado*" (very Mexican-ized).[70] Gross's language skills and familiarity with Mexico were appealing to the members of the Knights committee; at the end of the 1924 Holy Week mission, Bruce approached Gross and asked him if he would work with the fledgling community, and, as Gross recalled, "like one, two, three, I was on the committee, four, five, six, I was the chairman, I'm doing the whole thing." Gross's accounting knowledge, as well as his family's established history within the city's Catholic community (his grandfather had arrived in Milwaukee from Germany in 1842), proved instrumental in the founding of the Knights Mexican Committee in the spring of 1924.[71]

---

[69] "Mission for Mexicans," *Catholic Citizen*, April 19, 1924; "Many Attend Mexican Mission," *Catholic Citizen*, April 26, 1924.
[70] Federico Herrera interview.
[71] Gross interview.

With growing interest from the Mexican community for more Spanish-language services, the newly formed committee turned to securing support from the city's archdiocese. Archbishop Messmer's policy toward Milwaukee's Mexican immigrant community came to differ significantly from that towards the city's European groups for two main reasons. Most important, the archdiocese did not face challenges to executive control from immigrant priests representing the Mexican community, as no clerical support accompanied the Mexican congregants to Milwaukee. Historians such as Steven Avella have shown how a reliance on immigrant priests to serve foreign-born congregants forced bishops acros the Midwest to sacrifice religious uniformity, an issue that in Milwaukee led to a contentious power struggle in the first decades of the twentieth century between Archbishop Messmer and the Polish community. In addition, linguistic barriers and a lack of familiarity with Mexican culture prevented the archbishop from enforcing English as the only language to be used during Mass attended by Milwaukee Mexicans. Milwaukee's Catholic hierarchy thus did not pursue the systematic assimilation of Mexican Catholics in the same manner that Messmer had imposed upon the European-origin devout, which allowed for the formation of a quasi-national parish for the growing Mexican community.[72]

While not concerned with Americanizing Mexican immigrants, Archbishop Messmer and lay leaders were in part motivated to minister to the city's growing Spanish-speaking community because of fears of growing evangelization efforts by Protestant missionaries. The Catholic Church served as the primary religious home for most Midwest Mexicans – one study found that

[72] Steven M. Avella, "Sebastian G. Messmer and the Americanization of Milwaukee Catholicism," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 12, no. 3 (Summer 1994): 87-107; Stephen J. Shaw, "The Cities and the Plains, a Home for God's People: A History of the Catholic Parish in the Midwest," in *The American Catholic Parish: A History From 1850 To The Present*, ed. Jay P. Dolan (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 341-345; John J. Bukowczyk, "Mary the Messiah: Polish Immigrant Heresy and the Malleable Ideology of the Roman Catholic Church, 1880-1839," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 4, no. 2 (Spring 1985): 5-32.

97 percent of Mexicans living in the region considered themselves at least nominally Catholic. But several Protestant denominations had initiated outreach efforts to budding Spanish-speaking communities across the area in the 1920s.[73] In cities like Chicago, Detroit, and Milwaukee, Baptists had been among the most energetic of Protestant proselytizers to Mexican communities. The Milwaukee Christian Center, a south side non-denominational settlement house founded by the American Baptist Convention, opened a pre-school for Mexican children in the late 1920s.[74] During the decade, Milwaukee Catholic clerical and lay leaders voiced concerns of "losing souls" within the city's Mexican community – now ranging in population from four to seven thousand – to secularization and Protestant rivals. Under the direction of the archbishop, Gross tracked outreach efforts from the YWCA, the International Institute, the Protestant Missionary Association, and "*baptista*" evangelizers, and regularly reported these initiatives to the archdiocese. In addition, Knights committee members worked to shore up the religiosity of the community's youngest devotees by coordinating with the city's Carmelite Sisters and the Catholic Instruction League to develop a catechism center for Milwaukee's Mexican children.[75]

Beyond fears of Protestant proselytization, the archdiocese found itself addressing specific linguistic deficiencies among its clergy. As no Spanish-speaking Mexican priests had emigrated to Milwaukee through the early 1920s, linguistic barriers prevented the archbishop from enforcing English as the only language to be used during masses attended by Milwaukee

---

[73] Edson, *Mexicans in our North Central States*, 23.

[74] Carolyn J. Matthiasson, "Coping in a New Environment: Mexican Americans in Milwaukee, Wisconsin," *Urban Anthropology* 3, no. 2 (Fall 1974): 262-272. According to the Interdenominational Council on Spanish-Speaking Work, the Spanish American Baptist Theological Seminary in Los Angeles had placed female settlement workers at the Milwaukee Christian Center in the late 1920s. See Robert N. McLean, *The Northern Mexican* (New York: Home Missions Council, 1930), 20-21, 27.

[75] E.T. Sandoval to Frank Gross, November 22, 1925, folder 1, Frank Gross Papers, AMA; Frank Gross to Mary Dickenbaum, November 30, 1930, folder 1, Frank Gross Papers, AMA. For more on the U.S. Catholic Church's fear of losing immigrants to Protestant evangelization, see Rudolph J. Vecoli, "Prelates and Peasants: Italian Immigrants and the Catholic Church," *Journal of Social History* 2, no. 3 (Spring 1969): 251-253.

Mexicans. Messmer concluded that a Spanish-speaking priest would be needed to serve Mexican congregants, and instructed Gross to work with Fusz, the Spanish-speaking priest from Milwaukee's Gesu Church who had assisted Sandoval during the 1924 Holy Week mission. Fusz's ministry to the city's Mexican Catholics earned him the honorary title of "vicar to Milwaukee's Spanish-speaking Catholics."[76] Mexican parishioners appreciated the opportunity to work with a member of the clergy who spoke Spanish, and many Mexican congregants traveled to Gesu Church in the Avenues West neighborhood simply for the opportunity to consult with a priest who could communicate with them in their native language. Federico Herrera fondly recalled Fusz as the priest "*que tenía muy buenos conceptos de nuestra raza*" ("thought very highly of our race").[77]

With Fusz committed to administering to the spiritual needs of Mexican immigrants, Gross next reached out to Catholic social organizations in the city that might help provide for the physical welfare of the community. He first contacted the Society of St. Vincent de Paul to supply the social services that Mexican families had been unable to access through the city's Department of Public Welfare. Gross called upon Josephine Zimmerman, who worked in the central office of the Milwaukee branch of the society and asked her to begin conducting home visits within the community to gather information on how best to serve the needs of the Mexican immigrants. Linguistic bridges were again essential in fostering connections between the white and Mexican Catholic community. The bilingual Zimmerman assisted Mexican immigrants in finding homes, employment, and food, and helped families navigate the city's social welfare

[76] Gross interview.
[77] Federico Herrera interview.

organizations. Mexican families came to trust Zimmerman as a member of the faith community willing to lend an ear, and her time, to their concerns.[78]

With work under way to address the spiritual and physical needs of the city's Mexicans, Gross turned his attention to helping Mexican leaders create a more vibrant social life within the *colonia*, encouraging the community to form a Mexican branch of the Knights of Columbus. In May of 1924, Milwaukee Mexicans created the Mexican Committee, also known as *El Club Mexicano*, the first Mexican-led organization in the city. Like the Knights, the group functioned as a Catholic fraternal organization, focusing on fostering Christian brotherhood among the community's male leaders. *El Club* held several events in 1924, including community dances in collaboration with the Knights, who donated use of their meeting hall.[79] Through these celebrations, the organization created the first avenues for Milwaukee Mexicans to celebrate their national heritage. *El Club* brought the community together to commemorate the Battle of Puebla in early May through prayer, dancing, and singing in a Knights-sponsored event.[80] Organized as a celebration of national identity, advertisements for the gathering included images that emphasized pre-Columbian Aztec heritage and past Mexican military victories. These events carried an explicit political message, as Mexicans called upon their national pride in the face of racial degradation and began a tradition of festivals to observe Mexican national holidays that lasted through the late 1920s and early 1930s.[81]

---

[78] 33rd Annual Report of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, (Milwaukee: Catholic Archdiocese of Milwaukee, 1946), 32-33; "Where Mexico Has Invaded Milwaukee," *Milwaukee Journal*, August 14, 1927.
[79] Gross interview. The executive committee of the organization included Ricardo and Apolo Mijares, brothers who studied at Marquette University, and Rodolfo Schlemm, a Mexican immigrant of German descent.
[80] "In Local Catholic Circles," *Catholic Citizen*, May 3, 1924.
[81] When *El Club Mexicano* disbanded in 1925, a new organization, *El Comité Patriotico Mexicano* (The Committee of Mexican Patriotism) continued the tradition of celebrating the Battle of Puebla in 1926. Mutual aid societies organized the city's first parade to recognize Mexico's official Independence Day, September 16, in 1930.

While *El Club Mexicano* created a more active social space for the Mexican community, Mexican leaders and Gross continued to collaborate with Fusz in early 1925 to develop a welcoming spiritual home for Mexicans. The committee scheduled a mission for the city's Mexican Catholics for the first week of April 1925, culminating in a Palm Sunday celebration. Calling upon his connections within the Jesuit order, Fusz contracted Reverend Vicente Pardo, a Spanish Jesuit priest working in Cincinnati, to join him in celebrating the masses. Fusz hoped that a native Spanish-speaking priest would result in a higher turnout from the Mexican community, and was sure that with robust attendance, Archbishop Messmer would be more inclined to secure a permanent Spanish-speaking priest for Milwaukee.[82] Pardo's participation ensured the success of the Easter season mission. The community expressed appreciation for the opportunity converse with a member of the clergy in their native language, making the 1925 Palm Sunday Masses the most well-attended in the Mexican community's short history. *El Club's* efforts to distribute handbills in Spanish in *la colonia* were effective in bringing supporters to attend not just the religious celebrations, but also subsequent committee meetings. Along with Pardo's sermons, which were delivered in Spanish and well-received by the Mexican community, parents were heartened to find instructors from the Catholic Instructional League at each mass, who had come to gather the names of children to prepare future catechism classes.[83]

Emboldened by the success of the Palm Sunday mission, *El Club Mexicano* and white laity worked to develop more frequent missions that would draw in a larger portion of the Mexican population. *El Club* and Gross acknowledged that a Spanish-speaking priest would be

[82] Reverend Louis Fusz to Frank Gross, March 19, 1925, folder 1, Frank Gross Papers, AMA.
[83] Frank Gross to Archbishop Sebastian Messmer, May 4, 1925, folder 1, Frank Gross Papers, AMA. Funding for the mission came from several sources, including the Knights and the Archdiocese. Pardo arrived a few days prior to the start of the mission and stayed a few days after as well, using his extra time to call upon Mexicans in their homes as well as those convalescing in Milwaukee hospitals.

instrumental in bringing more congregants to attend Mass and prioritized recruiting a pastor with the requisite language skills and familiarity with Mexican Catholic customs. Gross turned to Chicago's Mission of Our Lady of Guadalupe, working with Reverend Sebastián Ripero, a Spanish Claretian and superior father of the parish, for help in planning the missions.[84] Ripero agreed to send Father James Tort, another Spanish Claretian working at Our Lady of Guadalupe, to assist with the next Milwaukee Mexican mission scheduled for December of 1925.[85]

The winter mission proved to be the most successful event organized within the Mexican community to date. With financial backing from the Knights, *El Club* devoted the mission in honor of Mexico's patron saint, the Virgin of Guadalupe. Members of the Mexican Committee constructed a shrine to Guadalupe, the first of its kind for Milwaukee's Mexican Catholics, at St. John the Evangelist. While past missions had included sermons in Spanish, which bridged a critical linguistic divide for Mexican Catholics, the mission held in December 1925, along with a celebration of *las posadas* just a few days later, were the first opportunities for the Mexican community to practice a Catholic religiosity that celebrated their Mexican cultural and ethnic heritage.[86] For Milwaukee Mexicans, the commemoration of the Virgin of Guadalupe's feast day represented a public renewal of their shared Mexican religiosity and history. The community

---

[84] For more information on Chicago's growing Mexican Catholic community, see Robert Orsi, *Thank You, St. Jude: Women's Devotion to the Patron Saint of Hopeless Causes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998*),* 4-5; Badillo, "The Catholic Church and the Making of Mexican-American Parish Communities in the Midwest," 254-257.

[85] Reverend Sebastián Ripero to Frank Gross, March 20, 1925, folder 1, Frank Gross Papers, AMA. Along with continued word-of-mouth circulation within the Mexican community, *Catholic Herald* published advertisements for the mission and extended an invitation to the "entire Latin-American colony," as well as to interested American Catholics in the city. "Mission for Mexicans Sponsored by K. of C. To Be Held Dec. 10-13," *Catholic Herald*, December 3, 1925; "Mission for Mexicans In South Side Church Opened This Morning," *Catholic Herald*, December 10, 1925.

[86] The Milwaukee Knights offered the Mexican *colonia* use of their council hall to celebrate, in the words of Frank Gross, "Christmas in true Mexican style" through *las posadas*, the Mexican tradition of the reenactment of Mary and Joseph's journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem. In his report to Messmer, Gross wrote that the celebration allowed the Mexican community to "bring out the religious significance of Christmas" in a familiar manner. Frank Gross to Archbishop Sebastian Messmer, December 31, 1925, folder 1, Frank Gross Papers, AMA; "Christmas Party for Mexican Colony," *The Compass* (Milwaukee), January 1926.

drew upon the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe, who, according to religious scholar Roberto S. Goizueta, has historically been identified with people, cultures, and races that have been "marginalized and rejected" by dominant society.[87] After living through over five years of racial antagonism on Milwaukee's south side, the city's Mexican immigrants saw in the Virgin's image and the celebration of her feast day a powerful symbol of ethnic collective solidarity. Their devotion in her honor allowed the assembled congregants to lay claim to religious and ethnic identities that years of racism and discrimination had previously discounted.

The Christmas season "triduo," or series of three masses, brought out members of the Mexican and the American community alike to each Mass, including dozens of white Catholics interested in engaging in fellowship with their city's newest co-religionists.[88] In an interview with *The Compass*, Father Tort spoke enthusiastically of the fruit borne from the collaboration between the Mexican community and the Knights. By Tort's estimation, unlike in other Midwestern cities, where city archdioceses had been forced to take the lead in organizing missions for immigrant communities, the "work of the [Mexican and white] laymen" in Milwaukee had been instrumental in "the realization of what the Mexican colony [in Milwaukee] means." Tort praised the initiative taken by Gross and *El Club Mexicano* to bring the white and Mexican communities together and emphasized how unique the missions had been in constructing both social and religious spaces for the Mexican *colonia*. Because of white and Mexican lay leaders' initiative, Tort estimated that Milwaukee now had the "nucleus of a real Mexican Catholic community."[89]

---

[87] Roberto S. Goizueta, "Our Lady of Guadalupe: The Heart of Mexican Identity," in *Religion and the Creation of Race and Ethnicity: An Introduction*, ed. Craig R. Prentiss (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 140-151.
[88] Frank Gross to Archbishop Sebastian Messmer, December 31, 1925, folder 1, Frank Gross Papers, AMA; "Mexican Class Added To South Side Center," *Catholic Herald*, December 24, 1925.
[89] "Mexican Missionary Work of K.C.'s Now Taken Up By Archdiocese," *The Compass* (Milwaukee), January 1926.

The December 1925 devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe energized Mexican Catholics in Milwaukee to create a new organization tasked with preserving their Mexican Catholic heritage. At the end of the *posadas* celebration, leaders within the Mexican community joined together to form the Association of Our Lady of Guadalupe. While *El Club Mexicano* had been developed primarily as a fraternal organization, the new association adopted an explicitly spiritual agenda, as Gross wrote to Messmer in his report on the December mission, to provide "for the religious welfare of our Mexican colony here."[90] Empowered through their collaboration with the city's white Catholic community, Milwaukee Mexicans now assumed control of their own religiosity, as Mexican community leaders held nearly all of the leadership positions on the association's executive committee.[91]

The establishment of the Association of Our Lady of Guadalupe emboldened Mexican leaders to petition the archbishop for monthly visits from the Chicago Spanish-speaking priests. Messmer, encouraged by Gross's reports and the success of the missions, provided the association with the necessary funds to hold monthly Masses for the Mexican community. With financial support from the archdiocese, the association arranged monthly visits from Chicago's Tort beginning in late February and held in the lower meeting hall of Holy Trinity School, the parochial school of Holy Trinity Church. Due in large part to constant outreach efforts to the Mexican community through postal cards and home visits by the association, the Knights, and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Tort's visits resulted in a church full of active and engaged

[90] Gross to Messmer, December 31, 1925.
[91] Gross interview. Ramon Cervantes, a leader within the Mexican community, was elected president of the committee, and Gross was elected treasurer. The committee's executive board included several well-respected members of the community, including the Avila brothers, Daniel and Rafael, who would go on to establish one of the first Mexican grocery stores in Milwaukee just a few years later; and Jesús Sánchez, Antonio Renteria, Guillermo Treviño, and Juan Santos Herrera, all of whom would play vital roles in the maintenance of the Mexican Catholic *colonia* for the next two decades.

parishioners.[92] Remembering fondly his time working with the association, Federico Herrera marked the development of monthly missions in early 1926 as the beginning of a unified Mexican community in Milwaukee, brought together through their Catholic faith and their efforts to construct religious spaces that celebrated their Mexican Catholic heritage.[93]

Despite the success of the missions, the Association of Our Lady of Guadalupe lost access to the Spanish-speaking priests who had held the new ethno-religious organizations together nearly as quickly as they had secured them. Gross, who as treasurer of the association arranged the visits of the Spanish priests from Chicago and saw to their payment, received notice from Ripero that signaled the end of the monthly missions in May of 1926. Due to the growth of Chicago's Mexican population and the opening of a Mexican center at the St. Francis parish, Ripero informed Gross that he would no longer be able to spare Tort's services for Milwaukee's missions.[94] Milwaukee's Mexican Catholic missions, now without Spanish-speaking priests, were at risk of closing just as they had begun to bring together the city's Mexican community.

"Our persecuted brethren in Mexico": Political Engagement, International Spaces, and the Mexican Mission Chapel of Our Lady of Guadalupe

Having learned that Chicago's Spanish-speaking priests would no longer be able to support the city's fledgling Mexican Catholic community, Milwaukee's Mexican leaders and white Catholic laity and clergy decided to pursue the development of an independent chapel capable of supporting the city's Mexican community. The efforts to purchase and create a

---

[92] Frank Gross to Archbishop Sebastian Messmer, March 1, 1926, folder 1, Frank Gross Papers, AMA.
[93] Federico Herrera interview.
[94] Reverend Serapio Ripero to Frank Gross, May 6, 1926, folder 1, Frank Gross Papers, AMA. With a population of over thirty-five thousand Mexican immigrants in 1926, Chicago's Spanish-speaking priests were constantly in need of time and resources. Chicago's Mexicans were geographically scattered in three distinct neighborhoods (Back of the Yards, the Near West Side, and South Chicago), forcing the few Spanish-speaking priests available to rotate between communities. Tort and Ripero were actively petitioning the Chicago Archdiocese for funding to purchase lots within these communities to build parishes for the city's Mexican community. They were successful in 1929. See Orsi, *Thank You St. Jude*, 1-39.

permanent chapel for Milwaukee's Mexican Catholic community coincided with the onset of anticlerical activities by the Mexican government in the summer of 1926. The war that erupted between the Mexican state and Catholics in northern and western Mexico known as *La Cristiada*, or the Cristero War, captivated Milwaukee's Catholic community, white and Mexican alike. Julia Young notes that Mexicans emigrants in the U.S. concerned with state repression of Catholicism in the late 1920s maintained "strong political, religious, and cultural ties to their home country," and deftly navigated political channels in their adopted U.S. homes to support co-religionists abroad.[95] Milwaukee's Catholic community spiritedly joined in support, as local press covered the state repression of the church with weekly front-page updates and the Knights of Columbus connected their efforts to assist Milwaukee's Mexican community with their greater project of defending the Catholic Church in Mexico. Through 1926 and 1927, Mexican and white leaders within the Knights portrayed the plight of the city's Mexicans as characteristic of greater geopolitical events in missives published by the office of the archbishop, sensationalized articles published in the local Catholic press, and fundraising requests for both national and local efforts for Mexican Catholics. The chapel they would create developed into a permanent space to maintain and cultivate Mexican Catholic identity and allowed the growing *colonia* to preserve a cultural and religious heritage distinct to their immigration experience.

The Knights of Columbus Mexican Committee and the Association of Our Lady of Guadalupe redirected their efforts in the early summer of 1926 towards the development of an independent parish chapel for the Mexican community. Just days after receiving news from Reverend Sebastian Ripero that Chicago's Our Lady of Guadalupe could no longer spare the services of their Spanish-speaking priests, Gross directed Phil Hayes, a realtor and member of

[95] Julia G. Young, *Mexican Exodus: Emigrants, Exiles, and Refugees of the Cristero War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 15.

the Knights, to conduct a survey of the lower south side with the purpose of finding a building that could serve as a church for the *colonia*.[96] Gross also contacted the office of the archbishop to explain that the purchase of a building would only be possible through collaboration with the Milwaukee Archdiocese, as "the colony could not undertake this without outside [financial] help." Gross maintained that the spiritual problems afflicting the Mexican community "merit our serious consideration," and that "a church of their own would multiply the results among these people most wonderfully."[97] The archbishop approved the committee's efforts and sent along his blessings for their search.[98]

Along with their efforts to purchase a building for an independent mission, the Mexican Committee and the Association of Our Lady of Guadalupe also began a search for a Spanish-speaking priest to serve as the permanent priest for Milwaukee's Mexican Catholics. Gross and officers in the association reached out to acquaintances across the United States in search of Spanish-speaking clergy.[99] The appeals made their way to the border region and into the hands of Reverend Ernesto Osorio Aguirre, a Chilean priest who had recently arrived in Boerne, a small town near San Antonio, Texas.[100] A priest of the Mercedarian Order, Aguirre had served for several years in parishes across South America, eventually travelling to Mexico in the spring of 1926 to work as a pastor for a rural village.[101] Unfortunately for the young priest, Aguirre's

---

[96] Frank Gross to Phil Hayes, May 7, 1926, folder 1, Frank Gross Papers, AMA. The parameters of the survey included any sort of building that could be repurposed as a parish building, including shuttered Protestant churches, old factories, fire stations, or even storefronts. Most important, Gross asked Hayes to find a building that would also have a hall and extra rooms so that the Mexican community would be able to host meetings and classes.
[97] Frank Gross to Archbishop Sebastian Messmer, May 9, 1926, folder 1, Frank Gross Papers, AMA.
[98] Frank Gross to Archbishop Sebastian Messmer, August 11, 1926, folder 1, Frank Gross Papers, AMA.
[99] Frank Gross to Reverend E.T. Sandoval, May 24, 1926, folder 1, Frank Gross Papers, AMA.
[100] Frank Gross to Reverend Louis Fusz, May 30, 1925, folder 1, Frank Gross Papers, AMA.
[101] "Milwaukee Mexican Colony Now Has Permanent Pastor," *The Compass* (Milwaukee), August 1926; "Mexicans Build Church Here," *Milwaukee Journal*, December 10, 1926.

arrival in Mexico coincided with the beginning of a three-year struggle between the Mexican Catholic Church and the anticlerical federal government known as the Cristero War.

Tensions between the Mexican government and the Catholic Church had been rising since the beginning of the Mexican Revolution in the early twentieth century. The 1917 Mexican Constitution, written by revolutionaries intent on curtailing the Catholic Church's power and wealth, contained a number of anticlerical provisions aimed at curbing the church's influence, including the secularization of all education and the closing of all religious-affiliated schools; the elimination of all public religious ceremonies; the confiscation of all church property; the registration of all priests, now all required to be native-born and stripped of the franchise; and the exclusion of religious institutions from legal protections.[102] Unlike his presidential predecessors, who had not attempted to enforce these provisions, President Plutarco Elías Calles, elected in July of 1924, saw in the Catholic Church a direct challenge to his attempts to solidify executive control. In February of 1926, Calles ordered the enforcement of these anticlerical provisions, including the expulsion of all foreign-born priests. In response, Catholic protesters rose up in arms across northern and western Mexico in the summer of 1926, with cries of *"¡Viva Cristo Rey!*" ("Long live Christ the King!").[103] Calling themselves *Cristeros*, these rebels engaged in protracted battles with the Calles government from 1926 to 1929.

The national U.S. Catholic community took notice of state repression of the Mexican church in the summer of 1926. Historian Matthew Redinger notes that most Catholics in the

---

[102] David Espinosa, "'Restoring Christian Social Order': The Mexican Catholic Youth Association (1913-1932)," *The Americas* 59, no. 4 (April 2003): 451-474. Mexican president Venustiano Carranza, who served during the ratification of the 1917 Constitution, chose not to enforce the anticlerical provisions in his efforts to consolidate political power in the immediate post-war years, a strategy his successor, Álvaro Obregón, also followed.
[103] Alan Knight, "The Mentality and Modus Operandi of Revolutionary Anticlericalism," in *Faith and Impiety in Revolutionary Mexico*, ed. Matthew Butler (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 21-56; Adrian A. Bantjes, "Idolatry and Iconoclasm in Revolutionary Mexico: The De-Christianization Campaigns, 1929-1940," *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 13, no. 1 (Winter 1997): 87-120.

United States "viewed the challenge that faced the Mexican Church as one that struck at the heart of some of their most deeply held assumptions as *American* Catholics," most specifically their concept of freedom of religious expression.[104] Catholic lay organizations such as the Knights of Columbus extended aid to Mexican Catholics by influencing American public opinion, raising donations, and petitioning the U.S. federal government to intervene on behalf of Mexican Catholics on humanitarian grounds. Playing upon American fears of a spreading socialist and communist international order at the southern border, the national Knights assembly and its hundreds of local councils portrayed the Calles government as a Bolshevik regime intent on destroying religious freedom in Mexico.[105] Local branches of the fraternal organization distributed tracts and handbills with provocative titles such as "Red Mexico: The Facts," which proclaimed that "the Mexican attack on the Catholic Church" was not merely a form of religious persecution but "an attack on the established principles of civilization and humanity." These broadsides thus portrayed the "Mexican problem" not only as an issue affecting North American Catholics, but one meriting the panic of all "liberty-loving, fair-minded, free men everywhere" around the world.[106]

In Milwaukee, clergy and lay organizations actively promoted the notion of an impending Bolshevik revolution imminently prepared to spill into the United States. The city's Catholic newspapers published extensive reports on the war, providing readers with sensationalized front-page updates on the persecution of the Mexican church and its clergy and congregants. Messmer,

---

[104] Matthew Redinger, "'To Arouse and Inform': The Knights of Columbus and United States-Mexican Relations, 1924-1937," *Catholic Historical Review* 88, no. 3 (July 2002): 489.
[105] Douglas J. Slawson, "The National Catholic Welfare Conference and the Church-State Conflict in Mexico, 1925, 1929," *The Americas* 47, no. 1 (July 1990): 55-93; James J. Horn, "U.S. Diplomacy and 'The Spector of Bolshevism' in Mexico (1924-1927)," *The Americas* 32, no. 1 (July 1975): 31-45; Kauffman, "The Knights of Columbus," 267.
[106] Knights of Columbus, "Red Mexico: The Facts" (New Haven, CT: Knights of Columbus Supreme Council, 1926), Box 149, Folder 3, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Office of the General Secretary, ACHRCU.

who had staked his claim against Milwaukee's vocal and successful socialist movement in the early years of the twentieth century, served as a vocal proponent for the Cristeros.[107] In July of 1926, the *Catholic Herald* published an address by Messmer calling on all Milwaukee Catholics to extend prayers for the church in Mexico on the feast day of St. Peter in Chains. Messmer asked that the "faithful of the various dioceses join in the universal prayer" for the "relief of our persecuted brethren in Mexico." Describing the "true and real persecution against the Catholic religion" in Mexico as an attack on "liberty" that "would dishonor any civilized people," the archbishop asked the city's faithful to continue praying for the Mexican Catholic Church until "that terrible persecution will be stopped."[108] Religious leaders of various Christian denominations followed Messmer's lead during the summer. The *Catholic Citizen* enthusiastically reported in August of 1926 that Protestant ministers across the city had "condemned without hesitation" the Mexican government's anticlerical initiatives. According to the newspaper, Milwaukee Episcopalian, Lutheran, and Presbyterian reverends offered their prayers and support while reminding parishioners that they "should be grateful of the protection afforded religion in this country."[109]

Wisconsin's religious leaders were joined by the state's elected representatives, who likewise framed their support of Cristeros as necessary to protect religious freedom in Mexico. Congressman Michael K. Reilly, from central Wisconsin, traveled across the state delivering public lectures warning about the growing military conflict and persecution of Christians in

---

[107] In 1902, Messmer issued an edict forbidding Catholics from joining the city's Socialist Party or even voting for its candidates, threatening excommunication for those parishioners that defied his order. The archbishop's admonishments went largely unheeded, as many Milwaukee Catholics joined the city's growing socialist movement in the early decades of the twentieth century. Pienkos, "Politics, Religion, and Change in Polish Milwaukee, 1900-1930," 194.

[108] "Jubilee Year Announcement Made by Archbishop Messmer; He Asks Prayers for the Church in Mexico," *Catholic Herald*, July 29, 1926.

[109] "Local Ministers Denounce Mexico," *Catholic Citizen*, August 7, 1926.

Mexico in 1927. In his remarks, Reilly stated that the "future of Christian civilization in Central and South America" depended upon the "attitude taken by the people of the United States towards the military despotism now ruling Mexico."[110] In Milwaukee, more than one thousand Marquette University students rallied to protest religious persecution in Mexico in the 1920s and early 1930s. Student leaders asked their colleagues to support a call for investigations by the U.S. government into attacks on Mexican Catholics. Marquette students also sent letters to Wisconsin Senators Robert M. La Follette and F. Ryan Duffy, demanding the federal government to move beyond a "hands off" policy to the region.[111]

Mexicans in Milwaukee felt the reverberations of the Cristero War in the summer of 1926. Juan and Francisco Sánchez corresponded with family still living in Mexico who fought on the side of the Cristeros, and received news from acquaintances who had witnessed the execution of priests in rural areas.[112] Approximately 500,000 religious refugees fled to the United States from 1926 to 1929, most of whom settled in southwestern states.[113] In August of 1926, nine Mexican nuns who had been driven from their convent in Monterrey passed through Milwaukee on their way to Green Bay, where they planned to reside until the crisis between the Church and the Mexican government had subsided. The Milwaukee Catholic press emphasized the "tragedy" in the voices of these nuns and commented on the "weariness" these exiles displayed after their long journey to the U.S. Midwest.[114] The nuns' stories, as well as those

[110] The Wisconsin Knights of Columbus sponsored the former representative's short speaking tour, further emphasizing potential Bolshevik influences controlling the Mexican government. "Ex-Congressman Michael K. Reilly Gives Lecture on Mexican Situation," *Sheboygan Press*, March 26, 1927.
[111] "Call Student Protest Rally," *Milwaukee Journal*, March 31, 1935; "Protest Policy of Mexicans," *Milwaukee Journal*, April 1, 1935.
[112] Juan and Francisco Sánchez interview.
[113] Badillo, *Latinos and The New Immigrant Church*, 31.
[114] "Mexican Nuns Pass Through City," *Catholic Citizen*, August 14, 1926.

recounted by other religious refugees who arrived in Milwaukee in the late 1920s, kept the city's Mexicans abreast of political and religious events in their home country.

Exiled clergy, including foreign-born priests like Reverend Ernesto Osorio Aguirre, escaped from Mexico in 1926 and made their way to Mexican enclaves across the U.S. Southwest. Aguirre, living in Texas as a religious refugee, responded to the Milwaukee Mexican community's calls for a Spanish-speaking priest in the summer of 1926. After corresponding with Gross and Messmer, Ramon Cervantes, president of the Association of Our Lady of Guadalupe, invited Aguirre to Milwaukee in early June.[115] Messmer appointed Aguirre as the official pastor for the Mexican *colonia* in late June, entrusting him with the administration of all spiritual counseling for Milwaukee Mexicans. Aguirre held daily masses on the third floor of Holy Trinity's parish school and Sunday masses in the school hall in the summer.[116] George Edson, an economics researcher from the University of California conducting surveys of Mexicans in the Midwest during the 1920s, remarked that the young priest was "the man whom nearly all the Mexicans come to for consultation and service."[117] With no proper rectory available, Aguirre was forced to board with different congregants of the Mexican Catholic community, an arrangement that Gross deemed "unsatisfactory" for the city's new pastor.[118] Eager to find a building that could serve as both a chapel and residence, Aguirre joined the Association of Our Lady of Guadalupe as members sought a home for the Mexican parish.[119]

The committee tasked with finding a suitable location for the chapel discovered a potential site in early September of 1926 that could serve as both a spiritual home and

---

[115] Frank Gross to Archbishop Sebastian Messmer, May 26, 1926, folder 1, Frank Gross Papers, AMA.
[116] Gross interview; Juan and Francisco Sánchez interview.
[117] Edson, *Mexicans in our North Central States*, 4.
[118] Gross interview.
[119] "Seek Store Building for Mexicans' Chapel on Lower South Side," *Catholic Herald*, September 2, 1926.

community center for Mexican Catholics. Gross, Aguirre, and William C. Bruce toured a two-story storefront building on Grove Street with space for a chapel on the first floor, a clubroom in the basement, and residence for the pastor and extra meeting rooms for Sunday school on the second floor. Despite bargaining the asking price for the building down to $9,000, the association still lacked the requisite funds needed to pay for the building on their own.[120]

Gross and Bruce arranged a meeting with Messmer following their tour of the Grove Street storefront, hoping to convince the Milwaukee Archdiocese to provide funding to purchase the building. The archbishop initially balked at the hefty $9,000 price tag, citing several funding priorities across the archdiocese that he felt had precedence over the Mexican community's requests. Gross, however, had come prepared to persuade the episcopal leader, and drew upon a story that revealed Milwaukee's long history of interethnic cooperation with Catholics in Latin American countries. The accountant began by asking Messmer if he knew how the city's episcopal see and principal church, the Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist, had been financed in the late 1840s. Gross, who considered himself an amateur historian of Milwaukee Catholicism, recounted how the city's first archbishop, John Henni, had hoped to build a cathedral in the early 1840s to establish a Catholic presence in Milwaukee. Unable to secure the needed capital stateside, Henni travelled to Cuba and Mexico, where he collected enough money through individual parishioner donations to finish building the cathedral. Gross explained to Messmer that, assuming Archbishop Henni had collected $5,000 on his Latin American tour, when compounded at 5 percent interest over eighty years, the amount raised by this Latin American tour amounted to $83,296.17. This, Gross said to Messmer, was "what the Archdiocese owed to the Mexicans" of Milwaukee. Amused by Gross' creative storytelling and perhaps persuaded by

[120] Frank Gross to Archbishop Sebastian Messmer, September 18, 1926, folder 1, Frank Gross Papers, AMA.

the idea of strengthening cross-national bonds, Messmer agreed to help the association by promising the archdiocese's complete financial support for the purchase of the storefront.[121]

With funding secured, the Mexican community and Milwaukee's Catholic social aid organizations collaborated to gather resources for the remodeling and refurbishment of the building. The Knights council connected local fundraising efforts to their national campaign to assist Mexicans Catholics engaged in hostilities with the Mexican government. Like many U.S. Catholics, members of the Milwaukee Knights council portrayed the war in Mexico as a stand against secularist attacks on religious life and liberty.[122] Gross called upon the contacts he had made as a member of the Knights and the St. Vincent de Paul Society in search of furniture, "begging" pastors and nuns for donations their churches could make to help furnish the new space.[123] Josephine Zimmerman of the St. Vincent de Paul Society secured an old altar from the Sister Superior of the Holy Angels Academy. After a few coats of paint and enamel, Mexican parishioners installed the altar at the head of the chapel.[124]

Members of the Association of Our Lady of Guadalupe fundraised within the Mexican community as well, despite the financial constraints on most Mexican Catholic families. Ramon Cervantes and Guillermo Treviño, association president and vice president respectively, coordinated with parishioners to survey the city's entire Mexican Catholic community. Families travelled through the south side of Milwaukee and asked fellow Mexican Catholics to donate what they could, which, due to the low wages many workers earned, typically amounted to small

---

[121] Gross interview. The committee also printed this story in the city's Catholic newspapers to help raise money for remodeling efforts. See "One Good Turn…" *Catholic Herald*, September 23, 1926.
[122] For more on the Knights' national "Million Dollar Fund," see Young, *Mexican Exodus,* 52.
[123] Gross interview. The president of Marquette University, Reverend Albert C. Fox, donated old pews that had been used in the school rectory, while a church in Eagle, Wisconsin donated the Stations of the Cross.
[124] Frank Gross to Sister Superior of Holy Angels Academy, December 4, 1926, folder 1, Frank Gross Papers, AMA.

contributions.[125] Considering the limited economic resources of most Mexican families, these donations represented a substantial commitment to the chapel and the growing Mexican Catholic *colonia*. While the community made relatively small monetary contributions, their artistic contributions to the remodeling of the storefront was extensive. Brothers Florencio and Juan Arenas painted the inside of the building and added artistic flourishes to create a space they felt represented the small rural chapels of their native Jalisco. Reflecting on his contributions to the remodeled building, Juan Arenas took pride in the community's efforts to add to the "Mexican" character of the space.[126] By early December of 1926, the *Catholic Herald* reported that the chapel revealed "no trace of its former role as a store building."[127]

Renovations carried on at a fast pace during the fall and winter of 1926 as parishioners hoped to meet a Christmas deadline. Gross asked William C. Bruce to coordinate publicity for the blessing and opening of the church, including contacting the city's popular press and Catholic newspapers and printing and distributing postal cards to both the white and Mexican Catholic community. In return for his assistance, Gross promised to secure Bruce a "reserved seat...in the Mexican heaven."[128] Milwaukee's secular and religious press carried invitations to Catholics of all ethnicities to attend the blessing of the Mexican Catholic community's new spiritual and social home.[129] The dedication of the Mexican Mission Chapel of Our Lady of Guadalupe was held on December 12, 1926, and was celebrated in accordance with the feast of the patron saint of Mexico. In blessing the new chapel, Messmer was joined by seven priests and

---

[125] Renteria interview.
[126] Juan Arenas interview by Arnoldo Sevilla, Milwaukee Mexican-American interviews, 1974-1977, sound recording, tape 857A, WHS.
[127] "Mexicans Here Await Dedication of Their Chapel Next Sunday," *Catholic Herald*, December 6, 1926.
[128] Frank Gross to William C. Bruce, November 21, 1926, folder 1, Frank Gross Papers, AMA.
[129] "Mexicans Here Await Dedication of Their Chapel Next Sunday," *Catholic Herald*, December 6, 1926; "Mexicans Build Church Here," *Milwaukee Journal*, December 10, 1926; "Messmer Opens Mexican Chapel," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, December 13, 1926.

deacons from Milwaukee parishes, including Reverend Fusz from Gesu Church, Reverend Haberstock from Holy Trinity Church, and Reverend Aguirre. With hundreds of Mexican congregants in attendance, excited parishioners had to stand in the street to hear the blessing conducted by the archbishop. Following the blessing, Haberstock celebrated a solemn high Mass with a sermon in Spanish by Aguirre. The *Catholic Herald* reported that Aguirre's sermon focused on the "significance of a Catholic house of worship, as a center of the people's spiritual life" and "on *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe* as [the] people's special patroness and protectress." Because of the popularity of the dedication, the new parish invited all Milwaukee Catholics to attend an open house, reception, and benediction the following Sunday, where visitors were given a tour of the new chapel and Sunday school quarters.[130]

In their first annual reports to the archdiocese, the mission listed nearly several thousand Mexicans in the city, "nearly all of whom were Catholic." While not all attended Mass – conservative estimates placed attendance at approximately 160 parishioners at each of the two Sunday services – the mission's pastor considered the city's entire Mexican population as part of his flock.[131] Along with Mass and sacraments, the mission offered catechism classes staffed by teachers from the Catholic Instruction League; English classes for adults held Monday through Thursday nights, with teachers supplied by the Milwaukee Public School Extension; sewing and social hour for women held weekly through a branch of the Daughters of Isabella; monthly meetings of men and women's Sodalities of Our Lady of Guadalupe; and, a growing parish library with over two hundred Spanish-language books.[132] Clergy and affiliated sisters also

---

[130] "Chapel of Mexicans Blessed on Sunday, Feast of Patroness," *Catholic Herald*, December 16, 1926.
[131] Catholic Archdiocese of Milwaukee, "Status Animarum: Our Lady of Guadalupe Church (Mexican Mission), 1927," Parish Records, AMA.
[132] The Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe*, "Annual Report: Mexican Mission and Social Center"* (1928), Box 121, Folder 27, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Office of the General Secretary, ACHRCU.

concentrated resources on the city's large population of single men, many of whom were transient between jobs. A 1929 parish census noted that proselytization efforts netted encounters with approximately five hundred single men annually, many of whom were either lax or lapsed worshippers.[133]

In the two years following the benediction of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Holy Masses celebrated at the chapel struck a distinctly political tone in response to the continued persecution of Catholics in Mexico. Milwaukee Mexicans celebrated the Feast of Christ the King, a liturgical festival created by the Mexican Catholic hierarchy in 1926 in response to the suspension of public religious celebrations in the country.[134] In commemorating the feast day, Milwaukee Mexicans imagined themselves providing spiritual succor and support for their coreligionists to the south. Historian Matthew Butler has explored how these celebrations, created in response to anticlerical provisions in Mexico, served explicit political ends, as they preserved and promoted Mexico's Catholic identity in light of attacks on the church and clergy.[135] The city's *colonia*, separated from residents' home country by thousands of miles but still intimately affected by the persecution of their coreligionists, connected with their Catholic brothers and sisters through prayer and these religious observances.

Milwaukee Mexican and white Catholics also gathered at Our Lady of Guadalupe to publicize the persecution of the Catholic Church in Mexico, creating a cross-ethnic political space for the *colonia* to track geopolitical events that affected the entire city's Catholic

---

[133] Catholic Archdiocese of Milwaukee, "Status Animarum: Our Lady of Guadalupe Church (Mexican Mission), 1929," Parish Records, AMA.
[134] Pope Pius XI promoted and developed such celebrations in his 1925 encyclical letter *Quas Primas* in response to the perceived growth of secularism around the world, focusing specifically on anticlerical legislation in Mexico. See Marta Eugenia García Ugarte, "Los católicos y el presidente Calles," *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* 57, no. 3 (July-September 1995), 131-155.
[135] Matthew Butler, "Revolution and the Ritual Year: Religious Conflict and Innovation in Cristero Mexico," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 38, no. 3 (August 2006): 465-490.

community. From the opening of the chapel until the end of hostilities in Mexico in 1929, congregants gathered every evening to pray for their Mexican Catholic brothers and sisters. The chapel also became a space to welcome and shelter refugees fleeing the political and religious unrest of the Cristero War. In May of 1929, Reverend Alfredo Scotti of the Mercedarian order, an exiled provincial priest from Mexico, conducted a two-week mission at Our Lady of Guadalupe that extolled the virtues of religious freedom.[136] In August of the same year, the chapel held a series of lectures provided by exiles who had served as delegates to the 1929 annual Knights of Columbus convention. Speakers included Edelmiro Traslosheros, who had fled Mexico three years prior and served as a leader of the League for the Defense of Religious Freedom, and Clefos Calleros of El Paso, a border representative for the National Catholic Welfare Conference. The city's Mexican community attended these events, anticipating political news and hoping to glean some information on the extent of violence in their hometowns. The Milwaukee Catholic press reported that the Mexican *colonia* filled the mission building for these conversations, and that the enthusiasm generated by the addresses encouraged the scheduling of future talks by exiled Mexican Catholics.[137]

Milwaukee Mexicans gathered at Our Lady of Guadalupe to celebrate the end of the Cristero War in July of 1929. Due in large part to diplomatic negotiations moderated by Father John Burke, executive secretary of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, and Dwight Morrow, the United States ambassador to Mexico, incoming Mexican president Emilio Portes Gil reached a partial settlement with the Catholic leadership that opened churches across the

---

[136] "Exiled Provincial to Conduct Mission at Mexicans' Church," *Catholic Herald*, May 9, 1929.
[137] Calleros also lectured on immigration policy and other social problems affecting Mexican immigrants across the U.S Gross wrote that he believed Calleros talk, "full of good, common-sense advice," would "do more good in our parish than some missions we have preached here." Quoted in Frank Gross to Reverend John J. Burke, S.S.P., September 17, 1929, Box 121, Folder 27, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Office of the General Secretary, ACHRCU. See also "Exile From Mexico Speaks at Mexican Mission on Monday," *Catholic Herald*, August 22, 1929; "Mexican Mission Hears Native Speakers," *Catholic Citizen*, August 31, 1929.

country in 1929.[138] A high Mass of thanksgiving was offered in what the *Catholic Herald* called "the expression of the Milwaukee Mexican colony's gratitude for the restoration of religious rights and peace in their homeland." Parishioners decorated the chapel's altar and church with red, white, and green flowers and candles, the national colors of Mexico, and, in commemoration of the ending of hostilities in their homeland, created a miniature shrine in their *Te Deum* (Christian hymn of praise) celebration similar to the national shrine to Guadalupe in Mexico.[139] Mexicans felt a sense of relief in knowing that their family and friends were safe in Mexico, and took pride in the belief that their fervent daily devotions, financial support, and political mobilizing for the Mexican Catholic Church, both at home and abroad, had helped bring the persecution to an end.

Conclusion

From 1927 to 1930, Our Lady of Guadalupe became the political, social, and educational center for the city's Mexican immigrants, as white and Mexican members of the clergy, laity and fraternal organizations strived to provide many of the services unavailable to *la colonia* through the city's institutions. Unable to access many of the city's social services due to linguistic barriers and racial discrimination, Mexican immigrants turned to Catholic institutions that fostered their faith to provide for the spiritual and physical needs of the community. With the help of white Catholic fraternal and social aid organizations like the Knights of Columbus and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, leaders within the Mexican community developed educational initiatives, health clinics, and baseball clubs to meet the needs of their community.[140] By 1929,

---

[138] Badillo, *Latinos and The New Immigrant Church*, 31.
[139] "Local Mexicans Are Thankful for Country's Church Peace," *Catholic Herald*, July 11, 1929.
[140] The Society of St. Vincent de Paul helped provide many of the social and legal services Mexicans were unable to access in the city, developing a weekly legal clinic and medical clinic in the late 1920s. See 18th Annual Report of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul (Milwaukee: Milwaukee Archdiocese, 1931, 15), 16; Wisconsin Anti-

the *Milwaukee Sentinel* reported that Our Lady of Guadalupe had become the "general headquarters for all the activities of [Mexican] life" in Milwaukee.[141] Most important for the community, unlike the programs offered by many of the city's social service organizations, the development of programs at the chapel were created through collaboration between Mexican and white leadership, allowing city Mexicans to maintain and nurture their ethnic and religious community on their own terms.

Economic difficulties across the city caused Milwaukee's Mexican *colonia* to shrink considerably with the onset of the Great Depression in the early 1930s. Milwaukee's once-booming companies joined thousands of employers across the nation in reducing their labor force to compensate for declining industrial output. In 1933, the city witnessed a 75 percent decline in wage earners employed from those in 1929, while one in every five families was on some form of public aid.[142] Milwaukee's industries, many of which had invested resources and capital to recruit Mexican workers in the 1920s, sought to rid themselves of what they now believed to be surplus labor. Mexicans were among the first employees laid off from the city's factories and tanneries, and workers found it difficult to find even sporadic work in construction and day labor. Felix González remembered in a 1975 interview that a large majority of the single men who had come to Milwaukee in search of work returned to Mexico in the early years of the economic depression, while many families who had settled in the city were forced to stay due to

---

Tuberculosis Association to Frank Gross, September 2, 1927, folder 1, Frank Gross Papers, AMA; W.A.T.A. *Social Workers' Bulletin*, September 1, 1930, Wisconsin Anti-Tuberculosis Association, folder 1, Frank Gross Papers, AMA. The Catholic Instruction League also opened a Catechism Center on the second floor of the building. See "First Communion Class At Mexican Mission," *Catholic Citizen*, June 29, 1929; "Mexican Mission's Sunday-School Has Doubled Attendance," *Catholic Herald*, October 10, 1929. In addition, Milwaukee Mexicans organized a recreational baseball team to compete in Milwaukee's Catholic Church league. The team, called *El Club Deportivo Los Amigos*, competed against other parishes from around the city, and won several championships in their league in the 1930s. See Juan Arenas interview; Richard Santillán, "Mexican Baseball Teams in the Midwest, 1916-1965: The Politics of Cultural Survival and Civil Rights," *Perspectives in Mexican American Studies* 7 (2000): 131-151.

[141] "Colony Brings Life of Spain To Milwaukee," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, December 8, 1929.

[142] Valdez, *Economic Integration of Mexicans and Puerto Ricans in Milwaukee,* 15.

high travel costs.[143] By 1933, the community had been reduced to fewer than 1,500 people, as many Mexicans either returned to Mexico of their own accord or were repatriated by local and federal government agencies.[144]

Depleted county welfare resources and rising anti-immigrant sentiment fueled crackdowns on both documented and undocumented immigration in Milwaukee during the Great Depression as part of a larger national repatriation effort against Mexican nationals living in the United States. While the majority of Mexicans deported during the 1930s lived in border states such as California and Texas, tens of thousands of Mexican nationals also faced expulsion from midwestern states in the early years of the decade.[145] Milwaukee's elected officials worked with federal immigration officers, such as the city's chief immigration officer Herman R. Landon, to search for immigrants on the county's welfare rolls. Many of these suspected "public charges" were apprehended and then transported to Chicago for deportation proceedings, often regardless of the individual's residency or citizenship status in the country.[146] Federal immigration policy listed numerous triggers for deportation proceedings, including illegal entry (including overstaying a visitor's permit or crossing the border after giving false information or avoiding inspection); becoming a "public charge" within five years after entry; and, committing a crime involving "moral turpitude." In practice, however, Mexicans could be deported after having been accused of committing even the most minor of crimes.[147] While some Mexicans faced forced

---

[143] Felix D. González interview.
[144] "Mexican Colony Here Dwindling; Jobs Scarce, Relief Food Strange," *Milwaukee Journal*, October 7, 1933.
[145] For more on repatriation efforts in the Midwest during the Great Depression, see Francisco E. Balderama and Raymond Rodríguez, *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006), 74-122; Guérin-Gonzales, *Mexican Workers and the American Dream*, 77-110; Abraham Hoffman, *Unwanted Mexican Americans in the Great Depression: Repatriation Pressures, 1929-1939* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1974).
[146] "Fond du Lac Mexican Facing Deportation," *Rhinelander Daily News*, March 30, 1934.
[147] "Children Often Exile Parents," *Milwaukee Journal*, March 18, 1934; "Four Are Sent Back to Their Mexican Home," *Milwaukee Journal*, January 28, 1938.

deportation, others returned to their home country in light of declining employment opportunities.[148] Carlos Duran, who arrived in Milwaukee in the early 1920s, recalled how Milwaukee County and relief agencies "tried to get rid of Mexicans" by offering "to pay their way" back to Mexico during the Depression.[149]

For those Mexican families that stayed in Milwaukee through the Depression, Our Lady of Guadalupe continued to be a primary source of spiritual and social community. Despite a shrinking Mexican population in the city, Sunday Mass attendance grew to over two hundred weekly congregants in the early years of the 1930s. Organizations like the Society of St. Vincent de Paul did their best to provide welfare aid and employment opportunities for struggling Mexican families during the decade.[150] David Badillo notes that during the Great Depression, with the fragmentation of Mexican immigrant communities across the Midwest, parishes became focal points for engagement with the society at large. The linguistic, cultural, and religious bonds laity developed within faith spaces encouraged the maintenance and spiritual development of these small communities in the face of municipal efforts to shrink their size.[151]

As Milwaukee's industries drew themselves out of the economic morass of the Depression, area corporations again turned to Mexican-descent laborers to fuel a resurgent economy. Mexicans and Mexican Americans joined in the rapid expansion of industrial work to support home front efforts during World War Two, filling many of the same positions earlier Mexican immigrants had held in the 1920s. By the mid 1940s, reports estimated that between nearly three thousand Mexicans lived in southeast Wisconsin. This population growth was

---

[148] John Gurda, "The Cohesiveness of the Latin Community on Milwaukee's Near South Side," May 24, 1976, 5, Cristobal Berry-Cabán Papers, Microfilm Collection, WHS; Salvador Valdovinos, "The Mexican in Milwaukee," Research paper, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (1950), Archival Resources on Hispanics in Wisconsin, WHS.
[149] "They Pioneered for Mexicans," *Milwaukee Journal,* January 3, 1974.
[150] Catholic Archdiocese of Milwaukee, "Status Animarum: Our Lady of Guadalupe Church (Mexican Mission), 1932," Parish Records, AMA.
[151] Badillo, "The Catholic Church and the Making of Mexican-American Parish Communities in the Midwest," 268.

heavily augmented by a budding community of migrant laborers who worked and lived in the surrounding rural zones adjacent to the metropolitan area. During the agricultural off-season, when large groups of Texas-born migrant workers temporarily settled out of the fields, Milwaukee's Mexican population ballooned to nearly ten thousand residents.[152] The archdiocese continued to support the city's emergent Mexican community through the decade, helping Guadalupe and its more than three hundred members families acquire a larger building just a few blocks away from the original storefront in 1944.[153]

The history of Milwaukee's Mexican Mission Chapel provides an important corrective to past scholarship that has either overlooked or denied the importance of religiosity and religious spaces in the development of interethnic communities. Scholars of Latino immigration must consider the central role local parishes have had in the development of distinct ethnic communities while also analyzing the ability of religion to bridge ethno-racial divides. Roberto Goizueta reminds scholars that in creating parishes and celebrating religious faith in public spaces, Latino immigrants create sites that give "expression to an alternative way of living, one that construes life in a radically different way, as a gift to be celebrated rather than as an instrument for profit."[154] Milwaukee Mexicans, arriving as laborers and settling in alien urban spaces often hostile to their physical security and socio-linguistic heritage, molded social imaginaries and nurtured political identities within their newly-formed church, doing so outside

---

[152] Valdovinos, "The Mexican in Milwaukee."

[153] With funding from the archdiocese, Guadalupe acquired the former headquarters of the Wisconsin Telephone company, a building located at the corner of West Washington and South Third Street, just four blocks from the old mission. "Milwaukee Mexican Parish Acquires Building to Serve as Social Center," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* September 23, 1944. Further research is required on Milwaukee's Mexican community during the 1930s and 1940s. Beyond a handful of oral histories, archival centers have failed to adequately document these community's development, a situation that this historian will work to rectify in the future.

[154] Roberto G. Goizueta, "The Symbolic World of Mexican American Religion," in *Horizons of the Sacred: Mexican Traditions in U.S. Catholicism*, ed. Timothy Matovina and Gary Riebe-Estrella (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 2002), 128-129.

of Americanization campaigns and the assimilatory rhetoric that guided U.S. Catholic dioceses' interactions with Latin American immigrants in other cities across the country.

The case of Milwaukee's Mexican religious community demonstrates how the Catholic Church has functioned as a central vehicle for the maintenance of what David Badillo calls the "transnational character of Mexican communities."[155] Studies of immigrant parishes like Our Lady of Guadalupe reveal how religious life can be an anchor for communities as settlements grow. Scholars must also acknowledge the power that religious devotion had in fortifying struggles against the assimilatory pressures nativist groups, social services, and settlement houses oftentimes imposed on Mexican immigrant communities in the early twentieth century. Historian Timothy Matovina notes that Mexican Catholic practices, and specifically Guadalupan devotion, can engender a "sacred realm" in which congregants are "valued and respected," and where they are able to symbolically reverse the racism they encounter in the world around them.[156] By creating a consecrated space in the form of a parish chapel, Milwaukee's Mexican immigrants affirmed the value of their language, cultural heritage, and religious traditions. Historians must continue to excavate and examine the impact of religiosity on immigrant Mexican communities in the United States, while also analyzing the power of religious transnationalism in defining relationships between Mexican and white Catholics in the first decades of the twentieth century.

---

[155] David Badillo, "Religion and Transnational Migration in Chicago: The Case of the Potosinos," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 94:4 (Winter 2001/2002), 420-440.
[156] Timothy Matovina, "Companion in Exile: Guadalupan Devotion at San Fernando Cathedral, San Antonio, Texas, 1900-1940," in *Horizons of the Sacred,* 17-40.

CHAPTER 2

"An opportunity for brotherhood which we should not pass up": Mexican Agricultural Workers and Migrant Ministry in Wisconsin, 1942-1966

In October of 1959, Father Richard W. Gilsdorf, a Catholic priest from Green Bay, Wisconsin, appeared before a meeting of the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Migrant Labor held in the state's capital. Gilsdorf, a longtime pastor serving among the thousands of Texas-born Mexican-descent, or Tejano, migrant farmworkers that ventured to Wisconsin every agricultural season during the mid twentieth century, arrived with a frank request. Presenting a message prepared by the bishops of every Catholic archdiocese in the state, the priest implored the senators to pass legislation that would force canners and growers to provide safe working conditions, hygienic camps, and living wages for the migrants they employed. The priest detailed a litany of labor abuses he had observed during his tenure in the fields, including inadequate educational opportunities for migrant children, poor sanitation facilities, and pay far below the state's minimum wage. Perceiving a need for intervention, Wisconsin's Catholic archdioceses provided religious and secular programming for the more than eleven thousand migrant workers each year, but care for migrants, according to Gilsdorf, was unsustainable without government intervention. Speaking on behalf of the state's bishops, he implored the legislators to act, stating, "We urge all levels of government to raise the economic and social standards of the migrant and the Church will dedicate her efforts to minister to his moral and spiritual growth."[1]

Tejano laborers faced excruciating working and living conditions in Wisconsin's fields despite transforming the state into a national agricultural leader in the mid twentieth century. Wisconsin, long considered America's Dairyland, had the potential to earn the moniker of the

[1] "Catholic Statement Urges Migrant Laws," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* October 10, 1959. Grower lobbyists lined up at the hearing to oppose the Church's requests. They spoke most vehemently against the extension of a $1 per hour minimum wage law to migrant workers, contending that the raise would reduce migrants' incentive to work.

nation's salad bowl and rival agronomic powerhouse states like California in the 1950s and 1960s. By the early 1960s, the state's $60 million a year agricultural industry included upwards of 320,000 acres of fields for processing crops and 75,000 acres for fresh vegetable production.[2] To meet the rising labor demands needed to keep pace with such growth, Wisconsin growers and canners in the state's central counties turned to more than ten thousand Tejano migrant workers and their families every single year. In the process, Mexican-descent labor remade the economic landscape of the Midwest and catapulted it into a national economic dynamo in agricultural production.[3]

This chapter shifts our focus of Wisconsin Latino settlement from urban to rural spaces. It examines the creation of migrant ministry programs by Catholic and Protestant organizations in response to the expansion of Mexican-descent migration to southeastern and central Wisconsin in the decades following the Great Depression. Catholic archdioceses in Milwaukee and Green Bay along with the Wisconsin Council of Churches introduced programs for Tejano migrants, including religious outreach, educational initiatives, and healthcare. In addition to spiritual support, clergy and laity petitioned state and federal legislators for expanded workplace protections for migrant workers. This chapter connects those early Wisconsin migrant ministry efforts that began in the late 1940s to farmworker labor union organizing that developed in the mid 1960s. As the state's migrant population grew through the 1960s, militant migrant labor organizers joined with clergy, many of whom had been engaged in migrant ministry work for decades, to struggle for expanded labor and civil rights for farmworkers in Wisconsin.

---

[2] "Will Wisconsin Become Nation's Salad Bowl?" *Wisconsin Rapids Tribune,* August 24, 1964.

[3] Mario Sifuentez's recent study of Mexican-descent labor in the Pacific Northwest details a similar transformation. His work serves in part as a model for this review of Wisconsin's migrant populations. Mario Sifuentez, *Of Forests and Fields: Mexican Labor in the Pacific Northwest* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2016), 10-35.

Past scholarship has too casually discounted the efforts of religious and lay groups to aid Midwestern migrant workers and their families in the first half of the twentieth century. Dionicio Nodín Valdes has referred to the individuals and organizations dismissively as "reformers," white, middle-class liberals who were more focused on moralistic posturing and bureaucratic improvements than whole-change modifications to the capitalist systems that produced exploitative conditions. Within this framework, religious and civic groups interacting with Mexican-descent migrant workers appear as nothing more than ineffective "do-gooders."[4] This perspective proposes that religious organizations' outreach to migrants was self-servingly motivated by proselytization efforts, depicting clergy as more focused on evangelization than bettering the lives of Tejanos. The story of migrant ministry in Wisconsin, however, offers a more complicated history, instead marked by shifting attitudes and strategies on the behalf of religious organizations, and a more complex relationship between religious leaders and laity and the Tejano migrants they sought to aid.

In Wisconsin, as in other states with a large agricultural industry, clergy also served on commissions assigned to assess the state's "migrant situation." Examining groups like the Wisconsin Governor's Commission for Human Rights (GCHR) and state migrant agencies, historians have accused these committees of accomplishing little beyond leading studies and offering recommendations that were never implemented. According to this analysis, governor's migrant committees, always constituted without worker representation and often supplied with little funding and no enforcement capacity, were nothing more than "gadfly" organizations that had little hope of effecting change.[5] These studies, however, miscalculate the intent and capacity

[4] Dennis Nodín Valdés, *Al Norte: Agricultural Workers in the Great Lakes Region, 1917-1970* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991), 114-115.
[5] Ibid., 113-114. See also Elisa Matia Alvarez Minoff, "Free to Move? The Law and Politics of Integration in Twentieth-Century America," (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2013), 256.

of 1950s-era of religious organizations and state migrant commissions, not fully exploring the efficacy of their educative and advocative efforts during the period. During the 1950s, liberal Wisconsin clergy and state commissioners did not envision a wholesale remaking of the economic systems that called for low-wage migratory labor. Assessing their capacity to enact reforms, white, middle-class advocates for migrant workers could not envision such changes as feasible, and instead turned to different strategies to slowly shift the perspectives of Wisconsinites who were either apathetic or resistant to the idea of expanding protections for workers and their families. For these reformers, amity, careful and scientific investigation, and appeals to humanity would serve as the key to bettering the lives of migrant workers.

Both clergy and state commissions developed numerous tactics to reach the minds, and hearts, of their fellow Wisconsinites. By the 1950s, state residents were at least somewhat familiar with stories of migrant deprivation, homelessness, and underemployment. During the Great Depression, the plight of migratory workers and families had been brought to the public's attention through the novels of John Steinbeck, reports by intrepid journalists like Carey McWilliams, and studies by Ernesto Galarza, Paul S. Taylor, and Arthur Ross. These accounts stressed a pressing national emergency that not only endangered the economic well-being of the country, but also threatened to subvert the moral character of the United States. Speaking with the voice of a church behind them, clergy and laity were cognizant of the moral and cultural capital they held at their disposal. Religious organizations wrenched the guilty conscience of Americans on their country's treatment of migrant workers.

Blunt opposition from religious organizations to exploitative labor systems, including those that used domestic laborers and those that turned to foreign nationals such as the bracero program, often depended on individual voices pushing from within institutions. Historian Gina

Marie Pitti has noted that while clerical leaders presented what appeared to be a unified Catholic opposition to the destitute conditions within which migrants labored, in reality, no consensus existed across the U.S. Catholic Church to these programs.[6] In Wisconsin, individual Catholic and Protestant clergy and laity served as the impetus to bring migrant issues to the public square, and initiated efforts to reform legislation and community-level practices affecting migratory workers. Reverend Ogle Chastain, chairman of state missions for the Wisconsin Baptist State Convention, explained to Wisconsinites the need to extend Christian fellowship to migrants, stating, "We have asked them to come to Wisconsin to harvest the crops…Their presence affords us an opportunity for brotherhood which we should not pass up."[7] Wisconsin Catholics and Protestants argued that the exploitation of migrant families not only affected the migrants themselves, but also left an irreparable scar on the very Christian character of the communities that received them. According to these advocates, indifference towards the suffering of migrants could no longer be the dominant feeling of the day – concentrated concern was needed to not only help these people, but also to save the soul of America. Supporters contended that these workers and their families deserved equal access to rights afforded to all Americans, including housing, education, wages, and live in freedom from discrimination.

For those with whom a moral argument made little headway, religious activists and state commissioners instead turned to economic considerations. Organizations like the GCHR reminded everyday Wisconsinites and employers alike of the financial implications of keeping Tejano migrants in what they could only describe as second-class citizenship. Rebecca Barton, director of the GCHR, often commented that some growers had come to understand that it was

---

[6] Gina Marie Pitti, "To "Hear About God in Spanish": Ethnicity, Church, and Community Activism in the San Francisco Archdiocese's Mexican American Colonias, 1942-1965" (PhD diss., Stanford University, 2003), 339-341.
[7] "Migrant Workers' Committee Urged," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* January 25, 1958.

"good business to treat the migrant decently because he is an economic asset." Her goal as commissioner of a human rights organization, however, was also to persuade employers that it was "still better business to do so because he is a human being."[8] Migrants themselves understood their economic power as laborers. Historians such as Zaragosa Vargas and Gunther Peck have pointed to one of Mexican-descent workers' greatest weapons against employer discrimination: their mobility. By refusing to return to fields with inhospitable living and working conditions, and then spreading word to avoid such camps within their social and kin networks, Tejano migrant farmworkers used their feet to reject mistreatment.[9] Despite the best efforts of organizations like the GCHR, most Wisconsin growers and canners failed, or refused, to recognize the economic importance, much less the humane significance, of offering even the most basic of guarantees to the migrant workers who travelled to their camps every year.

Reformers – religious, civic, and migrant alike – ultimately understood that the workplace inequities and racial discrimination propping up migrant labor systems in Wisconsin could not be altered solely through interpersonal relationships and "reasone"' economic arguments. With organizations like the Catholic Church, the Wisconsin Council of Church's Migrant Ministry, and the GCHR unable to modify the systemic issues that allowed migrants to earn less than a living wage and forced them to live and work in subhuman conditions, Tejano migrants began the process of organizing themselves into a labor union to call for change on their own terms. Their organization, Obreros Unidos, believed that dramatic shifts in policy, and not just Wisconsinites' attitudes, would be needed to enact meaningful and longstanding reform. As migrants organized themselves, Catholic and Protestant clergy and laity – many of whom had

---

[8] "Door County Aids Migrants," *La Crosse Tribune,* September 13, 1951.
[9] Zaragosa Vargas, *Proletarians of the North: Mexican Industrial Workers in Detroit and the Midwest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 31; Gunther Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor: Padrones and Immigrant Workers in the North American West, 1880-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 191-193.

been involved in migrant ministry for over a decade – offered solidarity by opening their churches, speaking in front of congressional committees, and marching alongside them.

"*Mexico y los Estados Unidos son buenos amigos*": Foreign Mexican Labor in Wisconsin During the Mid-Twentieth Century

Midwestern growers had begun recruiting Mexican-descent workers in the earliest decades of the twentieth century, turning to both foreign and domestic laborers to supplement their workforce.[10] Wisconsin growers drew their first large agricultural migrant workforce from Midwestern cities. Families of Belgian descent were drawn to Wisconsin in the first decades of the twentieth century because of expanding production in sugar beets and assorted vegetables, before being gradually replaced by Germans and Russians. Most of these workers and their families eventually settled out of the migrant stream, purchasing their own homes and becoming permanent residents of Wisconsin.[11] During the late 1920s and early 1930s, growers slowly turned to Mexican-descent migrant workers to supplement their labor force. Wisconsin sugar beet industry representatives joined thirty states in actively recruiting from the American Southwest, drawing approximately 3,000 Tejanos to the state annually during the 1930s.[12]

The United States' entry into World War II heralded a dramatic shift in demographics as well as in industrial and agricultural production in Wisconsin. Rural Wisconsinites, formerly the backbone of the state's farming industry, rushed to urban centers in search of booming economic

---

[10] Midwestern Sugar beet companies took advantage of guest worker programs as early as 1918. Paul S. Taylor, "Migratory Farm Labor in the United States," *Monthly Labor Review* 44, no. 3 (March 1937): 537-549; Kathleen Mapes, *Sweet Tyranny: Migrant Labor, Industrial Agriculture, and Imperial Politics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 136-141.

[11] Doris P. Slesinger and Eileen Muirragui, "Migrant Agricultural Labor in Wisconsin: A Short History," (Madison: University of Wisconsin Madison, Institute for Research and Poverty Discussion Papers, 1979), 2.

[12] William H. Metzler and Frederick O. Sargent, *Migratory Farmworkers in the Midcontinent Stream* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Services, 1960), 1; Edmundo Flores, "Mexican Migratory Labor in Wisconsin: A Study of the War Food Administration Program for the Use of Mexican Agricultural Workers During 1945, in the State of Wisconsin," (Master's thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1947), 4.

opportunity. From 1940 to 1946, approximately 140,000 people migrated from rural areas to Wisconsin's cities, as many workers left their farms to find employment in industrial jobs.[13] In addition to these population shifts, rural farmers struggled to compensate for the loss of young, able-bodied workers to the draft. With men leaving to serve in the armed forces, Wisconsin's 186,000 farmers were called on to harvest more crops with less manpower to work the fields.[14]

The wartime Wisconsin labor dilemma was part of a larger national manpower shortage. Washington legislators turned to guest worker programs with Mexico and Caribbean nations to supplement workforce demands. Labor programs allowed federal agencies and state offices to coordinate the recruitment of agricultural workers. Multinational agreements empowered Wisconsin farmers to enlist an annual average of 2,500 workers from Mexico, Jamaica, the Bahamas, and British Honduras (present-day Belize), as well as prisoners of war, to work primarily in the harvest of sugar beets and cherries, as well as pea and corn canning.[15] The regulation of labor migration fueled a 42 percent increase in farm production during the war, generating record yields in dairy production, canning, and cherry picking, and catapulting Wisconsin to lead the nation in total acreage of vegetables grown for canning.[16]

While Wisconsin growers and canners recruited most heavily from Jamaica during the war, it was their enrollment of Mexican nationals that had the longest impact on the state. The 1942 Mexican Farm Labor Agreement, also known as the bracero program, was the first in a multi-decade series of guest worker programs initiated by the United States and Mexican

---

[13] George W. Hill, "Texas-Mexican Migratory Agricultural Workers in Wisconsin," University of Wisconsin-Madison Agricultural Experiment Station *Bulletin* (May 1948), 3, Archival Resources on Hispanics in Wisconsin, Wisconsin Historical Society (hereafter referred to as WHS).
[14] "Farmers Must Produce More With Less Help," *Milwaukee Journal*, February 1, 1942.
[15] The total number of foreign guest workers in Wisconsin began with 1,300 in 1943, grew to 3,000 in 1944 and then 3,200 in 1945. Slesinger and Eileen, "Migrant Agricultural Labor in Wisconsin," 4.
[16] University of Wisconsin Agricultural Extension Service, "The Wisconsin Farm Labor Program, 1943-1947," 13-14. Wisconsin canned and processed one-third of the nation's peas and red beets, one-fifth of its sweet corn and kraut, one-eighth of its carrots, and one-twelfth of its snap beans.

governments in the mid twentieth century. The initial iteration of agreements lasted from 1942 to 1947 and were followed by a series of labor pacts that lasted until 1964. During the wartime period, braceros made up only ten percent of the hired workers in the United States; from 1948 until the program's end in 1962, however, the U.S. admitted on average two hundred thousand braceros per year, most whom worked in southwestern and Pacific Coast states.[17] While over half of the braceros recruited during the war worked in California, Mexican nationals also made up nearly one third of the manpower used in sugar beet production in Michigan.[18] From 1942-1947, Wisconsin contracted 4,817 braceros to the state.[19]

Seeking to avoid the abuses that had characterized American employment of Mexican nationals in the first decades of the twentieth century, including inadequate wages, unsanitary living and working conditions, and indiscriminate deportations, the Mexican government entered direct negotiations with the U.S. federal government. Under the negotiated contracts, Mexican migrants were guaranteed wages at local minimum rates, while the U.S. government also agreed to extend the same benefits to braceros regarding housing, sanitation, workplace safety, and medical attention available to American workers.[20] Labor historian Cindy Hahamovitch notes, however, that the state's role in these guest-worker programs, though defined as being one of mediator between employers and employees, often tended to be more ambiguous. Despite

---

[17] Erasmo Gamboa, *Braceros in the Pacific Northwest, 1942-1947* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990); Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the INS* (New Orleans: Quid Pro Books, 2010).
[18] Robert C. Jones, *Mexican American War Workers in the United States: The Mexico-United States Manpower Recruiting Program and Operation, 1942 to 1944* (Washington, D.C.: Pan American Union, Division of Labor and Social Information, 1945), 25.
[19] Ronald L. Mize, "The Invisible Workers: Articulations of Race and Class in the Life Histories of Braceros," (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2000), iv.
[20] Flores, "Mexican Migratory Labor in Wisconsin," 6-10.

promising to arbitrate complaints and institute basic worker protections, federal and state officials repeatedly ignored braceros' grievances to the benefit of growers and canners.[21]

For those braceros arriving in Wisconsin in the 1940s, these explicit contractual protections often lay far beyond the reality of their living and working conditions. Laborers arrived yearly by railway car to Chicago in April, where, because of the constant movement of soldiers and supplies headed to war, they were forced to wait for days on train station platforms with irregular access to meals and proper shelter. Upon eventually arriving at their work camp, Mexican laborers discovered that promises of proper compensation, decent housing comparable to those enjoyed by domestic workers engaged in the same work, and sanitary and medical facilities would be largely unmet. Mexican workers lived in repurposed boxcars with poor ventilation and inadequate restrooms. They encountered unreliable medical care, as monolingual company doctors slackened the standards for medical examinations by misdiagnosing illnesses like bronchial pneumonia as "bad colds" to avoid sending workers back to Mexico. In response, more than one hundred braceros assigned to Wisconsin fields would abandon their worksite and their contracts yearly and make their way to larger urban centers like Milwaukee in search of work in factories or foundries that paid much higher wages.[22]

To protect its citizens working in the U.S., the Mexican government sanctioned states that failed to hold offending employers accountable. Texas, where de facto segregation and discrimination were the norm for Mexicans and Mexican Americans, was among the first states blacklisted and to receive no workers in the 1940s. Along with Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Montana, Minnesota, and Wyoming, the Mexican government sanctioned Wisconsin

---

[21] Cindy Hahamovitch, *No Man's Land: Jamaican Guestworkers in America and the Global History of Disposable Labor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 1-11.
[22] Edmundo Flores, "Los braceros mexicanos en Wisconsin," *El Trimestre Económico* 17, no. 1 (1950): 23-80.

multiple times in the 1940s in response to working conditions and social circumstances in receiving towns and communities. Blacklisted by the Mexican government for repeated documented discriminatory practices, Wisconsin received a limited number of braceros throughout the second half of the 1950s.[23]

Wisconsin's religious organizations paid little heed to Mexican nationals arriving through the bracero program. The only notable exception came in Milwaukee, where railroad companies recruited more than one hundred Mexican nationals to work in railroad shops in February of 1944. By 1945, a railroad crew of over 180 Mexican workers labored in the Menominee river valley, all crammed into two former storage buildings that had been converted into dormitories. The braceros attempted to create a sense of community in the railroad colony, constructing a recreation room where resting workers could listen to the radio, practice their guitars, or write a letter home to their loved ones. They petitioned their employers for more educational and recreational activities, learning English through night classes offered by the Milwaukee Public Schools Department of Adult Education and the Milwaukee County Municipal Recreation Department. Braceros attended classes in a recreation hall next to their dormitory, with a blackboard lined with the Mexican and American flag and the bilingual slogan, "*Mexico y los Estados Unidos son buenos amigos* – Mexico and the United States are good friends." Though living in isolated quarters in the Menominee valley, the braceros also interacted with the more established Mexican American community on Milwaukee's south side. Practicing Catholics could attend a Mass every weekend presided over by a Father Alfredo Scotti from the city's

[23] Mize, "The Invisible Workers," vi, 129, 249.

Mexican Mission of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The devout met in a makeshift chapel in the workers' small recreation hall, with Mexican and American flags hanging on the wall.[24]

The use of guest workers from the Caribbean and Mexico in Wisconsin reached a peak of 3,600 in 1946, and then fell to 2,800 in 1947 in the final year of the program.[25] Wisconsin growers and canners continued to recruit Mexican nationals through the bracero program upon its continued renewal during the late 1940s and early 1950s, although on a much smaller scale. Employers found the contract stipulations requiring adequate housing, commensurate wages, and workhour restrictions cumbersome and invasive, and instead turned to a different source of Mexican-descent labor – domestic Tejano migrants – in the years following the war.

"Respectable partners in an honorable enterprise": Tejano Migrants in Postwar Wisconsin

The 1950s was a period of rapid agricultural growth in the state, as farm size increased and the demand for the types of crops on which migrants worked, many of which were difficult to mechanize due to perishability. Following the expansive agricultural drive of World War Two, Wisconsin crop yields increased rapidly as farmers harvested hundreds of thousands of acres of fields with peas, sweet corn, cucumbers, cherries, snap peas, lima beans, sugar beets, and tomatoes. While the demand for labor had grown during the war, the rural population of the state continued to fall as thousands of local farmers, many of whom hailed from small family farms, moved from agricultural to urban nonfarm wage labor in urban centers like Milwaukee, Racine, and Janesville. In the 1940s, rural Wisconsin witnessed a net population decrease of 140,000 people, of which conservatively 25,000 were farmworkers.[26]

---

[24] "Mexican Workers in Road Shops Do Excellent Job; Live in Own Barracks," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, May 14, 1944; "Romance Blossoms for Mexican Railroad Crew," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* May 15, 1944; "Provide Class for Mexicans," *Milwaukee Journal*, May 30, 1945.
[25] Hill, "Texas-Mexican Migratory Agricultural Workers in Wisconsin," 4.
[26] Ibid., 2-3, 18.

Following the war, Wisconsin farmers shifted the majority of labor recruitment efforts from commissioning foreign labor to employing domestic migrant workers, a trend mirrored across midwestern states. Wisconsin's migrant labor force grew from an average of eight thousand workers annually in the late 1940s to approximately twelve thousand per year during the 1950s, reaching a peak in the mid 1950s when close to fifteen thousand migrants were employed in the state.[27] Growers and canners reduced the number of recruited workers from the Caribbean and Latin America but increased their employment efforts among Tejano families. While migrant Tejanos had travelled to Wisconsin since the early twentieth century, mostly working in the sugar beet industry, the 1947 harvests signaled a sea change. Texas-Mexicans migrants were reported in twenty-three of the state's seventy-one counties during the summer of 1947, totaling more than five thousand workers and their families, with the largest concentration in towns like Wautoma, Rosendale, Oconto, Lomira, and Fox Lake.[28] Those arriving in Wisconsin were part of an estimated yearly migration of one hundred thousand Texans swinging through the central states, including Ohio, Minnesota, Illinois, Iowa, Montana, and the Dakotas.[29] In the immediate postwar years, Tejanos accounted for nearly 85 percent of migrant workers employed by Wisconsin farmers, helping the state maintain its national standing as an agribusiness leader.[30]

With the discontinuation of the National Farm Labor Program at the end of the war, the obligation for the recruitment of agricultural workers reverted to back to individual states. The Wisconsin State Employment Service (WSES) assumed responsibility for workforce

---

[27] Slesinger and Muirragui, "Migrant Agricultural Labor in Wisconsin," 7.
[28] Wisconsin Governor's Commission on Human Rights, "Migratory Agricultural Workers in Wisconsin: A Problem in Human Rights" (Madison, 1950), 7; Hill, "Texas-Mexican Migratory Agricultural Workers in Wisconsin," 4-17.
[29] "Migrants, 14,000 of 'Em, Help Get In Badger Crops," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, May 25, 1952.
[30] John Huber, "Migratory Agricultural Workers in Wisconsin," (Master's thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1967), 18.

employment in 1948 to both alleviate underemployment and avoid labor shortages. Wisconsin employers filed requests with WSES to fill their harvest crews. After establishing that the local labor force had been exhausted, the WSES would then work with a network of state employment services in Texas and other southern and southwest recruitment states such as Oklahoma, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Kentucky.[31] WSES relied on the established migratory routes between Wisconsin and Texas to recruit Mexican-descent laborers. Within Wisconsin, WSES established regional offices in high-need areas, first in 1949 in Door County to coordinate employment during the cherry harvest and in 1950 in Waushara County to assist with cucumbers.[32]

Migrant crews arriving in Wisconsin typically consisted of a group of families, ranging from ten to thirty men, women and children, who travelled by car and covered truck. During the late 1940s, most migrant children under the age of fourteen did not attend Wisconsin schools during the harvest season; out of economic necessity, many worked in the fields with their parents. For those children who did find a way to school, they could not expect to find teachers able to communicate with them in Spanish. Through the middle of the twentieth century, agriculture served as the nation's chief employer of child labor.[33]

As the state's Tejano migrant population grew in the 1940s and 1950s, tensions over living and working conditions in the fields festered. Employer-provided housing was often crude, unhygienic, and insufficient, while public healthcare services were always lacking. Migrants often found two forms of accommodations available in Wisconsin. The more desired housing was provided by larger growers who had formerly employed Mexican and Jamaican nationals during the war. In these locations, "adequate" lodging included a given amount of space for a

---

[31] "Migrant Workers Reap Little Leisure in Harvesting Crops," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, June 1, 1952.
[32] U.S. Senate, *Hearings before the Subcommittee on Migratory Labor of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare,* 86th Congress, 1st Session, August 7, 26, September 28, 30, October 1, November 30, December 7, 1959.
[33] Hill, "Texas-Mexican Migratory Agricultural Workers in Wisconsin," 11.

person with a weather-proof unit located on a well-drained piece of land. The housing would most likely have electricity and accessible running water, beds and bedding, adequate toilets and garbage facilities, and windows that could be opened with screens to keep out flies. This form of lodging, as one researcher noted, was provided by employers who saw migrants as "fellow human beings" and who believed they were employing laborers "as respectable partners in an honorable enterprise." The second form of housing, often provided by smaller growers, offered a starkly different reality. Referred to as "hovels which defy description" by one researcher, these arrangements were typically any type of shack, worn-out building, or abandoned dwelling a grower could cobble together, with no care taken to provide running water, sanitation, or bedding. According to a 1948 report, one-third of the housing units provided for migratory families were unfit for human occupancy. An early survey of these communities commented that a direct relationship could be traced between the prevalence of sub-standard housing and the farmer who had no contact with the laboring family.[34]

Beyond housing, many Wisconsin-bound Tejano migrants also found securing employment a non-certainty upon arriving in the state. Labor recruiters working on behalf of growers and canners were known to place fraudulent advertising in southern Texas towns, often resulting in over-recruitment and non-guaranteed work contracts. Over-recruitment served as an established method of suppressing wage rates in many states, but even where it wasn't a purposeful strategy employed by growers, difficulties in estimating local labor supply and annual crop yield often lead to reserve pools of workers. Migrant laborers also found that the unpredictable aspects of agricultural work such as inclement weather might bring a decreased demand for their services, resulting in sporadic un- or underemployment. In 1948, for example,

[34] Hill, "Texas-Mexican Migratory Agricultural Workers in Wisconsin," 15-17.

only forty percent of families reported steady work during the summer, while a majority noted work shortages that could occur at any moment.[35]

Faced with these conditions, migrants discovered no recourse through federal or Wisconsin laws regulating their working or camp conditions. Migrant workers were excluded from most federal protective legislation passed during the New Deal era of the 1930s. Working to appease agriculturalist concerns, southern Democrats had excluded migratory and domestic workers from the Fair Labor Standards Act, Social Security Act, and National Labor Relations Act, and ensured over the proceeding decades that these workers would continue to be omitted from federal entitlements. Because of these exclusions, migrant workers lacked protections in minimum wages, workmen's compensation, old-age and survivors' insurance, unemployment insurance, and collective bargaining rights.[36] Wisconsin's own state legislature failed to pass statutory legislation relating to migrant labor, a situation further complicated by Wisconsin statute's definitions of workers. While industrial laborers, like those that might work in industrial farming and canning, would fall under the state's Industrial Commission's jurisdiction, most farmworkers found themselves excluded from protective labor legislation, including workmen's and unemployment compensation and child labor restrictions. The State Board of Health, responsible for inspecting agricultural and industrial camps, also struggled to meet inspection obligations due to low staffing and limited financial and regulatory support from the state.[37]

Beyond their working conditions, African American and Tejano migrants encountered a less-than-welcoming experience outside of their camps. University researchers conducting

---

[35] Ibid., 10, 16-17.
[36] Cindy Hahamovitch, *The Fruits of Their Labor: Atlantic Coast Farmworkers and the Making of Migrant Poverty, 1870-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time* (New York: Liverlight Publishing, 2013), 161-182, 240-242, 268-272.
[37] Victor T. Whal, Jr., "Migrant Farm Workers in Wisconsin," *Wisconsin Law Review* 1951 (March 1951), 347-349.

surveys among workers noted that due to limited access to automobiles, migrants experienced a lack of social contact with their receiving communities and a sense of general isolation in migrant camps. Besides an inability to pursue recreational activities in town or shop beyond company stores, migrants also had limited access to church services during their stay in Wisconsin. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, migrants in search of religious services were forced to rely on a handful of lay preachers from Protestant denominations, who intermittently visited migrant camps during the summer.[38]

Migrants faced more than social isolation in their contact with Wisconsinites, however. A cold shoulder could also turn into prejudice and segregation in farming communities surrounding the fields in which they worked. The most public example of racially-based discrimination occurred in Door County, a prolific cherry producer and iconic resort town. By the early 1950s, Door County's one million cherry trees produced between twenty and fifty million pounds of cherries per season, placing the area third in national cherry production. Orchardists had turned to Tejano and southern African American migrants to compensate for fewer high school and college student workers, many of whom now sought work in industrial settings.[39] More than ten thousand seasonal Tejano and African-American workers travelled from twenty-nine states to work in the industry annually, with Tejanos constituting a majority of the workforce.[40] Migrant families, brought to the idyllic region to pick the bumper cherry crop, found themselves quickly embroiled in what the *Milwaukee Journal* referred to as the "Cherryland Problem."[41] Crammed into segregated, unsanitary shanties and living without proper medical attention, migrant workers

[38] Hill, "Texas-Mexican Migratory Agricultural Workers in Wisconsin," 14-15.
[39] Agricultural Extension Service, "The Wisconsin Farm Labor Program, 1943-1947," College of Agriculture – University of Wisconsin-Madison (January 1948), 14, Box 1, Folder 15, Wisconsin Department of Industry, Labor and Human Relations, Committee and Task Force Records, 1943-1973, WHS.
[40] Wisconsin Cherry Commission, "The Cherry Industry in Door County," June 1950, Pamphlet Collection, WHS.
[41] "Migrant Pickers Pose Cherryland Problem," *Milwaukee Journal*, August 18, 1948.

struggled with unfulfilled wage promises, often being paid at less than half the rate at which they had been contracted. Camp owners offered the well-worn canard that the segregation was not due to "racial difference," but instead that the workers preferred to "be among people of their own kind." African American migrant workers from the U.S. South faced the most visceral discrimination. In 1948, a gang of white Door County residents loaded one crew of Southern black workers into trucks and drove them to the county line, where they were told to "hit the road." Tejano youngsters also faced the ire of white schoolchildren, who reportedly called the migrants "beanpickers." In surrounding towns, community businesses instituted segregation policies, as eating establishments displayed "whites only" and "we cater only to whites" signs in their windows. Meanwhile, resort owners bitterly scorned the presence of the migrants, claiming that African American and Mexican workers drove away their customers, even though few if any of the workers ever ventured to the resort areas of the region. The state's district attorney suggested that the best solution would be to set stricter restrictions on the movement of migrants, constraining them strictly to work camps.[42]

"Fiestas and Fandangos": The Waupun Migrant Project and Early State-Religious Cooperation

Door County's reception of migrants proved to be the rule and not the exception for Wisconsin agricultural communities in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Racial and cultural clashes arose often between Tejano migrants and Wisconsinites across the state and often brought negative publicity to the area, prompting civic organizations and religious groups to call for action. Organizations such as the League of Women Voters and local religious congregations argued on behalf of migrant workers, contending that Tejanos deserved respect in Wisconsin

[42] "Farmers Need 'Good Rains,'" *Milwaukee Journal,* August 6, 1947; "Resorters Rap Cherry Orchard Help," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, August 16, 1948; "Group to Fight Prejudice Acts," *Milwaukee Journal,* September 18, 1948.

because of their economic importance to the state *and* because of their status as American citizens.

Struggles over recreational spaces between Tejanos and white residents in the central Wisconsin agricultural town of Waupun resulted in especially embarrassing media attention for the state. During the summer of 1949, Fond du Lac park custodian Seymour Patrick barred Tejano children and their families from swimming in the county pool. When asked by the local press why he had restricted their entry, the custodian declared, "They say these people are American citizens. When you become an American citizen you should talk the language. Lots of these people don't."[43] Threatening to close the pool rather than allow Tejanos to enter, Patrick explained to the local press that the Texas-born youngsters would have to confine their play to the Waupun city park, expounding that some "white parents [didn't] want their children to play with Mexicans" because of fears that Tejanos were carriers of polio, while others were simply "concerned about their color."[44] The Fond du Lac pool custodian's actions and comments prompted swift backlash from community organizations. The League of Women Voters of Waupun, which had recently begun working with area churches to provide recreational activities for the Tejano families, appealed the park officer's restriction to town officials. The league argued that the children's status as American citizens entitled them to "the same privileges (other) citizens in Wisconsin have."[45] Within a matter of days, the county parks committee, under advisement from the county attorney, issued a statement "refusing to tolerate any discrimination" and forced the custodian to resign.[46]

---

[43] "Racial Ban on Bathers Stirs a Row in Waupun," *Milwaukee Journal*, July 22, 1949.
[44] "Playground Ban Splits Waupun," *Racine Journal Times,* July 22, 1949.
[45] Ibid.
[46] "Rights Unit Lauds Race Row Solution," *Milwaukee Journal*, July 27, 1949. See also Rebecca C. Barton to Neil J. Walker, July 26, 1949, Box 1, Folder 23, Series 2, Wisconsin Governor (1947-1951: Oscar Rennenbohm): Records, 1907-1988, WHS.

County officials expressed concerns about how negative images of the "racial difficulties" in their community might affect local farmers' ability to recruit Tejanos for work. Waupun mayor F.A. Trilling feared that the "close view of an ugly example of racial discrimination right at [the city's] doorstep" presented negative publicity for the area. The county board, originally disinclined to commit time or resources to migrant discrimination concerns, was prompted into action after prominent Protestant pastors, Catholic laity, and the League of Women Voters voiced similar worries to the local press. Trilling subsequently established a community council on human relations, earning the town the distinction of being the smallest Wisconsin city to have such a group.[47] Comprised of civic leaders and members of religious organizations, the council expressed a desire to "break down social prejudices by working across racial lines" and increase contact between the Waupun community and Tejano migrants, doing so primarily through a program that would "facilitate the mutual adjustment of the community and the workers."[48]

The council made efforts to address migrants' concerns surrounding education in the summer of 1949, planning for a summer school program for the subsequent growing season. Volunteers turned to the Home Missions Council (HMC), an inter-denominational Protestant missionary agency that had over the previous five years conducted preliminary mission work among Wisconsin migrants. Reverend Ellis Marshburn, regional director of the HMC, offered to appoint a fulltime Spanish-speaking worker from his staff for the summer program.[49] Beyond opening educational and recreational opportunities for migrant children and their parents,

---

[47] "Waupun Again Taking Lead on Combatting Intolerance," *Milwaukee Journal,* December 9, 1949.
[48] "Activity Starts for Migrants," *Milwaukee Journal*, June 12, 1950.
[49] Waupun Community Council on Human Relations, "Report of Waupun migrant project: the 1950 major concern of the Community Council on human relations," 1. See also "Waupun Takes Strides With Migrants' Project," *Milwaukee Journal,* October 28, 1950; "Migrant Project in Waupun Told at Whitewater Meeting," *Janesville Daily Gazette,* October 11, 1951.

program coordinators portrayed their work as a means to "improve American democracy." They hoped their initiative would "build a sense of belonging to community, of being citizens of their own country" for Tejanos in Waupun. Volunteers admitted that their project was a patchwork one that might do little to improve the actual living conditions for migrants but would hopefully serve as a model for larger changes in the future.[50]

The Waupun council on human relations faced serious funding obstacles through the spring of 1950. Initial attempts to fundraise the required $1,500 to finance the salaries, supplies, and transportation costs for the program stalled, as letters sent to growers, local citizens, civic groups, lodges, and church groups garnered minimal support, and the Department of Public Instruction offered little more than well wishes for their efforts. Waupun's council finally relied upon the financial support of a newly-formed state organization, the Governor's Commission on Human Rights (GCHR), which allocated enough money from their own meager budget to pay for the salaries of two Spanish-speaking student teachers from the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Department of Education. In early spring, workers from the HMC arrived in Waupun. The HMC representatives presented to churches, fraternal organizations, and luncheon clubs to advertise the migrant project and build support and securing funding for the program.[51]

The summer program relied heavily on student teachers and donations from area schools, including a loaned bus to transport migrant children to the local school. Emphasizing English acquisition, the teachers used free text books from a textbook company and loaded copies from the university library. Each day at noon, teachers shuttled the school children to the city park where they ate lunches with local Waupun children as a planned form of interethnic interchange.

---

[50] Waupun Community Council on Human Relations, "Report of Waupun migrant project: the 1950 major concern of the Community Council on human relations," 2.
[51] Ibid., 2-4.

In addition to classroom instruction, HMC staff organized weekly "Family Nights" at each participating camp that included baseball games, community singing, and films. The summer school lasted for eight weeks, ending with a celebratory picnic at the closing of the beet season as families prepared to move north for cherry and pickle picking season.[52]

By the end of the summer, coordinators surveyed the efficacy of the migrant programming, identifying both institutional deficiencies but also windows of possible improvement. Without financial support from the city or county, funding had proven especially difficult in the summer of 1950. The situation became so dire in the middle of the summer that the contracted University of Wisconsin student teachers travelled back to their campus to fundraise when finances zeroed out before the end of the program.[53] While expressing hope that "face-to-face contacts, especially by the children from both sides in the parks programs," had facilitated "real friendship" and the expansion of "citizenship, mutual appreciation, [and] cooperation" by both local and migrant communities, final results seemed mixed. In their final program report, project coordinators found that attitudes in the local community towards migrants "ranged from latent, unorganized hostility, through apathy, to tacit support and active interest." The council also conceded that only "some progress" had been made toward the health and sanitation of migrant camps, due in part to the aid of a local nurse who provided routine exams and volunteers who scheduled dental appointments. In the end, the project had "not touch[ed] the basic economic problems of poor housing, sanitation, wages, working conditions, nor transportation to and from Texas."[54]

---

[52] Ibid., 4-5. The Project led to the development of a Department of Public Instruction curriculum guide for migrant education called "Travelling We Go." See Governor's Commission on Human Rights, "A Five Year Review, 1955-1960," (Madison, WI: State Capitol, 1961), 14, WHS Government Publications.
[53] "Nickels Pooled to Aid Migrant Workers, Families at Waupun," *La Crosse Tribune,* August 10, 1950.
[54] Waupun Community Council on Human Relations, "Report of Waupun migrant project: the 1950 major concern of the Community Council on human relations," 7-10.

The following year, the Waupun commission prepared for the second year of the migrant program, again emphasizing education and recreation, but also adding expanded attention to health concerns. Support again came largely from the GCHR and the HMC, which offered funding and staff as in the year before, while new bilingual student teachers from the university led classes and recreational periods with local Waupun children. Staff also introduced "Saturday night fiestas" at City Hall, where migrants came together with on average sixty local community members for dancing (square dancing, according to volunteers, "lubricated any constraints between locals and migrants"), singing, movies, and a meal. Volunteers hoped that the social nature of the fiestas might create a feeling of "genuine fellowship" among the communities during the summer.[55] The Waupun Project continued for another three years, thanks in large part to financial assistance from students and religious groups.[56]

Despite the intentions of Waupun's religious and civic leaders, this first foray into migrant programming produced ambiguous results. Sporadic instances of interethnic interaction via school lunches and dances belied a larger antipathy to the council's work in the region. As one newspaper update noted, relations between migrants and Waupun natives were nowhere near "fiesta and fandango" following the programs, as the program did little to substantively improve relations between the communities.[57] Mayor Frank Trilling, outspoken in his support for migrant issues and the council's work since 1949, paid the ultimate political price when he lost his re-election bid in the spring of 1951. Despite volunteers' hopes that the summer programming would replace the "wall of opposition" against migrants with a "bridge of understanding," latent

---

[55] Waupun Community Council on Human Relations, "Report of the Second Season: Waupun Migrant Project," (Waupun, Wisc., 1951), 1-4, Archival Resources on Hispanics in Wisconsin, WHS.
[56] Wisconsin Welfare Council, State Migrant Committee, "These are the children you have helped through your support of the Curriculum Development Project," February 1954, Box 19, Folder 18, Wisconsin Division of Economic Assistance: Economic Opportunity Section Administrative Subject Files, 1964-1978, WHS.
[57] "Migrant Plan Strides Noted," *Milwaukee Journal,* February 3, 1952.

opposition for the inclusion of Tejanos in Waupun's community continued in the early 1950s. Civic organizations' messaging surrounding the economic importance of migrants also seemed to have little sway among the area's businesses, as canners remained indifferent to reforms and local merchants largely avoided or shunned the migrants during their stay in the town.[58] State media, meanwhile, in an effort to declare a clean resolution to the area's "racial difficulties," congratulated the Waupun community for initiating what they hoped to be only the first steps in expanding a welcome to Tejano migrants. Noting the economic importance of Tejanos to the state – an argument that seemed to less persuasive among Waupun residents – the editorial board of the *Milwaukee Sentinel* argued that migrants deserved "a friendly hand and a fair shake" during their tenure in Wisconsin. As the Tejano sojourners made the difference between success and failure in many of the state's harvesting operations, the newspaper contended that workers deserved "decent treatment while they are giving it."[59]

"The Conscience of the State": The Wisconsin Governor's Commission for Human Rights and Tejano Migrant Advocacy

Migrant programming at the regional level in places like Door County and Waupun represented a local response to migrant issues that were quickly becoming a statewide concern. Through the late 1940s and 1950s, Wisconsin legislators and public advocate connected migrant issues to broader concerns surrounding discrimination and prejudice as part of broader national efforts in the postwar years to ensure equal treatment under the law all for *all* Americans. Political sociologist Anthony Chen notes that through mid-twentieth century, activists and legislators across the country of every racial, ethnic, and religious background fought to create a regulatory model in which the authority to enforce equal treatment would be lodged in the hands

[58] Waupun Community Council on Human Relations, "Report of the Second Season: Waupun Migrant Project," 6.
[59] "Let's Give Migrants A Better Break," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, November 16, 1952.

of state and federal agencies imbued with enforcement powers. Chen argues that "liberally minded men and women could be found insisting on strong government action against discrimination" in issues ranging from fair employment practices to housing desegregation to equitable educational opportunities.[60] *How* governmental bodies should intervene, however, ultimately had its local varieties. During the postwar years, Wisconsin migrant advocates wrangled with employers, local residents, and politicians on the extent to which regulatory actions would be enacted and enforced.

To both better address grievances from the migrant community and to create programming that might prevent future tensions between Tejanos and Wisconsinites, Wisconsin governors turned to state commissions consisting of bureaucrats, clergy, civic groups, and employers. Principle among these groups was the Wisconsin Governor's Commission on Human Rights (GCHR). Originally formed in 1945 to address concerns among the state's African American community, the group expanded its purview to include any person that submitted complaints based on racial, cultural, or religious discrimination. The group lacked, however, any form of prosecutorial power to enforce civil rights law. The GCHR's principal duty, according to its charter, thus became the dissemination of information and "means of discussion" to educate Wisconsinites "to a greater understanding, appreciation, and practice of human rights for all people…to the end that Wisconsin will be a better place in which to live."[61] The commission considered itself primarily a fact-finding and information-circulating body, seeking to throw light rather than heat on controversial subjects.

---

[60] Anthony S. Chen, *The Fifth Freedom: Jobs, Politics, and Civil Rights in the United States, 1941-1972* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 8.

[61] "Governor's Commission on Human Rights," February 3, 1949, Box 1, Folder 23, Series 2, Wisconsin Governor (1947-1951: Oscar Rennenbohm): Records, 1907-1988, WHS.

From 1948 until 1963, the GCHR was led by Rebecca Chalmers Barton, a comparative literature lecturer at the University of Wisconsin Madison's School for Workers.[62] Barton believed that racial discrimination could be rectified and eventually ended through what she termed "reasonable" conversation, personal outreach, and education.[63] Her perspective and tactics reflected a postwar liberal perception of racial discrimination most succinctly stated by contemporary sociologist Gunner Myrdal, who contended that racial inequality in the U.S. stemmed from prejudicial beliefs and moral failings of individual Americans. In his Nobel-Prize garnering *An American Dilemma,* Myrdal argued that U.S. racial problems reflected "a problem in the heart of the American."[64] Like Myrdal, Barton believed those moral failings could be addressed with educational initiatives to shift the prejudicial behavior of individual Wisconsinites.

A prolific writer and lecturer to crowds both in Wisconsin and across the country, Barton viewed her position as director of the governor's human rights' watchdog as one of "social engineering – not social reform." Barton disagreed with what she believed was a Progressive-era model of "social reform" that prioritized "telling people to be good," scolding them when they were "bad," and talking in terms of "villains and heroes." Her postwar liberal concept of "social engineering" instead called on citizens to study the nature of a problem and the obstacles that might prevent a desired settlement, following a scientific step-by-step process toward resolution. Relying on the power of reason, Barton believed the commission was uniquely situated to serve

---

[62] Rebecca Chalmers Barton, *Our Human Rights: A Study in the Art of Persuasion* (Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1955), 10-11; "Mrs. Barton Heads the State Agency That Converts 'Enemies' into Friends," *Racine Journal Times,* November 1, 1955.
[63] Governor's Commission on Human Rights, "The Way to a Man's Mind: A Public Relations Approach to Human Relations as Developed and Practiced by the Governor's Commission on Human Rights, 1949-1953," (Madison: State of Wisconsin Government Publications, 1953), 7, WHS Government Publications.
[64] Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma* (New York: Harper and Row, 1944), xlvii. See also Chen, *The Fifth Freedom,* 9-11.

as the "conscience of the state."[65] Barton hoped to chart a "middle way" in civil rights efforts that would not label "villains and heroes" and potential avoid the equal pitfalls of "indifference and iron-handed coercion."[66] Part of this approach included balancing state interests with customs and local idiosyncrasies. Recognizing what she referred to as the "validity in the principle of local autonomy," Barton thus confined the GCHR's work to educational rather than proscriptive initiatives.[67] This approach – never overly antagonistic nor reliant on government regulation – garnered the support of conservative politicians like Governor Walter J. Kohler, himself a highly successful Wisconsin industrialist and staunch union opponent. In the fall of 1951, Kohler praised the GCHR for attempting to nurture "deep and abiding understanding" rather than arguing for new state laws to solve Wisconsin's "racial tolerance problems."[68]

The GCHR's first major migrant initiative began in the fall of 1949, prompted in large part by labor-management disputes across the state. Most public among these clashes was an August 1949 strike by migrant southern black workers at the Mazo Food Products Company in Mazomanie, a small village just twenty miles outside of the State Capitol in Madison. Following a federal intervention into the strike, Wisconsin officials found that no state laws were available to mediate farm labor disruptions, and no state agency had clear purview to investigate migratory workers' concerns.[69] In response, the GCHR surveyed the state's migrant labor history and state

---

[65] "She Found a Shining New Tool," *Wisconsin State Journal,* July 19, 1953.
[66] "Wisconsin's Middle Way on Human Rights Brings Results," *Wisconsin State Journal,* October 24, 1952.
[67] Governor's Commission on Human Rights, "A Five-Year Review, 1955-1960," (Madison, WI: State Capitol, 1961), 12, WHS Government Publications.
[68] "Kohler Praises Rights Groups' Approach to Prejudice Problems," *Wisconsin State Journal,* October 18, 1951.
[69] In August of 1949, forty southern black migrant workers went on strike in Mazomanie, demanding a raise of sixty cents per hour, the elimination of compulsory food and clothing deductions, guaranteed transportation back to their homes in the U.S. South, untampered mail, and cleaner living conditions. Hoping to gain the ear of the governor, the workers travelled to Madison, where they entered the Capital with handbills titled "End Slavery in Wisconsin." Workers complained that it was impossible to leave their camp at the end of the season and return to Georgia and the Carolinas due to their employer's mandatory paycheck deductions, which left them with nearly nothing, prompting the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to launch an investigation to determine if workers had been in fact held in "involuntary servitude." The FBI's investigation convinced a state judge to issue warrants against the company owners for misrepresenting employment conditions in worker contracts, while the state board of health reported

services, publishing their findings in a 1950 report entitled "Migratory Agricultural Workers in Wisconsin: A Problem in Human Rights." The first such state-level study in the country, the Wisconsin report preceded a national report commissioned by President Harry Truman, who convened a similar national committee in 1950 called the Presidential Commission on Migrant Labor. In his opening letter of transmittal, chairman commissioner Dr. Robert C. Williams noted that while Wisconsin currently displayed "an average record in its treatment of these workers," problems of "adjustment" were likely to become more acute in the coming years without protective legislation to insure satisfactory conditions for agricultural laborers. Williams noted that migrants, "indispensable to the economy of this state," were "entitled to human rights."[70]

The report detailed a festering and growing situation, one that threatened to disrupt the economic health of the state. The GCHR commissioners assailed employers for providing subhuman living conditions for migrants, along with the unequal bargaining power of laborers (one observer referred to migrant labor in the state as "peonage," perhaps a reference to recent federal efforts to abolish systems of bound labor still used across the U.S.[71]), the absence of educational opportunities for migrant children and lacking public health facilities offered. The report's authors reserved special contempt for discrimination against migrants of different ethnic backgrounds – especially Tejanos and black southerners – noting, "The successful assimilation of the migrant worker and his family into the community to which he has come presents virtually

---

numerous health violations at the camps. See "Farm Hands Held As Slaves, Claim," *Kenosha Evening News,* August 19, 1949; "Food Company Given Warrant," *La Crosse Tribune,* August 21, 1949; "Mazo Farm Strike Ends," *Sheboygan Press,* August 22, 1949.

[70] Wisconsin Governor's Commission on Human Rights, "Migratory Agricultural Workers in Wisconsin: A Problem in Human Rights" (Madison, 1950), Pamphlet Collection, WHS.

[71] Postwar efforts by labor activists to end systems of debt peonage, most prominently in the U.S. South, first began at the turn of the twentieth century. Investigations into peonage by the U.S. Department of Justice accelerated in the 1940s, due in large part to advocacy by organizations such as the Abolish Peonage Committee. See Pete Daniel, *The Shadow of Slavery: Peonage in the South, 1901-1969* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972).

the same problems as the acceptance into the community of other minority groups."[72] In their conclusion to the report, the GCHR expressed hope that their work might help migrant workers would no longer be considered the "displaced persons of America."[73]

The Governor's Commission's report led to the creation of permanent governmental committees and the passage of new laws designed to protect migrant families in Wisconsin. At the request of the GCHR, Governor Oscar Rennenbohm appointed the Interagency Migrant Committee in spring of 1950 to act as a clearinghouse for migratory worker issues and to aid in planning among various state departments. The first such governor-appointed migrant committee in the country, its principal mission was to avoid labor stoppages and intercultural flare-ups between Wisconsinites and migrants. The committee included representatives from the State Board of Health, the Industrial Commission, the Board of Vocational and Adult Education, the Department of Public Instruction, the Department of Public Welfare, the University of Wisconsin-Agricultural Extension, and the GCHR.[74]

The GCHR and the Interagency Migrant Committee first turned their sights on revising a set of "migrant codes" originally passed by the state legislature in 1949. A 1951 amended code established a structure whereby all state migrant camps were to register annually with the State Board of Health and pass an inspection before receiving certification to continue operations. The State Board of Health, however, underfunded and understaffed, proved unable to either carry out inspections or ensure that each migrant camp met the proper standards. The GCHR revisited the issue in 1957, pushing the legislature to empower the State Board of Health to close camps that

---

[72] Wisconsin Governor's Commission on Human Rights, "Migratory Agricultural Workers in Wisconsin," 34.
[73] "Human Rights Progress Report: Would End 'Displaced Persons Status' of Migratory Workers," *Capital Times* (Madison, WI), June 22, 1950.
[74] Rennenbohm quoted in "State Agencies Study Migratory Workers," *Wisconsin State Journal,* May 25, 1950. See also Wisconsin Interdepartmental Committee on Migratory Labor, "Executive Release - August 7, 1950," Box 1, Folder 23, Series 2, Wisconsin Governor (1947-1951: Oscar Rennenbohm): Records, 1907-1988, WHS.

failed to meet housing protocols. Growers successfully lobbied, however, for the issuance of temporary permits that allowed camp operators to appeal for a three-year reprieve whilst they made required improvements for camps, effectively styming much of the State Board of Health's enforcement power. During the late 1960s and early 1960s, the board filed lawsuits against intransigent camps, nearly always losing their case in state court.[75]

As Wisconsin's seasonal migrant population continued to grow in the early 1950s, state officials attempted to bolster agency efforts by incorporating public figures into their decision-making process. In 1952, the Interagency Migrant Committee expanded into the State Migrant Committee, broadening their membership beyond state employees to include migrant employers, Protestant and Catholic churches, agricultural organizations, and members of community migrant committees.[76] Despite advising as early as 1953 for the inclusion of "indigenous leaders" from the migrant community to join their work, it wouldn't be until the early 1960s that migrant workers would be appointed to serve on advisory commissions.[77] While migrants themselves were not represented in the committee's membership, the new 1953 committee did include employer delegates. While ostensibly maintaining what Barton referred to as a "non-partisan" approach to migrant problems, the presence of growers and canners on the State Migrant Committee instead had the effect of stifling possible labor reforms, as committee deliberations over such points as resources for migrant camp inspectors nearly always acceded to employer desires.[78] A lack of consensus for state intervention at the committee level further bolstered

---

[75] In 1951, Wisconsin legislators appropriated only $26,300 for the Board of Health to employ fulltime engineers to carry out inspections of all migrant camps in the state. Governor's Commission on Human Rights, "Minutes of Semi-Annual Meeting," April 24, 1953, WHS Government Publications.
[76] Meeting Minutes of State Migrant Committee, Wisconsin Welfare Council," January 8, 1953, Box 1, Folder 2, Records of Wisconsin Governor's Committee on Migratory Labor, WHS.
[77] "Summary of Recommendations to the State Migrant Committees," March 17, 1953, Box 1, Folder 2, Wisconsin Governor's Committee on Migratory Labor, Records, 1959-1972, WHS.
[78] Governor's Commission on Human Rights, "Semi-Annual Report of the Director, Rebecca C. Barton," April 23, 1952, WHS Government Publications.

Barton's belief in the need to defer to the "wisdom of local autonomy" to expand improvements in migrants' living and working conditions.[79]

Barton hoped that direct appeals to employers' economic priorities, as well as perhaps their morality, might spur activity among members of the business community. Addressing the Wisconsin Canners' Association in November of 1952, Barton called on the employer group to establish its own commission to research and implement methods "to treat migrants as people, to educate them in the proper use of modern facilities and good housing, to discover their interest and aptitudes, to mediate their grievances and to channel their surplus energies into morale-building activities for the good of all concerned."[80] The Canners heeded Barton's advice, establishing their own Migrant Relations Committee, the first employer-run committee in the country focused on improving the "human side" of problems affecting migrant farmworkers. Barton congratulated the employers for their initiative, calling their record "impressive" and praising their "enlightened handling" of migrant issues that might help the state to "pull itself out of the morass of national defeatism into a position of positive leadership."[81] Despite Barton's praise, the Canners' Migrant Relations Committee proved minimally active. In 1953, the group prepared a report surveying conditions in 71 of the 78 canneries employing migrant workers in the state. The self-congratulatory study found, perhaps unsurprisingly, that most canners in the state recognized their responsibilities to provide for migrants, while others were gamely

---

[79] Rebecca Barton, "State Agencies and the Migrant Labor Problem, Wisconsin, 1954," Box 1, Folder 2, Wisconsin Governor's Committee on Migratory Labor, Records, 1959-1972, WHS.
[80] "Plan to Help Migrants Is Proposed to Canners," *Milwaukee Journal,* November 11, 1952; Governor's Commission on Human Rights, "Summary of Events, Annual Report of the Director," October 16, 1953, WHS Government Publications.
[81] Barton quoted in "Canners' Work Recognized," *Manitowoc Herald Times,* June 2, 1953. See also Wisconsin Canners' Association, "Press Release: Wisconsin Canners Form Migrant Relations Group," February 17, 1953, Box 1, Folder 2, Records of Wisconsin Governor's Committee on Migratory Labor, WHS.

"improving" their standards at a record pace. Little beyond reports, however, resulted from these types of employer organizations.[82]

Barton's work with the state's canners revealed what she hoped to be a more pragmatic approach in dealing with Wisconsin employers. Those canners and growers that agreed to engage in the GCHR's "human rights" work did not do so because of moral compunctions or to achieve equality for their workers, but instead to meet labor recruitment obligations. Marvin Keil, president of the Wisconsin Canners' Association, justified his organization's turn towards the GCHR's work by stating, "We have found that the way to get the most out of a person is to house them properly, give him good food, and supply him with facilities for bathing and laundry."[83] Relying on employers' self-interested economic motivations certainly did not fall beyond the scope of Barton's own methods for winning as many Wisconsinites as possible to the GCHR's objectives. Barton placed much stock in what she referred to as the "enlightened self-interest" of growers and canners in the state.[84] According to Barton, canners and growers could be considered "new partners for human rights" if they were merely "empowered" to see the economic benefit of providing better living and working conditions for their workers. For Barton, continued conversations with even the most inflexible employers that emphasized "common sense reasoning" could make the point "that good housing makes for healthy, happy, and therefore more efficient workers."[85] As the commission director explained to Wisconsinites

---

[82] Wisconsin Canners' Association, "Report on Survey of Services and Facilities for Migrant Workers Employed by Wisconsin Canners," May 25, 1953, Box 18, Folder 5, Wisconsin Division of Economic Assistance: Economic Opportunity Section Administrative Subject Files, 1964-1978, WHS.
[83] "Crop Workers' Problems Cited," *Milwaukee Journal,* May 9, 1952.
[84] Rebecca C. Barton, "Americans All: Address to Barbers' Journeymen's Union, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, February 17, 1953," in *Speech Sampler on Human Rights,* ed. Governor's Commission on Human Rights (Madison, WI: Governor's Commission on Human Rights, 1957), 46.
[85] Rebecca C. Barton, "New Dimensions in Human Relations: Address to Community Intergroup Luncheon, Cleveland, Ohio, April 29, 1956," in *Speech Sampler on Human Rights,* ed. Governor's Commission on Human Rights (Madison, WI: Governor's Commission on Human Rights, 1957), 68-69.

in an editorial for the *Milwaukee Journal,* it was always "good business to treat the migrant decently because he is an economic asset" to the state's future.[86]

"We don't care as long as you tell us about Jesus": The Creation of Migrant Ministry Programs in 1950s Wisconsin

While Barton and the GCHR appealed to growers' "enlightened self-interest" through what they believed to be reasoned economic-based claims, Wisconsin religious organizations of different denominations turned to moral arguments in their call for aid to Tejano migrants. Though most Tejanos were nominally Catholic (estimations from Catholic and Protestant agencies placed the proportion at anywhere from 70 to 98 percent), a wide variety of Christian denominations entered the fields in the late 1940s to administer to the spiritual, and at times physical, needs of arriving migrants. By the early 1950s, however, a considerable amount of Catholic and Protestant clergy and laity's energy was spent on territorial fights on which denomination could, and should, administer to Tejanos.

Wisconsin Protestants were the first in the state's religious community to create migrant ministry programming. Under the auspices of the National Council of Churches' (NCC) Council of Women for Home Missions, Protestant lay and clerical leaders had formed the National Farm Worker Ministry in 1920 in response to the devastating poverty of migrant workers in the southeastern United States.[87] In 1950, the NCC placed the Migrant Ministry program under the watch of the Division of Home Missions Council of North America, an interdenominational home mission agency. Beyond a moral and religious justification for their work, the NCC framed

---

[86] "Lend a Helping Hand To Migrant Workers," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, May 25, 1952

[87] In 1926, the organization rebranded itself as the National Migrant Ministry under the Federal Council of Churches, the forerunner to the National Council of Churches. By 1939, Migrant Ministry operated programs in fifteen states. Presbyterian Historical Society, "Working the Promised Land: Mission Service to Agricultural Workers," *Journal of Presbyterian History (1977-)* 88, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2010): 68-74; Presbyterian Historical Society, "Migrant Ministry," *Journal of Presbyterian History (1977-)* 93, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2015): 70-76.

their appeal for expanded migrant rights upon the United Nation's recently published Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Like human rights commissions around the country, NCC ministers asked why more than a million migratory farm workers and their families, who they referred to as "citizens of our own land," did not enjoy "the human rights and privileges which the General Assembly of the United Nations has agreed should be "a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations."[88]

The NCC framed their responsibility towards migrants as twofold. While pointing towards an immediate emphasis on direct ministry to meet the day-to-day needs of migratory farmworkers, the organization also prioritized developing a long-range program to confront institutional issues preventing migrants from taking "their rightful place as citizens in a democracy." The national Migrant Ministry's focused first on childhood education via daycare centers across the Atlantic seaboard. Lay volunteers found that migrant children had limited opportunities for schooling due to inadequate facilities, interruptions in schooling caused by seasonal work, and discrimination that resulted in the exclusion of migrant children from local schools. This early attention on education quickly grew to include considerations for healthcare options for migrants, sanitary housing, and the generally low economic status and insecurity of migratory farm laborers caused by workers' exclusion from protective legislation covering minimum wages, unemployment insurance, and collective bargaining.[89]

While acknowledging the structural forces that bracketed laborers and families locked into a status of second-class citizenship, Migrant Ministry programs often first pushed local

---

[88] General Board of the National Council of Churches, "The Concern of the Churches for Migratory Farm Laborers," *A Pronouncement: A Policy Statement of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States* 22, no. 1 (September 19, 1951), Box 18, Folder 34, Wisconsin Division of Economic Assistance: Economic Opportunity Section Administrative Subject Files, 1964-1978, WHS.
[89] Ibid.

receiving communities to develop more inviting social spaces for itinerant families. Migrants stood isolated from the community life of the regions they passed through, due to the nature of transient life as well as the hostile attitudes of locals. Members of the Migrant Ministry worried principally that migrants would be unable to be become part the established church life of congregations. Speaking to the annual meeting of the Protestant United Church Women of Wisconsin, Reverend William Scholes, the Midwest supervisor of migrant work for the NCC, explained that migrants wanted "security, housing and education, but most of all they want to be our neighbors."[90] Scholes's focus on amity was indicative of the NCC's prioritization of hospitality over changes to working conditions. The Division of Home Missions for the Wisconsin Council of Churches began their work in migrant ministry in the late 1940s, focusing first on the often-negative reception Wisconsinites offered Tejano migrants every summer season. Reverend Ellis Marshburn, the Midwest migrant supervisor of the Home Missions Council of North America, explained to a meeting of the Milwaukee County Council of Church Women at Grace Evangelical that "migrant workers do not like work in Wisconsin." Marshburn had conducted hundreds of interviews among Tejano migrant workers in Wisconsin after learning that Mexico had blacklisted the state because of discriminatory practices. According to the reverend, while the more than twelve thousand migrants working in Wisconsin from May to October each year were relatively satisfied with their wages and treatment by their employers, they couldn't stomach "the mistreatment in retail stores, social rejection and general attitude of unfriendliness with which they meet at the hands of the nonagricultural residents."[91]

---

[90] "Church Group is Set to Elect," *Milwaukee Journal,* May 12, 1953.
[91] "Migrant Workers to be Discussed," *Milwaukee Journal,* February 19, 1949; "Migrants Dislike Wisconsin, Word," *Milwaukee Journal,* February 24, 1949.

The cherry orchards of Door County, and specifically the Sturgeon Bay area, proved the most fertile ground for early NCC hospitality efforts in Wisconsin. The *Milwaukee Journal* described how young women, driving in borrowed station wagons and filled with "missionary zeal," arrived in the area in 1951 with hopes of "making life happier" for the more than six thousand cherry pickers in the region. Their unique program of teaching, preaching, and playing was cosponsored by the NCC and the local Door County Council of Churches. Led by the twenty-four-year-old Della Cross, an Oklahoman and member of the Disciples of Christ, the volunteers taught English to Tejano children, organized Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops, planned nursery groups, and all the while, spoke of fellowship through Jesus Christ. Cross believed that while her cohort of missionaries might not be capable of "radically changing" the future of the migrant workers they served, they could do their best to make their "present more enjoyable." Another young volunteer was twenty-seven-year-old Lilia Curti of Mexico City, the daughter of a Mexican army colonel. Curti, herself a Methodist, explained her method of bridging denominational differences: "I told the parents, I'm not going to preach. I'm just going to tell Bible stories. Even though they are Catholic, they don't mind. They say to me, 'We don't care as long as you tell us about Jesus.'"[92] By 1952, the Division of Home Missions had placed ministers in Door, Antigo, Columbia, Dodge, Randolph, Portage, and Sheboygan counties.[93]

Unlike Protestants, Wisconsin Catholics seemed slow to move from the pews to the fields in middle of the twentieth century. The dioceses of Green Bay, Madison, and Milwaukee initially worked independently to create ad hoc migrant programs. Green Bay Bishop Stanislaus V. Bona began an early trial ministry in 1948 that sought to administer to both the spiritual and physical

---

[92] "Children of Migrants Taught About Jesus," *Milwaukee Journal,* July 15, 1951.
[93] Wisconsin Council of Churches, Division of Home Missions, "Report to the Governor's Commission on Human Rights, 1952," Box 18, Folder 34, Wisconsin Division of Economic Assistance: Economic Opportunity Section Administrative Subject Files, 1964-1978, WHS.

needs of Tejanos working in cherry and pickle fields in northeastern Wisconsin. Despite the Green Bay Archdiocese's preliminary efforts to invite Tejanos to area churches, most migrants felt more comfortable receiving missionary support within their own camps, a fact that advantaged the travelling NCC ministers. Seeking to take their ministry on the road, Father George M. Weix, pastor of St. Joseph's Church in Wautoma, began a Confraternity of Christian Doctrine program to prepare migrant children for sacramental rites in 1950. Bona and the clergy he assigned to the fields in Brown and Door counties struggled to catch up to their Protestant peers, who had already laid the groundwork for missionary work over the previous five years.[94]

With less initial institutional structure to guide early evangelization efforts, Catholic outreach relied heavily on the individual initiative of priests and clergy. One such figure was Father James O'Connell, a Spanish-speaking Irish-American priest. Originally a student at the Redemptorists's seminary in Oconomowoc, O'Connell began working with Tejano migrants in 1953. His initial surveys of migrant camps declared spiritual life among Tejanos to be "practically dead," spurring him to organize missions. In the 1950s, O'Connell spent each July and August conducting missions and presiding over Sunday Masses among Tejano migrants working in the archdiocesan regions of Milwaukee, Green Bay, and Madison. From January to June, O'Connell could be found among Spanish-speaking congregants in Texas and Mexico, following the migrants along their work stream. The priest estimated that he travelled more than 25,000 miles each year in his mission efforts.[95]

---

[94] "Green Bay Bishop, Friend of Migrants, To Be Feted," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, August 18, 1962; "Wisconsin Cares for the Migrant Child," *Milwaukee Journal*, July 22, 1962.

[95] O'Connell quoted in "Spanish-Speaking Irish Priest Follows Migrants on Trek North," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* August 17, 1963. For more on O'Connell, see Steven M. Avella, *Confidence and Crisis: A History of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, 1959-1977* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2014), 276

The Wisconsin Catholic Church's concentration on spiritual outreach in part drew from fears of Protestant evangelization among Tejanos in the state. Catholic migrant ministers like O'Connell explained, "Our work is very important…if we don't do it the Protestants will move in." An emphasis on religious mission to prevent conversion drew the financial assistance from the archbishops of Milwaukee, Green Bay, and Madison, as well as from local St. Vincent de Paul Societies and Missionary Associations of Catholic Women, who provided clothing and religious items for distribution. The Irish American priest predicted that his outreach efforts alone had brought back hundreds of Tejano migrants to the church's fold who had either left because of Catholic neglect or Protestant initiative.[96]

Wisconsin Catholic clergy's fear of Protestant evangelization reflected a national preoccupation among episcopal leadership. The U.S. Catholic Church had first addressed issues affecting Latino congregants at an institutional level in the mid 1940s due in large part to fears of Protestant encroachment on their perceived spiritual territory. Under the leadership of San Antonio's Archbishop Robert Lucey, an outspoken early champion of migrant worker rights in Texas, bishops and archbishops in the U.S. West and Southwest came together to form the Bishops' Committee for the Spanish Speaking (BCSS) in 1944 under the aegis of the National Catholic Welfare Council's Social Action Department. Beginning in the late 1940s, Wisconsin's archdiocesan leadership provided representation to the BCSS.[97] Historian Gráinne McEvoy notes that while Mexican-descent migrant issues, as well as concerns related to all Spanish-speakers in

---

[96] "Spanish-Speaking Irish Priest Follows Migrants on Trek North," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* August 17, 1963.
[97] Both Milwaukee Archbishop Moses E. Kiley, who sat on American Board of Catholic Missions, and Green Bay Bishop Stanislaus V. Bona served on BCSS committees through the mid twentieth century. "Minutes of the Meeting of the Bishops' Committee for the Spanish Speaking Held in the Catholic University, Washington, D.C.," Box 90, Folder 19, Wednesday, November 13, 1946, National Catholic Welfare Conference Records, The American Catholic History Research Center and University, The Catholic University of America; "Minutes of the Meeting of the Bishops' Committee for the Spanish Speaking, Catholic University, Washington, D.C.," November 15, 1961, Box 18, Folder 4, November 18, 1959, Robert Emmet Lucey Papers, University of Notre Dame Archives.

the U.S., served as primary motivating factors for the development of the BCSS, Catholic leaders also envisioned their new organization as a bulwark against Protestant proselytization.[98] During the 1950s, the BCSS prepared training materials for Catholic clergy working among Spanish-speaking migrant workers, offering advice on how to circumvent the work of NCC staff in the fields.[99]

Tensions between Catholic and Protestant evangelizers came to a head in the early 1950s. The Division of Home Missions reported to the GCHR in 1952 that its efforts to organize local migrant committees in Wisconsin communities had "aroused the antagonism of large Catholic elements." According to the Protestants, internecine religious divisions were preventing the development of collaboration between religious and civic organizations, all to the detriment of migrants. The Migrant Ministry agreed to refrain from organizing committees in towns with a strong Catholic presence, even if Catholics weren't themselves taking on the task of extending Wisconsin hospitality to migrants. In the many Wisconsin municipalities where the Catholic Church was a "non-vocal minority," however, the Division of Home Missions moved forward to work with people who were "used to expressing their community service and missionary zeal through their church." Otherwise, the Protestant laymen explained to state officials, "it would be a crime to stunt the migrant program in these communities" because of denominational battles.[100]

---

[98] Nationally, Lucey was joined as one of the most outspoken Catholic promoters of migrant issues by Monsignor George G. Higgins, director of National Catholic Welfare Conference's Social Action Department, and James L. Vizzard, director of development for the National Catholic Rural Life Conference. Gráinne McEvoy, ""Operation Migratory Labor": Braceros, Migrants, and the American Catholic Bishops' Committee for the Spanish Speaking," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 34, no. 3 (Summer 2016), 75-98; Albeus Walsh, "The Work of the Catholic Bishops' Committee for the Spanish Speaking in the United State" (Master's thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1952); Joan Farone, "The Evolution of the Secretariat of Hispanic Affairs of NCCB/USCCB and its Contributions to Catechesis for Hispanic/Latinos in the United States," (PhD diss., Catholic University of America, 2009).

[99] "Suggestions for Locating Catholic Migratory Workers in American Agriculture and for Procuring Lay Apostles of Catholic Action to Offer Them Spiritual and Temporal Aid, 1956," Box 19, Folder 1, November 18, 1959, Robert Emmet Lucey Papers, University of Notre Dame Archives.

[100] Wisconsin Council of Churches, Division of Home Missions, "Report to the Governor's Commission on Human Rights, 1952," Box 18, Folder 34, Wisconsin Division of Economic Assistance: Economic Opportunity Section Administrative Subject Files, 1964-1978, WHS.

By the late 1950s, religious infighting between Catholics and Protestants over migrant issues had become public enough to raise concerns among state officials. At a February 1957 meeting of the State Migrant Committee, director Rebecca Barton recommended a policy for interfaith cooperation and "respect" among religious groups. Stressing that migrant workers should not become a "battleground" between Catholics and Protestants, Barton explained that each church and religious leader had an essential role to play as a distinct part of the state community's plan to improve migrant conditions. Barton encouraged "harmonious relationships" among denominations engaged in migrant work, in a way that goals might be "'separate as the fingers' in matter of religious beliefs and practices, and yet 'one has the hand' in matter of common civic concern." The committee voted unanimously in support of Barton's recommendations, which included a better partitioning of religious activities to be under the sponsorship of a church or group of churches and stressing that religious activities not be associated with community planned or supported projects unless prior and complete agreement had been reached.[101]

While migrants may have appreciated the opportunity to meet with clergy and perhaps even receive sacraments in Spanish, many saw in these early forms of Catholic outreach a limited understanding of "ministry" and hospitality. Eventual labor leader Jesus Salas, recalling migrant ministry outreach efforts at a hemp plant in Hartford in the early 1950s, noted that Protestant proselytizers seemed "consumed with hygiene" but disinterested in reforming labor laws or bettering migrants' working conditions. Focused on providing better health services and sporadic recreational opportunities, white clergy and laity, according to Salas, passed out toothbrushes to migrant children and showed the occasional Charlie Chaplin or Abbot and

[101] "Minutes of Meeting of State Migrant Committee, Wisconsin Welfare Council," February 28, 1957, Box 1, Folder 3, Records of Wisconsin Governor's Committee on Migratory Labor, WHS.

Costello film, "but they left everything else intact."[102] For Salas, as for many other migrants, the question in the mid 1950s was whether ministers had anything to offer Tejano migrants beyond prayers and warm welcomes.

"We Can Help the Migrant Problem": Escalating Migrant Ministries and Expanded State-Religious Cooperation

Wisconsin Catholic and Protestant clergy and lay efforts to serve as moral models and advocates for Tejanos had been blunted by their own internecine and territorial fights in early iterations of migrant ministry programming. Due in large part to a rising sense of ecumenism, however, competition over proselytization that had previously dominated migrant ministry began to dissipate by the end of the decade. Religious groups focused on migrant issues came into closer contact, and eventual collaboration, through their mutual work on state committees and commissions. Individual clergy proved indispensable in shifting the responsibilities and priorities of their organizations' efforts. As religious and civic leaders spoke with migrants and attempted to heed their concerns, their advocacy also evolved from patronage to partnership. Clerical members appointed to state committees shifted their priorities from spiritual counseling and periodic excursions into migrant camps towards building educational capacity for migrants, either through religious institutions or local and federal apparatuses.

Noting the energy wasted through internecine battles of proselytization, Protestant and Catholic clergy expressed an interest in moving beyond denominational distinctions to serve migrants. Reverend Dean I. Jordan, pastor of the First Methodist Church in Sturgeon Bay, believed that as Christians, both camps had an obligation to work towards bettering migrants' situation, and expressed hope that Protestants and Catholics could cooperate on future

[102] Jesus Salas, interview by author, Milwaukee, WI, June 24, 2015.

programming.[103] Leaders such as Jordan stressed publicly that Protestant organizations should focus their efforts not on conversion, but instead in bearing a "Christian witness as friends" for any social, health, and educational needs the migrants had.[104]

Institutional leadership proved key in shifting the focus and methodology of migrant ministry within the Catholic context as well. The Milwaukee Catholic Archdiocese, having sponsored migrant ministry program over the previous ten years, institutionalized their efforts with the appointment of Reverend George Kolanda of Cudahy as a permanent outreach coordinator to migrant workers in 1960. A Milwaukee native ordained in 1944, Kolanda initially served in parishes in the southeastern Wisconsin city of Racine. The priest's interest in the Spanish-speaking population was borne out of a 1952 trip to Mexico. Upon returning to Racine, Kolanda more closely examined the poor living conditions of the city's Mexican residents. Working with clergy and the local St. Vincent de Paul branch, Kolanda developed a mission for the city's growing Mexican barrio in the Sheridan Woods neighborhood. In 1955, the Milwaukee Archdiocese sent Kolanda to Mexico for a year of study in Spanish at the Mexican City College. Kolanda returned to Wisconsin in 1956, where he resumed his pastoral service in Waukesha and Cudahy parishes while managing the archdiocese's migrant ministry services.[105]

Kolanda's system of migrant ministry pushed to move beyond rosaries and charity towards a form of migrant integration. Through his shepherding in Racine, the priest had found Wisconsin residents "willing to give [Tejano migrants] their old clothes," but Kolanda pushed his congregants to consider if they would be "willing to shake their hands, and maybe invite some of them of the Mexicans to their homes for supper." Unlike some of his predecessors,

---

[103] "Work With Migrants Starts Religious Clash," *Milwaukee Journal,* August 16, 1959.
[104] "Protestants Eye Policy on Migrants," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 6, 1959.
[105] Kolanda quoted in "Racine Priest to Study in Mexico To Aid Him Work With Mission," *Racine Journal-Times,* August 21, 1955. See also Avella, *Confidence and Crisis,* 278.

Kolanda believed a singular focus on the spiritual wellbeing of Tejano migrants would do little to better the lives of families. Like any other Catholic, migrant workers, Kolanda explained, could not be expected to concentrate on sacraments and regularly attending Mass if they were "hungry or cold." Kolanda also expressed a disdain for public welfare and instead believed Wisconsin's Catholic parishes should focus on "helping the Mexicans help themselves" by protecting their rights to bargain collectively and fight for a living wage.[106]

Like Barton and members of other state commission, Kolanda believed in the need to educate middle-class, white congregants on the plight of migrant workers, both as a way of challenging public apathy towards their status and to fundraise for archdiocesan programming. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Kolanda spoke to parishes and lay groups such as Catholic Women's Clubs. With speech titles like "We Can Help the Migrant Problem," Kolanda emphasized the personal responsibility of every Catholic to support legislative reforms that might better the living and working conditions of laborers, and called on parishioners to, at a minimum, offer Tejano migrants "a friendly invitation to come to church," and make them feel included in Wisconsin's communities.[107]

Kolanda was joined by a young, energetic priest named John Maurice. A Milwaukee native, Maurice entered the St. Francis Minor Seminary in the late 1940s, where he was influenced by the Catholic Action movement and the Cardijn Center in Milwaukee's emphasis on working with the poor and organized labor. After being ordained in 1957, Maurice spent time as a missionary in Peru, where he immersed himself in the Spanish language and Latin American culture. He returned to Milwaukee in 1960, where he was assigned to Waukesha's St. Joseph

---

[106] "Racine Priest to Study in Mexico To Aid Him Work With Mission," *Racine Journal-Times,* August 21, 1955.
[107] Kolanda quoted in "Rev. Kolanda Will Address CWC Meeting," *Racine Journal-Times,* October 17, 1957. See also "Asks Programs For Migrants," *Racine Journal Times,* October 21, 1957; "Catholic Women in City, County to Join MACCW District Meeting Monday," *Kenosha Evening News,* August 26, 1960.

Church to work with the region's growing migrant population. In 1964, Maurice took over the position of assistant director of the archdiocese's Spanish-speaking apostolate while at St. Matthew parish in Oak Creek. He assumed leadership of the apostolate from Kolanda in 1965, a position he held until the fall of 1970.[108]

Under Kolanda and Maurice, the Milwaukee Catholic Archdiocese expanded their outreach beyond religious instruction. In the summer of 1961, Kolanda began the Milwaukee Archdiocesan Migrant Worker Program, which sponsored a school for migrant children living near Belgium and Random Lake. The school was a collaborative effort between the Sisters of St. Dominic of Racine, who sent four Spanish-speaking sisters and offered its school facilities, and St. Mary's parish of Lake Church. Kolanda even persuaded the migrants' employer, the Krier Canning Company, to provide transportation between camp and school.[109]

Through the early 1960s, Catholic clergy around the state also came to recognize that engaging in outreach to Tejano migrants would entail cultural and linguistic retraining to better serve their new parishioners. In the small central Wisconsin town of Princeton, the rapid influx of Tejano migrants prompted Reverend Josef Cieciorka, pastor of St. John the Baptist, to engage in a crash course program of self-instruction by way of books and audio recordings to quickly learn Spanish.[110] In anticipation of joining the Catholic Migrant Apostolate of Green Bay, seminarians travelled to San Antonio, Texas in the offseason of 1962 to live among migrants who would eventually travel to Wisconsin. The students hitchhiked as far south as Mexico City to learn Spanish and experience Mexican culture before returning to their studies.[111] The call for

---

[108] "Archdiocese Loans Priest to Peru Mission," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* May 17, 1958; "Fr. Maurice Tells Need For Priests in Peru," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* September 27, 1958.
[109] "Faiths Plan Schools for Migrant Children," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* July 25, 1961; "40 Migrant Children Are Attending School," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* August 4, 1962.
[110] "Church 'Advertises' To Serve Migrants," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, August 30, 1961.
[111] "Seminarians Given Glimpse of Poverty," *Milwaukee Journal*, July 7, 1962.

language and cultural education also reached Milwaukee. In 1962, the Milwaukee Catholic Archdiocese initiated a pilot program at Marquette University to train priests for assignment among 25,000 Spanish-speaking residents in the region. Program directors trained a corps of fifty priests in Spanish grammar, conversation, and culture, and hoped the program would become a model for other dioceses in working with Spanish speakers.[112]

The Wisconsin Council of Churches (WCC) expanded Protestant outreach to migrants as well. The National Council of Churches provided "churches on wheels" for 250,000 migrant farm workers per year in thirty states including Wisconsin through the decade. Led by Reverend Dean I. Jordan of Sturgeon Bay's First Methodist Church, migrant support in the 1960s saw increased funding and institutional backing from groups like the United Church Women of Wisconsin, while clergymen from Door, Waushara, Washington, Dodge, and Oconto counties supervised the work of seminarians and laymen. In January of 1963, the WCC approved an extended migrant ministry program with funding for health education, medical aid, and religious services, as well as surveys, analyses of migration trends, and frequent conferences to review results. Beyond teaching duties, an interracial team of staffers provided medical inoculations for scarlet fever and tetanus at schools in Manitowoc County and Sturgeon Bay.[113]

Catholic and Protestant clergy also found a stronger voice to speak out on behalf of migrants through state commissions. Prompted by public criticism from clerical leaders regarding lax enforcement of housing and working standards for migrants, Wisconsin Governor Gaylord Nelson created the Governor's Committee on Migratory Labor to replace the previous State Migrant Committee in 1960. Like its predecessor, the new committee included

---

[112] "Training for Priests at MU Scheduled," *Milwaukee Journal,* September 22, 1962.
[113] "Faiths Plan Schools for Migrants' Children," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, July 24, 1961; "Migrant, Indian Ministry Pushed," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* January 16, 1963; "Faiths Plan Schools for Migrants' Children," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, July 24, 1961.

representatives from the public, religious organizations, migrant employers, and various state agencies with responsibilities associated with migrants, and worked in conjunction with the Governor's Commission on Human Rights (GCHR). The group was charged with promoting state benefits to migrants and recommend legislation to the governor and state legislators that might improve migrants' living and working conditions.[114] Nelson placed special emphasis on expanding coordination between the public and private sector in order to provide migrant families with "an adequate foundation for happiness, full productive lives, and good citizenship."[115]

Unlike its predecessors, the Governor's Committee on Migratory Labor assumed a much more confrontational stance toward intransigent employers and inadequate enforcement mechanisms. The committee was chaired by Elizabeth Brandeis Raushenbush, a University of Wisconsin economics professor. Raushenbush had worked on migrant issues since the mid-1950s, when she investigated minimum wage and child labor provisions among sugar beet workers.[116] Like many of the commissions that had preceded it, the new Governor's Committee on Migratory Labor conducted an initial review of migrant laws and camps in the state. The commission's final report, issued in 1962, documented what its members believed to be the "evils inherent in migratory work." The damning study surveyed many of the issues missionaries

---

[114] State of Wisconsin Executive Department of Governor Patrick J. Lucey, "Executive Order No. 46," Box 1, Folder 1, Records of Wisconsin Governor's Committee on Migratory Labor, Wisconsin Historical Society; Elizabeth Brandeis Raushenbush to Governor Gaylord A. Nelson, June 14, 1960, Box 5, Folder 20, Wisconsin Governor (1959-1963: Gaylord Nelson): Gaylord Nelson Papers, 1958-1963, WHS.
[115] "Executive Order Release, For Release 10 A.M., Friday, July 8, 1960," Box 1, Folder 1, Records of the Wisconsin Governor's Committee on Migratory Labor, Records, WHS.
[116] Brandeis Raushenbush was the daughter of renowned Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, and was married to Paul Raushenbush, himself a worker advocate and son of Walter Rauschenbusch, a leading Christian theologian of the early twentieth century and proponent of the Social Gospel. Together, Elizabeth and Paul led the fight for the adoption of unemployment insurance in Wisconsin in the middle of the twentieth century. Clara M. Beyer to Elizabeth Brandies, December 29, 1954, Box 1, Folder 2, Records of the Wisconsin Governor's Committee on Migratory Labor, Records, WHS.

and social service organizations had identified since the late 1940s: substandard housing and subpar wages offered by employers, inadequate medical and health standards enforced by the state, and nearly nonexistent educational opportunities for the children of migrant workers. According to the commission, migrants traveled thousands of miles on crowded and unreliable cars, trucks, or buses to get to Wisconsin in hopes of finding better-paying positions to provide for their families, only to discover living and working conditions well below the standard the state had established for its own residents. Outside of the fields in which they worked, Tejanos were received as foreigners regardless of their citizenship status, where their dark skin and accented English made them targets of discrimination by Wisconsinites.[117]

The Governor's Committee on Migratory Labor presented a new opportunity for Catholic and Protestant clergy and laity to petition for expanded funding for migrant ministry programs and develop a clearer legislative lobbying voice. Religious leaders joined with lay colleagues on the committee to advance larger appropriations for public schooling and childcare for migrants.[118] In January of 1961, educators, clergy, and civic officials began an intensive campaign geared towards the Wisconsin legislature to provide summer schooling for four thousand migrant children in the state. The lobbying push was preceded by an innovative 1960 summer schooling program in Manitowoc County known as the Demonstration School, a four-week summer school proposed by the GCHR and the Governor's Committee on Migratory Labor as a sample for a possible state-funded and statewide initiative.[119] Hoping to expand the success

---

[117] Elizabeth Brandeis Raushenbush, "The Migrant Labor Problem in Wisconsin," (Madison: Governor's Commission on Human Rights, 1962), 12-14.
[118] "State's Migrant Workers Challenge to Educators," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, November 4, 1960; "Educating Migrant Children Debated," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, May 4, 1962.
[119] The 1960 and 1961 Manitowoc Demonstration School was possible due to a 1959 Industrial Commission order which forbade the use of children under the age of twelve from working in cherry orchards, truck farms, and sugar beet and cranberry fields. The order resolved an exception in state child labor law that permitted migrant children to work in these industries. For more on the "Demonstration Summer School for Migrant Children," see Governor's Commission on Human Rights, "Education on the Move: Report of a 1960 Summer School for Migrant Children in

of the demonstration school, the Wisconsin Catholic Bishops' Migrant Commission, the WCC, and the United Church Women endorsed an education funding bill drafted by the Assistant Superintendent of Public Instruction, R.F. Lewis, himself an advocate for migrant education.[120]

Church leaders clashed with growers over the migrant schooling bill at a February 1961 public hearing of the Wisconsin Assembly education committee. Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish leaders rallied behind the bill to authorize state aid for summer schools, while vegetable growers, many from Waushara County, assailed the legislation, complainging to assemblymen that children would go to school instead of work in their fields. One representative from the Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation, an employer lobbying group, blasted the "do-gooder" members of the Governor's Committee on Migratory Labor and warned that the legislation would be a step toward "collectivism." The lobbyist's testimony caused one Protestant minister from Jackson County to grow so agitated with the employers' attacks on the bill that he began to call out replies during their testimony and had to be restrained by a committee chairman.[121]

Despite growers' efforts to halt the allocation of state funding for migrant resources, persistent lobbying from church leaders and civic officials garnered significant provisions for various programs. In July of 1962, the Department of Public Welfare opened the first state-run day Head Start program for migrant children. With a working budget of $5,000, the pilot initiative included six weeks of care for thirty-five children. The first program in the state history's to be supported with government funds, its staff included educators, psychologists, and trained aides, and was led by Catholic sisters from Alverno College in nearby Milwaukee. The

---

Manitowoc County, Wisconsin, Part I" (Madison, WI, 1960), WHS Government Publications; Governor's Commission on Human Rights, "Education on the Move: Report of a Demonstration Summer School for Migrant Children in Manitowoc County, Wisconsin, Part II" (Madison, WI, 1961), WHS Government Publications.

[120] "Bill to Be Pushed in Legislature; Want School for Migrant Workers' Children," *Capital Times* (Madison, WI), January 23, 1961.

[121] "Summer School Aid Spark Controversy," *Milwaukee Journal,* February 6, 1961; "Catholic Unit Backs Migrant Schools Aid," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 25, 1961.

program's director first became involved with migrant work after attending a Wisconsin Council of Churches-hosted conference, and organized a committee among Protestants and Catholics, clergymen, public health officials, teachers, doctors, merchants, and other community leaders to help create programming for the daycare.[122] Facilitators collaborated with religious groups in the surrounding area such as St. Joseph's Catholic Church that had facilitated youth programs for migrants for more than a decade. Bilingual student teachers from Alverno like Elvira Sandoval Denk, whose parents were among *los primeros* to settle in Milwaukee in the 1920s, helped pay for their college tuition by working at the Head Start program in the early 1960s.[123]

Fighting for "the union ideal": Obreros Unidos and Religious Advocacy for Collective Bargaining Rights

The termination of the national bracero program in 1964 prompted even larger statewide concern regarding the treatment of Tejano migrant workers. Along with national labor leaders and Mexican-American activists such as Ernesto Galarza, religious organizations had called for the discontinuation of the program in the 1950s and accelerated their criticism by the end of the decade. Opposition to the program facilitated deeper collaboration among liberal Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish migrant advocates as well. Within the Catholic context, where clergy were already engaged in deeper examinations of their moral obligation to participate in political and interfaith activism, protracted lobbying for the end of the bracero program represented, as

[122] Despite receiving a small amount of funds to begin the program, the center received immediate criticism from Wisconsin growers, who felt that migrant workers were being "spoiled" by "too many handouts" from the state. See "Wisconsin Cares for the Migrant Child," *Milwaukee Journal*, July 22, 1962. For report of program, see Wisconsin Department of Public Welfare, Division for Children and Youth, "Report of a Demonstration Project: Day Care for Migrant Children, 1962," Box 18, Folder 6, Wisconsin Division of Economic Assistance: Economic Opportunity Section Administrative Subject Files, 1964-1978, WHS.

[123] Theresa Delgadillo, *Latina Lives in Milwaukee* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 66-67.

historian Gina Marie Pitti notes, the "triumph of a labor-liberal coalition that secured American Catholics' place in the political and social mainstream."[124]

Rooting their critique of the program in Catholic social action theology, members of the U.S. Catholic Bishops' Committee for the Spanish Speaking (BCSS), the National Catholic Rural Life Conference (NCRLC), and the National Catholic Welfare Conference-Social Action Department sustained that continued employment of imported migrant labor, both legally-contracted and undocumented, damaged the working and living circumstances of American migrant laborers and their families. Historian Mireya Loza notes that Catholic clergy and laity had lobbied for reforms or a discontinuation of the bracero program, "not to enact economic justice but as a moral imperative."[125] Archbishop Robert E. Lucey of San Antonio, chairman of the BCSS, referred to the program as a "national scandal and international crime," and accused Congress of working on behalf of agricultural interests to protect "a sacred cow, feeding fat on the exhausting work of an underpaid, semi-captive and totally disorganized labor force."[126] Every year that the bracero program was brought for renewal to the House agriculture subcommittee, Catholic and Protestant clergy testified against it and pressed parishioners to petition politicians for its end.[127]

In Wisconsin, growers had moved away from the recruitment of braceros following the end of World War Two, shifting instead towards domestic migrant Tejano labor. By 1962, only 638 Mexican nationals made their way to the state to do agricultural work. Across the country,

---

[124] Pitti, "To 'Hear About God in Spanish,'" 320-321.
[125] Mireya Loza, *Defiant Braceros: How Migrant Workers Fought for Racial, Sexual, and Political Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 82.
[126] "Hierarchy Told Migrant Labor Problem is National Scandal," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* November 28, 1959.
[127] "Ask Government Halt Importing Mexican Workers," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* April 2, 1960; "Two Bills Before Congress on Mexican Farm Labor in U.S.," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* August 20, 1960; "Terms Bracero Program Ghastly Intern'l Racket," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* November 26, 1960; "End to Migrant Worker Law is Asked by Priest," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* April 13, 1963. See also Pitti, "To 'Hear About God in Spanish,'" 326-334; McEvoy, ""Operation Migratory Labor,"" 92-95.

employers had also moved away from the guest worker program and towards domestic labor as the costs of transporting and housing braceros became prohibitive.[128] Meanwhile, the program faced attacks from migrant advocates, church groups, and labor unions as inhumane and exploitative. Advocates such as Reverend John Maurice asked why different standards existed for migrant agricultural and industrial workers: "The question everyone ignores when talking about the bracero program is the human one. Put it in terms of Milwaukee: Who would allow a manufacturer, who pays slave wages and has improper working conditions, to operate here? No one would want to work for him."[129]

The program's discontinuation in 1964 raised alarm among Wisconsin farmers and canners, who feared the indirect consequences of the agreement's end on the state's migrant labor force. Although the state's share of bracero workers was marginal in comparison to states like California and Texas, which recruited more than two hundred thousand workers per year, the termination of the program signaled a need to hire more domestic migrant workers. Wisconsin employers feared increased workforce competition with southwestern and southern farmers would lead to rising labor costs in the state. Wisconsin State Employment Services (WSES) officials voiced similar concerns, warning that state employers would be at a disadvantage in recruiting Tejano workers, as the cherry and cucumber harvests lasted only from six to eight weeks, while southwestern growers could offer longer periods of stable employment.[130]

The end of the bracero program prompted religious leaders to accelerate calls for protective legislation for domestic migrant workers. Monsignor William J. Quinn, director of the

---

[128] In Wisconsin, growers preferred to use domestic Tejano laborers, who did have contractual obligations surrounding transportation, wages, and housing. "'Bracero' On Way Out," *Milwaukee Journal,* June 7, 1963.
[129] "Imported Labor," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* July 3, 1965.
[130] "More Migrant Labor Problems in 1965," *Milwaukee Journal*, April 18, 1964; "Canners Lament End of Bracero Program," *Milwaukee Journal*, November 9, 1964.

Chicago office of the BCSS, endorsed the extension of minimum wage and labor protections to migrant workers in testimony before the Senate Labor and Public Welfare Committee. He implored senators to not "let any geographic area in our country or any phase of American endeavor remain outside the mainstream of American freedom of opportunity."[131] Father James L. Vizzard, director of the NCRLC, opined that it was past time to focus legislative efforts on migrant workers, who he referred to as "America's neglected man." As long as the bracero had been available, Vizzard explained, growers "had been under no pressure to improve wages and working and living conditions to the point where enough qualified citizen workers would be attracted to the fields." For more than a decade, a handful of mostly large-farm growers, never more than 50,000 in the whole nation, had been "able to use the poverty of Mexico to their own benefit but to the continuing disadvantage of the poorest of the poor in America, our own migratory workers." With the bracero program "taken away from" growers, Vizzard accused employers of showing "little sense of responsibility for raising job offers and working and living conditions to something approaching a normal American standard."[132]

National Catholic leaders' enthusiasm for expanded rights for domestic migrant workers and their families spread to Wisconsin. The Milwaukee *Catholic Herald Citizen* proclaimed 1964 the year of the "big push to help the migrant worker." The newspaper noted migratory issues as one of few causes Catholics, Protestants, and Jews had consistently spoken of with one voice, coordinating their federal lobbying efforts in the belief that only national legislation could create lasting solutions. Reverend George Kolanda viewed the bracero program as the crux of the domestic migrant problems and anticipated substantive changes with its end. Following the

---

[131] "Extend Benefits to Farm Labor, Bishop Pleas," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* July 24, 1965.
[132] "The migrant worker: America's neglected man," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* August 13, 1966.

termination of the program, the Wisconsin Catholic Church pledged its support for minimum wage laws and collective bargaining for migratory workers.[133]

National and state leaders demanded higher wages, proper inspection of labor camps, and the right to bargain collectively. In 1965 and 1966, the BCSS endorsed legislation extending the federal minimum wage, enhancing child labor protections, authorizing collective bargaining for farmworkers under the National Labor Relations Act, and creating a national advisory committee on farm labor. Monsignor George Higgins, director of the National Catholic Welfare Conference's Social Action Department, explained that migrant farmworkers were "among the least privileged of any major occupational group in the nation" and deserved the opportunity to organize into bargaining associations like any other American.[134] Monsignor William J. Quinn, director of the Chicago office of the BCSS, testified on behalf of Catholic bishops to the Senate labor and public welfare committee, reminding legislators that no other country in the Americas deliberately excluded workers from social legislation.[135]

While religious leaders lobbied for federal changes to collective bargaining laws in 1965, farmworkers accelerated their own calls for action. Chief among these mobilizations were the actions of the thousands of California migrant farmworkers that joined César Chávez and Dolores Huerta in the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA), first created in 1962. Building upon decades of Mexican- and Filipino-descent organizing in California's agricultural industry, the NFWA gained national attention with the development of a strike against grape growers in Delano, California, in 1965. The NFWA joined the Agricultural Workers Organizing

---

[133] The newspaper described the defeat of the bracero program as the "first clean-cut victory the church lobby had over won over the farm lobby." "Big Push to Help Migrant Workers," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* August 3, 1963.
[134] "Farm Laborers Need Benefits of Union Organization, Catholic Spokesmen Declare," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* January 30, 1965.
[135] "Extend Farm Benefits to Farm Labor, Bishops Plea," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* July 25, 1965.

Committee, led by Philip Vera Cruz and Larry Itliong, in calling for first a statewide, and then national, expansion of migrant farmworkers' rights to organize into unions and collectively bargain with employers over their working conditions.[136]

California's religious leaders joined the state's farmworkers in their protests, many of whom had been involved in migrant ministry work over the previous two decades.[137] Chávez himself was heavily influenced by his Catholic faith and infused a sense of religious morality into his organizing work. Theologian Frederick John Dalton argues that Chávez's "moral vision" originated from his particular social and religious framework and personal theology. Chávez's concept of "liberative character ethics" combined his Catholic faith and the church's social action teachings with the Mexican American migrant farm worker experience, arguing for an understanding of labor that acknowledged and elevated the dignity of workers.[138]

Religious bodies across the country spoke in support of California farmworkers' protests and organizing. In March of 1966, clergy and laity attending the Midwest Catholic Conference on Migrants in South Bend, Indiana voted unanimously to support the grape-pickers' strike in Delano and called for greater interfaith cooperation on local migrant programs. Reverend John Maurice, in attendance as a representative of the Milwaukee Archdiocese, also cited a need to reevaluate the Church's role of ministering to the U.S.'s Spanish-speaking population:

> Is our only objective to get them to church and to simply be Catholic? Is it fair to use the migrant camp as a captive audience where we can attempt to impose religion on them? I think we must be very cautious in catechizing that we do not divorce them from what is going on in the rest of the Church in terms of freedom, personal responsibility,

---

[136] Matthew Garcia, *From the Jaws of Victory: The Triumph and Tragedy of Cesar Chavez and the Farm Worker Movement* (Berkeley: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 12-75.

[137] While support from Californian clergy was not monolithic, their call for protections in collective bargaining did represent a shift from a previously more conservative tone in the 1950s. See Marco G. Prouty, *César Chávez, the Catholic Bishops, and the Farmworkers' Struggle for Social Justice* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2006); Alan J. Watt, *Farm Workers and the Churches: The Movement in California and Texas* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2010).

[138] Frederick John Dalton, *The Moral Vision of César Chávez* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), 3. See also Mario T. García, ed., *The Gospel of César Chávez: My Faith in Action* (Lanham, MD: Sheed & Ward, 2007).

> involvement and the rest. We must translate the council into the terms of the migrant and make his religion as dynamic and challenging to him as is being made for any other middle-class Catholic.[139]

Maurice and other clergy thus argued for an expanded understanding of ministry that moved beyond simply spiritual advising and into the realm of social equity, a move that would elevate migrants to the same level of treatment that other Catholics received in the church.

Migrant workers in Wisconsin took advantage of the shifting political landscape in migratory issues in the state. Among these laborers was Jesus Salas, a third-generation Texas-born Mexican American farmworker from central Wisconsin. Salas's parents had been migrant farmworkers who had travelled across the U.S. since the 1940s but had bought a restaurant in Wautoma in 1958 and settled their family there permanently to give their children more stable educational opportunities.[140] From 1961 to 1965, Salas worked during the summers in daycare programming for migrant children with local churches and the Wisconsin State Division of Child and Youth. In 1965, Salas, then a junior at Stevens Point State University, was hired along with his brother Manuel by University of Wisconsin Professor Elizabeth Brandeis Raushenbush to conduct a study of migrants in the Wautoma area, where they learned more about the workers' piecemeal wages and substandard living conditions, as well as about state labor and migrant employment laws. The time spent with Raushenbush proved transformative, as the economics professor pushed her students to connect the daily experiences of migrant workers with larger institutional structures that enabled inhumane living and working conditions.[141]

---

[139] "Catholics Active With Migrant Workers Support Delano," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* April 22, 1966.
[140] "Who Is Salas? Everyone Has an Answer," *Milwaukee Journal,* August 29, 1965.
[141] Jesus Salas, interview by author, Milwaukee, WI, April 1, 2010; Jesus Salas, interview by author, Milwaukee, WI, June 24, 2015. Salas also credited his time in Madison, then home to burgeoning antiwar, civil rights, and countercultural movements, for raising his social justice consciousness. Although not a student at the University of Wisconsin at the time, Salas spent considerable time with members of the local Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) branch. Salas first learned about Chávez's growing farmworker movement in California after reading a Los Angeles newspaper article an SDS member shared with him in Madison.

In the summer of 1966, Salas joined with a cadre of young migrant workers, community organizers, and university students to begin union organizing drive in central Wisconsin's cucumber industry. While Salas joined the midwestern branch of the NFWA, the push represented the first sustained effort to form a migrant farmworker labor union in the Great Lakes Region. Focused on improving farmworkers' wages and living and working conditions, Salas and his allies were most invested in reaffirming the dignity of migrant laborers and their families. Migrant workers expressed a desire for institutional change, and not the piecemeal reforms that had defined earlier migrant advocacy efforts. The young Salas and members of the new union understood these larger shifts as necessary to claim their full standing as American citizens. In surveying the place of Wisconsin's farmworker movement within the scope of 1960s social justice organizing, historian Marc Rodriguez notes that Obreros Unidos, "much like other Americans, were caught up in the rising expectations of the era and increasingly aware of their rights, not as 'Mexicans' within a system of racial apartheid, but as United States citizens with universal human rights."[142] Wisconsin's migrant workers chose Obreros Unidos, or Workers United, as the name of their new organization, and adopted the slogan of "La Raza Se Junta" (Our People Rise to the Cause) as their rallying cry.[143]

Obreros Unidos faced a litany of obstacles in their early efforts to organize Wisconsin migrants. Principal among these was the transient nature of migrant farm work. That transience made it easier for growers to disrupt organizing among workers. Growers could simply choose to not rehire a worker perceived to be an agitator the following growing season. Organizing scattered groups of laborers in constant motion presented a challenge for labor leaders as well, as

---

[142] Marc Rodriguez, *The Tejano Diaspora: Mexican Americanism and Ethnic Politics in Texas and Wisconsin* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 67.
[143] Jesus Salas, *Struggle for Justice: The Migrant Farm Worker Labor Movement in Wisconsin* (Madison: Wisconsin Labor History Society, 1998), 15.

migrants traversing long distances across the U.S., oftentimes working a few weeks at a time in a specific camp, remained in any given area for short periods of time.[144] Tejano migrants only lived and worked in Wisconsin for a few months a year, making it difficult to reach a wide swath of workers and persuade them to commit to a union. To offset this challenge, Obreros began their organizing in Texas, speaking to workers that were part of what Marc Rodriguez refers to as a "Tejano diaspora" before they began their annual voyage to Wisconsin. Many of the migrants who made their way to the Midwest annually hailed from borderland towns such as Crystal City, a politically active Mexican-American community that had successfully secured electoral victories in the city council in the early 1960s. The connection of what Rodriguez refers to as a "translocal politics" between these Texas and Wisconsin locales facilitated a burgeoning sense of political identity among those migrants settling in central Wisconsin in the 1960s.[145]

Texas was not the only base of potential political power that Obreros relied on, however. In considering what indigenous organizing apparatus the union might draw from, Salas turned to one of the only institutions in the Wautoma area that had been engaged in the migrant community for decades: the Catholic Church. The allure of connecting labor organizing with faith-based institutions was not as natural for Salas as it had been for César Chávez. Unlike the California movement leader, Salas was not himself Catholic, and in fact had grown up in a family with a several members of the Masons. His interactions with ministers entering migrant camps in his youth had also been less-than-inspiring:

> The migrant ministry, and the Catholic Archdiocese, had summer programs, but they were toothpaste-toothbrush-soap kind of things. They would come in and show us movies

[144] Wisconsin farm workers did have one advantage over their peers around the country, however – while farmworkers in California and Texas were bound by the National Labor Relations Act's exclusion of agricultural workers from collective bargaining and action protections, Wisconsin state law made no such prohibitions. Wisconsin migrants thus hoped to petition the Wisconsin Employment Relations Commission for full protections as organized, unionized workers under this legal wrinkle. Mark Erenburg, "Obreros Unidos in Wisconsin," *Monthly Labor Review*, June 1968, 19-20.

[145] Rodriguez, *The Tejano Diaspora,* 2-4.

> on hygiene, and they would take us to church camps, or come in to show us movies to pass the time at the labor camps. But there was no activity for self-help.[146]

Salas understood, however, that both Catholic and Protestant churches were respected institutions not only in the Tejano community, but among most Wisconsinites. While not having shown much impetus in the past to directly challenge inhumane working conditions, Salas believed the cultural capital churches wielded could prove invaluable for organizing a union.

Salas found a willing ally in Father Michael Garrigan, a Wisconsin native and pastor at Wautoma's St. Joseph's Catholic Church. The bilingual Garrigan had developed a relationship with many migrant families in central Wisconsin, both as a religious leader and as a facilitator of recreational spaces, as young Tejanos would often play football on Sundays after Mass in the church's back lot.[147] Finding it hard to gain access to migrant camps in Wautoma, where growers vigilantly weeded out any form of activism among their workers, Salas and Garrigan turned to sports as the avenue to reach Tejanos. Growers, who encouraged laborers and their families to attend Mass on Sundays, also supported the church's recreational activities as a way of appeasing migrant ministers and state commissions. Supporting sporting activities, just like funding rudimentary educational programming, took some pressure off growers and demonstrated a facile commitment to bettering the lives of their workers. As historians Lizabeth

---

[146] Jesus Salas interview, conducted by Marc S. Rodriguez, July 24, 1998, Box 3, Folder 1, Series 2, Marc S. Rodriguez Papers, Julian Samora Library at the Institute for Latino Studies, University of Notre Dame.

[147] "Migrant School Term Extended," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* August 5, 1961. In 1965, Garrigan and Pastor George M. Weix had applied for nearly $4,000 in federal funding to support their migrant ministry work at St. Joseph's. The Wautoma parish had been involved in migrant programming since the early 1950s and had made connections between secular and religious education by establishing a school for migrant children in 1956. "St. Joseph's Parish (Wautoma, Wisconsin) proposal for federal funding submitted to Office of Economic Opportunity, February 10, 1965," Box 18, Folder 9, Wisconsin Division of Economic Assistance: Economic Opportunity Section Administrative Subject Files, 1964-1978, WHS.

Cohen and Elizabeth Fones-Wolf have noted, employers also used sports as a method of Americanizing laborers and instilling some method of social control outside of the workplace.[148]

Salas and Garrigan, however, had different plans for their church-based recreational activities. Salas turned to St. Joseph's baseball diamond to educate migrants as workers and instill a sense of labor solidarity among Tejanos. With a captive (and pious) audience on hand following Sunday Mass, Salas organized Tejano migrant workers on church grounds into baseball teams according to their labor camp. Amid baseball and softball games, Salas spoke with migrants about unionization and worker rights. As the games grew, so did the labor organizing. By the summer of 1966, those devout workers who had stayed after church for a game of baseball were wearing t-shirts emblazoned with the union's name, Obreros Unidos.[149] During the growing season, St. Joseph's team played against other camps, local university students, and priests and seminarians. With each passing game, their contests became what José Alamillo has referred to as interethnic spaces for "incipient political activism," as Tejanos and white players – migrant workers, union organizers, priests –played ball and organized.[150]

As Obreros increased their worker base in the Wautoma area, union leaders planned for a dramatic introduction of their organization to the Wisconsin community. Drawing on Chávez's spring 1966 march from Delano to Sacramento, Wisconsin's migrant leaders organized their own

---

[148] Cohen and Fones-Wolf both show how support for sporting programs functioned as a form of "welfare capitalism," where management assumed some obligation to protect the well-being of its employees, and in return expected improved productivity and a complacent workforce. Sponsoring leisure-time activities helped offset the monotony of work and encourage self-betterment, as well as instilling self-discipline and creating goodwill between management and employees. Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (New Edition; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, "Industrial Recreation, the Second World War, and the Revival of Welfare Capitalism, 1934-1960," *Business History Review* 60, no. 2 (Summer 1986): 232-257.

[149] Jesus Salas, interview by author, Milwaukee, WI, June 24, 2015; "Beisbol, Beisbol," *La Voz Mexicana*, July 22, 1965; "Aguilas Del Valle Triunfan," *La Voz Mexicana*, August 5, 1965; "And He Connects," *La Voz Mexicana,* August 5, 1965; "Obreros Unidos Juega Con Equipo Local," *La Voz Mexicana*, July 28, 1967.

[150] José Alamillo, *Making Lemonade out of Lemons: Mexican American Labor and Leisure in a California Town, 1880-1960* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 7.

protest from Wautoma to Madison in August of 1966. Twenty-four marchers representing over five thousand migrant laborers employed in Waushara, Portage, and Marquette counties pledged to walk the eighty miles separating their camps from the state's capitol in a protest the workers referred to as a "march for respectability" for Tejano migrants. Like the middle-class and religious reformers that had preceded him in the 1950s, Salas understood that appealing to everyday Wisconsinites would require not just an economically pragmatic argument, but also a call for morality and dignity. Salas explained to local press that the march's primary objective was thus to "dramatize the needs of migrant farmworkers" in a manner that would "appeal to the conscience of the people of Wisconsin."[151]

Along with shifting the moral consciousness of Wisconsinites, migrant leaders sought concrete changes to farmworker policies. Obreros drafted four key demands, including a $1.25 per hour minimum wage; coverage under the state's workmen's compensation and health insurance laws; migrant labor representation on the Governor's Committee on Migratory Labor; and public sanitation facilities for migrant workers.[152] Hoping to halt the march and avoid negative press for the state, representatives from the Wisconsin State Industrial Commission met with migrant leaders and promised to enter negotiations at a later date. Despite receiving a conciliatory reception from state officials, Salas pledged to continue the march in mid-August.[153]

With state officials unable to persuade Obreros for a delayed resolution, Salas rallied over two hundred supporters on the steps of the Waushara County Courthouse on Sunday, August 14. Representatives from the NFWA's Midwest office attended the rally, bringing with them the encouragement of the organization's president, César Chávez. In a telegram to Salas and the

---

[151] "Migrant Workers Embark on March," *Appleton Post-Crescent,* August 15, 1966.
[152] "Migrants Will March Despite State Efforts," *Milwaukee Journal,* August 14, 1966.
[153] "State Assurance on Demands Fails to Halt Migrant March," *Milwaukee Journal,* August 16, 1966.

migrants, Chávez encouraged the young marchers by stating, "The time is past due for all Americans to recognize the right of farm workers to dignity, equality and the same legislative protection which is extended to all other workers in the United States." Chávez sent a corresponding telegram to Wisconsin Governor Warren Knowles, urging him to "extend full support and cooperation to the march." Following the rally, the assembled protesters met for a special Mass and benediction at St. Joseph's Catholic Church under Father Garrigan, who pledged to join the workers along with other religious leaders such as Reverend Barry Shaw, a Waterloo Methodist minister and director of the Wisconsin Council of Churches.[154]

Following the benediction, migrant workers began their five-day march to Madison. The marchers carried three banners: an American flag, representing their claim to rights afforded to all American citizens; posters with the thunderbird made famous by Chávez's farmworker movement; and, a standard bearing the image of la Virgen de Guadalupe. Guadalupe's appearance, patron mother of Mexican Catholics, along with presence of Garrigan, Shaw, and seminarians from the Green Bay Archdiocese, lent the march a distinctly religious feel. Like Chávez's April 1966 march from Delano to Sacramento in support of California grape pickers, some who joined the Wisconsin march saw their voyage as a pilgrimage. Religious studies scholar Carlos Piar notes that the use of Catholic iconography and ritual in farmworker protests of the era lent marches a "transcendent meaning" as participants struggled "for far more than higher wages…in the fields; they were asserting that every human being is worthy of dignity and respect by virtue of being created in God's image."[155]

---

[154] "Migrants to March Today," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* August 15, 1966

[155] Carlos R. Piar, "César Chávez and La Causa: Toward a Hispanic Christian Social Ethic," *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* 16 (1996): 111. Frederick John Dalton further notes that Guadalupe's image was "omnipresent" in farmworker movements across the U.S. See Dalton, *The Moral Vision of César Chávez,* 35-37.

Wisconsin's religious leaders, some who had been engaged in migrant ministry for years, offered their aid along the march as well. Migrants camped overnight and rested at supportive Methodist and Lutheran churches. In Poynette, a local delegation organized by Reverend Richard Burgess of the Presbyterian church met the marchers and invited them for dinner at the town's Methodist church, while the following morning Father Leo Joyce of St. Thomas Catholic Church treated them to breakfast. Leaving De Forest on the last day of the march, the marchers were joined by Reverend Robert Kolze, the central states representative of the National Council of Churches.[156] In anticipation of the march's end, Milwaukee's Father John Maurice presented recommendations to the state industrial commission in Madison. Maurice called for expanded funds for migrant education and implored the state to aid migratory workers in becoming permanent residents in Wisconsin, which would allow them to meet residency requirements to access industrial training and income assistance.[157]

Despite the outward encouragement from clergy like Maurice, Garrigan, and Shaw, not all members of Wisconsin's religious community supported the migrants' march. In a letter to the *Waushara Argus,* two religious leaders from Central Wisconsin's Migrant Ministry admonished the demonstration as one built on "vicious lies and subtle half-truths" that did not represent area growers' best efforts to rectify migrants' living and working conditions. The priests accused Salas and other labor organizers of moving too quickly to disregard local attempts to meet their demands, and for having engaged in "forceful rather than cooperative" tactics. Surprisingly, the ministers also submitted the pointed clarification that while Obreros may have focused their efforts on economic matters, the Migrant Ministry under their watch

---

[156] "Weary Migrants Find Kindness Along Route of Protest March," *Milwaukee Journal,* August 16, 1966; "Singing Migrants Near End of Protest March," *Milwaukee Journal,* August 18, 1966; "Priest Joins In Migrants' Protest March," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* August 20, 1966.
[157] "Priest Outlines Needs of Migrant Workers," *Milwaukee Journal,* August 19, 1966.

would continue to concentrate on "spiritual issues."[158] This pronouncement stood in stark contrast to the work of many members of the state's Migrant Ministry, who had engaged in both secular reform and religious counseling in the years preceding the August 1966 march.

By the time the marchers reached the steps of the state capitol on August 19, the protest had grown to over 150 people, including migrant workers from around the state, clergy, nuns, and university students. Addressing the assembled crowd at the steps of the capitol, an appreciative Salas said, "We marched 80 miles to show a social and economic problem exists. The state of Wisconsin has a progressive tradition and must alleviate these problems." Rally speakers also included Attorney General Bronson La Follette, State Senator Fred Risser, and Charles Heyman, regional director of the AFL-CIO. The migrant workers moved into the governor's conference room to meet with representatives from the state industrial commission to discuss their demands.[159]

While not able to secure all their demands, the Obreros march achieved the new union's principle goal of broadcasting Tejano migrants' call for better living and working conditions for farmworkers to the state. In the years immediately following the march, two migrant representatives secured positions on the Governor's Committee on Migratory Labor, while state officials renewed a push for the construction of public sanitary facilities in central Wisconsin camps. In addition, the Governor's Committee commissioned a study of migrant wages in the cucumber industry while renewing a review of minimum wage laws affecting agricultural workers and placing more robust resources to enforce migrant housing codes.[160] The march was

---

[158] Maia A. Surdam, "Migrant Camps and Family Farms: The Politics of Housing, Community, and Citizenship in Wisconsin Agriculture, 1933-1972" (Master's thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2006), 47-48. Clergy quoted in "Ministers Deplore March of Migrants," *Waushara Argus,* August 25, 1966.
[159] Salas quoted in "Migrant March Ends With Rally at Capitol," *Milwaukee Journal,* August 20, 1966.
[160] Erenburg, "Obreros Unidos in Wisconsin," 20-21.

perhaps most effective in publicizing the plight of migrant workers across Wisconsin, spurring organizations to voice their support for worker unionization. In November of 1966, the Wisconsin Bishops' Commission for the Spanish Speaking endorsed efforts by migrant workers to organize and bargain collectively. The commission, representing the five Catholic Wisconsin archdioceses, said in its statement, "farm labor now stands in the pitiful posture of the exploited factory workers of the 19th century. The union ideal which has elevated the trades to such heights and prospered the whole economy must now be extended to farm labor."[161] Organizations like the bishops' commission were spurred on by migrant ministers like Maurice, Garrigan, and Madison's Auxiliary Bishop Jerome Hastrich, who had spent years serving migrants. In January of 1967, delegates to the Wisconsin Council of Churches' annual convention passed a similar resolution supporting farmworkers' collective bargaining rights and urged their respective churches to organize boycotts against growers who opposed open and fair labor negotiations.[162]

Not surprisingly, Wisconsin growers disagreed vehemently with Obreros Unidos' contentions, going as far as to accuse Salas of giving the Wautoma area a "black eye." Along with publicly pushing back against calls for an increased minimum wage, employers denied claims that they failed to provide safe and sanitary living and working conditions and invited journalists to tour their facilities to verify their high standards. They also singled out Salas and his efforts as some form of "plot" that aimed to unionize all migrants across the state – a claim that perhaps the young leader might not have rejected. Growers worried that higher wages would simply encourage migrant laborers to work less for more. Robert Schramek, executive vice

---

[161] "Migrants' Plans to Organize Wins Commission Okay," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* November 12, 1966.
[162] "Churches Back Migrant Workers," *Milwaukee Journal,* January 18, 1967. The following year, the conference affirmed their support of Obreros Unidos, noting, "We regret that they have not always met with sympathy and understanding from people of the local churches of the areas where they have worked." See "Church Council Endorses Migrant Unions," *Milwaukee Journal,* January 17, 1968.

president of the Chicago Pickle Company based out of Redgranite in Waushara County, explained to the *Milwaukee Journal,* "We'd be getting a lot of them up here who would just want to take it nice and easy and earn their $1.25 an hour. You'd also have to supervise them to make sure they worked." Schramek, parroting the beliefs of Wisconsin growers who had lobbied against educational programming for migrant programming just years earlier, already suspected migrants of having minimally inspired work habits, going as far as to imply that "some [workers] just come up here to get out of the hot Texas sun."[163]

The creation of Obreros Unidos and calls to bargain over wages and working conditions prompted Wisconsin growers to accelerate mechanization to defray labor costs, especially in the cucumber industry. Large growers warned that increasing minimum wage floors in locations like Waushara county, where some 4,500 Tejano migrants were responsible for picking cucumbers off the vines via stoop labor, would dissuade farms from growing in the state. These preoccupations, coupled with increasingly more stringent state monitoring of employment and working conditions, spurred companies like Libby, McNeill, & Libby to increase funding towards research in emerging harvesting technologies.[164] The Wisconsin Canners' Association, meeting in Madison in 1961, first raised the possibility of replacing as many workers as possible with machines. Association leaders explained to plant representatives that they hoped machinery would make migrant workers a "rare" sight in Wisconsin within five years. John Rouse, commissioner of the Wisconsin Industrial Commission, explained to growers that before they'd need to "solve" all the state's "migrant worker problems, machinery will have taken over [workers'] jobs." Over the following years, farm owners introduced mechanical pickers in bean,

[163] "Misunderstandings Grow in Migrant Worker Area," *Milwaukee Journal,* August 28, 1966.
[164] "Machines and Unions Race to Pickle Fields," *Milwaukee Journal,* August 7, 1967.

pickle, tomato, and corn harvesting, all but eliminating stoop labor in those fields.[165] By 1963, thanks in part to more organized scheduling of migrant workers by the WSES but more important because of growing mechanization, the *Milwaukee Sentinel* reported that gone were the days when "migrants by the truck load poured into the county looking for work."[166]

With energy running high following the migrant march and growers consolidating tactics to stall labor organizing, Obreros Unidos embarked upon an organizing drive in October of 1966 at a potato processing plant in Almond in the first attempt to organize migrant laborers in Wisconsin history. After employers denied the demands of one hundred migrant workers for union recognition, the new union voted to engage in an eight-day strike. Seeking solidarity from other labor organizations, Jesus Salas spoke to the delegates of the Wisconsin AFL-CIO State Convention that same month, who met the young labor leader with thundering applause, a resolution of support, and a strike-fund contribution of $2,500.[167] Catholic clergy joined the picket line in Almond as well. Salas turned to Monsignor James Finucan of Stevens Point to serve as an intermediary between migrants and their employer.[168] Although the nine-day walkout failed to win a contract for the workers, it did draw the attention of the state's vast vegetable growing and processing industries, as well as organized labor, progressive groups, and church organizations. The strike also forced the state employment relations board to intervene, giving some hope that a future unionization strike might be more successful. Through state arbitration, the union won some stipulations including back wages, while state officials moved to sanction the plant owners for unfair labor practices.[169]

---

[165] "Automation Taking Jobs From Migrants," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, March 15, 1961.
[166] "Portage County 'Pickles' Migrants 'Bank Money,'" *Milwaukee Sentinel*, September 30, 1963.
[167] Help For Migrants Pledged By Unions," *Milwaukee Journal,* August 9, 1967; "AFL-CIO Gives Migrants $2,500," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* October 13, 1966.
[168] "Migrants' Strike Failed, But Offered Lessons," *Milwaukee Journal*, October 16, 1966.
[169] "Migrants Firm," *Milwaukee Journal,* October 13, 1966; "Migrant Workers End Strike," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* October 15, 1966; "Migrants' Strike Failed, But Offered Lessons," *Milwaukee Journal,* October 16, 1966.

Drawing lessons from the Almond effort, Obreros Unidos planned for another union drive during the summer of 1967. The workers chose the Libby, McNeil & Libby Company, a cucumber processor that had actively resisted efforts to alleviate poor conditions in the previous decade, as their first target. In the winter before the cucumber harvest of 1967, Salas traveled to Texas to meet with migrant workers who planned to travel to Wisconsin later that year, speaking in people's homes, union meetings and labor councils, and civic events to persuade Tejano migrants of the necessity of collective action through organized labor. Back in Wisconsin in the summer of 1967, Salas and Obreros' organizers held meetings, published a monthly bilingual newspaper called *La Voz Mexicana*, and planned volunteer legal aid for migrants. In August, Obreros demanded "immediate recognition" of collective bargaining rights for workers at Libby plants.[170] The call for a union vote coincided with the Obreros' filing of thirty complaints alleging violations of the minimum wage law by pickle processors in Waushara, Adams, and Portage counties with the new state department of industry, labor, and human relations.[171]

Libby management refused to recognize the labor union or their leaders' call for a representation vote. With no compromise in sight, four hundred Obreros Unidos members representing eighty percent of the Libby workforce walked off the job on a half-day strike on August 23 and promised a full work stoppage if their employer failed to meet them at the bargaining table.[172] After meeting with Salas and Libby management, the Wisconsin Employment Relations Commission (WERC) called for a prompt union recognition election. With the cucumber harvest rapidly ending and migrants set to leave the state for their next harvest season, the WERC scheduled an expedient election before the end of the month. By a

[170] "Salas to Resume Union Efforts," *Milwaukee Journal,* June 14, 1967; "Migrant Union Seeks Recognition by Libby," *Milwaukee Journal,* August 20, 1967.
[171] "Migrants Plan to File Wage Complaints," *Milwaukee Journal,* August 22, 1967.
[172] "Hearing Set On Migrants," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* August 25, 1967.

resounding majority, more than four hundred migrant workers at Libby voted to accept Obreros Unidos as their bargaining representative. The WERC immediately certified Obreros as the exclusive labor union for the company's fieldworkers.[173]

The following month, representatives from Obreros Unidos and Libby met to discuss contract proposals. With initial bargaining sessions bearing little fruit, Libby management notified Salas that the grower would move towards a fully mechanized harvesting system in 1968 and would no longer require migrant labor in their fields. Stunned by the company's unilateral decision, Obreros immediately filed an unfair labor practice complaint with the WERC. While it recognized that Libby's decision to mechanize would have "a significant and detrimental impact" on the migrant workers, the WERC held that the decision to mechanize was made on economic grounds and that Libby had thus not engaged in unfair labor practices. Although Libby management was forced to bargain with Obreros over the mechanization process, as well as offer preferential hiring to former migrant workers for mechanized positions, the WERC decision struck a major blow to the union's collective bargaining position.[174]

Conclusion

Despite Obreros Unidos' ultimate defeat at the hands of Libby management in 1967, the efforts of Salas, migrant farmworkers, and their allies to fight for more just living and working conditions represented the opening salvo in a new struggle to redefine the relationship between Tejano-descent workers, their employers, and the state of Wisconsin that would last for decades to come. Obreros Unidos' organizing in 1966 and 1967, however, also represented a critical

---

[173] "Migrants Vote for Union," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* September 1, 1967. In 1968, the state employment relations commission ordered Libby to hire harvesters from an Obreros-approved list, as well as to collectively bargain over mechanization processes. See "Libby to Use Union List for Hiring," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* July 18, 1968.
[174] Philip L. Martin, "Harvest Mechanization and Agricultural Trade Unionism: Obreros Unidos in Wisconsin," *Labor Law Journal* 28, no. 3 (March 1977): 166-173.

touchstone in a larger history of Mexican-descent migration to the state's agricultural fields and the reception they received in predominately white Wisconsin communities. During the 1940s and 1950s, Mexican nationals and Tejano migrants had faced overwhelming barriers to rectify grievances against their employers, as well as effect change in the ways in which Wisconsin communities received them. Irregular migration, transient Latino populations in rural counties, and ineffectual state regulations forced many migrants to bitterly accept living and working conditions that academic researchers and state observers considered subhuman, economically untenable, and morally bankrupt.

With little to no voice in policy-making considerations or at their worksites, Tejano migrants relied on the largesse and social capital of liberal reformers and church organizations in the 1950s to publicize their plight. Clergy and laity from various Christian denominations set the parameters in conversations of reception and reaction. Faith communities in rural areas and surrounding urban centers asked Wisconsinites to open their congregational doors, and ultimately, their hearts as Christians, to these migrants. Della Cross, a lay leader of the National Council of Churches' migrant ministry efforts in Door County, explained in 1952 that her "purpose" was ultimately to "make [residents] understand that there is one God over us all…In building bridges like that, the growth is always slow, but it is a very rewarding experience."[175] Due in large part to the efforts of these proselytizers, Wisconsinites attitudes' towards migrants would vary across the period, ranging from indifference, hostility, and suspicion, to, in some areas, a growing concern and even hospitality.

Altruism and a message built upon shared Christianity, however, was not the only instrument in migrant ministers' toolkits. A more pragmatic approach was to remind the general

[175] "Children of Migrants Taught About Jesus," *Milwaukee Journal,* July 15, 1951.

citizenry of the economic import of migrant labor, and the possible deleterious effects of allowing for deplorable conditions in the fields to continue. While growers were assumed to be the primary caretakers for living and working conditions, religious organizations, along with state and federal commissions, advised Wisconsinites that surrounding communities also had a role to play in ensuring adequate educational opportunities for migrant children, safe working conditions, and sanitary housing.

Growers and canners objected to the efforts of reformers, secular and faith-based, to stimulate statewide conversations regarding the treatment and incorporation of Mexican-descent migrant farmworkers. Dubbing these community members "do-gooders," many employers accused state officials and religious organizations of indulging and coddling their laborers, serving as impediments for the continued economic expansion of Wisconsin's agricultural industries. When farm owners did accede to the requests of organizations like the Governor's Commission on Human Rights, as the Canners' Association publicly professed to doing in 1952, their efforts were often superficial, leaving many of the migrants' working and living conditions essentially unchanged.

Religious and state organizations slowly came to recognize that appealing to the morality of growers and canners, as well as the good faith of communities, would bring little substantive adjustment to migrants' situation in Wisconsin. Christian organizations slowly shifted their priorities away from competing for the souls of Tejano migrants as they had in early 1950s, when churches placed an overwhelming emphasis on catechistical education, recreation, and access to health care. By the late 1950s and early 1960s, the emphasis was on direct advocacy at local and state levels. The causes of this modification in priorities were varied, including an overwhelming amount of evidence of migrant subjugation and the growing public voice of

migrants themselves, but shifts within church bodies cannot be discounted. National religious leaders like Father James L. Vizzard, director of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference, pushed Americans to reconsider their economic and social priorities in regards to migrants, publishing burning screeds against continued employer indifference, writing in 1966, "Since these growers seem incapable of self-reform, they need to be told emphatically and with finality by outraged citizens and their legislators that the approximation of slave-labor conditions which they have perpetuated will no longer be tolerated in this nation."[176] In Wisconsin, individual clergy invested in the social outreach like Reverends George Kolanda, John Maurice, and Michael Garrigan, argued for a sharp turn toward support of collective bargaining rights and a tougher stance towards employers unwilling to recognize the humanity of their workers .

Wisconsin growers' and canners' attempts to find alternatives to migrant labor in the face of rising migrant farmworker union mobilization efforts brought along broad demographic shifts for the state's Latino population. Migrant labor use dropped sharply beginning in the early 1960s, as agriculturalists replaced two-thirds to three-fourths of migrant positions with mechanization.[177] As the need for labor in the fields declined, Tejano migrants in Wisconsin sought employment alternatives in both major urban centers like Milwaukee and smaller towns like Waukesha, Oshkosh, and Appleton. With a rising number of migrants arriving in urban spaces, Christian organizations would again grapple with the question of their role in receiving these new communities, both as sisters and brothers in a Christian faith and as new members of civic communities. Catholics' and Protestant's hard-learned lessons from the migrant ministry period of the 1950s – most important, the efficacy of ecumenical and interfaith collaboration –

[176] "The migrant worker: America's neglected man," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* August 13, 1966.
[177] Slesinger and Muirragui, "Migrant Agricultural Labor in Wisconsin," 7.

would be key in developing institutional structures to facilitate the integration of thousands of migrants into cities like Milwaukee during the 1960s.

CHAPTER 3

"Milwaukee has proven it has a warm heart and does care": Religious Resettlement and the Politics of Integration Among Puerto Rican Migrants and Cuban Exiles in Milwaukee, 1945-1967

In June of 1962, Victor Hevia and his family arrived at Mitchell Airport in Milwaukee as political exiles. The Cuban refugees had once run a prosperous jewelry business in Cuba but were forced to flee the island when the communist government of Fidel Castro commandeered their firm. First arriving on a "freedom flight" to Miami, Florida, where a Cuban expat community was swiftly growing, the Hevias were unable to find work and were forced to live in a cramped one-room apartment. The family of five, however, accepted the hospitality and sponsorship of a faraway Christian family in the early summer of 1962, and decided to move to Milwaukee. Their Cuban compatriots pleaded with them not to leave Miami, foreseeing potential difficulties wrought by language barriers, a cold climate, and a nearly non-existent Cuban community. Victor, however, saw in the Midwestern city an opportunity for a new start. Sponsored by a Christian Family Movement family that were members of St. Leo's Catholic Church, Victor warmly recalled the Hevia's first night in Milwaukee: "[Mr. and Mrs. Raphael Ennis, the sponsoring couple] went to the attic to sleep. They gave up their bedroom for us. No one in Miami would believe that." After finding their own fully furnished apartment and securing employment, Victor explained, "If I have to live the rest of my life out of my country, I would like to live here in Milwaukee."[1]

A decade before the arrival of the Hevia family, another group of Latinos had made their way to the Great Lakes region, but under significantly different circumstances. In the fall of 1952, Anselmo Torres, a twenty-six-year-old Puerto Rican migrant laborer, toiled away in an

[1] "The Cuban Refugee II – New Home Lost, Freedom Gained," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* March 5, 1963.

overheated foundry on the south side of Milwaukee. In the meager time he had for sleep, Torres shared a small one-room apartment with another young Puerto Rican man in a boarding house in the city's downtown. The cramped quarters were all either man could afford, but the hopeful Torres dreamed of one day renting a larger space and bringing his wife and three small sons to join him in the city. The lonely migrant had spent two years in the upper Midwestern hub working in Milwaukee's booming industries, where he made a pittance of $65 a week, half of which he sent back to his family still living on a small farm on the island. Despite attention by organizations like the Catholic Archdiocese, the Catholic Youth Organization, the Mayor's Commission on Human Rights, and the Community Welfare Council, Puerto Rican migrants like Torres found a difficult adjustment in Milwaukee. It was an experience plagued by inadequate working and living conditions, police harassment, and suspicion of political disloyalty to the United States by the city's legislators and social service agencies. Perhaps because of this inhospitable reception, Torres only planned for a temporary stay in his current position, eager to return to his native Puerto Rico once economic conditions on the island had improved.[2]

Despite having arrived within a decade of each other, sharing linguistic and cultural backgrounds and hailing from the same Caribbean region, why did the Hevias and Anselmo Torres experience such dissimilar receptions in Milwaukee? This chapter will work to untangle those distinctions, focusing on the arrival of two Latino populations to Milwaukee in the middle of the twentieth century – Puerto Rican migrants who began settling in the city in the late 1940s, and Cuban exiles who first arrived in the early 1960s – and their constantly shifting positions within the city's broader economic, cultural, and social public. Shifting this study's focus from migrant workers in the rural counties of Wisconsin to newly-arrived Latinos in the urban spaces

[2] "Group Eases a Possible Migrant Racial Problem," *Milwaukee Journal,* October 25, 1952.

of mid-twentieth century Milwaukee, this chapter explores how Puerto Ricans and Cubans navigated questions of belonging and citizenship in their new home city within the context of an unstable and ever-changing Cold War landscape. As they had for Mexican immigrants beginning in the 1920s, religious organizations played a key role in receiving these Latin American emigres and helped define the social and political parameters by which the newest Spanish speakers would be integrated into their new communities.

Within the Midwestern context, studies of Puerto Ricans and Cuban migration in the middle decades of the twentieth century have been considerably constrained. In the case of Puerto Ricans in the upper Great Lakes region, historians have focused nearly exclusively on migration to and settlement within Chicago.[3] Scholarship on Cuban exiles, meanwhile, has not shifted far beyond the city of Miami, where a large majority of refugees settled following the Cuban Revolution.[4] While there have been several studies of Puerto Rican migrant and Cuban exile religiosity, none have yet attempted to bridge the experiences of these two groups.[5] This study, then, places the histories of these two migrant groups into conversation, focusing historians' attention on the impact of faith organizations in resettlement and integration processes in Milwaukee. This chapter argues that Milwaukee religious organizations took markedly

---

[3] Felix M. Padilla, *Latino Ethnic Consciousness: The Case of Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans in Chicago* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), 16-59; Maura I. Toro-Morn, "Boricuas in Chicago: Gender and Class in the Migration and Settlement of Puerto Ricans," in *The Puerto Rican Diaspora: Historical Perspectives,* ed. Carmen Teresa-Whalen and Víctor Vázquez-Hernández (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005), 128-150; Mérida M. Rúa, *A Grounded Identidad: Making New Lives in Chicago's Puerto Rican Neighborhoods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Lilia Fernández, *Brown in the Windy City: Mexicans and Puerto Ricans in Postwar Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 57-90.

[4] María Cristina García, *Havana USA: Cuban Exiles and Cuban Americans in South Florida* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

[5] The notable exception is Jay Dolan and Jaime Vidal's seminal survey of these two communities, which offers historians entry points for larger analysis. See Jay P. Dolan and Jaime R. Vidal, ed., *Puerto Rican and Cuban Catholics in the U.S., 1900-1965* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994). See also Ana Maria Diaz-Stevens, *Oxcart Catholicism on Fifth Avenue: The Impact of the Puerto Rican Migration upon the Archdiocese of New York* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993); Thomas A. Tweed, *Our Lady of the Exile: Diasporic Religion at a Cuban Catholic Shrine in Miami* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Gerald E. Poyo, *Cuban Catholics in the United States, 1960-1980* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).

different routes in the manner in which they interacted with, received, and integrated Cuban and Puerto Rican communities into the city's larger society, decisions that were often marked by perceived racial identities and political allegiances.

In the middle decades of the twentieth century, Puerto Ricans and Cubans contended with myriad barriers that prevented them from acceptance and integration into Milwaukee's economic, social, and cultural mainstream. At nearly each step of the way, the city's religious leaders and communities played a key role in defining the parameters by which this integration would, or would not, occur. This chapter argues that clergy and lay organizations drew upon popular conceptions of citizenship status and assimilability, all closely connected to the Cold War culture of the period, to better understand and process the arrival and settlement of the city's newest Latino emigres. Ultimately, each Spanish-speaking population would experience a distinct reception process in Milwaukee.

Through the postwar period, while Milwaukee's Latin American-descent populations would grow considerably, no cohesive Latino community would develop. The city's Mexican community, decimated by the economic depression and deportation drive of the 1930s, came to life again in the years following World War Two. Reports estimated that nearly three thousand Mexicans lived in southeast Wisconsin in the late 1940s, a number that could grow to nearly ten thousand with the arrival of Tejano migrant farmworkers to surrounding rural areas during the growing and harvest season.[6] Puerto Rican migrant workers began settling in Milwaukee in the late 1940s in small numbers, enlisted first as agricultural laborers to supplement the state's agrarian workforce. Industrial employers soon joined in the recruitment efforts, considerably accelerating the growth of Puerto Rican population during the 1950s. At its peak, the Puerto

[6] Salvador Valdovinos, "The Mexican in Milwaukee," Research paper, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (1950), Archival Resources on Hispanics in Wisconsin, Wisconsin Historical Society (hereafter referred to as WHS).

Rican community in Milwaukee reached approximately 5,000 residents, nearly all working-class laborers who struggled to survive economically in their new environment.[7] Cuban exiles, meanwhile, reached Milwaukee in the early 1960s, oftentimes after first having spent a short stay in Miami's budding refugee community. Between 1960 to 1976, the United States admitted more than 750,000 Cuban refugees. While Milwaukee's Cuban community never grew larger than more than a few hundred residents living within the city, reaching its peak in 1969, the exiles received substantial amounts of attention from the city's press and politicians.[8]

Relocated in Milwaukee under dissimilar circumstances, Puerto Rican and Cuban communities shared important parallels in the manner they were accommodated by the city and their process of resettlement. As it had for Mexican sojourners in the late 1920s, fears of attacks on religious liberty played an important role in the way Milwaukee religious organizations received Puerto Rican and Cuban emigres in the middle of the twentieth century. Historian Kevin Smith notes that across the U.S. North, religious leaders of Catholic and Protestant faith decried the supposed insidious spreading of socialist ideologies among their congregants, denouncing communism as a "rival, "radically materialistic" faith" that threatened to ruin the very standings of religion in American society.[9] Milwaukee clergy and laity stressed the need to protect and proselytize among these newest arrivals to stem the infiltration of communist "fronters" among Puerto Ricans and Cubans, and advocated for the efficacy of religious agencies' particular form of outreach to prevent the spread of atheism in the city. In welcoming the newest Cuban exiles to Milwaukee in May of 1962, for example, Charles O'Neil, executive

---

[7] "Puerto Rico Celebrates – and Worries," *Milwaukee Journal,* March 17, 1957.
[8] Silvia Pedraza-Bailey, "Cuba's Exiles: Portrait of a Refugee Migration," *The International Migration Review* 19, no. 1 (Spring 1985): 4-34; Alejandro Portes, "Dilemmas of a Golden Exile: Integration of Cuban Refugee Families in Milwaukee," *American Sociological Review* 34, no. 4 (August 1969): 505-518.
[9] Kevin D. Smith, "Breaking Faith: Religion, Americansim, and Civil Rights in Postwar Milwaukee," *Religion and American Culture* 20, no. 1 (Winter 2010): 59.

director of the Milwaukee branch of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, explained "Milwaukee has proven it has a warm heart and does care."[10] This chapter will reveal, however, that support for Puerto Rican migrants and Cuban refugees in the postwar era was often much more complicated than an opening of Milwaukee Christians' hearts and minds.

To combat the spread of communism among these national groups, Milwaukee religious organizations advocated the integration of Puerto Ricans and Cubans into the American mainstream starting through the local parish. To this end, churches and faith-based aid groups expected both populations to assimilate into the dominant culture of their adopted city. Integration would require Puerto Ricans and Cubans to learn English, adopt the cultural customs of U.S. churches, and interact with communities outside their national brethren. Historian Gary Pokorny notes that within the Milwaukee Catholic context, outreach to Latinos in the 1950s represented a shift in evangelization among Spanish speakers. Episcopal leadership advocated an "assimilation model of ministry" that was nearly "the antithesis of the national parish model" that had been offered to Milwaukee's Mexican immigrants in the 1920s. The preservation of language and culture no longer prevailed as the guiding force for integration – instead Spanish-speaking emigres were expected to take on the linguistic and faith traditions of their new homes in order to gain entry into the mainstream.[11]

The expectation of a swift assimilation into the American church structure, however, would prove the only shared aspect of outreach by Milwaukee churches to Latino communities during this period. Despite proselytizing to migrant and exile residents that shared linguistic needs and aspects of socio-cultural heritage, city churches of various denominations did not

[10] "58 Cuban Refugees Already Settled Here Without Fanfare," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* May 3, 1962.
[11] Gary Pokorny, "Ministry to Hispanics in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee," in *Milwaukee Catholicism*, ed. Steven M. Avella (Milwaukee: Knights of Columbus, 1991), 112.

develop a uniform policy for outreach to Puerto Ricans, Cubans, or Mexicans as a unified *Latino* population. During the postwar period, Catholic clergy and laypeople developed a series of ad hoc programs and outreach initiatives specific to each national group within the context of Americanization, often dependent on questions of migration status, residency length, socio-economic and educative background, and presumed political affiliation. Milwaukee religious organization's disparate outreach to Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and already-established Mexicans mirrored a broader reality amongst these communities in the mid twentieth century. Despite hailing from Latin America, sharing a common language, and being considered the city's newest immigrant-migrant-exile Milwaukeeans, these diverse national-descent populations did not initially coalesce into a pan-Latino community. During this period, members of these communities defined themselves as Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, or Cubans, or at times, as soon-to-be-Americans, displaying an ambivalence towards a shared sense of Latinidad.

Beyond faith organizations, Milwaukee's social service agencies, politicians, and press often portrayed difficulties arising between the newest Spanish-speaking arrivals and the city's citizens as merely a byproduct of cultural and language differences. Bureaucrats and social agencies argued that accelerated interaction between Milwaukeeans and Latinos would facilitate the crumbling of any facile barriers. Expanded social interaction, however, would not prove the panacea for all Spanish speakers to overcome the obstacles that prevented full participation in the city's economic, social, and cultural spheres. The opportunities afforded to Milwaukee Puerto Ricans and Cubans by city institutions across the mid-twentieth century differed starkly, often dependent on the racial, color, and class identities of the emigres themselves. While Puerto Ricans found themselves classified as a social "problem" to be solved, akin to how Mexicans had been portrayed by the city's periodicals in the 1920s, Cuban emigres discovered a much more

hospitable environment upon arrival in Milwaukee in the 1960s, classified not as "social problems," but instead as model exiles prepared for integration into American society.

Cubans and Puerto Ricans were not passive recipients of the beneficence offered by religious organizations and social aid agencies, nor did they simply fall lockstep into the integrationist efforts of Milwaukeeans. Through the postwar period, both populations emphasized that they would incorporate themselves into their new communities on their own terms. This chapter thus also analyzes the ways in which Puerto Ricans and Cubans resisted the label of *immigrant*, a term that, for Spanish-speaking emigres, carried the negative connotations their Mexican predecessors had borne. Instead, both communities claimed their *right* to exist, belong, and ultimately thrive in the United States on distinct prerogatives that emphasized their citizenship or exile status in the country and the city they had come to call home.

"It's the same old story, the flight to freedom and the flight from communism": Milwaukee's Religious Communities and the Politics of Cuban Refugee Resettlement

Cuban refugees, fleeing revolution at home, arrived in Wisconsin as welcomed guests and then potential citizens in the postwar decades. Settled as escapees of the newly-established communist regime under Fidel Castro, refugees served as markers for the United States government and its faith communities that American democracy and all of its promises of individual liberty were superior to communism. For their part, exiles were explicit in the use of language that reinforced their usefulness as Cold War warriors and supporters of religious liberty. During the 1960s, Cubans offered themselves as 'freedom fighters' grateful for American benevolence and readily prepared to proffer insight into how to stem the tide of rising communism in Latin America. The exiles' Milwaukee sponsors, Catholics and Protestants from diverse denominational backgrounds, infused a sense of religious morality into arguments in

support of the Cubans' "flights to freedom," arguing that support for refugees represented a larger effort to protect Christian faith and religiosity across national boundaries.

While Cuban presence in the United States dates to the early decades of the nineteenth century, the first significant migrations from the island to the mainland did not occur until the late 1950s. Cuban emigration to the United States on a large scale followed in three distinct phases, all instigated by shifting political concerns on the island. The first period, lasting from 1959 to 1962, followed the first tremors of the communist revolution in Cuba and witnessed the arrival of primarily upper and middle-class and professional emigres fleeing the Castro regime. The second stage, from 1965 to 1973, consisted of "freedom flights" from Havana to Miami that brought more than 300,000 refugees to the U.S. Many of these exiles had kin networks with some of the original exiles who had arrived in the first Cuban refugee period, and most came from Cuba's middle class. The "Mariel boatlift" of the 1980s marked the final era of large-scale Cuban migration, when more than 125,000 working-class and impoverished exiles arrived first on the shores of Florida before being resettled in communities across the U.S.[12]

While many early refugees would later portray their exile from Cuba as inevitable, the government of Fidel Castro initially enjoyed the support of members of most sectors of Cuban society in the aftermath of the revolution of 1959. In the wake of dictatorial control under Fulgencio Batista, many hoped for the restoration of democratic processes and administration, as well as the implementation of severely needed economic reforms. As Castro introduced radical transformations to government and society during the late 1950s early 1960s, however, wealthy and powerful Cubans feared changes to their privileged economic and social status on the island. What began with protests from large landowners and industrialists watching their businesses

[12] García, *Havana USA,* 1-6.

being seized by the government quickly spread to include proprietors and professionals, and then white-collar workers and petite-bourgeoisie of small traders and shop owners, who protested the strong-arm nature of their new government's reforms.[13]

Relations between religious institutions and the Castro regime took a chilly turn quickly following the conclusion of the 1959 coup. While the country's Catholic episcopal leadership briefly supported the new government's agrarian reform program and their efforts to end prostitution and political corruption on the island, by 1960, Castro had begun issuing decrees prohibiting public religious practice, confiscating churches and their property, ejecting foreign priests, and nationalizing education. Religious historian David Badillo notes that the Cuban Catholic hierarchy, sensing a sea change in their status on the island, began speaking out more stridently against the government, leading Castro to declare in early 1961 that the Church was a "fifth column of the counterrevolution." Some Catholic priests went farther than simply denouncing these anticlerical initiatives. Church leaders and foreign-born priests began leaving the island into exile in 1961, hoping to grow the Catholic Church from abroad and one day return after the ouster of Castro's regime.[14] The Cuban state's continued harassment and impeding of episcopal leadership culminated in the Curia's excommunication of the Cuban president in January of 1962.[15]

The early 1960s brought the first significant migration of Cuban exiles to the United States. By 1962 alone, more than 150,000 Cubans had arrived in the country and registered as

---

[13] Marifeli Pérez-Stable, *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course, and Legacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 61-81.
[14] Badillo, *Latinos and the New Immigrant Church,* 94-96. See also Joseph Holbrook, "The Catholic Church in Cuba, 1959-62: The Clash of Ideologies," *International Journal of Cuban Studies* 2, no. 3/4 (Autumn/Winter 2010): 264-275; Lillian Guerra, *Visions of Power in Cuba: Revolution, Redemption, and Resistance, 1959-1971* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 93-106, 170-197; Miguel De La Torre, "Pray for Elián: Religion and Politics in Miami," in *Latino Religions and Civic Activism in the United States,* ed. Gastón Espinosa, Virgilio Elizondo, and Jesse Miranda (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 249-262.
[15] "Fidel Castro Has Been Excommunicated," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* January 13, 1962.

political refugees. Most who arrived in south Florida beginning in 1959 were members of Cuba's economic and social elite, formerly owners of large firms, plantations, representatives of foreign corporations, and educated professionals. They saw their settlement in the U.S. – primarily initially in Miami – as a temporary exile, transitory until their American allies assisted them in overthrowing the Cuban government.[16] Those who joined the exodus community in Florida identified themselves as fiercely anti-communist, and many joined dissident movements with connections to anti-Castro groups that remained on the island. Of those who fled their homes in the first exile, Cuban refugees also displayed a stronger affinity to the Catholic faith and were more likely than the general Cuban public to attend religious services or observe sacraments.[17]

As Cuban exiles arrived by the thousands in coastal cities like Miami, city officials and religious leaders in the U.S. grappled with the enormous logistical task of providing humanitarian support to this population. The Cuban resettlement program that developed in the early 1960s was prompted in large part by the petitioning of religious agencies to the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations, creating a confluence of foreign policy considerations, immigration policy, and commitments to religious liberty. Due in large part to advocacy by religious organizations such as the Catholic Diocese of Miami, Cuban exiles received an unprecedented amount of federal assistance for emigration and settlement in the U.S. In December of 1959, President Dwight D. Eisenhower allocated $1 million in federal aid for the creation of the Cuban Refugee Emergency Center in Miami. When refugees began to arrive in large numbers in the summer of 1960, they found support in the recently-established Centro

[16] Pedraza-Bailey, "Cuba's Exile," 11-12.
[17] Badillo notes that while most Cubans considered themselves nominally Catholic, less than 20 percent of the Cuban population was active in either Protestant or Catholic congregations when Castro came to power. A substantial portion of those who fled the island in the early 1960s, however, included those who practiced religion regularly or considered themselves devout. Badillo, *Latinos and the New Immigrant Church,* 96.

Hispano Católico. Centro handled more than 450,000 exile cases from the fall of 1959 to the summer of 1968, assisting arriving refugees with employment and housing.[18]

Along with immediate humanitarian support, Miami's Catholic leadership also lobbied heavily for political support for exiles. Petitioning by Miami Bishop Coleman Carroll to the Eisenhower administration lead in large part to the establishment of the federally-funded Cuban Refugee Program in March of 1961. Continued appeals from Miami's religious community prompted President John F. Kennedy to send legislation to Congress with significant funding commitments for Cuban resettlement the following July. In justifying American support for the political exiles, Kennedy connected humanitarian concerns with foreign policy aims. Administration officials hoped that a viable resettlement program would promote faith abroad in the U.S.'s humanitarianism and further strengthen the image of American democracy in contrast to communism's growing influence in Latin America. The initiative provided financial support for exiles through subsidized housing, dispersal of everyday household goods, and employment retraining.[19] While the Catholic Church served as the most vocal religious advocate for Cubans, the U.S. Department of Health also worked with Protestant and Jewish agencies to provide immediate aid for arriving exiles in 1961.[20]

Upon settlement in the U.S., Cuban expatriates resisted the title of "immigrant," instead proudly asserting their federally-recognized status as *political refugees,* or *political exiles.* María Cristina García argues that this distinction allowed Cubans to assert "an identity that was political as well as cultural." Having fled Castro's regime, refugees styled themselves as Cold

---

[18] Ibid., 99-109.
[19] A.B. Shaffer, "Cuban refugees," *Editorial research reports 1962,* vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 1962), retrieved from http://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/cqresrre1962041100. See also Masud-Piloto, *From Welcomed Exiles to Illegal Immigrants,* 32-53.
[20] "Cubans Love Miami Nun," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* April 9, 1961. Along with the National Catholic Welfare Council, the Church World Service and the United Service of Hebrew Immigration Aid Society provide support to refugees in Miami.

War warriors that could offer the United States certain political benefits. Their flight from communism granted refugees a sense of authenticity to serve as spokespeople against spreading leftism in Latin America. By declaring their stay in the United States as temporary – a momentary respite until a combination of Cuban "freedom fighters" and U.S. military support could oust the Castro government – Cuban exiles spurned complete assimilation into American society as a rejection of their past lives and cultural heritage.[21]

Many refugee arrivals were initially convinced that their new American hosts would intervene quickly to prevent the establishment of a communist regime in their home country. The exiles grounded the hope of swift foreign intervention in Cuba in their recent memory of U.S.-Latin American relations, recalling the numerous intercessions on the part of U.S. military and intelligence forces in Central and South American nations that threatened to "go left" over the previous three decades. After the botched Bay of Pigs intervention in 1961, however, Cuban exiles considered their chances of overthrowing the Castro regime less immediately feasible and contemplated the prospect of making a home in their adopted country. As Miami's Cuban population swelled in the early 1960s, U.S. federal officials in Washington D.C. worked alongside religious organizations to create alternative resettlement plans for refugees that would relocate Cuban communities in cities across the country, including in Milwaukee.

"Until such a time as you can return to Cuba, Milwaukee is your fatherland": Religious Organizations and Cuban Refugee Resettlement in 1960s Milwaukee

While U.S. federal officials had considered the idea of resettling Cuban refugees outside of Florida as early as 1960, many refugees initially blanched at the prospect of leaving Miami and its growing "Little Cuba." The city offered the familiarity of a close-knit community of

[21] García, *Havana USA,* 1-6.

compatriots, the ability to speak Spanish, a similar climate, and the closeness to Cuba in case a changing political situation allowed exiles to return quickly to their home country. Settling in U.S. cities beyond Florida raised several other concerns for refugees. The fear of loosening bonds to cultural traditions preoccupied many, while others worried that if they failed economically in a new city far from Miami, they would be unmoored without the support of family and friends. The reluctance to leave Miami began to change by 1961, due in part to the failed Bay of Pigs invasion but also because of increasing overcrowding in the city that continued to strain resources and employment opportunities. The U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare began exploring resettlement options for Cubans in the summer of 1961. Officials coordinated with the U.S. Employment Service and the Public Housing Administration to find accommodations in urban centers across the U.S., while church and social organizations managed local resettlement arrangements. To encourage relocation, the federal government paid transportation costs from Miami, defrayed expenditures for relocation, and guaranteed return transportation if it became possible for exiles to return to their homeland.[22] Between 1959 and 1978, of the estimated 632,000 Cubans who had arrived in the United States, more than 469,000 were resettled in metropolitan areas outside of Florida.[23]

Volunteer organizations contended that relocation would be less difficult for Cuban refugees and alienation could be avoided if several families could be resettled together. Beginning in 1961, a coalition consisting of the Church World Service, the National Catholic Welfare Conference, the United Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, and the International Rescue Committee developed the national "Flights for Freedom" resettlement program. Initial plans

[22] "Refugee Resettlement is Big Federal Headache; Communities Urged to Help," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* May 26, 1962.
[23] Carla P. Davis, "Beyond Miami: The Ethnic Enclave and Personal Income in Various Cuban Communities in the United States," *The International Migration Review* 38, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 450-469.

called for the resettlement of roughly twenty-five families compromising approximately eighty individuals per new receiving city, where a local community would be prepared to invite exiles with sponsors, housing, employment, and support services. The cities of Cleveland, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Jersey City became the first to join the program in May of 1961.[24] In Miami, the Cuban Refugee Center produced promotional literature to be distributed to congregations around the country that emphasized "free" American Catholics' obligation to aid Cubans "escaping communist tyranny" in order to "fulfill their faith in freedom."[25]

Milwaukee's white, middle-class Catholic community initiated the first Cuban resettlement programs in Wisconsin in the summer of 1961. In July of that year, members of Milwaukee's Christian Family Movement at the suburban St. Matthias Church and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul (SVDP) facilitated the arrival and resettlement of two Cuban refugee families from in Miami. Felix "Tony" Gutierrez and Estrella arrived with their two children, along with the young couple of Carlos and Barbara Otero. Both families had first spent time in Miami, hoping for a move to a city less burdened by the sudden surge in exiles. Working in conjunction with the Catholic Family Life Program, the Milwaukee Christian Family Movement coordinated the resettlement process through Catholic Relief Services of the National Catholic Welfare Conference in Miami.[26]

Working with Catholic organizations, Milwaukee families collectively sponsored the Gutierrezes and Oteros and helped the arrivals find furnished housing accommodations, with one family settling near the Milwaukee School of Engineering and the other on the near south side.

---

[24] Shaffer, "Cuban refugees," *Editorial research reports 1962*.
[25] Miami Cuban Refugee Center, "Sponsor Cuban Refugees…Fulfill Their Faith in Freedom," undated flyer, Box 65, Folder 5, Catholic Charities USA Records, The American Catholic History Research Center and University, The Catholic University of America.
[26] "Cuban Refugee Family Arrives to Make Its Home in Milwaukee," *Milwaukee Journal,* July 19, 1961; "Help Two Cuban Families From Miami Settle in Milwaukee," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* July 29, 1961.

Sponsors also worked to find the two adult males work in the city. Both men, fluent in English, had held middle-class professional positions in their home country. In Cuba, Gutierrez had worked for decades as a manager of shipping department in publishing company while also running his own taxi company, while the young Otero had experience as an architect, designer, and builder. Neither expected to immediately resume their professions in the United States but hoped for jobs at least somewhat connected to their work experience.[27]

The Oteros, who had only been in Miami for a few days before making their way to Milwaukee's Mitchell Airport, had originally believed strongly in Castro's promise of a new, more equitable Cuban society. They explained to the Milwaukee *Catholic Herald Citizen,* however, that they soon realized he "told nothing but lies." One of their motivations for leaving the island had been the acceleration in surveillance among citizens, extending into religious services where Carlos explained congregants were "searched by guards when they enter and leave the church." Both husband and wife believed that Castro's regime would be overthrown someday and that they'd have the chance to return to their homeland.[28]

While the Oteros journey to Milwaukee from Cuba and Miami had been rather direct, the Gutierrez family experienced a much more arduous path to the Midwest. Estrella had fled the island nearly three years prior with their oldest daughter, first seeking asylum in Mexico. Tony left Havana a year and a half later after refusing to hire "communists" to drive his taxis as mandated by the state, and initially settled in Miami where he was joined by his wife and their young daughter Estrellita. Like Carlos Otero, Tony believed that Castro would eventually be overthrown by the Cuban people, but he professed no intention or desire to return to his home

---

[27] "Cuban Refugee Family Arrives to Make Its Home in Milwaukee," *Milwaukee Journal,* July 19, 1961; "State's First Cuban Refugee Family Arrives, Another Due," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* July 19, 1961.
[28] "Help Two Cuban Families From Miami Settle in Milwaukee," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* July 29, 1961.

country. His motivation? His two-month old son, Tony, who had been born in Miami during the family's initial exile. The refugee father explained proudly that his son, born stateside, was "an American, an all-American boy," and would be the family's ballast in their adopted home.[29]

The arrival of the Otero and Gutierrez families marked the beginning of a resettlement campaign by Milwaukee's Catholic community in 1961 and 1962. The city's two papers of records welcomed the arrival of the refugees to help allay the surging Miami community, where the *Milwaukee Sentinel* reported, "Lady Liberty – "mother of exiles" – [was] working overtime."[30] The *Sentinel*'s editorial board presented the image of a model refugee for Americans to not only assist, but in fact emulate. Cubans in Miami, according to the newspaper, had asked to return their welfare payments to the U.S. government, quoting one exile who explained, "I am returning my check because I have found a work to help me live decently with my family. There are others who may be in need of this aid. I am working now and it is not fair to accept your aid further." According to the paper's editors, the United States "could be proud to claim as citizens the destitute Cuban refugees" who arrived in Miami and made their way to Milwaukee, going as far as admonishing the "hundreds of deserving Milwaukeeans who receive public assistance" as well as the "hundreds of thousands who don't" to "contemplate and even emulate the spirit of these Cubans" in their "goal of happiness and freedom."[31]

The *Sentinel*'s rival newspaper heartily agreed with the sentiment, promoting the image of Cuban exiles as model refugees. Upon hearing of plans to resettle twenty-five Cuban families in Milwaukee during the summer of 1962, the *Journal*'s editorial board proclaimed that "a

---

[29] Ibid. The *United Press International* claimed that the reunited Gutierrezes had been the first family to register at the Miami refugee center in February of 1961. See "Cuban Refuges Superimposes Culture and Customs in Haven from Home," *United Press International,* April 14, 1966.
[30] "They Fled Castro," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* April 9, 1961.
[31] "Refugee Pride," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* August 11, 1961.

community the size of ours certainly can absorb such a small group." Milwaukee had, according to the newspaper, a successful history of "warmly welcome[ing]" refugees "in the recent past," including hundreds of European refugees in the postwar years, most of whom had "become good citizens" of the city. Like the *Sentinel*, the *Journal* assured Milwaukee residents that Cubans would not become public charges that would necessitate taxpayer dollars – sponsored by local churches and social organizations, Cubans would arrive in Wisconsin with housing and employment already secured. Besides, the paper offered, most of those fleeing Castro's communist Cuba were "professional people with marketable skills" who would never need to go on relief. Ultimately, the *Journal* declared, resettlement was a "worthwhile project," one that Milwaukee should join with an extended "helping hand" and full-throated support for "Cuban freedom seekers."[32]

Of the numerous organizations coordinating refugee resettlement in Milwaukee, SVPD proved the most active agency. Charles O'Neil, executive director of Milwaukee's SVDP branch, reported that fifteen families comprising 58 refugees were brought to Milwaukee between the summer of 1961 and 1962. The families were scattered across the city and the surrounding metro suburbs, and most importantly for SVPD, the director explained that they had "integrated very quickly" into their communities by attending their local Catholic congregations. O'Neil's image of ideal Cuban exiles reflected postwar conceptions of the nuclear family, a formation built around a primary male breadwinner capable of providing for his family without the support of state welfare services. "All of the breadwinners" according to O'Neil, were "professional, business and skilled people" who were "willing to work" and had "found gainful employment" in the city without having to rely on public relief. Their families were "closely-

[32] "25 Cuban Families," *Milwaukee Journal,* April 6, 1962.

knit" and each Cuban parent's primary concern was the future of their children. O'Neil explained that one of the driving concerns for leaving their homeland had been the parents' fears that their children would become "communist-indoctrinated" under the instruction of Castro's public education system. The *Sentinel* enthused that Cuban refugees had "proven to be industrious, talented people" and had been "assimilated, rather than segregated, into Milwaukee's melting pot of nationalities."[33]

O'Neil's observations regarding the educational and economic preparedness of Milwaukee's Cuban refugees reflected larger trends within this exile community. Most Cuban refugees who arrived in the United States brought with them a high level of educational attainment and occupational skills. These advantages facilitated an accelerated process of structural assimilation and rapid upward socioeconomic mobility in the U.S., especially in relation to contemporaneous immigrant and refugee populations. Sociologist Alejandro Portes, surveying Milwaukee's Cuban community in the late 1960s, remarked that Cubans had engaged in a "golden exile," adding that "seldom has a foreign group come to the United States so well prepared educationally and occupationally and seldom has this country received one so well."[34]

Following the successful arrival of just under one hundred refugees, more than thirty Milwaukee civic, church, labor, and social organizations met in early spring of 1962 to plan the sponsorship and resettlement of additional Cuban families. Calling themselves the Milwaukee Area Resettlement Committee (MARC), the group included representatives from the Jewish Welfare Fund, Inc., the Greater Milwaukee Council of Churches, the Milwaukee Federation of

---

[33] "58 Cuban Refugees Already Settled Here Without Fanfare," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* May 3, 1962.
[34] Portes, "Dilemmas of a Golden Exile," 507. Portes contended that social scientists thus studied Cuban refugees in the 1960s not as a "problem," as they might study other refugee or immigrant groups, but as a distinct story of integration and assimilation.

Lutheran Churches, Missouri Synod, and the Milwaukee County YMCA.[35] As committee members ramped up their resettlement efforts, MARC worked to strengthen relationships with federal agencies by reaching out to the Cuban Refugee Resettlement Program in the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare and the U.S. Employment Service.[36]

Over the next year, SVDP and MARC facilitated the migration on average of more than one Cuban refugee family per month to Milwaukee.[37] Even with the growing support from religious, civic, and social organizations, the director of Milwaukee's Catholic Social Welfare Bureau Monsignor Joseph P. Springob stressed the need for more sponsors from Milwaukee and its surrounding suburbs. According to the National Catholic Welfare Conference, agencies across the U.S. continued to resettle 500 Cuban refugees per week to keep pace with the influx of more than 1,500 refugees arriving weekly in Miami. MARC's establishment allowed for the distribution of duties to numerous religious and civic institutions. Catholic organizations continued to take the lead, as members of the Christian Family Movement took charge of securing area sponsors for each arriving family while the local Catholic Social Welfare Council saw to administrative details. The search for sponsors also expanded beyond religious circles. The Milwaukee Association of Commerce indicated that multiple industrial firms had expressed interest in helping sponsor families, while the Milwaukee County Labor Council (AFL-CIO) noted that several labor unions had expressed similar enthusiasm.[38]

---

[35] "Cuban Refugees Care Sought in Milwaukee," *Milwaukee Journal,* March 27, 1962; "25 Cuban Families May Settle Here," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* April 3, 1962.
[36] "Catholic Welfare Bureau to Aid Refugees," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* May 26, 1962. The national Cuban Refugee Resettlement Program stressed that very few of the refugees had gone on public relief, but were a refugee to lose their job, they'd receive support from federal rather than local relief offices. In addition, the federal government worked to allay fears of receiving communities that "outsiders" would be competing for available jobs by pointing out that most refugees did not want to remain in the country and hoped to promptly return to Cuba.
[37] "The Cuban Refugee V – Work, Housing Essential Aids," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* March 8, 1963.
[38] "Meeting Set on Aid to Cuban Refugees," *Milwaukee Journal,* April 19, 1962.

In the summer of 1962, MARC and representatives from twenty sponsoring churches and fraternal organizations welcomed the largest convoy of exiles to the city to date. Two hundred Milwaukeeans, including twenty-two sponsors and all fourteen Cuban families that had already resettled in the city, met eighty-one Cuban refugees arriving from Miami on a "freedom flight" at Milwaukee's Mitchell Airport.[39] After receiving warm rolls and milk, the refugees settled in for an extended program of welcome speeches. After opening remarks from Reverend Dr. Richard W. Miller, president of the Greater Milwaukee Council of Churches, Father George A. Kolanda, pastor at St. Joseph's Church in Cudahy and representatives of the Milwaukee Catholic Archdiocese explained to the arrivals, "Until such a time as you can return to Cuba, Milwaukee is your fatherland." U.S. Representative Henry S. Reuss, told the refugees that "Milwaukee has for more than a century welcomed people who have come to breathe fair air after having lived under a tyrant." Albert Davis, executive director of the International Institute, concluded the program by reading a welcome message from Governor Gaylord Nelson.[40]

By the following spring of 1963, the administration of Milwaukee's Cuban resettlement program grew into a larger, more interfaith effort. In March of that year, the Episcopal Diocese of Milwaukee welcomed more than twenty Cuban families in a program they called "Operation Good Samaritan." The spring 1963 group arrived on a new set of what their sponsors called "Flights in Freedom," this time subsidized by the Church World Service, the National Council of Churches, and assorted Catholic and Jewish agencies. Just as the refugees who had arrived the previous summer, the arrivals received a glowing reception from the city's religious community.

---

[39] "81 Refugees From Cuba Arrive Here," *Milwaukee Journal,* June 10, 1962. While the term "freedom flight" is typically used to refer to government-sponsored airlifts to reunite Cubans with relatives in U.S. that lasted from 1965 to 1973, the Milwaukee press and religious community referred to the 1962 arrivals with the phrase.
[40] "Welcome Slated at Airport for Cuban Refugees," *Milwaukee Journal,* June 8, 1962; "Cubans Look for Sponsors," *Milwaukee Journal,* June 11, 1962.

Episcopal bishop Donald H.V. Hallock organized the group's welcome at the airport and coordinated group-chartered buses to a celebration at All Saints Episcopal Church. The refugees and their sponsors enjoyed a prayer service, an official welcome extended by Milwaukee Mayor Henry Maier, and a luncheon.[41] To ensure the fortification of the refugees' religiosity, religious agencies supplied their sponsored families with prayer books in Spanish as a welcome gift.[42]

Working with MARC, sponsors settled the refugees across southeast Wisconsin, finding homes and employment for them in Milwaukee, Waukesha, Beloit, Kenosha, and Madison, as well as placing children in parochial schools in their new communities. Despite arriving with higher educational attainment than most Latin American immigrants, language remained the largest barrier for economic advancement and social integration for Cuban refugees. The exiles found opportunities to expand their English through immigrant settlement houses, including the International Institute and the Jewish Community Center, where they took courses with other "new Americans." Both agencies also offered those Cubans interested in pursuing permanent American citizenship the opportunity to do so.[43] Charles O'Neil of SVDP believed the Cubans' enthusiasm to enroll in English classes and join other immigrants exploring the possibility of citizenship represented "their deep sense of independence and the will to acclimate themselves to American life," as well as a desire to reject "charity" so as to "earn what they get."[44]

With a growing Cuban community spread across the Milwaukee metro area, exiles in the city jumped at a surprise opportunity to facilitate the resettlement of family members who had been stuck in legal limbo on the Cuban island in 1965. After years of strictly controlling

---

[41] "Cuban Refugees Will Need Housing, Job and Language Aid," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* December 15, 1962; "New Life Awaits 70 Cubans Here," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* February 28, 1963.
[42] "The Cuban Refugee V – Work, Housing Essential Aids," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* March 8, 1963.
[43] "The Cuban Refugee IV – Language Often Stumbling Block," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* March 7, 1963.
[44] "Cuban Teacher Milwaukee Worker," *Kenosha News,* November 26, 1962.

emigration from the island, the Castro regime announced that Cubans would be allowed to leave for the United States in October of that year. While the administration of President Lyndon Johnson worked to create a program that would advantage vetted political exiles and the family members of those already settled in the U.S., more than three thousand expectant refugees immediately left the island on small boats, forcing Miami resettlement organizations and affiliates like the Catholic Archdiocese to scramble to meet their needs. The following month, Cuban and U.S. officials negotiated an airlift schedule that prioritized family reunification for Cuban refugees already resettled on the mainland. While American officials initially expected that approximately 100,000 Cubans would arrive under the new refugee agreement, the twice-daily "Freedom Flights" arranged through the Swiss embassy in Havana that flew from December 1965 to early 1973 brought more than 250,000 Cubans to the U.S.[45]

Unlike the original "freedom flights" of 1961 to 1963, the resettlement initiatives begun in 1965 placed Cuban families already in the United States as the responsible parties for facilitating many of the contacts that brought new refugees to the mainland. In Milwaukee, religious leaders in contact with activities in Miami believed there would be an immediate influx of refugees hoping to join family members in Wisconsin and moved to support the city's Cuban families in their outreach efforts. Reverend Gilbert Marrero, pastor at the Spanish Baptist Church, coordinated meetings at the Milwaukee Christian Center with many of the agencies that had originally worked with Cuban refugees in the early 1960s. Marrero turned to a newly formed

[45] "12 Months After Accepting Castro's Challenge, United States Has Resettled 50,000 Cuban Refugees," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* January 7, 1967.

Milwaukee organization, the Cuban Resettlement Coordinating Committee (CRCC), to begin contacting potential relatives and friends in Cuba that might make their way to the Midwest. [46]

Working alongside Marrero's Spanish Baptist Church and the Milwaukee Catholic archdiocesan settlement division of Catholic Social Services, the CRCC began outreach work within the city's Cuban community in late 1965. The committee secured funding from several religious organizations to help defray initial resettlement costs and coordinated with the Catholic archdiocese-supported Spanish Center to send letters and questionnaires to more than one hundred Cuban families in Milwaukee inquiring the number of relatives they expected to join them from the island. Committee members used this information to begin securing housing and employment for the pending arrivals. By the end of the year, the CRCC expected more than two hundred refugees to arrive within the following six months.[47]

In December of 1965, the first refugees to emigrate under the new U.S.-Cuban agreement arrived in Milwaukee. As had been the case for those refugees that had proceeded them, the newest exiles were met at Mitchell Airport by the CRCC and their families for a reception to celebrate the long-awaited reunions.[48] Over the following five years, refugees from the island and those who looked to resettle from Miami continued to make their way to Milwaukee with support from organizations like the CRCC. Exiles found in the Midwestern city welcoming hosts ready and willing to offer opportunities in housing, employment, and possible integration into

---

[46] The Milwaukee Area Cuban Resettlement Committee (MARC) disbanded in April of 1963, with individual members pledging to continue resettlement efforts on an individual basis and through official agencies. "Cuba Resettle Committee Disbands Here," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* August 8, 1963.

[47] "Housing, Jobs Sought Here For Refugees," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* November 13, 1965; "Plans Being Developed to Resettle Cubans Locally," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* November 20, 1965; "237 Cuban Refugees Expected," *Milwaukee Journal,* December 10, 1965.

[48] Torres quoted in "City Welcomes Cuban Refugees," *Milwaukee Journal,* December 12, 1965. See also "Cubans Here Await Flights of Refugees," *Milwaukee Journal,* December 3, 1965; "8 Cuban Refugees Arrive Here," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* December 4, 1965; "Cuban Greets Wife After 4 Long Years," *Milwaukee Journal,* December 5, 1965; Cuban Family Reunited," *Milwaukee Journal,* April 17, 1966.

Milwaukee's general society. Religious organizations affiliated with these resettlement agencies saw in the Cuban refugees potential new congregants and outspoken defenders of liberty – and most importantly for faith-based groups, religious liberty – that could be welcome additions to Milwaukee's religious community. Through the decade, most Milwaukeeans agreed with Charles O'Neil, executive director of the local SVDP branch, who expressed in 1962, "Experience has convinced us that these are good people and that they adjust quickly… I think they (the Cubans) are making a contribution to Milwaukee."[49]

"The refugees are people who are well prepared to work and who do not want charity": Cuban Refugees as Model Exiles and Candidates for Assimilation

Milwaukee Cubans experienced a much more complicated process of integration in Wisconsin than those communities that settled in Miami. Historian Gerald Poyo argues that Cubans that initially settled in Florida rejected the idea of assimilation, believing that their situation was temporary and that they would eventually return home. These exiles instead chose a form of integration that "sought ways of adjusting without losing their Cubanness."[50] This may have been true for Cubans emigrating to areas with large concentrations of their compatriots, but in cities like Milwaukee – where the Cuban population never grew much larger than a few hundred people during the 1960s – it became much more difficult to maintain a sense of ethnic and cultural separation. Many Milwaukee Cubans took seriously the possibility of assimilation, grappling with the implications of abandoning the hope of a homecoming to the island and potentially joining Milwaukee society. With prospects of returning to the island fading after the failed Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961, many emigres quickly overcame their reluctance to integrate into their new Wisconsin communities and came to see themselves as aspiring Americans.

---

[49] "Area Likely to Take 25 Cuban Families," *Milwaukee Journal,* April 3, 1962.
[50] Poyo, *Cuban Catholics in the United States,* 2.

Claiming an identity as exiles, in contrast to immigrants, also allowed Cubans to distance themselves from the Latino residents that had preceded them in settlement in Milwaukee. Of lighter skin, hailing primarily from Cuba's upper and middle class, and arriving with much higher levels of economic and educational attainment, Cubans saw themselves – and were perceived by Milwaukeeans – as a class apart from their Spanish-speaking peers. Proudly announcing their former careers on the island as doctors, professors, and professionals, Cubans arriving to the city in the 1960s hoped to avoid the negative connotations associated with Mexican immigrants and Puerto Rican migrants, including issues connected to employment opportunities, perceived criminality, and questioned legal status. For the most part, Cubans who arrived in the city did not interact with the other Latino populations. Discrepancies in how Cubans viewed themselves racially, in how they understood skin color, in class positionalities, and in political orientations all impacted Cubans' apprehension to be considered part of Milwaukee's growing Latino community.[51]

The SVDP's Charles O'Neil was not the only resident of Milwaukee to view Cuban refugees as "good people" who would be probable candidates for integration into the city's larger social and cultural tapestry. Unlike the Mexican and Puerto Rican migrants who had preceded them in settlement in the city, Cuban exiles faced fewer obstacles in becoming welcomed members of U.S. society. In the eyes of many city natives, the Spanish-speaking refugees carried the cultural, educational, and social capital that would make them prime candidates for assimilation. Sociologist Alejandro Portes reported that Milwaukeeans saw in the Cuban refugees a ""middle-class" ethic and style of life," a capitalistic striver mentality manifested in their search for employment comparable to that which they had held on the island, as well as

[51] James P. Dolan and Jaime R. Vidal, "Introduction," in *Puerto Rican and Cuban Catholics in the U.S.,* 4.

their public rejection of city, county, and federal welfare.[52] Milwaukee resettlement agencies, as well as refugees themselves, emphasized Cubans' class background, racial makeup, and political beliefs in creating the image of model exiles worthy of support from the larger city community.

Clerical and lay volunteers saw within programs like "Operation Good Samaritan" multiple benefits for Milwaukeeans and Cuban refugees. George Leisenring, Milwaukee area chairman of the Episcopal diocesan refugee committee, believed that "the friendship and interest" sponsors "invested" in the Cuban refugee's successful future would produce the greatest value for the city and the arrivals. Engaging in fellowship with the exiles, according to the hopeful Leisenring, would spur a new impetus for involvement in "other social problems at our doorstep" for the "public-spirited church people" of the diocese and city.[53] According to SVPD's O'Neil, sponsorship for the refugees expanded beyond providing housing and employment opportunities, or as he explained, "not just a matter of helping to get the gas and electricity turned on." O'Neil believed the relationship between sponsors and exiles demonstrated the true meaning of fellowship, of "concern and compassion in a Christian way." Sponsors, according to the director, felt "a responsibility, and they follow through. They become friends of the families." For their part, refugees presented themselves as welcoming recipients of the religious largesse offered by their sponsors. One arriving exile referred to the supporting churches as "guardians," and explained to the local press that his trip from Cuba to Milwaukee had been "like a dream." The refugees showed their gratitude for their sponsors' hospitality and support in different ways. The Suarez family, for example, named their first newborn, Richard Robert, after their sponsors Richard Scheller of Shorewood and Robert DeVries of Menominee Falls.[54]

---

[52] Portes, "Dilemmas of a Golden Exile," 507.
[53] Ibid.
[54] "Cubans' 1st Words to City: 'Thank You a Million," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* March 4, 1963; "The Cuban Refugee V – Work, Housing Essential Aids," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* March 8, 1963.

Religious leaders shepherding the arrival and resettlement of the refugees emphasized the image of self-sustaining, industrious Cuban refugees. Reverend Fergus With, assistant at the Christ Episcopal Church in suburban Whitefish Bay, believed that refugees weren't asking for "permanent charity" when they received the aid of the city's churches. Instead, he explained that Cuban exiles wanted "to stand on their own two feet, earn their own living, live in their own houses as soon as possible."[55] In this vein, the city's religious establishment as well as newspapers of record promoted stories of Cubans who had arrived in Milwaukee with nearly nothing and made a life for themselves and their families. The *Milwaukee Journal*, for example, described the story of Alfredo Lima, a Chinese-Cuban chef who had operated four restaurants in Cuba until government officials seized his businesses in 1960. Holding differing political convictions than those espoused by the Castro regime, Lima fled his country with only with his hat, two suits, two changes of underwear, and a pair of shoes, leaving his family behind. After spending a short stay in Miami, Lima arrived in Milwaukee, where he opened a Chinese restaurant called The Bamboo Room.[56]

The local press actively promoted the image of Cuban refugees persevering against assumedly insurmountable odds. In the summer of 1966, the *Milwaukee Journal* profiled the Quintana family, who had settled in Wisconsin in 1964. The newspaper commented that like other refugees, the Quintanas had arrived with barely anything in Miami when they fled Havana three years prior, having sacrificed their teaching careers, their home, their savings, and all their possessions. And yet, the *Journal* remarked, the industrious will of husband and wife Arturo and Olga had opened endless possibilities for social and economic success in the United States and eventual integration into Milwaukee's general community. The Quintanas had lived a privileged

[55] "Ask Sponsors for Refugees," *Milwaukee Journal,* December 15, 1962.
[56] "Cuban Refugee Family Holds Reunion Over Chinese Dinner," *Milwaukee Journal,* November 6, 1964.

life in Havana, where both held doctorates in education and taught in prestigious high schools and universities. When Olga and Arturo lost their jobs in 1963, the Quintanas fled the island on a Red Cross ship with the help of the Swiss ambassador. With all their possessions seized at the dock at departure, the penniless family arrived in Miami where they were befriended by lay volunteers at a Catholic Church welfare agency. Thanks to the beneficence of Miami's Episcopal bishop, the Quintanas made their way to Illinois, where they again turned to the Swiss embassy for assistance in reestablishing their teaching credentials. The couple eventually accepted positions as Spanish teachers at area high schools in Milwaukee in 1964.[57]

Stable employment in hand, the Quintanas moved into the middle-class suburb of West Allis, a popular destination for upwardly-mobile white Milwaukeeans in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The move seemed to be a permanent one for the family. Arturo expressed little optimism for political change in his home country that would allow for a safe return and believed that Milwaukee would "probably be our home for the rest of my life." All things considered, however, the Quintanas believed that the resettlement would be a comfortable one. Arturo explained that his family had experienced no racial or cultural prejudice or discrimination in their new community. The only difficulties they had faced in Wisconsin, in fact, had been a surmountable language barrier and cold winters: "We are so grateful to be here. For us there is nothing like Wisconsin, and the people are so wonderful. We have been accepted and permitted to resume our careers."[58]

Unlike Mexican or Puerto Rican migrants that had preceded them, Cubans in Milwaukee and in other larger metropolitan areas faced little of the racial discrimination reserved for most

---

[57] "Cuban Refugees Appreciate New Life Here," *Milwaukee Journal,* August 28, 1966. Arturo taught Spanish at New Berlin High School while Olga taught Spanish at Muskego High School.
[58] Ibid.

Latin American arrivals. For the most part, Cuban exiles arriving in the city in the 1960s could "pass" as either European or Spanish, allowing them access to a similar position within color- and raced-based social and economic hierarchies in the United States. As was the case in Puerto Rico, racial social hierarchies in Cuban society closely paralleled class divisions as whites were much more highly represented within the upper economic and social Cuban strata. The post-revolution exodus was largely settled along class lines, leading to a pronounced underrepresentation of Cubans of color within the refugee population. A 1969 study of Milwaukee's Cuban community found that while the most recent Cuban census placed the proportion of black and people of mixed racial descent on the island at more than a quarter of the population (most likely an undercounting), the proportion of Cubans of color among the exile population barely reached 4 percent by the end of the decade.[59]

In addition to circumventing the racial discrimination experienced by other Spanish speakers in Milwaukee, Cuban exiles like the Quintanas found that integration into their new American communities also did not necessitate a rejection of their cultural identity as Cubans. Arturo and Olga joined the Cuban Family Association, a social organization created by Cuban expats living in southeast Wisconsin, and they maintained their linguistic heritage through their teaching careers. They believed their family's story could, however, serve as a model for future refugees from their homeland to follow – a love of liberty, the rejection of leftism, and an adherence to hard work would offer success for any expat who blazed their own path in Milwaukee. Arturo explained that a successful Cuban refugee was,

---

[59] Portes, "Dilemmas of a Golden Exile," 507. For more on racial politics in Cuba and their confluence with class structures, see Mark Q. Sawyer, *Racial Politics in Post-Revolutionary Cuba* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 36-78; Esteban Morales Domínguez, *Race in Cuba: Essays on the Revolution and Racial Inequality* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2013); Karen Y. Morrison, *Cuba's Racial Crucible: The Sexual Economy of Social Identities, 1750-2000* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 190-268.

> a person who loves freedom and abhors communism. He finds he must leave his homeland, which he once loved, to come to this country. The refugee comes here to seek freedom of speech, thought, and religion. The refugees are people who are well prepared to work and who do not want charity. They only want the opportunity to use their talents that God has given them in a free society.[60]

The Quintanas' story was in many ways indicative of larger cultural and national shifts in identity among Milwaukee's Cuban refugees. While refugee arrivals to the United States brought with them considerable attachment to and pride in their previous style of life, they continued to negotiate what it meant to be "Cuban" as an exile in the Midwest. According to a 1969 study of those living in the city, while 73 percent of interviewees were comparatively less happy in the United States than they had been before being forced into exile, 58 percent of Cuban émigrés expressed great satisfaction with their settlement, while another 31 percent voiced at least some fulfilment with their time in Wisconsin. Asked if they would repatriate to Cuba if Castro were overthrown, 35 percent of refugees declared that they would not return and would continue to make their home in Milwaukee. The question of integration and assimilation became even more muddled within the second generation of exiles, as a plurality of Cuban refugees in Milwaukee preferred for their children to adopt an "American" identity instead of primarily identifying as "Cuban." According to the researchers, all interviewees seemed, at a minimum, to have adapted to new life in Milwaukee, with varying levels of "integration." Unlike their Mexican and Puerto Ricans peers, however, the researchers determined that any lack of integration could *not* be attributed to discrimination, but rather to cultural affinities Cubans continued to hold to their home country. The researchers emphasized this point by paraphrasing a typical statement from Cubans in Milwaukee: "Things may not be perfect here, but they are certainly better much better than we thought they were going to be."[61]

---

[60] "Cuban Refugees Appreciate New Life Here," *Milwaukee Journal,* August 28, 1966.
[61] Portes, "Dilemmas of a Golden Exile," 514.

"If you could implant the American way of life in Cuba, there wouldn't be a chance for communism, my friend.": Cuban Refugees as Spokespeople Against Communism

American support of Cuban refugees was part of larger Cold War-era projects to stem the growth of communism in Latin American. Following the Cuban Revolution in 1959, a primary goal of U.S. foreign policy in the region was to prevent a "second Cuba" from emerging. While engaging covert actions and supporting paramilitary initiatives in countries with leftist governments already in power throughout the middle of the twentieth century, U.S. officials also turned to refugee policies as a weapon in the fight against communism. Federal support for resettlement programs administered by religious organizations represented a "soft-power" tactic to not only maintain the allegiance of anti-Castro exiles arriving in the U.S., but also an effort to project the image of a humane and inviting American democracy across Latin America.[62]

Exiles that escaped to Florida beginning in 1959 were a mixture of pro-Batista supporters, Conservative anti-Castroites, and less politically aligned Cubans seeking to escape their country's political uncertainty. Immediately upon arrival in Miami, supporters of the Batista government created the structures to support an anti-revolutionary counter initiative against the Castro regime, establishing newspapers, lobbying U.S. politicians, and fostering the funding sources for paramilitary forces that might one day seize power on the island. Conservative refugees that followed the initial migration of Batista supporters in the early 1960s – many of whom came from the Cuban upper and middle class and had lost their businesses and material wealth following Castro's nationalization of the country's banks and industries – fostered similar aspirations. Cuban exiles with ambitions for an armed counterattack against the Castro

---

[62] Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 158-206; Hal Brands, *Latin America's Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012); Stephen G. Rabe, *The Killing Zone: The United States Wages Cold War in Latin America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 59-118.

government found willing allies in the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), who provided a yearly budget, staff, and training for the anticommunists.[63]

Armed insurrection was not the only tool Cuban refugees and U.S. federal officials had at their disposal for promoting an anti-communist message. U.S. resettlement programs functioned as part of a deliberate strategy to employ Cuban immigrants as spokespeople to discredit the Cuban Revolution. International studies scholars Gil Loescher and John Scanlan note that refugee policy regulating Cuban entry into the U.S. represented a "double standard" that gave preference to exiles fleeing communism and seeking liberty in "democratic America" while denying such beneficence to immigrants who didn't fulfil a U.S. foreign policy objective. Both executive action and legislative directive during the late 1950s and 1960s, according to Loescher and Scanlan, equated "refugee" with someone "turning his or her back on Communism." The Cuban exile situation thus laid bare contradictions within U.S. refugee policy as political anxieties on the mainland often outweighed, or at a minimum superseded, humanitarian concerns stemming from the island.[64]

Cuban exiles became "cold warriors" almost immediately upon arriving in Miami, oftentimes thanks in large part to the influence of religious organizations that had aided their resettlement to the U.S. Efforts specifically by Catholic episcopal leadership to "save" Cubans from the feared spread of atheism in Cuba, according to David Badillo, "converted religious

---

[63] Carlos Forment notes that a Conservative Cuban refugee-CIA coalition "transformed the city of Miami into the largest CIA field station in the world outside of Langley, Virginia" in the early 1960s, with a yearly budget of $100 million, a staff of 300 U.S. agents, the employment of more than 5,000 Cuban exiles, and more than 50 front organizations. At the collaboration's height, the CIA had "become the largest employer in the South Florida area." See Carlos A. Forment, "Political Practice and the Rise of an Ethnic Enclave: The Cuban American Case, 1959-1979," *Theory and Society* 18, no. 1 (January 1989): 47-81, quoted on 62; Aviva Chomsky, *A History of the Cuban Revolution* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 75-82.

[64] Gil Loescher and John A. Scanlan, *Calculated Kindness: Refugees and America's Half-Door Open, 1945 to Present* (New York: The Free Press, 1986), 61-84.

sentiments into political awareness."[65] In the early decades of the Cold War, the U.S. government thus placed much trust in the Catholic Church's ability to speak out against leftist governments across the world, but especially in Latin America. Historian Anita Casavantes Bradford notes that the Catholic Church's "anti-communist credentials were impeccable," as they "consistently condemned communism as a threat to Christian civilization" through the second half of the twentieth century.[66]

If the U.S. demonstrated a preference for refugees willing to speak out against their home country's leftist governments, Milwaukee's Cuban exiles proved more than willing to act as anticommunist campaigners and vocal supporters of American democracy. Refugees frequently gave interviews to the city's newspapers, presented at religious organizations, and held press conferences in conjunction with major foreign policy events occurring in Cuba. Carlos and Babara Otero, two of Milwaukee's first Cuban refugees, jumped into the work only a few months after arriving in the city when they presented at the National Convention of the Catholic Council for the Spanish Speaking, held at the Pfister Hotel in downtown Milwaukee in April of 1962. The Oteros described in detail the material, social, and cultural sacrifices they'd been forced to make in fleeing Castro's regime, while also proudly emphasizing the warm "reception and assimilation into the American community" their Christian Family Movement sponsors had facilitated for them in Milwaukee.[67] Dr. Ramon Casas, a Cuban exile starting an internship at a Chicago hospital to recertify his medical license, reiterated the Oteros' story of personal sacrifice

---

[65] Badillo, *Latinos and the New Immigrant Church,* 101.
[66] Casavantes Bradford, ""Let the Cuban Community Aid its Haitian Brothers,"" 107. Gerald Poyo notes that Cuban Catholic refugees "used the vehicles of faith and Church to promote their continuing connection to Cuban nationality and a claim to their identity of origin." The strong exile culture and consciousness they developed in Miami included a vehement rejection of communism. See Gerald E. Poyo, ""Integration without Assimilation": Cuban Catholics in Miami, 1960-1980," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 20, no. 4 (Fall 2002): 91-109, quoted on 92.
[67] Proceedings of the Eleventh Conference National Catholic Conference for the Spanish Speaking (Milwaukee: May 1962), 67-68, Pamphlet Collection, WHS.

(what he called "the price of freedom") at the hands of the communist government at the same conference. Casas explained to the conference goers that the Catholic Church in the United States could "play a definitive role in reviving and strengthening the faith of the Cuban" by continuing their resettlement efforts and speaking out against communist insurgencies spreading across Latin America.[68]

Refugees regularly placed the abundant opportunities available in the United States in opposition to the stilted future available to them in communist Cuba. In anticipation of another incoming "freedom flight" in June of 1962, the *Milwaukee Journal* interviewed a young Cuban couple that had arrived just a few weeks before, Eduardo and Sara de la Torre. A member of the Revolutionary Recuperation Movement, a secret organization of anti-Castroites plotting to overthrow the communist government, Eduardo had been jailed twice by the regime. Fearing harsher reprisals than imprisonment, their "main object" had been to "get out of Cuba as fast" as they could, leaving most of their material belongings and familial connections behind. They now had had no intention of returning to Cuba if they could find a way of making a living in the United States. Although Sara had been able to secure employment as a messenger at an appraisal company Eduardo, an accountant who had run his own business in Cuba, was still in search for a job. He expressed no doubt, however, that life in the United States would offer more opportunities than anything that awaited him in Cuba.[69]

Some refugees spoke of the stolen economic and educational opportunities taken from them by the new communist regime. Thirty-three-year-old Nicolas Lebredo arrived in Milwaukee in June of 1962. He had served as teacher of math and Spanish at a private school in Havana that had been founded by his grandfather two generations earlier. When the Castro

---

[68] "Refugees Give All to Flee Cuba," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* May 11, 1962.
[69] "74 Refugee Families to Arrive Saturday," *Milwaukee Journal,* June 7, 1962.

government seized the school in May of 1961, Lebredo made his way to Miami with his wife and two children. Nicholas, now working in a box factory in Milwaukee, believed strongly that Castro's time in power would be short. He explained to the *Kenosha News* of the strong chances of Castro's imminent ouster, as "almost 80 percent of the Cuban people are against him. And when he is overthrown, I will probably return to my school. But that might not be for some time." In the interim, Lebredo would make the most of his time in the United States, improving his English skills and eventually recertifying his teaching credentials.[70]

Other exiles spoke of the misplaced excitement they had placed in Cuba's new leader, and of their transformation into anti-Castroites in the years following his announcement of a full-blown communist revolution in the home country. Enrique Aizcorbe, resettled in Milwaukee, had initially hoped and believed that "Castro was human…decent…honest." Having fled Cuba in 1959 after the American-owned construction firm he worked for was confiscated by the Castro regime, Aizcorbe was fortunate in that he arrived in the U.S. with a high level of English fluency and experience working in Cuban business. After settling in Milwaukee, both Enrique and his wife Anna took positions helping refugees and immigrants to the city. Enrique became a staff member at the International Institute, where he worked with "new Americans," while Anna found employment with the Episcopal diocese, where she expanded resettlement preparations for Cuban refugees. Both now avowed anti-communists, the Aizcorbes believed strongly that there was "self-respect in being self-supporting and doing without public assistance," ideals they forwarded to their clients at the International Institute and the Episcopal diocese.[71]

Exiles stepped forward to offer their opinions to the Milwaukee press on U.S. efforts to remove the communist government from power in Cuba. Following President John F. Kennedy's

---

[70] "Cuban Teacher Milwaukee Worker," *Kenosha News,* November 26, 1962.
[71] "The Cuban Refugee I – Says Castro Deluded His Countrymen," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* March 4, 1963.

blockade in the wake of the Cuban missile crisis in October of 1962, Cuban refugees assembled at the International Institute issued a blanket endorsement of the U.S. administration's response. The exiles considered themselves prepared to support the United States' demand for the removal of Soviet missiles in Cuba and urged for further sanctions or actions against Castro's regime to drive out the country's communists. Felix Gutierrez, one of the first refugees to arrive in Milwaukee with his wife in 1960, explained, "If you could implant the American way of life in Cuba, there wouldn't be a chance for communism, my friend." The refugees also shared with the reporter their willingness to join the fight, explaining, "We are ready to help by doing anything that is asked."[72]

Milwaukee's religious and political organizations also invited Cuban refugees touring the nation on speaking circuits to join them in Milwaukee to share their perspective on the Castro regime. The Milwaukee Press Club hosted exile leader Enrique Abascal in April of 1963. Abascal, a former prominent businessman who broke with Castro in the summer of 1959 and fled to Miami and then New York, warned Milwaukee residents that Soviet forces continued to stream into the island to bolster the communist government's "international brigade." Abascal warned that while Cuban rebels and ex-pats settled around the United States were prepared to fight their own "war of liberation" for their country, they required the support of U.S. war material, the sympathy of the American people, and assurances that "our backs are guarded."[73] The following year, Cuban exile scholar and political activist Luis V. Manrara spoke at St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Church and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Student Union. The president of The Truth About Cuba Committee, Incorporated, a non-profit organization

[72] "Cubans Here Back Blockade," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* October 24, 1962.
[73] "Red Force's Arrival Told," *Milwaukee Journal,* April 25, 1963; "Exiles to Honor Edict, Says Cuban," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* April 25, 1963.

founded by Cuban exiles in Miami in 1961, Manrara echoed many of Abascal's calls for an accelerated fight against communism in Cuba and other parts of Latin America.[74]

While speakers like Abascal and Manrara offered Milwaukeeans a direct link to the political exploits of anti-communist dissidents still fighting on the island against Castro, resettled refugees continued to be the most vocal and sought-after voices to portray the exile experience. Although many Cubans living in Milwaukee saw a permanent future for their families in the American Midwest, dissenting voices called upon the refugee community to avoid becoming comfortable in their new dwellings and continue to plot for a return to their homeland. In a letter to Cuban exiles across southeast Wisconsin published by the *Milwaukee Sentinel* in 1964, Jose Fernández de Castro called upon his compatriots to not forget their "native lands." He accused those who had taken new jobs and purchased homes in the U.S. of "apathy," and reminded them that the struggle for Cuban liberation had not ended. Assimilation for exiles, according to Fernández de Castro, was impossible not because of a lack of hospitality from American hosts, but because Cubans' true homeland continued to call for their support:

> You Cubans walk in a land which is not yours and never will be. You have no fatherland now. Do not think that because you earn more here, have a car, dress well and have other material assets, you can abandon your duties to your fatherland. Cuba is where you were born and where you belong.

While showing gratitude towards the United States for giving them "the opportunity to work and live as free men," Cubans should more importantly learn from Americans' example of always "bravely defend[ing] their land when it was in peril." What, Fernández de Castro asked his fellow exiles, would Americans they think of them if Cubans did "not try to liberate our land?"[75]

---

[74] "Cuban Exile to Speak in Milwaukee Twice," *Milwaukee Journal,* October 14, 1965.
[75] "Cuban Exiles," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* March 17, 1964.

"Foreigners" in Milwaukee: Puerto Ricans, Political Citizenship, and Religious Outreach in Postwar Milwaukee

While Cubans arriving in Milwaukee in the postwar years successfully parlayed fears of spreading communist influence as validation for their integration into the economic and social mainstream, their Puerto Rican counterparts experienced a much different reception within the city's Cold War atmosphere. For dominant society, suspicions of communist infiltration justified discrimination against Puerto Ricans while affirming their embrace of Cubans. A study of the reservations expressed by Milwaukee employers, social service agencies, and churches warning of Puerto Ricans' susceptibility to political infiltration demonstrates, however, that these fears were often motivated by contemporary xenophobic concerns surrounding race, class, language, and perceived foreignness. Unlike Milwaukee's Cuban refugees – upper-class, well-educated, and often able to pass as white community members – Puerto Ricans struggled to fit within these institutions' parameters of integration and Americanization in the postwar period, finding instead ill treatment at the hands of local law enforcement and discrimination in worksites and housing.

Puerto Rican arrivals to Wisconsin drew upon their status as American *citizens* in arguing for equal treatment within Milwaukee's communities. The United States maintained a colonial relationship with Puerto Ricans following the country's acquisition of the island in the wake of the 1898 Spanish-American War. In 1917, Congress conferred American citizenship on all Puerto Ricans through the Jones Act, allowing their migration to the United States free from immigration barriers. Despite their status, however, Puerto Ricans held a tenuous relationship with American citizenship. Puerto Ricans arriving in the United States in the mid twentieth century found themselves in the amorphous position of being considered what historain Jaime Vidal calls "citizen immigrants," those who were born with the full rights bestowed on other

Americans but who were perceived by mainland natives as immigrant newcomers.[76] Historian Lorrin Thomas likewise notes that throughout the twentieth century, Puerto Ricans' relationship to their citizenship was "spelled out awkwardly" through terms like "American citizen of Puerto Rican origin," a distinction that created an "impossible category" whereupon their identities as *Puerto Ricans* and *American citizens* fit together only when mediated by the United States. This intermediate status served as a point of tension for Puerto Ricans both on the island and for those who lived in the mainland diaspora, often serving to place Puerto Ricans in a state of persistent political marginalization.[77]

The continued colonial relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico as well as contested questions surrounding citizenship followed island transplants as they ventured to the mainland. Puerto Rican migration to cities beyond New York City was limited prior to the 1940s. While the east coast metropole had a community of more than 45,000 by the early decades of the century, between 1900-1940, net migration to the United States averaged only 4,000 people annually. Historian Carmen Whalen notes that accelerated American economic and political interventions on the island in the mid twentieth century created conditions for emigration by concentrating capital in the hands of U.S. corporations and displacing workers. Following the end of World War Two, U.S. employers, with support of the insular government, recruited Puerto Ricans as a source of low-wage labor.[78] The reestablishment of regular shipping lines as well as the emergence of commercial airlines following the war also facilitated the seasonal migration of laborers and expanded the geographic dispersion of the Puerto Rican

---

[76] Jaime R. Vidal, "The American Church and the Puerto Rican People," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 9, no. 1/2 (Winter-Spring 1990): 127-128.
[77] Lorrin Thomas, *Puerto Rican Citizen: History and Political Identity in Twentieth-Century New York City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 5.
[78] Carmen Teresa Whalen, "Colonialism, Citizenship, and the Making of the Puerto Rican Diaspora: An Introduction," in *The Puerto Rican Diaspora: Historical Perspectives,* 1.

diaspora. Between 1940 and 1950, the Puerto Rican population across the United States soared, growing from 70,000 to more than 300,000. While employers took initial responsibility for labor recruitment in the postwar years, an increasing number of working and living condition complaints filed by migrant workers to the Department of Labor spurred the passage of federal labor contract legislation and the formation of a Migration Division within the Puerto Rican Department of Labor in 1947. Serving as an intermediary for both agricultural and industrial employers, the Migration Division expanded the scattering of Puerto Ricans beyond the U.S. Northeast. In the Midwest, Chicago became an early hub in the late 1940s, followed closely by cities like Gary, Indiana, and Cleveland and Loraine, Ohio.[79]

In Milwaukee, Puerto Rican arrivals became part of a larger wartime and postwar labor migration that profoundly transformed the city's workforce. Historin Patrick Jones notes that during World War Two and the late 1940s, Milwaukee's "racial dynamics changed dramatically" as the city's booming industries drew thousands of African Americans from the U.S. South, poor whites from Appalachia, displaced rural workers from Wisconsin, and Puerto Ricans to supplement rising labor needs.[80] Most Puerto Ricans who made their way to the city in the immediate postwar years arrived via step migration, first making stops as either migrant agricultural workers or industrial laborers in other Midwestern cities. Following the end of harvest seasons or dismissals at their places of industrial employment, groups of Puerto Ricans eventually made their way to Milwaukee. By the end of the 1940s, the city's Puerto Rican

---

[79] Clarence Senior, "Patterns of Puerto Rican Dispersion in the Continental United States," *Social Problems* 2, no. 2 (Oct. 1954): 93-99; Fernández, *Brown in the Windy City,* 24, 41-43; Anne Akulicz de Santiago, "The Puerto Rican Community of Milwaukee: A Study of Geographic Mobility," (Milwaukee: Spanish Speaking Outreach Institute, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 1977), 9-11, Local History Reference Collection, Milwaukee Public Library Archives (hereafter referred to as MPL); Eugenio Rivera, "La Colonia de Lorain, Ohio," in *The Puerto Rican Diaspora,* 151-173.

[80] Patrick D. Jones, *The Selma of the North: Civil Rights Insurgency in Milwaukee* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 23. From 1940 to 1950, the city's African American community expanded from 8,821 to 21,772, an increase of more than 140 percent, and by 1954, the population had grown to more than 30,000

population stood at only 500 itinerant workers, most whom lived in rooming houses near their employers just northeast of downtown Milwaukee in a generally impoverished and ethnically mixed neighborhood occupied by Italians, Greeks, and Poles.[81] Following the creation of the Migration Division, an estimated 2,000 workers arrived in Milwaukee from 1950 to 1952, all men from rural areas and most arriving with little or no industrial skills.[82]

Despite working in similar positions and sharing language and certain aspects of cultural heritage, Milwaukee's Mexicans and Puerto Ricans found little common ground in the immediate postwar years. Joseph Cárdenas, whose parents had settled in the city from Mexico in the 1920s, recalled that it wasn't "a pleasant, easy merger," as many of Milwaukee's Mexicans "didn't [initially] care for the Puerto Ricans." According to Cárdenas, by the 1940s the city's Mexicans felt "like [Milwaukee] was their hometown," and were afraid of Puerto Ricans "mess[ing] with us" and what little integration into the city's social structure they had achieved. Like the Cuban exiles who would follow them just a decade later, Puerto Ricans did not necessarily find a common pan-Latino identity with their Mexican compatriots. Interethnic tensions between second-generation Mexican residents and newer Puerto Ricans arrivals often placed these Spanish-speaking populations in adversarial positions. Dance halls, according to Cárdenas, could become sites of physical confrontation when alcohol would flow too freely, as "somebody would get hammered, and somebody would say something and blow their tops, and there'd be fights" between the city's two Latino communities.[83] Ray Bacalzo, whose family had settled from Mexico to Milwaukee in the 1920s, also remembered early Puerto Rican arrivals as

---

[81] Tom Tolan, *Riverwest: A Community History* (Milwaukee: Past Press, 2003), 87-88; Akulicz de Santiago, "The Puerto Rican Community of Milwaukee," 23.
[82] Constance K. Kopp, *Limited English Proficiency Students in Wisconsin: Cultural Background and Educational Needs – Part I: Hispanic Students* (Madison: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 1982), 57-58.
[83] Joseph and Margarita Cárdenas, interview by author, Milwaukee, WI, June 8, 2015.

being "dis-attached" from the Mexican community in the 1950s, as both Latino groups struggled to develop their own social institutions.[84]

Disconnected from the city's Mexican *colonia* and Milwaukee's larger community, Puerto Rican migrants struggled to make a home for themselves in the upper Midwestern urban center. The small community established mutual aid societies in the early 1950s as their Mexican predecessors had done in the 1920s, but these organizations served merely as stopgap channels to meet a paucity of social and employment opportunities.[85] As Milwaukee's Puerto Rican population fluctuated according to labor needs through the decade, ranging from 2,000 in 1952 to over 4,000 by the end of the decade, community members struggled to find a social and economic foothold in the city.[86] Their efforts were often stymied by a number of barriers, including police harassment, language difficulties, and housing discrimination.

Milwaukee's "Newest Strangers": Puerto Rican Migrants and the Limits of Assimilation

Despite the promise of equal treatment under the law promised via their status as American citizens, Milwaukee Puerto Ricans encountered numerous barriers in their ability to integrate into the city's larger community. In the 1950s, newly-settled migrants faced persistent police harassment, communist baiting, and housing discrimination. Puerto Ricans voiced their displeasure with this reception through political channels and the press, demanding inclusion into the city's social and economic life and the fulfilment of the promises made by their ascribed

---

[84] Ray Bacalzo, interview by author, Milwaukee, WI, June 12, 2015.

[85] The island-based newspaper *El Mundo* cited the development of a Milwaukee *mutualista* called "Puertorriqueños Unidos" in 1951, which the periodical heralded as the "soul of the *colonia*." The mutual aid society functioned like many others across the Midwest, organizing musical groups and baseball teams, publishing a newspaper, and offering employment support, legal aid, and loans. "Boricuas Milwaukee Organizan Una Sociedad con Fines Cívicos," *El Mundo*, September 6, 1951.

[86] "Meeting Notes - Puerto Rican Institute, January 20, 1954," Latino/Hispanic American Collection, Milwaukee County Historical Society (hereafter referred to as MCHS); Clarence Senior, "Puerto Rican Dispersion in the United States," *Social Problems* 2, no. 2 (October 1954): 93-99.

citizenship. Despite their pleas, Puerto Ricans struggled to gain admission into the city's mainstream because of their perceived foreignness, as Milwaukeeans often viewed Puerto Ricans' "country" of origin, language, and skin color as sufficient justification for exclusion.

City agencies, social welfare groups, and religious leaders argued that the path to ensuring Puerto Rican's equal treatment would be to assimilate them into Milwaukee's larger social structure. This form of integration, most ardently advocated by the Puerto Rican Department of Labor's Migration Division as well as by mayoral commissions and episcopal leadership, required Puerto Ricans to abandon or subsume aspects of their cultural and linguistic heritage in order to assume full entry into the city's mainstream. The solutions these organizations offered – increased interaction between Puerto Ricans and city officials and more political and civic education for migrants, for example – did little to address fundamental issues of structural racism and discrimination. Ultimately, Puerto Ricans' perceived foreignness and ambiguous racial positioning within the city's ethno-racial hierarchy would prevent them from attaining those economic and social benefits offered to white Milwaukeeans – and Cuban exiles – during the postwar period.

Fearing the effect of continued discrimination against Puerto Ricans and the inability of employers to recruit labor to the city, the Migrant Division worked primarily through the Milwaukee Mayor's Commission on Human Rights (MCHR) to propose solutions to these recriminations. Formed in 1944, the advisory body of community members, religious leaders, and city bureaucrats functioned as an investigative and educative organization for the mayor and the city's Common Council, considering allegations of discrimination and segregation in housing, education, and employment.[87] The MCHR worked towards similar postwar liberal

[87] The organization was first formed by Mayor John Bohn as the "Mayor's Commission on Interracial Relations." It went through a series of re-brandings, including the "Mayor's Commission on Human Relations" in 1949, the

objectives as the Tejano farmworker-focused Wisconsin Governor's Commission on Human Rights (GCHR). Like its statewide counterpart, the MCHR had no enforcement capacity of its own, instead cooperating with local police to investigate complaints of racial and religious discrimination. Corneff P. Taylor, executive secretary of the group, described the MCHR as "a sort of conscience for municipal government," a sentiment that mirrored the director of the GCHR Rebecca Barton's own understandings of the reach and limited power of such postwar organizations.[88] Much like the GCHR, Milwaukee's commission sought to address the *perception* of discrimination in the city, advocating for more interactions between Milwaukeeans and aggrieved residents in order to create an atmosphere of "understanding" and tolerance among Milwaukee citizens. These solutions, however, often had the effect of demanding assimilative concessions from communities like Milwaukee's Puerto Ricans, and did little to address the larger economic and social structures that allowed for discrimination to persist.

Local organizations like the MCHR were tasked with addressing contentious flashpoints between Puerto Ricans and Milwaukee institutions, including police harassment, purported claims of communist subversion, and housing discrimination. Antagonistic interactions between local law enforcement and newly-settled migrants grew out of a dearth of recreational opportunities for Milwaukee Puerto Ricans. Excluded from many of their neighborhood's drinking establishments, young Puerto Rican men would take to playing guitars on their front stoops. Annoyed by the strumming and signing, or perhaps by their very physical presence on the city streets, white neighbors would call police to disperse the impromptu serenades. Officers,

---

"Mayor's Commission on Human Relations" in 1949, the "Milwaukee Commission on Human Rights" in 1954, and finally, the "Milwaukee Commission on Community Relations" in 1961. See John M. Vietoris, ""A Golden Opportunity for Reaping a Harvest of Souls": A History of the Ministry to African American Catholics in Milwaukee, 1908-1963," (PhD diss., Marquette University, 2009), 411.

[88] "Rights Unit's Goals Given," *Milwaukee Journal,* September 18, 1952.

looking to scatter groups congregating on stoops and street corners, barked commands in English, and interpreted Puerto Ricans' Spanish responses as resistance. By 1952, clashes occurred with enough frequency to bring the *Milwaukee Journal* to note that these "incidents and misunderstandings" had been "fanned into serious racial distrust and tension" between law enforcement and Puerto Ricans.[89]

With every dustup with police officers, Milwaukee Puerto Ricans asserted their American citizenship and right to be treated as equals in their new homes. They expressed a growing resentment to local media and their representative at the Migrant Division as being thought of as "foreigners" in Milwaukee, noting their right to congregate in the city as they pleased.[90] In claiming their rights as American citizens, Milwaukee Puerto Ricans also sought to distinguish themselves from their Mexican compatriots. In one 1953 report commissioned by Mayor Frank Zeidler and the MCHR, one Puerto Rican respondent explained that police officers assumed *all* Latino Milwaukeeans were roiled in some form of mischief:

> We are American citizens but the police are prejudiced. Americans are always right, we are always wrong. Treatment is unfair…Police never come to help our conditions – only to put blame on something. That is why we are reluctant to answer questions. We don't want trouble! Police are cruel![91]

In asserting his right to access to equal protections against police harassment, the interviewee sought to distinguish himself and the city's Puerto Ricans from area Mexicans, who often lived across a broad spectrum of citizenship statuses.

Milwaukee Puerto Ricans confronted continued police harassment through several channels. In the fall of 1953, a contingent of community members retained legal counsel and brought their case to the Common Council. Despite repeated calls to meet with the police chief

---

[89] Group Eases a Possible Migrant Racial Problem," *Milwaukee Journal,* October 25, 1952.
[90] "Meeting Notes - Puerto Rican Institute, January 20, 1954" Latino/Hispanic American Collection, MCHS.
[91] Morris, "Some Aspects of the Puerto Ricans in Milwaukee," 50.

to discuss remedies, local politicians refused to address the community's concerns.[92] Several other Puerto Ricans joined the local branch of the Civil Rights Congress (CRC), a national human rights organization formed in 1946 that organized against discriminatory policies in urban northern cities and segregation in the U.S. South.[93] The organization, which employed a dual-pronged strategy of litigation and demonstration, had included protests against Puerto Rico's continued colonial status in a 1951 petition to the United Nations, and had recently begun organizing in the city to fight discrimination against African Americans and Puerto Ricans.[94]

Within Puerto Ricans' protests, city officials and local media saw not a call for civil rights but rather attempts by outside agitators to radicalize the migrant community. The city's police chief accused the Milwaukee lawyer assisting Puerto Ricans of being "an agitator" that was "associated with known Communists and subversive groups." Despite the lawyer's contestations, local press published the chief's accusations without comment.[95] The *Milwaukee Journal*, meanwhile, identified Puerto Ricans as being easy prey for political propagandists, noting in 1952 that the "Communist-front" CRC had already made significant inroads into the city's growing Puerto Rican community.[96]

These initial responses from the city's police chief and the *Milwaukee Journal* illustrated the way in which the complicated political terrain of the Cold War would influence Puerto Rican

---

[92] "Puerto Rican Hearing Held," *Milwaukee Journal,* October 27, 1953.
[93] "Group Eases a Possible Migrant Racial Problem," *Milwaukee Journal,* October 25, 1952. Members of the Wisconsin CRC would eventually be called in front of the House Un-American Activities Committee in the mid 1950s. See U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Hearings Before the United States Congress House Un-American Activities Committee, *Investigation of Communist Activities in the Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Area – Part I*, 84th Cong., 1st sess., 608-710.
[94] The CRC included a call to address the "cruel and inhuman policy of [the U.S.] government toward the people of Puerto Rico" in their 1951 petition to the United Nations. See Civil Rights Congress, "We Charge Genocide: The Crime of Government Against the Negro People," (Paris, 1951).
[95] "Puerto Rican Hearing Held," *Milwaukee Journal,* October 27, 1953.
[96] "Group Eases a Possible Migrant Racial Problem," *Milwaukee Journal,* October 25, 1952.

migrants' settlement experiences and efforts to petition for civil rights in the postwar period.[97] As William Preston and other scholars have demonstrated, local and federal repression of nonwhite and politically-radical populations throughout the twentieth century often employed the rhetoric of fears of Soviet infiltration to mask xenophobic attacks on communities and stymie their efforts to secure equal political, economic, and social rights.[98] In Milwaukee, politicians, social service agencies, and local press portrayed Puerto Ricans as susceptible to infiltration from leftist elements in their efforts to discredit the community's grievances. Despite arriving as American citizens, these institutions associated Puerto Ricans' foreignness – their language and skin color – with their supposed susceptibility to communist infiltration. As historian Ariel Arnau has noted in her study of civil rights organizing within the Puerto Rican community in 1950s Philadelphia, Cold War-era efforts to stamp out political subversion "reflected a distrust of the foreign," a sentiment that extended especially to communities of color across northern urban spaces.[99] The threat of communism would become a catch-all to subvert Puerto Ricans' calls for improved living conditions, equitable treatment in the eyes of the law, and the fulfillment of their rights as citizens of the country.

---

[97] Puerto Ricans' arrival in Milwaukee coincided with a growing preoccupation amongst city officials and citizens of political subversion in the vein of communist agitators. Despite a tradition of socialist and progressive politics that extended as far back as the turn of the century, Milwaukee's political world succumbed to the spread of Cold War anti-communist fervor in the postwar era. Tula Connell notes that while the city's voters had elected the socialist Frank Zeidler as mayor in 1948, and would elect him for two more terms through 1960, most Milwaukeeans viewed local progressive politicians and labor unionists as distinct from a Soviet-influenced form of communism they feared threatened American democracy. Tula A. Connell, *Conservative Counterrevolution: Challenging Liberalism in 1950s Milwaukee* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016), 32-38. For scholarship on Milwaukee's history of socialism, see Aims McGuinness, "The Revolution Begins Here: Milwaukee and the History of Socialism," in *Perspectives on Milwaukee's Past,* ed. Margo Anderson and Victor Greene (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 79-106.

[98] William Preston, *Aliens and Dissenters: Federal Suppression of Radicals, 1903-1933* (Reprinted ed., Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994). See also Stephen Meyer, *"Stalin Over Wisconsin": The Making and Unmaking of Militant Unionism, 1900-1950* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992); Shelton Stromquist, ed., *Labor's Cold War: Local Politics in a Global Context* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008).

[99] Ariel Arnau, "The Evolution of Leadership within the Puerto Rican Community of Philadelphia, 1950s-1970s," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 136, no. 1 (January 2012): 55.

Accusations of communist connections exasperated the city's Puerto Rican community. Their efforts to address these allegations produced what might have been a comedic misunderstanding if not for the near tragic results. Anticipating the potential of being branded as communist provocateurs and losing their ability to secure employment, Puerto Rican community leaders financed the printing of Spanish pamphlets warning the city's migrants of joining any Milwaukee organization *whatsoever* for fear that it might be communist in its leanings. Puerto Ricans distributed their literature at the gates of companies employing their fellow compatriots with a stern warning against joining political groups. Unfortunately for the workers who accepted the group's literature, the only words in the pamphlets understandable to their employers were terms like "Communist," "Daily Worker," and "Communist front." Noting that "a howl went up from many of the alarmed employers" who cried that Puerto Ricans were organizing communist cells, Anthony Vega, director of the Chicago-based Migrant Division of the Puerto Rican Department of Labor, travelled to Milwaukee to translate the pamphlets and allay companies' fears that their Puerto Rican workers were not, in fact, leftist subversives.[100] In the end, even efforts to avoid *the appearance* of engaging in political advocacy served to remind the Puerto Rican community of their tenuous sense of belonging in the city.

Instead of addressing continual harassment and communist baiting by police officers and employers, city officials opted to create programming to facilitate the integration of Puerto Ricans into the larger Milwaukee community. In early 1952, the Migrant Division coordinated with state employment officials to organize an ad hoc committee consisting of representatives from public, social, and Catholic agencies. The group held informational sessions and dances at area schools and churches in the summer, each intended to spur more welcoming interactions

[100] "Group Eases a Possible Migrant Racial Problem," *Milwaukee Journal,* October 25, 1952.

between city officials and Puerto Ricans. Hundreds of the city's Puerto Rican residents attended these events, where they also received Spanish-language pamphlets detailing recreational and church activities and opportunities for English classes. Lectures by Milwaukee officers, meanwhile, sought to teach Puerto Ricans to observe city laws and how to respond to police requests for identification. Described by committee members as a form of "aid" to the new migrants, the format of these "informational sessions" expounded a form of assimilation that assumed Puerto Ricans would attend as willing, and perhaps passive, students. They likewise promised the opportunity for better treatment by Milwaukee institutions if Puerto Ricans acquired a new language and submitted to the appeals of law enforcement.[101]

Deeming the informational sessions a success, Milwaukee mayor Frank P. Zeidler transferred the responsibilities of the ad hoc committee to the MCHR and instructed the group to expand their work in the community. The MCHR likewise promoted assimilatory programming for a group they dubbed Milwaukee's "newest strangers," including English classes and semi-regular meetings with law enforcement, to compel the city's more than two thousand Puerto Rican residents to adjust to new customs and "avoid unwitting involvement with leftwing fronts."[102] The MCHR drew the praise of the *Milwaukee Journal*, who applauded the mayor's efforts to "meet a delicate problem of human relations." Parroting in many ways the commendation offered by state media to organizations like the Governor's Commission on Human Rights and its contemporaneous efforts to assist Tejano migrant workers, the newspaper

[101] "Plan to Help Puerto Ricans," *Milwaukee Journal,* September 11, 1952.
[102] "Puerto Ricans' Aid Outlined," *Milwaukee Journal,* November 16, 1952; "Racial Discrimination Adds to Slum Problem," *Milwaukee Journal,* April 6, 1954.

offered that continued friendly interactions, English language instruction, and bureaucratic solutions would "bring about mutual adjustment" for all parties involved.[103]

The solutions proposed by the MCHR and applauded by the *Milwaukee Journal,* however, did little to remove the stain of political radicalism placed on all of the city's Puerto Rican residents or adjust Milwaukeeans' perception of the community as a foreign element. Looking to toe the line between full assimilation and the preservation of the migrant workers' heritage, Anthony Vega, Migrant Division coordinator, explained that "Puerto Rican traditions should not be abandoned" but "habits" needed to "conform somewhat to those of the community."[104] Few Puerto Ricans seemed to agree with Vega's assessment that there might be a fair trade-off in "conforming" to their new community. The scarce Puerto Rican leaders included in planning via the MCHR took umbrage at the persistent accusation that efforts from their community to demand civil rights were indicative of migrants "turning Communist." They voiced their concerns to city officials and the local press with little success. With direct protests about police harassment to the Common Council proving unfruitful, however, these community leaders continued collaboration with the MCHR in hopes of at least piecemeal reform.[105]

As distressing as police discrimination and communist baiting were for Milwaukee's Puerto Ricans, perhaps more pressing was the issue of substandard housing available for area residents. One 1953 report alarmingly described a deteriorating housing situation as "bad in almost every respect" for the Spanish speakers.[106] Like many other urban centers across the U.S. North, Milwaukee's housing availability reached perilous levels in the 1950s due to several

---

[103] "Understanding Puerto Ricans," *Milwaukee Journal,* November 1, 1952. The newspaper singled out the mayor's commission for singular praise for holding "what the armed forces call "indoctrination" meetings, to steer Puerto Ricans" away from the alleged communist-front organizations and instead towards "English classes and community social activities."
[104] "Puerto Rican Survey Made," *Milwaukee Journal,* October 28, 1953.
[105] "Plan to Help Puerto Ricans," *Milwaukee Journal,* September 11, 1952.
[106] Morris, "Some Aspects of the Puerto Ricans in Milwaukee," 5.

factors, including a housing shortage, the quickly deteriorating quality of apartments, and discriminatory redlining practices. The arrival of thousands of African Americans and whites from the U.S. South and migrants from Puerto Rico and Mexico further complicated the housing scarcity. Historian Kevin Smith notes that through the 1950s, the rapid growth of the city's African American and nonwhite population "increasingly dominated Milwaukee's political discourse."[107] According to a report from the Governor's Commission on Human Rights, between 1940 and 1950, Milwaukee's nonwhite population increased 145 percent while the number of dwelling units available to nonwhite residents had only risen by only 79 percent.[108]

Both African Americans and Latinos faced rampant discrimination from property owners in their options for buying and renting housing and found little recourse among the inadequate enforcement mechanisms at the city, county, or state level. The MCHR, responsible for fielding allegations of housing discrimination in the city, focused much of their attention on the city's African American residents, Milwaukee's largest and fastest growing minority community, but also investigated discrimination against Puerto Ricans. Prejudice in the buying and renting of property, according to Kevin Smith, "remained intractable" in the postwar years, and became a leading concern for the MCHR. Stymied by property owners' associations, the Board of Realtors, and a lack of public funding from the city's Common Council, the organization proved largely ineffective in alleviating discrimination.[109]

Puerto Ricans' perceived racial identities and skin color presented an ambiguous challenge to Milwaukee property owners intent on maintaining strict racial segregation in the city's housing environment. While the Puerto Rican Department of Labor's Migration Division

---

[107] Kevin D. Smith, ""In God We Trust": Religion, the Cold War, and Civil Rights in Milwaukee," (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1999), 32.
[108] Connell, *Conservative Counterrevolution,* 96-110.
[109] Smith, ""In God We Trust,"" 60.

encouraged arriving transplants to live among whites to quickly assimilate into American society, Puerto Rican's mixed racial background and their diversity of skin color confused realtors and home owner associations, who during the 1950s were already in the process of solidifying clear demarcations between white and non-white housing areas in the city. As historian Michael Gonzales has shown in his analysis of Puerto Rican settlement in Chicago, island transplants to the Midwest thus occupied an "ambiguous and often contradictory racial status" that exposed them to similar housing discrimination and struggles to find adequate accommodations that black Milwaukeeans experienced.[110] As inadequate income wouldn't permit home purchases, nearly all were forced to rent apartments or share overcrowded boarding house rooms. Dismal housing options coupled with workplace discrimination did little to ingratiate the city as a welcoming environment for the migrants, many of whom did not see a permanent future for themselves in Milwaukee.[111]

Milwaukee Puerto Ricans' frustrations with organizations like the MCHR, tasked with alleviating tensions between migrants and the broader city, bore out most succinctly in their critiques of integrationist efforts. Community members identified a disconnect between calls for assimilation by these organizations and the lack of substantive changes in the material lives of Puerto Ricans. In 1953, community leader Miguel Vaquer wrote to the *Milwaukee Journal* that despite the efforts of city agencies and their published reports, Puerto Ricans continued to have to have to prove they were "law abiding citizens anxious to integrate themselves socially and economically" in their new environment. Despite public forums and educative initiatives by the

[110] Michael Gonzales, "Ruffians and Revolutionaries: The Development of the Young Lords Organization in Chicago," (Master's thesis, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2015), 46.
[111] Researchers found that most Puerto Rican workers considered themselves transitory– only 55 percent of those surveyed were interested in full assimilation into the city's community, and only 45 percent hoped their families would one day join them on the mainland. Morris, "Some Aspects of the Puerto Ricans in Milwaukee," 5.

MCHR, Milwaukeeans still failed to understand that Puerto Ricans were not immigrants, but "native born American citizens, free to come and go as they please…" If Puerto Ricans were fully-vested members of their communities, Vaquer opined, then why were they constantly being asked to abandon their language and culture to fully appreciate the economic and social benefits of American citizenship? Vaquer warned Milwaukeeans that "under these circumstances," the city could never expect Puerto Ricans to be "cheerful citizens in complete harmony" with the larger city community.[112]

Sharing a Church's "Generosity of the Heart": Milwaukee Puerto Ricans, Integration, and Religious Evangelization

Along with city officials, local business leaders, and social service representatives, organizations like the Mayor's Commission on Human Rights (MCHR) often included representatives from Milwaukee's Catholic community. During the postwar period, Catholics organizations, including the archdiocese, the Catholic Youth Organization, the periodical *Catholic Herald Citizen,* the Catholic Welfare Bureau, the Cardijn Center, and Marquette University, developed strategies to facilitate the integration of Puerto Ricans into the city within the framework of providing social service agency-like resources. Unlike previous interactions with the city's small Mexican community, which had often celebrated Mexicans' ethno-religious heritage within religious and social spaces, Catholic organizations welcomed these Spanish speakers under an assimilationist model that preached Americanization. While Milwaukee clerical leadership may have assumed the largely Catholic Puerto Rican community would join their flock, they soon found that the city's newest migrants carried a much more complicated relationship with the Church and institutional religion than their Mexican forbearers.

---

[112] "From the People: The Puerto Ricans," *Milwaukee Journal,* August 1, 1953.

Beginning with the U.S. acquisition of Puerto Rico in 1898, a lack of strong and centralized Catholic leadership on the island encouraged evangelizing by Protestant denominations. With under-sourced chapels and minimal financial support from the Curia, rural Catholic priests struggled to administer to disperse communities across Puerto Rico. Protestant missionaries from various denominations, sensing an opportunity to convert the under-churched population, convened in 1899 to divide the island into proselytizing zones. This denominational subdivision, what David Badillo refers to as an "ecumenical approach" to Protestantism, encouraged Puerto Ricans to easily move across religious observances not just within Protestant denominations, but also across Catholicism and Protestantism, throughout the first half of the twentieth century. During the 1920s and 1930s, the island's religious diversity further expanded with the growth of Pentecostalism across Puerto Rico. Like other Protestant denominations, Pentecostal missionaries focused on rural areas and found success among their congregants by offering Spanish-language church services and Bibles.[113]

The diversity of religious affiliation prevalent on the island also bore out among the migrants that made their home in Milwaukee. One 1953 report found that while 95 percent of Puerto Ricans in Milwaukee considered themselves nominally Catholics in the early 1950s, only half attended church or participated in sacraments. As the Puerto Rican community was more geographically dispersed across the city than the older Mexican immigrant and second-generation population, Puerto Rican Catholics proved more mobile in their search for a home parish. The report found that only 19 percent of those interviewed had regular contact with a Spanish-speaking priest, mostly by those who trekked to the Our Lady of Guadalupe parish on the near south side. Researchers also noted that Puerto Ricans much less successfully created

[113] Badillo, *Latinos and the New Immigrant Church,* 45.

community through the congregations attended, as less than 20 percent of those interviewed said they had social contacts with other members of their churches.[114]

If Catholics had been slow in responding to the needs of the city's newest Spanish speakers, Milwaukee Protestants demonstrated a more proactive attitude in their outreach. By the early 1950s, a small but growing group of Protestant Spanish speakers attended the Spanish Baptist Church and the Hulbert Baptist Church. Spanish-speaking Baptist pastors in Milwaukee and the Protestant community emphasized a hands-on approach to the growing Puerto Rican community that slowly generated trust within the nominally Catholic population. Spanish-speaking Protestants expressed gratitude for ministers that helped sign them up for classes at the city's vocational school, as well assistance for those who faced legal trouble after tangling with the police.[115]

Protestant outreach to Milwaukee's Puerto Ricans began at clerical level of several area churches. From his position on the MCHR, Reverend David Griffith, pastor of Trinity Presbyterian Church, had witnessed the rapid growth of the city's Puerto Rican population, and believed proselytization inroads could be made with the right touch. Speaking at the annual conference of the United Church Women in 1953, Griffith explained, "As Milwaukee becomes a greater industrial city, the problem of these people, often without church affiliation, will become greater." He exhorted his fellow Protestant churchmen to work to bring Puerto Ricans, as well Mexican immigrants, into the "life of the churches" through welcoming outreach.[116]

---

[114] Morris, "Some Aspects of the Puerto Ricans in Milwaukee," 39-41. The report stressed that many Catholic Puerto Ricans believed the only church with a fulltime Spanish-speaking priest, Our Lady of Guadalupe, was primarily a "Mexican Church" where they did not feel entirely comfortable or welcome.
[115] Ibid., 42.
[116] "Winning Asia, Topic of Talk," *Milwaukee Journal,* September 23, 1953.

The most spirited Protestant evangelization to the city's Spanish speaking was led by a Baptist reverend name Eleucadio Mendez. Born in Mexico into a Catholic family, Mendez had converted to the Baptist faith while in college. He immigrated to Los Angeles in the late 1940s to continue his studies in Christian ministry at the Spanish American Baptist Seminary. Following graduation, Mendez was called to serve Milwaukee's Spanish Baptist Church in 1951 as part of a mission initiative to the city's Mexican and Puerto Rican communities. For the first five years of his tenure at the church, the young priest held services in a small room in the Milwaukee Christian Center on the near south side, right in the heart of the city's Mexican neighborhood.[117] Mendez proved to be an industrious evangelizer for the Baptist Church, extending his outreach beyond the spiritual shepherding expected of the reverend. Both Mendez and his wife Beth accompanied their congregants as interpreters during their job searches across Milwaukee. Mendez became a popular lecturer at white Christian parishes in southern and central Wisconsin and northern Illinois, where he implored Christian communities with access to economic, social, and cultural capital to intervene in migrant and broader Latino issues.[118]

In Milwaukee, Mendez continued to grow his Spanish-speaking ministry through preaching. By the mid 1950s, the pastor offered two Spanish services every Sunday within the overcrowded confines of his one-room sanctuary at the Milwaukee Christian Center. After requesting expanded space for what he believed to be a ripe opportunity for expanded evangelization in the city – Mendez estimated that of the more than 6,000 Puerto Ricans and Mexicans who had come to Milwaukee seeking better employment, a quarter of them were nominally Protestant but were unchurched – the Wisconsin Baptist State Convention aided the

---

[117] "Native Tongue Churches Planned By Baptists," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* December 11, 1954.
[118] "Ministers to Meet Tuesday," Sheboygan *Press,* February 13, 1956; "Cedar Grove News," *Sheboygan Press,* March 1, 1956; "May Fellowship Planned By Church Women," *Sheboygan Press,* April 22, 1958.

congregation in acquiring their own building. The purchased refurbished building, rebranded the Spanish Speaking Baptist Church, seated two hundred and offered expanded space for social activities, including regional religious meetings.[119] In June of 1957, Mendez and the church served as hosts to two hundred delegates from ten Midwestern states for the North Central Area Conference of the Spanish-American Baptist Convention.[120]

The city's Catholic Archdiocese, increasingly concerned with the expanding influence of Protestant evangelizers among Spanish speakers, moved to shore up their ministry within the Puerto Rican community. Archbishop Albert Meyer directed his attention and resources to the city's lower and north eastside and westside congregations, areas where non-English speaking Puerto Ricans had begun to assemble. Principal among these was the northeast side parish of Old St. Mary's Catholic Church. The church served as the oldest Catholic church still in use in Milwaukee, and its beginnings coinciding with the birth of city. By the late 1940s, Father Philip Schwab, the church's pastor, struggled to provide for the new Puerto Rican community's spiritual needs while the local St. Vincent de Paul Society expanded its material outreach as well.[121] Perhaps no clergy in the city understood the concerns of Puerto Ricans more intimately than St. Mary's Father Robert Rodriguez. Born in Gary, Indiana, Rodriguez had become the first Mexican-descent priest ordained by the Milwaukee Catholic Archdiocese in 1953. Meyer assigned the priest to Old St. Mary's parish in 1954. The young Rodriguez was a jack-of-all

[119] The congregation raised the $3,100 down payment for the building from their own collections and borrowed the remaining $23,000 from the Wisconsin Baptist State Convention. Their new home was a fifty-year old building originally used by the Ebenezer Evangelical Free Church on South 7th Street. "50 Year Old Church 'New' to This Group," *Milwaukee Journal,* March 10, 1956.
[120] "Convention of Spanish Baptist Groups," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* June 22, 1957.
[121] "Old St. Mary's parish prepares to celebrate 125th anniversary" *Catholic Herald Citizen,* September 4, 1971.

trades according to the *Catholic Herald Citizen*, who referred to the pastor as "priest, interpreter, advisor, employment agent, teacher or friend" for his congregants.[122]

Archbishop Meyer anticipated Rodriguez's tenure at Old St. Mary's to be provisional, only lasting until Puerto Rican congregants could learn English and no longer need the support of a Spanish-speaking priest. The archbishop, who had no intention of creating a new "national parish" like the south side Mexican Our Lady of Guadalupe, expected Puerto Ricans to learn English quickly, affiliate with the parish near where they lived, and integrate into Milwaukee's general Catholic community. Unlike Mexican immigrants who first arrived in the 1920s, Milwaukee's Catholic hierarchy sought to assimilate Puerto Ricans quickly into their congregations. Religious historians Jay Dolan and Jaime Vidal note that any concessions made by Catholic leaders to traditional Puerto Rican religiosity in the mid twentieth century were temporary, and only offered to advance the goal of full assimilation of the Spanish speakers into the general Catholic body.[123] Meyer was not necessarily opposed to Spanish-speaking priests and did not negate the importance of linguistic heritage among the city's Puerto Ricans – he had, in fact, committed considerable resources to training Milwaukee seminarians in Spanish to better connect with Mexican migrant workers across southeast Wisconsin – but he believed strongly in integrating all newcomers into existing congregational structures to facilitate their assimilation.[124] Meyer's directive aligned with that of most other archbishops and clerical leaders across the U.S. Catholic Church, such as Cardinal Francis J. Spellman of New York, who noted

---

[122] "Priest Assigned to Aid Spanish Speaking People," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* November 21, 1953; "Its's a New Life in Strange City but Puerto Ricans Happy Here," *Milwaukee Journal,* November 13, 1955; "City's Puerto Ricans Have Their Traditions," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* November 24, 1956; Steven M. Avella, *Confidence and Crisis: A History of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, 1959-1977* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2014), 284.
[123] Dolan and Vidal, "Introduction," in *Puerto Rican and Cuban Catholics in the U.S., 1900-1965*, 3.
[124] "Pastoral Care of Puerto Ricans Bridges Barriers of Traditions," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* March 20, 1954; Pokorny, "The History of Hispanic Ministry in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee," 19.

in the official report of the first Conference on the Spiritual Care of Puerto Rican Migrants in 1955 that "integration" should be the principal objective of Catholic ministry on the mainland.[125]

Rodriguez's term at Old St. Mary's, however, lasted longer than planned. As the pastor expanded his charge far beyond the walls of his congregation he also facilitated a middle ground between a "national parish" and an integrated model of ministry. Rodriguez believed his "first duty" to Milwaukee's Puerto Rican community was to "get them acquainted with the new way of life" in the upper Midwestern city, starting first with assisting migrants in their acquisition of language skills. In the 1950s, his church offered religious instruction in both English and Spanish and directed parents to English courses at the Jefferson Street Social Center. Pragmatically, Rodriguez recognized that his congregants enjoyed a privileged position over other Spanish-speaking immigrants because of their citizenship status, and believed it behooved Milwaukee Puerto Ricans to "realize that they can find a better way of life and better opportunities for their families" if they prepared themselves adequately to participate in the city's full economic and social community.[126]

Even language barriers, however, proved more complicated for Milwaukee's Puerto Ricans than they first assumed. The form and substance of the English they learned mattered as well. To better prepare students for economic success and cultural assimilation into their new communities, Dominican Sisters at St. John Cathedral School organized a six-week course in summer of 1956 that aimed to "Americanize the English" of Puerto Ricans in Milwaukee. Under the watchful eye of principal Sister Mary Gracita, volunteers ranging from high school students

[125] Timothy Matovina notes that by the 1950s, most U.S. Catholic leaders questioned the efficacy of the "national parish" model for facilitating assimilation of new immigrant and migrant groups. See Timothy Matovina, "The National Parish and Americanization," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 17, no. 1 (Winter, 1999): 48.
[126] "City's Puerto Ricans Have Their Traditions," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* November 24, 1956.

to public school principals led their pupils in learning what they believed to be proper, unaccented English.[127]

The services of clergy like Rodriguez proved especially important by the late 1950s, when shifting economic winds made Puerto Rican workers dispensable for factories in Milwaukee. Lacking seniority on the job, Puerto Ricans were among the first to be laid off and found that their lack of specialized skills and education, along with unfamiliarity with English, made them unattractive applicants for most employment. By 1958, the *Milwaukee Journal* had dubbed Puerto Rican families "victims of recession." Among the 4,000 Puerto Ricans living in Milwaukee, the unemployment rate soared to nearly 40 percent among island transplants, in stark contrast to the city's rate of 6 percent.[128] Unemployment and dismal pay compounded difficulties in housing for Milwaukee Puerto Ricans, who generally lived in several of the city's poorest neighborhoods and dealt with unsanitary conditions and rising rent rates. A house-by-house survey on the lower east side found rental rates to be "terrifically high" for Puerto Ricans. In addition, a survey of the city's public housing found that only twenty-four Puerto Rican families lived in the Milwaukee's 2,849 public units.[129]

Puerto Ricans in the city found little material support from county or state organizations. Straining under the number of unemployed seeking state relief, county legislators had placed new residency requirements for accessing welfare funds, making many Puerto Ricans who had arrived in Milwaukee within the last year ineligible for support.[130] In 1955, the Milwaukee

---

[127] "Painless English For Puerto Ricans," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* July 19, 1956; "Volunteers Teach English to Puerto Ricans," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* July 21, 1956.
[128] "Victim of Recession; 2 Month Old Nilla," *Milwaukee Journal,* February 27, 1958.
[129] "Puerto Rican Total Here Is Put at 4,000" *Milwaukee Journal,* April 28, 1957; "Housing, Work Woes Plague Migrants Here," *Milwaukee Journal,* April 6, 1958; "En Torno a la Fortaleza," *El Mundo,* April 17, 1958. Milwaukee's public housing authority's rigorous requirements – one year's residency in the city and a limit on the number of people who could live within an apartment – placed high barriers on Puerto Ricans, many of whom had recently arrived in Milwaukee and who had larger families.
[130] "Dropped Off Relief, Some Find It Tough," *Milwaukee Journal,* July 14, 1957.

branch of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul (SVDP) formed a new division, the Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Conference, with sixteen volunteers created to "help [Puerto Rican] people to help themselves."[131] During 1958, the conference increased its expenditures among the Spanish speakers by more than 30 percent from the previous year. The Conference was led by a small group of professional women calling themselves "Christ Childers," who used their training as nurses, social workers, and teachers to deliver clothing, kindling, and food for Puerto Rican families. Most social service agencies in the city did not provide direct relief to those in need, instead focusing on counseling, recreation, and medical and child care. The Society also intended its aid to be merely supplemental – its office regularly provided surplus food as well as clothes and wood for stoves – but the agency had been forced to provide rent money for numerous Puerto Rican families at the request of the children's court to keep youngsters from being sent to the county home for dependent children.[132]

By the end of the 1950s, migration from Puerto Rico to the United States had leveled off considerably. Worsening economic conditions in major urban centers like Milwaukee, along with improvements in industrial conditions on the island spurred on by U.S. federal initiatives removed many of the incentives for migration to and settlement on the mainland, and in some cases, in fact encouraged return settlement to Puerto Rico. The 1960 census marked Wisconsin's total Puerto Rican population at only 3,574, with 2,820 residing in Milwaukee.[133] Even after a decade of protracted community work to facilitate their integration into the general community,

---

[131] "Our Latin Newcommers," *Milwaukee Journal,* April 8, 1958.
[132] "Vincentians Increase Aid to Puerto Ricans," *Milwaukee Journal,* April 8, 1958; "'Christ Child' Cares for Children Year Round," *Milwaukee Journal,* December 19, 1958.
[133] U.S. Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Census of Population, 1960. Subject Reports. Puerto Ricans in the United States.* Final Report, PC (2)-ID (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1963), 103-104; Akulicz de Santiago, "The Puerto Rican Community of Milwaukee," 60; The Puerto Rican Organization of Milwaukee, "A Survey of the Puerto Rican Community on Milwaukee's Northeast Side in 1976," (Milwaukee: The Milwaukee Urban Conservatory, 1977), 6, Local History Reference Collection, MPL.

social service agencies and religious leaders noted persistent economic and social inequalities for Milwaukee's Puerto Ricans. The MCHR continued to flag barriers to incorporation for the city's Puerto Ricans at the turn of the decade. Corneff Taylor, the commission's executive secretary, explained to pastors, rabbis, and priests at a meeting of the Urban Church Seminar in 1960 that many of the same issues that plagued early arrivals in the early 1950s – language barriers, poor housing conditions, grueling labor, and cultural clashes – obstinately dogged those arriving into the early 1960s.[134]

Conclusion

A comparative study of Puerto Rican and Cuban settlement in Milwaukee provides an opportunity to interrogate questions of citizenship and belonging, political membership, and integration in urban U.S. spaces during the postwar era not yet fully considered by historians. For Latinos arriving in Milwaukee throughout the period, distinctions in immigration status, political standing, racial and skin color, class, and education set the parameters by which individual populations would be welcomed in the city by employers, social institutions, and Milwaukeeans. Like the Mexican sojourners who preceded them, Puerto Rican migrants and Cuban exiles often found an unequal and disjointed reception in their Midwestern homes.

Admonishments like those from Cuban exiles like Jose Fernández de Castro to remain loyal to their home nation and maintain hope of the prospect of one day returning to it illustrate the ambivalence many Latinos felt upon migrating to Midwestern cities like Milwaukee. For these refugees, thousands of miles of land and sea proved just one barrier to making cities like Milwaukee feel like a permanent home. Longstanding and resilient ties to a "native land" could serve as larger obstacles for full integration, leaving exiles to carefully, and at times

[134] "Indian, Latin Have Problems in City," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* October 15, 1960.

pragmatically, navigate the cultural, political, and social allegiances that bound them to two communities. Most Cubans, however, found that support from religious organization could at a minimum secure their economic well-being in the city. One exile described the welcome attention her family had received from Milwaukee's community, and the nearly seamless transition back into the middle-class life they had once lived in Cuba: "We came to the United States with nothing and knowing no one; now (five years later) at least my husband works as a doctor and we have a good home and a decent living."[135]

Unlike the Cuban emigres who could base their validity for living in the United States upon their status as refugees of communism, Milwaukee Puerto Rican migrants found much less room in the city's workplaces and social spaces to claim and navigate political and cultural identities. Placed at the lower levels of a quickly solidifying racial hierarchy by Milwaukee employers and social institutions and marked as politically suspect and susceptible to communist infiltration, Puerto Ricans often struggled to lay claim to their right as American citizens to make a living, create home, and thrive in their new living environments. While Cubans found opportunities to successfully assimilate into Milwaukee's white middle class by the late 1960s, Puerto Ricans would be forced to turn to community organizing and social protest in asserting their standing in Wisconsin.

Throughout the middle decades of the twentieth century, Milwaukee's religious community played a key role in influencing and at times guiding conversations regarding Puerto Rican and Cuban's potential integration into the city. Despite developing distinct strategies and services for both national-origin populations, Catholic and Protestant clergy and laity emphasized an integrationist model of reception that differed greatly from their earlier

[135] Portes, "Dilemmas of a Golden Exile," 516.

interactions with the city's Mexican immigrants of the 1920s. Just as it had for their outreach with earlier Mexican settlers, however, religious organizations placed primacy on the fear of the diminution of religiosity in their outreach to both Puerto Ricans and Cubans. Churches and faith organizations would eventually again play a key role in debates surrounding Milwaukee Latinos, political subversion, and belonging in the United States in the 1980s with the arrival of Central American refugees. Those contests, however, would result in widely disparate outcomes in coalition building and advocacy for both Milwaukeeans and exiles from Latin America.

CHAPTER 4

"We will have fallen short of Christ's ideal if our love of neighbor does not go beyond an occasional prayer for them.": Milwaukee Religious Outreach and the Creation of Latino-Serving Institutions, 1960-1968

In May of 1962, more than two hundred clergy and laymen representing fifty-four dioceses and four countries gathered at Milwaukee's regal Pfister Hotel for the eleventh annual convening of the National Conference of the Catholic Council for Spanish Speaking. Meeting under the theme of "New Horizons in the Spanish Speaking Apostolate," attendees discussed a wide breadth of topics, each centered on the spiritual and social needs of the United States' growing Latin American-descent population. The conference's multiday program was filled with speakers who had been at the forefront of religious outreach to Latino immigrants and migrants for the last two decades. Chaired by Archbishop Robert E. Lucey of San Antonio, the executive chairman of the Bishops' Committee on the Spanish Speaking and longtime migrant farmworker advocate, the meeting included appearances by Father William McKeon of Lansing, Michigan, president of the National Catholic Council for Spanish Speaking, and Monsignor William Quinn of Chicago, the executive secretary of the Bishops' Committee for Migrant Workers.[1] The discussions held during the conference proved wide reaching, as clerical leaders lent debated pending federal immigration addressing migrant workers and the soon-to-be discontinued bracero program, as well as U.S. efforts to blunt the influence of communists in Latin American countries.[2]

---

[1] Conference presenters from Wisconsin include Reverend George Kolanda, director of the Wisconsin Bishops' Committee for Migrant Workers and the Milwaukee Archdiocese's director of migrant worker programs, and Father Richard Gilsdorf, director of the migrant apostolate for the Green Bay Archdiocese. "Council for Spanish Speaking Will Meet," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* April 14, 1962; "Council for Spanish Speaking May 8-10," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* May 5, 1962.

[2] Near the end of the conference, the executive council adopted several nonbinding resolutions, including endorsements of proposed federal legislation to improve educational opportunities, health facilities, and working conditions for migrant laborers. "Council for Spanish Speaking May 8-10," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* May 5, 1962; "'Tomorrow May Be Too Late' To Save Braceros for Church," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* May 12, 1962; "Notes on

The Midwestern city offered an opportune location for the conference's meeting. In the early years of the 1960s, Wisconsin's Latino population was markedly on the rise. The area encompassed within the ten-county Milwaukee Catholic Archdiocese counted a Latino community of over 25,000 residents, mostly augmented by the continued arrival of immigrant workers from Mexico.[3] While the net migration of Puerto Ricans to Wisconsin had declined in the last years of the 1950s, the state was also witnessing a steep increase in migration from both the island and other American cities in the early months of 1962. Within one year, Milwaukee's Puerto Rican population would grow by more than 300 percent.[4] Along with these two larger Spanish-speaking populations, a small group of Cuban exiles, recently resettled by Milwaukee religious organizations from their temporary refugee homes in Miami, had begun a transplantation process that would last across the rest of the decade. In addition to the growth of Milwaukee's Latino communities, more than twenty thousand migrant workers, both Tejano and Mexican-descent, arrived annually to supplement the state's agricultural workforce.[5]

After offering a pontifical Mass for conference attendees at St. John's Cathedral, Milwaukee Archbishop William Cousins praised the Council's work at a closing banquet. Cousins explained that for too many years, the entire "nomadic tribe" of Spanish-speaking arrivals had been overlooked by social service agencies and government authorities, obliging them to accept salaries far below subsistence levels and forcing them to reside in living quarters that "wouldn't pass the most careless of health inspections." According to Milwaukee's archbishop, most efforts from secular communities to alleviate the deplorable conditions within

---

the Office of the Bishops' Committee for the Spanish Speaking, 1962," Box 18, Folder 4, November 18, 1959, Robert Emmet Lucey Papers, University of Notre Dame Archives.

[3] "Hope to Coordinate Organizations Helping Spanish-Speaking People," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* March 16, 1963.

[4] Anne Akulicz de Santiago, "The Puerto Rican Community of Milwaukee: A Study of Geographic Mobility," (Milwaukee: Spanish Speaking Outreach Institute, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 1977), 63-70, Local History Reference Collection, Milwaukee Public Library Archives (hereafter referred to as MPL).

[5] "Church Must Step Up Efforts to Reach Migrants in Urban Areas," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* May 19, 1962.

which Latin American immigrants toiled in the U.S. had been half-hearted and ineffective, and failed to incorporate a true sense of Christian charity:

> Too often there has been philanthropy without charity, loss of personal trust, loss of personal responsibility…The love of a neighbor is the implementing of charity regardless of a person's background. Love of neighbor is not a word, not a polite phrase; it is a virtue of charity. We will have fallen short of Christ's ideal if our love of neighbor does not go beyond an occasional prayer for them.[6]

The Catholic Church's Spanish-Speaking Apostolate, according to the episcopal leader, offered an alternative, one steeped in the deepest and most tightly-healed Christian beliefs of fellowship and hospitality. Cousins applauded those in attendance for offering an alternative to charity without compassion, one based in material benefit and aimed at initiating larger structural improvements. Any progress in Spanish speakers' living and working circumstances, Cousins told those in the audience, could primarily be attributed to the work of organizations like the National Conference of the Catholic Council for Spanish Speaking.[7]

The commitment to the bettering of the lives of Spanish speakers across the country demonstrated at the May 1962 convention represented a culmination of decades of service for Milwaukee's religious community, but also served as the spark for new, more substantive material engagements with the area's growing Latino population. Through the rest of the decade, Milwaukee Catholic clergy and laity as well as their Protestant brethren committed personnel, tens of thousands of dollars, and spiritual support to the creation of three new permanent institutions that aimed to close the economic, social, and cultural gaps that persisted between white city residents and Latino denizens. These organizations – the Spanish Center, founded by the Catholic Archdiocese in 1963; the United Spot, established by the cross-denominational

---

[6] Proceedings of the Eleventh Conference of National Catholic Conference for the Spanish Speaking (Milwaukee: May 1962), 1, Pamphlet Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society (hereafter referred to as WHS).
[7] "Church Must Step Up Efforts to Reach Migrants in Urban Areas," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* May 19, 1962.

Protestant Milwaukee Christian Center in 1963; and, the United Migrant Opportunity Services, created as an ecumenical initiative by the Catholic Church, the Wisconsin Council of Churches, and the Episcopal Church in 1965 – consolidated many of the ad hoc Latino migrant and urban ministry initiatives initiated by these religious groups over the previous two decades. While the organizations created in the 1960s were new, many of the individuals involved in supporting southeastern Wisconsin's Latinos were veterans of earlier outreach efforts to these communities. This chapter thus argues for an expanded genealogy of Catholic and Protestant institutions developed in this period. By tracing the lineages of both organizational support and individual involvement, historians can better understand the relationship between the intermittent religious endeavors of the mid twentieth century and the more established and better funded efforts of the 1960s.

The May 1962 Milwaukee meeting of the National Conference of the Catholic Council for Spanish Speaking in many ways presaged shifts within the Catholic Church that would move parishes across the U.S. toward a more profound and sustained engagement with the secular world. Responding to the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, first convened by Pope John XXIII in October of 1962 and closed under Pope Paul VI in December of 1965, Catholic clergy and laity reassessed their responsibility to engage their flock beyond the walls of their parishes churches. Historian of religion John McGreevy notes that before the Council, the attention of the U.S. Catholic Church "focused on the construction of parishes and schools and on Catholic professional societies and social organizations."[8] The spirit of Vatican Two, however, called on Catholics to reinterpret the relationship between the Church and the modern world to better meet

[8] John T. McGreevy, "Racial Justice and the People of God: The Second Vatican Council, the Civil Rights Movement, and American Catholics," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 4, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 221-254, quoted on 222.

challenges wrought by political, social, economic, and technological change. Within outreach to Spanish-speaking populations, a handful of Wisconsin clergy had already been engaged in efforts that moved beyond these constrained congregational efforts – migrant ministry programs infused with attempts to influence legislation impacting living and working conditions in the 1950s serving as a primary example – but the early 1960s heralded a new period of social action at the archdiocesan level. Parish clergy and individual missionaries were now joined by clerical leadership, who emphasized a "servant church" model that would engage with social justice issues such as racial discrimination and economic inequality.

The spirit of social action within religious organizations the preceded the Second Vatican Council and followed it first reverberated in Milwaukee's African American community, where Catholic and Protestant clergy had been engaged in organizing against discrimination and racism since the 1940s. As was the case in many northern urban centers, black Milwaukeeans faced dreary employment opportunities and dismal wages, substandard housing, and disparate educational openings throughout the middle decades of the twentieth century. Movements for expanded political and economic justice for black Americans in the U.S. South beginning in the 1950s spurred Milwaukee church organizations to ramp up their efforts to address these issues, which they and city officials referred to as "urban difficulties" in the early 1960s. Although Latino migrants and immigrants faced similar economic and social barriers confronting Milwaukee African Americans, Spanish speakers and their white religious allies struggled to find a space within these citywide conversations, often built along a black-white binary. As the city's Latino community continued to grow through the decade, the issues this population faced became impossible to ignore, not just for religious organizations, but for city officials as well. Organizations such as the Spanish Center, the United Spot, and UMOS helped interject the needs

and complaints of Latino residents into evolving conversations related to economic justice, access to political representation, and social equality.

While working to insert themselves into citywide and national conversations regarding racial discrimination and equity, Milwaukee Latinos and their religious allies benefited greatly from a critical intervention of the black freedom movement: the introduction of federal funding streams to support antipoverty and social justice initiatives. Nancy MacLean has described the African American freedom movement's fight for jobs and justice as the "prime mover" of other contemporary civil rights movements, including those for Latino communities across the country.[9] Social movements petitioning for increased support from Washington, D.C. also prompted the creation of federal funding apparatuses that made possible increased support from both the state and religious institutions. President Lyndon B. Johnson's call for a "war on poverty" in his 1964 State of the Union address, and the subsequent creation of a number of Great Society funding sources, opened the door for public and private collaboration during the decade. Each of the three preeminent Milwaukee Latino-serving institutions created in the 1960s turned to federal sources – most importantly through Johnson's Office of Economic Opportunity and its allocated $800 million for antipoverty proposals – to fund new initiatives in education, health care, and employment training.[10]

A turn to federal funding and the creation of new agencies also presaged a different relationship between faith communities and Latinos in southeastern Wisconsin in the 1960s. Instead of merely relying upon individual clergy to act as advocates for agricultural and

---

[9] Nancy MacLean, *Freedom is Not Enough: The Opening of the American Workplace* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

[10] Marc Rodriguez has analyzed the dearth of scholarship assessing the impact of OEO funding to migrant labor programming and the social justice movements that followed the mid 1960s initiatives, especially within the Wisconsin context. Marc Simon Rodriguez, *The Tejano Diaspora: Mexican Americanism and Ethnic Politics in Texas and Wisconsin* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 100-112.

industrial workers, Catholic and Protestant churches served as crucial brokers between federal and state funding sources and local communities, offering vital support in grant writing, connections with elected officials, and even leadership training for the creation of community programs. While clergy sat on the boards of directors and set the agendas for these institutions, they did so in collaboration with Latino community members. Within Latino communities, the profile and importance of these religious institutions grew largely because of their ability to connect much-needed fiscal and social resources with a growing Mexican and Puerto Rican population.

The increase in federal funding to support marginalized communities' efforts to alleviate economic and social inequality paralleled a rise in Milwaukee religious organizations' monetary and personnel commitments to Latino residents. Identifying a linguistic barrier between clergy and parishioners, for example, Catholic and Protestant leaders placed larger emphasis on the enlistment of Spanish-speaking staff to serve Latino communities. While Protestant denominations such as churches affiliated with the Milwaukee Christian Center recruited pastors from outside of Wisconsin who were either of Latin American descent or had prerequisite language skills, the Milwaukee Catholic Archdiocese placed financial resources into training its seminarians and clergy. Beginning in the fall of 1962, the archdiocese sponsored yearlong adult education seminars to prepare Milwaukee-area priests to better serve Latino congregants. Coordinated by Reverend George Kolanda, a veteran of migrant ministry work in Wisconsin, as well as the continuing education department at Marquette University, lecturers offered courses in Spanish grammar and Latin American culture and history. Kolanda expressed hopes that within four years the city would have "a corps of nearly 50 priests with the training and experience to

meet the spiritual needs of Puerto Rican, Mexican American and Cuban families" in Wisconsin.[11]

For nearly four decades, Milwaukee's Catholic and Protestant clergy and laity had provided temporary services to the city's Spanish speaking through ad hoc agencies like mutual aid societies and migrant ministries. The hiring and training of clerical staff prepared to work with Spanish speakers, along with the creation of permanent institutions dedicated to bettering the material and spiritual wellbeing of Latino communities, demonstrated an augmented commitment by Milwaukee's religious organizations to the city's fastest growing population. A budding spirit of social action in the early 1960s among the city's faithful, focused on alleviating economic and social inequalities to ultimately bridge the divide between Milwaukee's Latino and white residents, served as the crucial building block for the creation of agencies that would continue to be fundamental for Latinos throughout the second half of the twentieth century.

Milwaukee Religious Organizations Address "Urban Difficulties" in the Early 1960s

During the early to mid 1960s, discussions of the economic and educational disparities between different communities in Milwaukee and the racial dynamics that colored those inequalities centered primarily within a black-white binary, both within religious spaces and arenas outside of them. Media coverage, city and county reference reports, and public conferences discussed the economic and housing inequities African American residents faced,

[11] Brother Leo V. Ryan, C.S.V., director of continuing education at Marquette, viewed the seminars as an experiment that promised "to provide a substantial educational opportunity for the participants and may well serve as a model for other dioceses seeking the solution to a similar problem of providing on-the-scene training for priests who must reach the migrant worker, the new immigrant and other Spanish-speaking." Curates from across the archdiocese participated, including those working in sections of Milwaukee without large Spanish-speaking populations that hoped to broaden their skillset in case Latinos would eventually move into their parishes. "Program to Prepare Priests for Work With the Spanish Speaking," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* September 22, 1962; Notes on the Office of the Bishops' Committee for the Spanish Speaking, 1962, Box 18, Folder 4, November 18, 1959, Robert Emmet Lucey Papers, University of Notre Dame Archives.

primarily on the city's near north side and inner core area. The issues facing Milwaukee Latinos – Mexican immigrants, Tejano migrants, Puerto Rican transplants, and Cuban refugees – were, for the most part, treated by city officials and religious leaders as a world apart. Religious organizations, city social services, and the media, in perpetuating this black-white dichotomy for understanding race in the city, typically referred to Latinos broadly as either 'migrants' or 'the Spanish-speaking community.'

This bifurcated racial dichotomy was not particular to Milwaukee, but indicative of larger historical trends in industrial metropolises across the U.S. Midwest. In her study of Latinos in urban areas like Chicago and Detroit throughout the mid twentieth century, Deborah Kanter identifies the ways in which Mexicans lived as "truly in-between people" that did not fit within a racial binary fit along black and white lines.[12] In assessing social services, religious initiatives, and federal programs aimed to alleviate economic disparities and employment discrimination in Milwaukee, grassroots activists such as Jesus Salas worked against the notion that "most of the inner-city problems have been defined as Black problems, not as Spanish-American problems."[13] It would not be until the late 1960s and early 1970s that Latino activists forced themselves into the city's conversations regarding poverty, urban blight, and structural racism, often borrowing strategies and language from African-American civil rights and black power movements flourishing within the city.

It was within this binary that Milwaukee church leaders of different Christian and Jewish denominations first began organizing to address what they referred to as "urban difficulties"

---

[12] Deborah Kanter, "Truly In-between People: Situating Latinos in Twentieth-Century Urban History," *Journal of Urban History* 41, no. 6 (2015): 1143-1151.
[13] Jesus Salas, "Reflections on Urban Life," in *Teaching About Life in the City,* ed. Richard Wisniewski (Washington, D.C.: National Council for the Social Studies, 1972), 61-73, Archival Resources on Hispanics in Wisconsin, WHS.

affecting black residents in the late 1950s. In the 1950s and early 1960s, liberal clergy in northern urban cities formed interracial and interreligious councils as both educational initiatives and monitors of instances of racism within congregations. Beryl Satter notes that members of these councils based their organizations on a vision of religion as a "third force" separate from economics or politics and hoped to use their standing as religious authorities to influence political leadership in their cities. The Milwaukee Catholic Archdiocese formed their first interracial council in 1958, making inroads to connect with other Christian and Jewish faith leaders through the end of the decade.[14]

The work interfaith and interracial organizations took on during the late 1950s and early 1960s was twofold. First, white clergy worked to bridge divides between black and white congregants within religious spaces, confronting segregation in churches and religious organizations. The Milwaukee Catholic Interracial Council, for example, expressed as a central goal the promotion of "interracial justice and charity" that would "thus contribute to [the] removal of tensions and prejudice between races," pledging to do so by "assisting on the parish level with the integration of newcomers into the life of the community be they of Negro, Puerto Rican, Mexican, Indian, Chinese, Japanese, or other descent." The second objective, however, was more complicated and often open to interpretation, as white members of religious communities grappled with the extent to which they felt they had a responsibility to fight for political and economic change alongside communities of color *outside of their parishes*. While the Milwaukee Catholic Interracial Council pledged to work not just within congregational

[14] Beryl Satter, ""Our Greatest Moments of Glory Have Been Fighting the Institutions We Love the Most": The Rise and Fall of Chicago's Interreligious Council on Urban Affairs, 1958-1969," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 22, no. 2 (Spring 2004): 33-44. For studies on Midwestern Catholic interracial programs in the 1960s and 1970s, see Karen Joy Johnson, "The Universal Church in the Segregated City: Doing Catholic Interracialism in Chicago, 1916-1963," (PhD diss., University of Illinois-Chicago, 2013); Kevin Michael Ryan, "Catholic Liberal Interracialism in the Archdiocese of Chicago in the 1960s and 1970s," (PhD diss., University of Buffalo, 2016).

spaces, but also with public and private organizations and institutions dedicated to improving "human relations" in the city, outward-facing programs were often underfunded and temporary.[15] The divide between messaging and intent from clergy, and a practical application of these objectives across spiritual and secular spaces, often proved difficult to bridge. Milwaukee became a crucial staging ground for these debates. The Wisconsin city, as John McGreevy has noted, became the "site of the most sustained Catholic encounter with racial issues" in the urban north during the 1960s as people of religious faith from different ethno-racial backgrounds wrestled with both contentions.[16]

Interfaith and interracial councils organized regional and national conferences in the 1960s that brought together religious leaders to address their roles in alleviating racial tensions wracking urban congregations. Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish leaders held the first National Conference on Religion and Race in Chicago in January of 1963. With nearly seven hundred delegates representing sixty-eight religious bodies along with over two hundred observers, the meeting had the backing of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, the National Council of Churches, and the Synagogue Council of America. A historic meeting of civil rights leaders, including Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the interfaith conference marked the first occasion national leaders of the three major faiths had agreed in a unified voice on the immorality of racism. Joseph Chinnici notes that the convening created "a new public religious language for social change" that emphasized "rights, participation, equality, conscience, justice, and civic

---

[15] "Objectives of the Catholic Interracial Council of Churches, 1959," Series 1, Box 1, Folder 1, Milwaukee Catholic Interracial Council Records, Marquette University Department of Special Collections and University Archives (hereafter referred to as MUDSCUA).

[16] McGreevy's study places the history of Milwaukee's Catholic Church and its complicated mid-twentieth century interactions with race in conversation with Boston, Chicago, Detroit, New York, and Philadelphia. John McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth-Century Urban North* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 197.

engagement for social change."[17] In a lengthy opening statement at the conference, Chicago's Catholic Cardinal Albert Meyer cited racial animosity as residing at the core of the many problems facing American society. Identifying racial prejudice against African Americans as "an evil [society had] inherited," Meyer called on Christians to "realistically assess the dimensions of this evil, to examine our conscience in the light of our religious convictions, and to determine to do something constructive about it in a manner in keeping with our best American traditions."[18]

Following the Chicago meeting, Milwaukee held its own symposium in April of 1963, the Greater Milwaukee Conference on Religion and Race, later branded the Interfaith Conference. Led by organizers from the Milwaukee Catholic Archdiocese and the Greater Milwaukee Council of Churches, representatives from approximately forty different Christian and Jewish congregations attended sessions on education, employment, housing, and interracial communication.[19] Later that fall, leaders of Milwaukee's major faiths pledged themselves and urged all citizens to cooperate in helping tear down religious and racial barriers of prejudice, discrimination, and segregation in a joint appearance before the Conference on Race and Religion in September of 1963, the largest interfaith meeting ever held in the city.[20] By 1966, the Greater Milwaukee Conference on Race and Religion had established a fulltime staff and

---

[17] Joseph P. Chinnici, O.F.M., "Ecumenism, Civil Rights, and the Second Vatican Council: The American Experience," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 30, no. 3 (Summer 2012): 39. See also Steven Avella, *Confidence and Crisis: A History of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, 1959-1977* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2014), 94-95.
[18] "Racial Prejudice Called Moral Evil by Chicago's Cardinal Meyer," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* January 19, 1963.
[19] The conference focused specifically on African-American—white relationships in the city, with keynote addresses entitled "The Aspirations of the American Negro" and "The Negro in Milwaukee." See "Proceedings: Greater Milwaukee Conference on Religion and Race, 1963" Local History Manuscript Collection, Milwaukee County Historical Society (hereafter referred to as MCHS); "Milwaukee Conference on Religion and Race, September 15-16, 1963," *Race Forum Newsletter: The Catholic Interracial Council,* September 1963, Series 1, Box 1, Folder 2, Milwaukee Catholic Interracial Council Records, MUDSCUA; Kate McCarthy, *Interfaith Encounters in America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 104; Avella, *Confidence and Crisis*, 95.
[20] "Leaders of Major Faiths Pledge Help In Eliminating Racial, Religious Bias," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* August 21, 1963; Avella, *Confidence and Crisis*, 96-99.

secretariat charged with leading the campaign to "eradicate the Negro ghetto" and eliminate "all traces of racial discrimination" in the city.[21]

Milwaukee's Catholic Church took a lead in committing staffing and financial support to organizing around issues related to race in the city through the decade. In February of 1966, Archbishop Cousins called a meeting of inner-city-serving priests to create a plan for improving community race relations. While most of the committee's members were from predominately African-American neighborhoods on the city's north side, Reverend John Maurice, embedded on the city's Latino south side and a veteran of migrant ministry programs, also joined the group's work. Father Patrick Flood, spokesman for St. Martin's parish and a graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's graduate program in urban affairs, offered proposals addressing black economic and social disparities resulting from two years of community forums and discussions. The following month, Cousins sanctioned the meeting of priests as the Council on Urban Life (CUL) with Flood as its interim director, and invited the clergy from inner city parishes to establish committees to tackle fair housing, poverty, employment, education, and human relations.[22] Maurice, in his role as senior director of the archdiocese's Spanish Speaking Apostolate, served on the organization's executive committee, a post he held through the early 1970s.[23] While the CUL's primary charge focused on black-white relations in Milwaukee,

---

[21] "Conference on Race and Religion Approves Plan for Decade-Long Attack on Prejudice," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* March 5, 1966; "Archdiocese Pledges $50,000 To Local War on Prejudice," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* May 14, 1966.

[22] The Council coordinated many of its efforts with the previously-established interfaith Conference on Religion and Race. "Inner Core Priests Take First Steps Toward Positive Program," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* February 5, 1966; "Core Area Priests Form Council on Urban Life," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* March 15, 1966; "Core Area Council of Priests Sets Up Objectives, Committee," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* March 19, 1966; "More Speeches Made Than Questions Asked At Council's First Forum on Open Housing," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* October 7, 1967. See also Avella, *Confidence and Crisis,* 287-292.

[23] "'Core' Priests Pick Bleidorn as Chairman," *Milwaukee Journal,* March 15, 1966; "Meeting Minutes, November 1, 1966," Series 1, Box 1, Folder 2, Council on Urban and Rural Life Records, MUDSCUA. Maurice would go on to serve as the chairman of the Board of Officers for the Council from 1971 until 1974. See "Meeting Minutes, October 12, 1971, 1967," Series 1, Box 1, Folder 2, Council on Urban and Rural Life Records, MUDSCUA.

Cousins reminded its members to offer special attention to shifting demographic trends in the city, suggesting that parishes form groups to offer aid to newly-arriving Spanish-speaking families as a symbol of "expand[ing] the Christian hand of love."[24]

The Council on Urban Life immediately took charge of archdiocesan efforts to increase clergy's involvement in the pressing secular issues of the day. CUL engaged in what its members considered "catalytic functions," jumpstarting, advising, and pressuring local Catholic and affiliated organizations to participate in racial and social justice initiatives connected to housing and poverty.[25] CUL held continuing education seminars for Milwaukee priests to discuss the "urban life" of their congregants, offered recommendations on textbooks for use in parochial schools that represented a diversity of "multi-ethnic" experiences, and developed sermons on race and poverty for use on Sunday mornings.[26] Maurice, who chaired the Council's Government Program Committee, also petitioned for archdiocesan-funded English classes for Milwaukee's Spanish speakers and expanded local and federal efforts to provide government publications in Spanish for community members.[27] Protracted advocacy on behalf of area Latinos exemplified CUL's growing and expanding focus on communities of color beyond Milwaukee's black residents. In May of 1967, the group amended their institutional charge, rebranding their focus to

---

[24] "Archbishop Urges Council on Urban Life to Broaden Goals," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* June 4, 1966.
[25] "Report to the Board, March 3, 1969," Series 1, Box 2, Folder 4, Council on Urban and Rural Life Records, MUDSCUA.
[26] CUL also raised funding to send Milwaukee priests to the Urban Training Center in Chicago, which offered intense courses in "urban ministry" and community organizing and worked to "form the correct attitudes in ministers in order for them to do their work more effectively" in urban settings. See "Meeting Minutes, February 14, 1967," Series 1, Box 1, Folder 2, Council on Urban and Rural Life Records, MUDSCUA; "Report to the Board, March 3, 1969," Series 1, Box 2, Folder 4, Council on Urban and Rural Life Records, MUDSCUA; "Sermons Prepared by the Milwaukee Council on Urban Life," Series 1, Box 2, Folder 6, Council on Urban and Rural Life Records, MUDSCUA.
[27] "Meeting Minutes, March 16, 1967," Series 1, Box 1, Folder 2, Council on Urban and Rural Life Records, MUDSCUA.

include "poverty" issues instead of "Negro" issues, a stipulation designed to include Milwaukee's growing south side Spanish-speaking community.[28]

Guiding CUL's work was an impetus to transform area Catholic institutions into arms of a "servant church," a chief ecclesiological principle of the Second Vatican Council that called on Catholics to address secular needs in the economic, social, and political orders. CUL's founding documents called on Milwaukee clergy to serve "the whole man," focusing not only on the soul of parishioners but also on the "temporal needs and aspirations" of the faithful. They further offered that to expand the influence and responsibility of the Church in social matters, clergy were required to focus not only on parishes, but also on improving and educating what they referred to as "the secular city."[29] With membership growing to more than 140 clergy within a year, Cousins transitioned CUL into a fulltime office in September of 1967. The archbishop assigned Flood, recently returned from Chicago where he had spent the previous year observing the urban affairs office of the Chicago archdiocese, as the Council's fulltime director.[30]

The efforts of a growing cadre of social-justice minded priests and nuns through the mid and late 1960s quickly came into conflict with urban white Catholics' anxieties surrounding the potential social and economic ramifications of the civil rights movement, a split that represented competing ideals of the Catholic Church's role in civil rights activism in the urban north. John McGreevy posits that civil rights movements and the Second Vatican Council "widened the divide" between "two Catholic peoples." In combination, these two trends shifted the church

---

[28] "Meeting Minutes, May 3, 1967," Series 1, Box 1, Folder 2, Council on Urban and Rural Life Records, MUDSCUA. Through CUL, also Maurice instigated a federal Civil Rights Commission investigation into discrimination against Spanish-speaking students in ten Milwaukee public schools. See "Report to the Board, March 3, 1969," Series 1, Box 2, Folder 4, Council on Urban and Rural Life Records, MUDSCUA.

[29] "The Council on Urban Life: Declaration, April 12, 1966," Series 1, Box 2, Folder 6, Council on Urban and Rural Life Records, MUDSCUA.

[30] CUL's mission, according to Flood, included promoting "a policy of self-determination" among marginalized communities in the city. "Urban Affairs Office Opened by Catholics," *Milwaukee Journal,* September 20, 1967.

from being set apart from the world to being more closely linked to modern life, and began a reorientation for Catholicism towards a more global perspective. On one end resided "liberal Catholics" who condemned racism and worked to create coalitions to end segregation and alleviate economic disparities. Those congregants were challenged by a larger majority of Catholics, who felt threatened by demographic changes recomposing the racial background of urban neighborhoods.[31] Patrick Jones notes that the flight of many middle-class whites to the surrounding suburbs in the postwar years coupled with urban white ethnic Catholics and their neighbors worrying about "declining home values, crumbling urban infrastructure, rising crime rates, and the beginning of the long economic slide toward deindustrialization" fostered an air of anxiety across Milwaukee in the 1960s. Jones argues the concurrent rapid growth of communities of color in the city, first black and then Latino, "seemed like a threat" to urban white Catholics. Leaders of urban congregations, both Catholic and Protestant, understood however that their survival in part depended on their ability to reach out to the city's growing communities of color. To create inviting religious spaces, inner city clergy needed to understand the circumstances and aspirations of their prospective congregants.[32] For those priests already involved in social justice actions in Milwaukee's communities, the Second Vatican Council, however, seemed to offer official endorsement and justification of their interracial initiatives.

Perhaps no individual exemplified the tension between social justice ministry and conservative Catholics more than Milwaukee's Father James Groppi. From 1966 to 1969, Groppi

---

[31] McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries,* 155-174; Patrick D. Jones, *The Selma of the North: Civil Rights Insurgency in Milwaukee* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010)*,* 84-92; Timothy Kelly, *The Transformation of American Catholicism: The Pittsburgh Laity and the Second Vatican Council* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009); Suellen Hoy, *Good Hearts: Catholic Sisters in Chicago's Past* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 125-153.

[32] Jones, *The Selma of the North,* 84-92. See also Jeffery Burns, *Disturbing the Peace: A History of the Christian Family Movement, 1949-1974* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 205; McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries,* 133-145.

served as the advisor to the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Youth Council, helping organize protests alongside African-American activists against segregation in Milwaukee schools and social clubs and in support of fair housing laws. Groppi marshalled the Youth Council and thousands of supporters in 1967, leading open housing marches which included two hundred nights of marches between the city's inner core and south side. Gaining national prominence for his ability to gather support and media attention, the charismatic Groppi soon caught the ire of Milwaukee's more conservative Catholics. The civil rights leader's opponents went so far as to accuse the Archbishop Cousins of subsidizing Groppi and the Youth Council's discontent and civil disobedience, taking out an advertisement in the *Milwaukee Journal* in 1967 calling on all Catholics to cease donations to the archdiocese's Charities and Development Fund. Cousins, who himself disagreed with many of Groppi's more public demonstration but felt it necessary to support the priest's advocacy, called for a middle-road approach focused less on direct action protests and more on mediation and interfaith and interracial conversations.[33]

While Groppi's dramatic marches garnered much of the local and national media's attention during the 1960s, individual clergy and religious organizations had been quietly involved in their own forms of social justice outreach to Milwaukee Latinos since the beginning of the decade. Individual Catholic priests such as Reverends George Kolanda and John Maurice, innovators in migrant outreach, had founded the south side-based Spanish Center in 1963, while Catholics combined their efforts with Protestant initiatives to create the United Migrant Opportunity Services (UMOS) in 1965. These clergy relied upon church social action theology from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, as well as Catholic Action and Catholic

[33] "Archbishop Cousins: 'Deeply Shocked' at Action Appealing to Racial Justice," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* March 18, 1967; "Archbishop Clarifies Stand on Charities, Race Issues," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* March 25, 1967.

Worker Movements, as spiritual guidance and dogmatic justification for their work among the city's Spanish speakers and outspoken support for more forceful efforts to alleviate economic disparities between communities of color and the city's majority community.

Moving Beyond the "Sugar Christian" Approach: The Spanish Center

Questions of "social action" and religious organizations' responsibility to those most in need dominated Milwaukee Catholic leaders' agendas in the 1960s. As the city's Spanish-speaking population soared to over twenty-five thousand residents in the early 1960s – largely among Mexican immigrants, Mexican-descent Texas migrant workers, and Puerto Rican migrants - religious and lay organizations across the area created ad hoc committees and initiatives to provide at least minimal forms of aid for the rapidly growing Latino community, but often found themselves understaffed and under-resourced to adequately address health care and educational concerns. Spurred on by the 1962 meeting of the National Conference of the Catholic Council for Spanish Speaking, Reverends George Kolanda and John Maurice of the Milwaukee Catholic Archdiocese gathered several organizations with experience in the field of Latino outreach in the spring of 1963. Consolidated under the newly-formed Archdiocesan Council for Spanish Speaking, the conglomerate agency carried the charge of improving "the general welfare of Spanish speaking residents and migrants by coordinating resources of diocesan organizations and efforts of individual ethnic groups through a central council."[34]

The new Milwaukee Archdiocesan Council for Spanish Speaking met at St. Hyacinth Hall in March of 1963 to triage the group's priorities. Kolanda, serving executive secretary of the Wisconsin Bishops Migrant Commission, and Maurice, assistant director of the Commission, led

[34] "Hope to Co-Ordinate Organizations Helping Spanish-Speaking People," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* March 16, 1963.

a meeting attended by thirty-five priests and laymen from across southeast Wisconsin. Representatives from a wide range of Catholic-serving institutions were in attendance, including the Christian Family Movement, the Milwaukee Archdiocesan Council of Catholic Nurses, the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, the St. Vincent de Paul Society, and the St. Thomas More Society. In addition to the lay religious organizations, Maurice invited Latino-directed community groups such as El Círculo Cubano de Milwaukee, El Club Latino Americano, La Sociedad Mutualista Hispano Azteca, LULAC of Racine, and the Waukesha Human Relations Council to attend.[35]

From its start, the Council sought to coordinate the growing number of social service agencies catering to Latinos and amplify the impact of the agencies' offerings. Expressing the Church's particular need to serve the predominately Catholic Latino community, Kolanda explained to the groups' members at their first meeting, "We can't ignore these people. We have to show them that the Church is interested in them not only spiritually but as a whole person." Maurice believed that each Latin-American nationality group had specific problems they felt weren't being met, and that individual efforts to help such a diverse population couldn't "be accomplished on the parish level but aid might be gained through a united effort." Kolanda and Maurice thus hoped that "through an exchange of ideas and information" through the council, all organizations could be of assistance to one another. Council members agreed upon several areas of need, including expanded Spanish and English classes for learners of all ages; more bilingual personnel in Milwaukee and Waukesha County welfare departments; and, an impending demand for resettlement aid for those who would be affected by the expansion of the south leg of the city's expressway system along Fourth and Fifth Streets, an area heavily-populated by Spanish

[35] Ibid.

speakers. Understanding that part of the council's work would include outreach to non-Latino Catholic congregants, John Herod of Racine, a member of Christian Family Movement, implored the white members of the council to begin having conversations with their parish colleagues who might be reticent to join the organization, explaining that "you don't have to be an expert in the Spanish language to help these people…you just have an interest in them and their welfare."[36]

In the spring and summer of 1963, the group's elected six-member leadership committee met to draft a constitution and bylaws. The interethnic council leadership included Richard H. Naber, representing the Christian Family Movement; Federico Herrera, representing Sociedad Mutualista and Our Lady of Guadalupe; John M. Winters, a professor at Marquette University Law School and representative of the St. Thomas More Society; Katherine Fitzgerald, representing the Milwaukee Archdiocesan Council of Catholic Nurses; and, Ernesto Malacara of Racine, representing LULAC-Racine. Maurice was appointed as the Council's spiritual moderator and de facto meeting leader, and Kolanda served as Cousin's liaison. Members agreed to chair committees that include public relations, health, legal aid, legislation employment, welfare, religious affairs, education, migrant workers, and housing.[37]

Unlike future efforts like the United Migrant Opportunity Services (UMOS), the Archdiocesan Council for the Spanish Speaking was principally a Catholic organization. All members of the committee either served on parish councils or in a Catholic lay society. Maurice conceded that the development of the Council was in part motivated by the archdiocese's growing concern towards the Protestant Council of Churches' social service initiatives within the city's Latino community. The reverend believed that Cousins intended the Council to

---

[36] "Catholics Will Aid 'Spanish,'" *Milwaukee Sentinel*, July 20, 1963.
[37] "Select Committee to Help Push Organization for Spanish Speaking," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* April 6, 1963; "Spanish Speaking Council Given Official Approval of Archbishop," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* May 18, 1963; "Name 2 Leaders for Catholic Unit," *Racine Journal-Times,* July 19, 1963.

"counteract other influences" as "the Protestant churches and YMCA were making bids" on the area's Latinos, and Council outreach would thus act as a "keep-the-Protestants-out kind of thing."[38] Charles O'Neill, executive secretary of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, noted that he had intereacted with several Spanish speakers in the region who were Protestants. While acknowledging that future efforts would need to include evangelizing among the unconverted, O'Neil urged the Council to work with any Latino in need regardless of their denominational affiliation: "If we lost them forget that part of it. Just keep working with them, hoping they'll return. Everyone is precious, we don't want to lose any more." [39]

Maurice hoped that the Archdiocese would promise to commit material resources to the council's initiatives, beginning with the purchase of a space to house a referral center for welfare and health services. His initial outreach to Cousins, however, proved less than successful:

> We needed a physical space where Spanish speaking could walk in and have someone to talk to. In '64 we asked the Archbishop to open a storefront operation. He said no. He just wanted to run the program out of the parish. I told him that it couldn't work that way because the people whom you wanted to help wouldn't come to the church. That's the old "sugar Christian" approach. You tell the person to come to church and we'll help you.

Maurice's persistence, however, paid off by the spring of 1964, when he secured a small set of archdiocesan funds to rent an abandoned storefront on South Sixth Street, in the heart of the south side's Latino community, for an affordable forty dollars a month. Maurice turned to volunteers to renovate the building along with donations from community members from everything ranging from lightbulbs to stovepipes.[40]

Employing the resources of the different community organizations represented on the council, the Archdiocesan Council for the Spanish Speaking opened El Centro Hispano

---

[38] Howard Coan, "The History of the Spanish Center," Unpublished typescript (Milwaukee: 1972), 3, Archival Resources on Hispanics in Wisconsin, WHS.
[39] "Spanish Council Outlines Aims, Names Officers," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* July 27, 1963.
[40] Coan, "The History of the Spanish Center," 4.

Americano, also known as the Spanish Center, in June of 1964, becoming the first Latino non-profit organization in Wisconsin. To avoid provoking interethnic animosity between area Mexicans and Puerto Ricans, the board of directors chose Maurice – a white priest – to serve as the fulltime director of the Latino-serving Center. With a small $6,000 budget from the Archdiocese, Maurice primarily envisioned Centro as a referral agency and community focal point for Latinos seeking advice and counsel, helping direct Spanish speakers towards city and religious departments that specialized in education, employment, health, legal matters, and religious affairs.[41] Almost immediately, the new director began minimizing any overt religiosity in the Center's programming, explaining:

> We felt religious activities should be taken care of by the parishes. I felt strongly that I didn't want to compete with parishes in the religious area. We trained Latins to be more effective leaders in their parishes. I felt the role of the Spanish Center – if the Church was true to its own commitment – would show the Church was concerned about human and social problems and give more credence to the gospel.[42]

Within a few months of the Centro's opening, however, Maurice realized that the community's needs required more than a simple referral service distributing brochures. Thanks to the volunteer efforts of fifty community members and the Sisters of the Divine Savior, the organization developed much-needed English elementary-level classes for recent adult arrivals, as well as creating a library for children and teenagers. The new courses brought hundreds of Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban community members through Centro's doors in the fall and winter of 1964. As class waiting lists grew, Maurice turned to both white and Latino neighborhood members for more volunteers, imploring, "We need people with some imagination

---

[41] "Establish Center To Aid Spanish Speaking People," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* April 11, 1964; "Catholics Plan Spanish Center," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, May 30, 1964; "Spanish Center To Open Monday On South Side," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* June 20, 1964.

[42] Coan, "The History of the Spanish Center," 6. The Center also served as a headquarters for the archdiocese's migrant workers program.

who'll spend some time to find out what's going on…people who feel any interest in helping must develop it within themselves and see these needy persons as their brothers in Christ."[43]

Following a move to a larger building on West National Avenue and with demand for their services expanding, Centro seized upon newly-made available federal funding from the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) in the summer of 1965, receiving financial backing to start Wisconsin's first urban bilingual Head Start program. Centro volunteers worked with Sister M. Charles Ann, a Spanish instructor at Mount Mary, and Sister Mary Pierre, both School Sisters of Notre Dame, to develop curriculum and hire teachers to teach 120 pre-school children. The $18,000 OEO grant funded twelve teachers and aids, who taught alongside 130 volunteer high school and college students. Working with a student population that was three quarters Spanish speaking, Sister Ann explained, "We'll teach them English but we'll also correct, greet and praise the child in Spanish." Responding to pleas in parish bulletins and school registration forms for support, the children's mothers staffed many of the volunteer positions, most of whom assisted in what few free hours they had between busy work schedules.[44]

In the mid to late 1960s, women like Sisters Patricia Ann and Mary and the mothers of schoolchildren served as the primary educators for the Spanish Center's classroom offerings. The nuns and mothers were often joined by young, white female volunteers from local colleges interested in gaining on-the-job teaching experiences in the community. Volunteer students from the local teaching colleges such as Pat Murphy, a nineteen-year-old University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee sophomore, tutored young Spanish speakers during evening classes at the Center

---

[43] "Young and Not So Young Learn English at Center," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, December 5, 1964; "Centro-Hispano American Helps Spanish Speaking People Adjust to New Culture," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* December 19, 1964.
[44] "Four Parochial Schools Will Be Pressed Into Service When 'Operation Head Start' Begins Monday in Milwaukee," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* June 26, 1965; "Mothers Play Important Role in Helping Provide Auxiliary Education Services at St. Michael's," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* January 22, 1966. Centro's grant writers relied in part upon research by Marquette University students conducted at the site in 1964.

multiple times a week while completing their regular course loads. Student volunteers were drawn to the work for a variety of reasons, including a linguistic interest sparked by study abroad experiences in Latin American countries. Murphy, who had studied Spanish for four years in high school, cited an intensive summer session at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) in Mexico City as the catalyst for her involvement. More than thirty young white women like Murphy served as the only available educators, nearly always gratis, both before the infusion of federal funding in 1965 and in the intermittent periods when Head Start funding proved insufficient to compensate for paid educators from the local school district.[45]

The successful first year of Head Start classes and the ensuing waiting lists prompted Centro to apply for an additional $66,000 in federal funds the following summer, which allowed them to offer health services for all registered students and create satellite programs at the parochial schools of St. Patrick, St. Boniface, and St. Francis. When the nearby Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church and Holy Trinity parish merged in the summer of 1966, the Archdiocese gave the Center use of the old Guadalupe Church and parish house at West Washington Avenue as a permanent home for the Head Start program. The preschool classes proved so popular that Centro expanded curricular offerings to span across the entire school year, transforming the program into one of the neighborhood's first integrated and most successful schools with Latino, white, African-American, and American-Indian students in attendance. Turning to increased funding from the Archdiocesan Charities and Development Fund to increase the number of classrooms, the program grew to full capacity with a waiting list of nearly 250 children by 1968.[46]

---

[45] "She Helps Others Over Language Hurdle," *Milwaukee Journal,* December 6, 1964.
[46] "4 Head Start Requests OK'd Here, Sent to US," *Milwaukee Journal,* September 16, 1965; "Encouraged by Summer 'Head Start' Programs, Nuns Plan to Continue Project Through Winter," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* October 2, 1965; "Mothers Learn to Cook," *Milwaukee Journal,* June 9, 1966; "Women Have Families of Their Own but

While bilingual Head Start classes served as the base for the Center's programmatic offerings in its early years, staff and volunteers also incorporated innovate adult education curricula to meet broader community needs. Centro expanded their curricular offerings to include Adult Basic Education (ABE) classes funded by the State Board of Adult and Vocational Education and coordinated through the Milwaukee Area Technical College in 1966, becoming within a few years the state's largest adult education and only bilingual ABE program. Program coordinator Jesus Pagan emphasized one-on-one English tutoring for job skills development to spur Latinos out of the "marginal jobs" traditionally designated for monolingual Spanish speakers. Pagan, originally from Puerto Rico, had first worked in New York with teenage gangs before moving to Wisconsin to work at the Lakeside Children's Center in Milwaukee, where Maurice recruited him to facilitate several Centro's programs. The young director professed an affinity for the Second Vatican Council's concept of the "church of the poor," a guiding philosophy that pushed Centro staff to seize as their responsibility the confrontation of all problems of poverty faced by Latinos across the city.[47]

The ABE programs and English courses served immigrants from various Latin American countries working towards American citizenship, as well Cuban refugees who had held professional positions in their home countries but were forced to work as laborers in the U.S. due to language barriers. Most students, however, were native-born Spanish-speaking American citizens who couldn't speak, read, or write in English and had very limited literacy in Spanish. Teacher Rose Guajardo described her students as "courageous, intelligent people who are very much aware that unless they better themselves they will not be able to compete with our present

---

Interest in Other Children Bring Them to Mount Mary College," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* July 16, 1966; "In Our Little Spanish Town," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* July 26, 1967.

[47] "Christian Way To Help the Poor," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* July 7, 1966; "Spanish Center Helps Adults Hurdle Obstacles of English," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* April 3, 1967.

technology…Our students merit and have our respect, for it takes a lot of courage and great humility to come and advertise, so to speak, the fact that they are undereducated." Striving to build community beyond the classroom, program facilitators held open houses, community dances, and holiday parties at nearby St. Hyacinth Church to celebrate the successes of their students and invite the wider Latino community into Centro's work. Thanks to private grant funding that allowed the purchase of adjacent storefronts and the expansion of ABE programming, the student population boomed to nearly nine hundred students by 1967.[48]

The ABE classes also served to expand educational prospects for young Milwaukee Latinas through the decade, oftentimes the only avenues available to them in the city. Graciela de la Cruz began working as a receptionist at the Spanish Center in 1968 after her family welcomed their second daughter to the fold and found themselves in need of expanded income. Working at the Center's front desk from six to nine nearly every week night, Graciela was called upon to substitute as an ABE teacher promptly upon joining the agency and was soon facilitating a class of more than thirty adult English learners from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Russia. De la Cruz described the opportunity to expand her educational training thanks to a chance site visit from a federal OEO representative in her first year as a teacher:

> While I was teaching, a young man from Washington, D.C. representing the Great Society programs came to observe our classes. I explained to him that I wasn't a teacher, but he asked to observe my class anyway. He sat in the back of my class, writing and writing. He then asked me, "How much college do you have?" I told him, "None, but I was very good in school and was even in honor society." He then gave me his card and told me to go to [college], to go see a specific counselor, and to tell them that he had sent me.

Despite juggling raising her two daughters and continuing her work at the Spanish Center, de la Cruz enrolled in courses at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, spurred on by her students:

---

[48] "Spanish Center to Expand Facilities," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* June 10, 1967; Milwaukee Council for the Spanish Speaking, "Adult Basic Education Annual Report, July 1, 1967-June 30, 1968," (June 1968).

> With the taking care of the home and children, it was difficult, but my students loved me. They would say to me, "You're going to become a teacher, you have to become a teacher." I would have been one of the only certified teachers at the Spanish Center, where I kept working while I attended university.

De la Cruz would eventually earn her bachelor's degree in education before pursuing two graduate degrees in educational administration and becoming one of the first Latina administrators in Milwaukee's public schools.[49]

Centro staff also recognized public health needs within the Milwaukee Latino community in areas. In 1965, a local dentist recruited colleagues and dental hygienists to set up a free dental clinic in a small back room of the Center. The ad hoc staff opened their clinic with an old dental chair, a retrofitted x-ray machine, and the barest of medicine, but soon received donations of new equipment from Marquette University Dental School. With more materials on hand, Sister Patricia Ann organized a mothers' group to expand the dental services into a pediatrics clinic in the old Guadalupe rectory in 1969. The *Catholic Herald Citizen* reported that volunteer doctors and nurses from the nearby suburb of Hales Corners served the community "with the dedication of missionaries in a foreign land." Doctors found that Spanish-speaking families who may have been reticent to visit their formal medical offices were more willing to make appointments at the Guadalupe rectory, at this point a familiar spot to Spanish-speaking parents as the home of the community's bilingual Head Start program. The makeshift medical services became a fully operational children's clinic known as the Guadalupe Center the following year, serving Latinos across the south side for decades to come.[50]

---

[49] Graciela de la Cruz interview, conducted by author, Milwaukee, WI, January 10, 2017.

[50] The clinic began with no running water and volunteers scrambled for medicine either drawn from samples that came from the doctor's offices or that were donated by pharmaceutical companies. Patients paid $0.50 per visit, but only if they could afford it. "Inner city clinic like mission outpost for suburban doctor, nurse," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* June 20, 1970. See also "Si, It's Good Time to See the Dentist," *Milwaukee Journal,* April 6, 1966; "Community Celebrates Xmas," *La Guardia,* December 1970; "Children's Clinic," *La Guardia,* February 1971.

In identifying barriers to the Latino community's economic advancement in the city, the Centro's board of directors also found that Spanish speakers faced much greater difficulty in securing loans for buying homes. As no bank served the neighborhood near the Center, the board established El Centro Consumer Education and Credit Union in October of 1966 to help alleviate the pressing problem of limited availability of credit for south side Latinos. Organized under Office of Economic Opportunity guidelines to receive federal funding and support, the new credit union offered low-interest loans to its members, as well as budget counseling and advice for those seeking to grow their financial literacy. Anthony Martínez, manager of the new credit union, explained, "We are here to help the people help themselves, with the emphasis on service instead of profit." Twenty-five charter members paid an initial $5.25 membership fee to inaugurate the credit union. By the end of the decade the credit union successfully expanded the number of potential depositors and widened its loan funding pool by accepting organizational members as well.[51]

In totality, Centro's expansion into so many different areas of Latino life represented Maurice's efforts to move beyond a "band-aid" effort to improve economic and social problems on the city's south side.[52] With more than fourteen fulltime workers, thirty part-time tutors, five neighborhood youth corps workers, two Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) workers, as well as countless volunteers, the Spanish Center had expanded by the late 1960s into the economic, educational, and social lives of many of Latinos living in Milwaukee's south side

---

[51] "Credit Union Opens At Spanish Center," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* October 8, 1966; "Spanish Center credit union given permission to expand," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* March 7, 1970; Coan, "The History of the Spanish Center," 13-14. The OEO granted $37,375 to staff and equip the office while the state credit union provided an additional $25,000. A five-member board of directors supervised the center, and applications for loans up to $1,000 were voted upon by a committee of three neighborhood residents. For more on the establishment of the Centro Credit Union, see Mark Edward Braun, *Social Change and the Empowerment of the Poor: Poverty Representation in Milwaukee's Community Action Programs, 1964-1972* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2001), 170-181.

[52] "Stop Treating Deep Social Wounds With Band-Aids, Director of Spanish Center Tells Mission Rally," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* October 22, 1966.

community. The Center's adult basic education classes taught English to four hundred Spanish speakers from countries all over Latin America, along with new arrivals from Eastern Europe and Asia. The credit union – now a branch of the State Credit Unions – served over 450 members and loaned over $1 million to the Spanish-speaking community, while the newly-opened job referral office and youth corps facilitated employment opportunities and helped Latinos secure their licenses through a driving education program. Volunteers organized and hosted fundraising dances with local bands at area churches to help fund the growing Center and provide resources like a bus to transport youth and adults to their classes. Nearing the end of the decade, most Latinos in Milwaukee either directly interacted with Centro staff or could count a family member or friend who benefited from its multifaceted services.[53]

Baptist Evangelizing to the "Hard to Reach" and The United Spot

While Catholic clergy took the lead in establishing the initial service agencies to Milwaukee's Spanish-speaking communities, religious support and aid to the city's Latino community was certainly not limited to Catholic endeavors during the 1960s. Beginning in the 1950s, Protestant leaders of different denominations across the city had created evangelist units that targeted both settled residents and transient migrants, most significantly among Milwaukee's growing Puerto Rican population. Several statewide Protestant organizations also hoped to draw from their experiences ministering to Tejano migrant workers in rural Wisconsin in the 1950s and early 1960s. Ultimately, however, they faced a steep uphill climb in their outreach efforts, as most Latinos considered identified as Catholic throughout the period. A 1960 survey sponsored

[53] "VISTA Workers Meet the Latins," *Milwaukee Journal,* August 24, 1966; "Activities Hum, Staff Zooms At El Centro Spanish Center," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* October 2, 1967; "Ole! Dance to Aid Spanish Center," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* May 18, 1968. By 1968, adult English and citizenship classes included students born in Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Panama, Venezuela, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Peru, and Spain.

by the National Council of Churches, for example, showed that less than 3 percent of Mexican Americans across the U.S. were affiliated with Protestant churches. Just a decade later, that number had only risen to 5 percent.[54]

Despite the large odds for converting the city's Spanish-speaking population, Protestants committed considerable resources to expanding their social services and spiritual aid in the early 1960s. Milwaukee's Lutheran leaders expanded their previously limited influence among Latinos in 1963, when Missouri Synod leaders called upon Reverend Hector Pacheco, a Mexican pastor serving in Brazil, to become a "missionary" to the city's Spanish speakers. Directors of the south Wisconsin district of the Synod pledged to establish a mission for Milwaukee Latinos, along with limited resources, under the newly-arrived Pacheco. Working from St. Stephen's Church on the city's south side, Pacheco conducted "person to person evangelism" with potential Latino members, and conducted surveys with two hundred teenage volunteers to identify the spiritual and health needs of Spanish speakers residing near the congregation.[55] Just one year later, pastors from several Protestant churches joined together to create an ecumenical ministry committee to aid Spanish speakers in integrating into the city's Lutheran congregations.[56]

Protestant organizations in Milwaukee also expanded services beyond congregational-based outreach. Founded in 1921, the Milwaukee Christian Center (MCC) was a non-denominational settlement house founded by the American Baptist Home Mission Society that focused on outreach to youths on Milwaukee's south side and provided alternative programming

---

[54] Leo Grebler, Joan Moore, and Ralph Gúzman, *The Mexican American People: The Nation's Second Largest Minority* (New York, Free Press, 1970), 487-488.
[55] "Lutherans Call Missionary to Latin Americans Here," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, September 7, 1963; "Mission to Spanish OK'd in Milwaukee," *Milwaukee Journal,* September 7, 1963; "Church Groups Step Up Aid to Spanish Speaking People," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, February 22, 1964; "200 Teen Agers Need for Project," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* July 9, 1966.
[56] "Protestants Pool Aid to Spanish," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, May 9, 1964. The committee included representation from Baptist, Evangelical United Brethren, Disciples of Christ, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches, along with the Greater Milwaukee Council of Churches and the South Side Ministerial Association.

to teenagers to prevent involvement with street gangs. Settlement workers had first started small pre-school classes for Mexican-American children in the late 1920s, while also administering after-school programs for teenagers of every ethnic group in the city. In the 1950s, the MCC operated small programs for high school dropouts and juvenile delinquents across sites in the south side, serving both Latino and white students.[57] The MCC conducted most of their spiritual outreach to the city's Latino community through the Spanish Baptist Church on South Seventh Street, originally opened as the first Spanish-language Baptist congregation in Milwaukee in 1956.[58] By early 1960s, Reverend Kenneth L. Smith, director of the MCC, explained that "Christian concern and love for [Spanish-speaking] Christian brethren command our attention and most effective efforts. As American Baptists we can be proud of the way in which Milwaukee Christian Center and the Spanish Baptist church are working cooperatively in rising to the occasion of every opportunity for Christian witness and Christian service."[59]

Under the direction of newly-arrived Revered Gilbert Marrero, the Spanish Baptist Church collaborated with the MCC in 1963 to help address community fears of Latino youth delinquency and a growing number of street gangs on the city's south side. Marrero, himself a former member of a New York city street gang in his youth, had turned to a religious life by serving as a missionary in Central America before heeding a call to service in Milwaukee in 1962. Upon settling in Wisconsin, Marrero's initial charge was to conduct religious services for the church's Spanish-speaking families, as well as helping those who had been laid-off from

---

[57] "South Side Haven For Young, Old," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* August 9, 1959; "Baptists Will Honor Roths on Retirement," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, September 30, 1961; "They're Prepared," *Milwaukee Journal,* June 27, 1966; Joseph Rodriguez, Sarah Filzen, Susan Hunter, and Marc Rodriguez, *Nuestro Milwaukee: The Making of the United Community Center* (Madison: Wisconsin Humanities Council, 2000), 19.

[58] The Milwaukee Christian Center held its first Spanish-language services in 1927 following the arrival of Mexican families to the city. "'Spanish' Church Responds to Change," *Milwaukee Journal,* February 4, 1967.

[59] "50 Year Old Church 'New' to This Group," *Milwaukee Journal*, March 10, 1956; "South Side Haven For Young, Old," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, August 9, 1959; "Baptists Reach for 'Hard to Reach,'" *Milwaukee Sentinel*, March 23, 1963.

their jobs find new employment. The young pastor soon found, however, that his pastoral care had grown to include assisting Latino families "cut through the fog of prejudice" that created employment discrimination, antagonistic relations with the city's police, and unequal access to social aid benefits. With the help of Smith and an initial $3,000 in funding, Marrero developed programming to reach the "hard to help" Spanish-speaking youth living in the core are of the south side, along with the thousands of Spanish speakers across the county. Federal funding and grants from the state Department of Public Welfare's division of children and youth initially supported the program, along with funding from the Baptists' state convention.[60]

Unlike the Spanish Center's broad mission to aid all Latino residents, Marrero's initial charge was explicitly styled to work with the neighborhood's "troubled youth" in what Smith referred to as a "hard to reach, hard to serve" program. The young pastor began by reaching out to a Spanish-speaking youth gang called the "National Avenue Rebels" operating within a few blocks of the church, hoping to redirect the group's energy away from petty crime and street rumbles with rival gangs towards more productive endeavors. Marrero worked with the group's leaders to bring some semblance of order to the gang, advising the youth on how to elect officers democratically, create meeting rules, and collect weekly dues. Turning to the Boy Scout's use of uniforms as a tool to engender group cohesion, the young men pooled their new organizational funds to buy matching jackets with their groups' name emblazoned on the back to promote a sense of unity. With the help of the Baptist church and Marrero, the young members of the street gang transformed themselves into a community club newly-dubbed "The Thunderbirds."[61]

---

[60] "Social Worker Infiltrates National Avenue Rebels," *Milwaukee Journal*, March 23, 1962; "Church Groups Step Up Aid to Spanish Speaking People," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, February 22, 1964; Rodriguez et. al., *Nuestro Milwaukee,* 19-21.

[61] "Madison Baptist Youths Conduct Their Own 'Peace Corps' Project," *Capital Times* (Madison, WI)*,* June 6, 1964; "Spot Funds Cut," *La Guardia,* December 1969.

The MCC's Latino outreach efforts grew into an independent program under the auspices of the organization's youth department dubbed "The Spot." Thanks to funding from the MCC's "Hard to Reach" program and supplemental support from the state Department of Public Welfare, the new organization found a home in a small vacated tavern on South Sixth Street in the summer of 1966. Teenage members of the Thunderbirds became involved in worship services and activities at the church while others attended the program's new vocational school. The center also took aim at the city's public schools and their failure to adequately serve Spanish-speaking students. Marrero held monthly seminars to discuss and review educational programming for Puerto Rican students across the city, inviting community leaders such as Willard Downing, a representative for the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, to join as well. During these educational sessions, the pastor prompted his students to dissect cultural representations of Latinos in popular media, as when a class watched the film *West Side Story* and discussed stereotyped depictions of Puerto Ricans "as gang members who would sing and dance and, when necessary, do battle for their turf."[62]

Under Marrero, the Spot became an important vehicle for more than two hundred area youth to develop leadership skills and receive personal counselling. Working under the belief that programs needed to be tailored to meet the desires of its participants, "Mr. G," as the youths referred to the pastor, proposed innovative programming like a coffeehouse, a car repair club where youths could repair automobiles under the supervision of experienced mechanics, and a beauty shop where students could train under certified beauticians. The young Thunderbirds also expanded the Center's physical fitness program, repairing and building exercise equipment and a

[62] The Puerto Rican Organization of Wisconsin and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, "A Survey of the Puerto Rican Community of Milwaukee's Northeast Side in 1976" (Milwaukee: The Milwaukee Urban Conservatory, 1977), 31.

new boxing gym themselves. Fridays were always the busiest nights at the Center, when area youths would gather after school to spend their afternoon boxing, weightlifting, and roller skating, and end their night with a dance. At the close of the night, the teenagers would gather as a group for a Thunderbirds business and planning under the guidance of Marrero to talk about neighborhood problems and engage in counseling services.[63]

Marrero, along with his successor Emilio Velez who assumed control of the organization in 1967, frequently faced charges by more conservative community members that the Spot was nothing more than a den for delinquents and gangs. While conservative local politicians accused Spot leaders of enabling street crime, Marrero and Velez took pride in ceding much of the club's responsibilities to its adolescent members and developing leadership among the youths. Ignoring these critiques, Velez, along with VISTA worker Roger Tulin and Carmen Porco of the Hulburt Baptist Church, worked with youth leaders in the mid 1960s to extended the center's tutoring curriculums.[64]

Under Velez and newly-hired youth programming director César Pabón, a native of Puerto Rico, the Spot enlarged its physical space with the acquisition of a new building and its programmatic offerings in the late 1960s. The freshly-named "United Spot" continued to cultivate its community outreach efforts across the period. Beyond expanding their extremely popular boxing program at the Ace Spot Gym, the United Spot also developed training in cultural awareness and leadership development for area residents. Center leadership also developed a center for job referrals, family counseling, and housing assistance. Thanks to a state

---

[63] "Youth Leave Street Corners, Find Fun at Christian Center," *Milwaukee Journal,* October 12, 1965; "Car Repair, Beauty Shop Urged for Christian Center," *Milwaukee Journal,* February 2, 1966; "Center Gone, but Services Branch Out," *Milwaukee Journal,* February 13, 1967; "Ring Gym a Project for Many," *Milwaukee Journal*, May 2, 1967; "Spot Funds Cut," *La Guardia,* December 1969.
[64] Rodriguez et. al., *Nuestro Milwaukee,* 20-22.

grant of $122,000 through the Department of Local Affairs and Development, staff even hired some of their more seasoned teenage members to go out into the neighborhood and look for children with nothing to do and no places to play, invite them to the center, and fold them into the Spot's activities. Dubbed the "pied pipers" program, this creative form of community youth work aimed to empower area teenagers to be leaders among their peers. Nearing the end of the decade, the United Spot was known among area Latino youths as one of the south side's only Latino-focused safe spaces to socialize.[65]

Ecumenical Collaboration: The United Migrant Opportunity Services (UMOS)

During the 1960s, disruptions in labor patterns and demographic shifts prompted religious organizations to extend outreach to and support of Wisconsin's Latino community beyond urban areas like Milwaukee. Through the decade, the continued mechanization of agricultural work forced tens of thousands of Mexican-descent migrants, mostly of Tejano descent, to make the difficult transition from transitory agricultural labor to industrial work. In response to these demographic changes, Wisconsin's Catholic and Protestant clergy and lay organizations shifted their focus from migrant ministry programs in the fields to resettlement efforts in urban spaces, often doing so together via ecumenical collaboration. Religious agencies relied heavily upon newly-made available federal antipoverty funding, creating community agencies focused on aiding migrants on the transition from migratory life to permanent settlement in Wisconsin. The *Milwaukee Journal* referred to the aid these religiously-founded

[65] "Refusal to Confirm Brown Stirs Challenge," *Milwaukee Journal,* December 14, 1966; "South Side Center Seeks Out Youth," *Milwaukee Journal,* March 29, 1969; "'Spot' on South Side Expanding Its Scope," *Milwaukee Journal,* August 2, 1969.

agencies offered migrants as necessary during "a time of bitter dislocation for migrants, steadily being shoved from field to processing plant to city as automation replaces hands in the fields."[66]

For many Wisconsin Tejanos, migratory work dependent on regular harvest seasons and agricultural yields no longer offered a tenable income for family life. Beyond the dreadful working and living conditions that had existed in the fields since the 1940s, increased mechanization in the 1960s dramatically reduced the number of available positions. According to the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Wisconsin farms employed one fifth less hired hands between 1960 and 1967. Of the thousands of migrants that continued to make their way to Wisconsin every planting season, 95 percent were estimated to be of Mexican-descent.[67] For those families travelling to the state in hopes of finding agricultural employment, unfulfilled labor promises could often be disastrous, as one Tejano field hand working in Waukesha explained to the local press, "The boss promised the work on his farm but when I get up here I have to scratch around like a chicken for three weeks because he hasn't got a job for me."[68]

Across the U.S. Midwest during the 1960s, Tejano migrants made the difficult decision to leave the migrant labor stream in search of more stable work. In the process, formerly transient families transformed urban-rural divisions that often defined Latino community settlement in the region. Two driving factors – the slow progress of reforming substandard migrant working conditions along with increasing mechanization in agricultural production – prompted a growing number of laborers and their families to "settle out" of migrant work and move into urban centers during the period. As Delia Fernández has noted in her study of Mexicans and Puerto Ricans in

---

[66] "The Voice of the Migrant," *Milwaukee Journal,* September 7, 1969.
[67] "234 Migrant Families Choose New Life," *Esperanza: Published by United Migrant Opportunity Services,* February 1967, Box 19, Folder 1, Wisconsin Division of Economic Assistance: Economic Opportunity Section Administrative Subject Files, 1964-1978, WHS.
[68] "Migrant Workers Follow Sun To Work in State's Fields," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* August 30, 1968.

mid-twentieth century western Michigan, Midwestern Latinos, often on the move between agricultural work during planting and harvest seasons and city centers in the winter, blurred the urban and rural divide within which scholars have traditionally viewed Latino history. As migrants moved between these two poles during the 1960s, they refashioned cities and the fields as concurrently urban and rural spaces.[69]

The transition from agricultural work to industrial labor, along with the shift from transient settlement patterns to more established living in the city, was often a difficult one for migrant families. The gradual influx of new families often prompted city institutions to reformulate their service capacity to Spanish-speaking populations. Education officials in Milwaukee, for example, grappled with the growing arrival of migrant families into the city in the early 1960s. In 1961, Milwaukee public schools joined nine other school districts in major northern urban areas to pilot privately-funded educational programming for children whose families had migrated from southern U.S. states, Mexico, and Puerto Rico. Targeting the social, economic, and psychological pressures produced by constant itinerancy on migrant children, program coordinators professed a goal of preventing the creation of a generation of a "lost population" of American citizens.[70] Milwaukee schools' proactive efforts served as an exception in relation to other urban centers in the state. Speaking to the Wisconsin Federation of Teachers in 1966, Father John Maurice, veteran of migrant ministry efforts, expressed continuing difficulties in engaging with other southeastern Wisconsin school districts, explaining that

---

[69] Delia Fernández, "Rethinking the urban and rural divide in Latino labor, recreation, and activism in West Michigan, 1940s-1970s," *Labor History* 57, vol. 4 (Oct. 2016): 482-503.

[70] Financed by the Ford Foundation, the Great Cities Improvement Program offered funding for the implementation of innovative pedagogical techniques like multi-aged classrooms and expanded resources for parental outreach and engagement. The nine cities included in the pilot initiative served one-sixth of the nation's elementary school enrollment. "School In-Migrant Aid Lauded Here," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* August 31, 1961; "Transient Children Project Successful," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* March 16, 1962.

migrant advocates had to "battle with school boards to enroll" and provide adequate support for migrant children.[71]

After years of administering to migrant workers in central Wisconsin, the state's religious organizations understood the mounting issues facing a constantly transient population. Of his numerous duties working within amongst southeastern Wisconsin's Spanish-speaking community, Maurice identified migrant laborers as perhaps the most marginalized and in most need of support from religious organizations. Migrant farmworkers – many of whom earned less than $1,000 per growing season in Wisconsin – ranked among the most depressed economic groups in the state in nearly every measurable category. With no minimum wage laws in place and "archaic" minimum work age laws that did little to protect migrant youth, Maurice hoped that federal funding would spur local communities to create programs that could provide suitable working, living, and educational conditions for seasonal workers in place of state protections. He also hoped that federal oversight would prompt more stringent enforcement of housing and health codes, as the state's health department only sporadically shuttered migrant camps for failed inspections and continually failed to bring companies to heel for repeat violations.[72]

The prospect of infusing hundreds of thousands of dollars of newly-made available federal funding into Wisconsin migrant reform efforts served as a practical impetus for ecumenical collaboration. The passage of the Migrant Health Act of 1962 prompted Catholic and Protestant migrant ministry leaders to at least temporarily put aside creedal divisions to work across denominational lines in order to secure federal funding for statewide efforts. Beginning in the fall of 1963, veterans of migrant outreach joined with state officials to form the Southeastern

---

[71] "Education of Migrant Youth Hit," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* October 5, 1966.
[72] Maurice explained to the Madison-based *Capital Times* in 1966, "Migrant workers are the only group that travels so far at such great personal cost and get so little in return." "Migrant Workers Get Least in Return," *Capital Times* (Madison, WI)*,* July 20, 1966.

Wisconsin Migrant Health Committee (SWMHC). Many of the organization's members, who had been involved in state migrant commissions since the early 1950s, brought vital connections with local communities and experience to their work. Some veterans of migrant ministry, however, also carried internecine baggage over denominational and territorial battles. One early committee report remarked that SWMHC's Catholic and Protestant members had to initially navigate a "rugged history, marked with distrust between the two faiths" before engaging in the difficult task of preparing budgets and narratives for grant proposals.[73]

Denominational affiliation, however, became a secondary issue under the SWMHC's ecumenical leadership. Tasked with coordinating grant writing efforts for program funding from the Migrant Health Act, the state organization was led by Maurice, serving as chairman, and Reverend Harry W. Baumer of West Bend's Immanuel United Church of Christ, who served as the head of the Wisconsin Council of Church's division of home mission and vice-chair of the SWMHC. Efforts to create ecumenical working relationships between the different denominations were aided by a purposeful avoidance of conversations regarding religious instruction and proselytization – as federal funding through the 1962 Act was explicitly designated for health and sanitation programs, leaders like Maurice and Baumer dodged potentially contentious conversations on the "three R's" that had guided earlier migrant ministry efforts, especially discussions surrounding "religious instruction."[74]

In the fall of 1963 and the early months of 1964, members of the SWMHC expanded the reach of this new ecumenical enthusiasm to interactions with national religious bodies as well as private citizens. Maurice and Baumer met regularly with Robert Kolze, the Midwest Director of

---

[73] "Survey of Programs for Agricultural Migrant Workers Families, 1963-1965," Box 18, Folder 5, Wisconsin Division of Economic Assistance: Economic Opportunity Section Administrative Subject Files, 1964-1978, WHS.
[74] "Churches Minister to Migrants," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* March 12, 1964.

the National Council of Churches (NCC), who provided feedback on grant applications and routine updates on programming across the region. Kolze expressed hope that the Home Missions Division of the NCC and the Catholic Bishops' Committee on Migratory Labor could foster a broad spirit of common support for social, economic, and legislative programs to assist migrant workers. In the spirit of ecumenical collaboration, Maurice, Baumer, and Kolze met with Monsignor William J. Quinn, director of the Bishops' Committee on Migratory Labor in 1964. Quinn, who served on the grant review committee of the Migrant Health Act, advised the Wisconsin contingent that federal reviewers would look favorably upon proposals that fostered associations between governmental agencies and religious organizations, as well as those that included opportunities for broad community participation. To that end, Kolze served as a vital conduit for connecting with representatives from the Wisconsin Board of Health and the U.S. Department of Labor, who additionally offered feedback on grant narratives. The SWMHC also sought partnerships with non-sectarian private organizations who could serve as funding advocates for future health-related programming for migrant workers.[75]

The 1962 Migrant Health Act served as only the first of several federal interventions in migrant and seasonal farmworker legislation. Dennis Nodín Valdés notes that migrant reformers had the support of several Midwestern politicians in the early 1960s, including Senators Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin, Patrick V. McNamara and Philip Hart of Michigan, and Hubert Humphrey, Eugene McCarthy, and Walter Mondale of Minnesota. Working through the Senate

[75] Margaret Garrity to Raymond Gladieux, January 8, 1964, Box 18, Folder 35, Wisconsin Division of Economic Assistance: Economic Opportunity Section Administrative Subject Files, 1964-1978, WHS; "Meeting Minutes – Southeastern Wisconsin Migrant Health Committee," December 9, 1963, Box 18, Folder 35, Wisconsin Division of Economic Assistance: Economic Opportunity Section Administrative Subject Files, 1964-1978, WHS; "Meeting Minutes – Southeastern Wisconsin Migrant Health Committee," December 18, 1963, Box 18, Folder 35, Wisconsin Division of Economic Assistance: Economic Opportunity Section Administrative Subject Files, 1964-1978, WHS; Carmen Mockrun to Jenny J. Lind, April 25, 1964, Box 18, Folder 35, Wisconsin Division of Economic Assistance: Economic Opportunity Section Administrative Subject Files, 1964-1978, WHS.

Subcommittee on Migratory Labor, these senators endorsed federal legislation to reform the health, educational, and economic circumstances of agricultural workers.[76] These efforts were further emboldened in 1964 with President Lyndon B. Johnson's announcement of a federal War on Poverty and the passage of the Economic Opportunity Act (EOA) of 1964. Two stipulations within the EOA pertained specifically to migrant workers: Title III-B provided funding for housing, sanitation facilities, educational and daycare projects, while Title II-A allowed for the establishment of Community Action Programs, locally-created agencies tasked with coordinating anti-poverty efforts. Promotional material provided by the newly-founded Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), the federal bureau charged with regulating Community Action Programs, stipulated in 1965 that "the key" to a successful program would require "the involvement of as many facets of your community is possible." As such, the OEO encouraged collaboration between local civic and religious organizations and governmental agencies to create community-based agencies and programs to aid in the battle against poverty.[77]

The prospect of utilizing federal funding under the EOA for migrant programming stimulated expanded conversations and ecumenical collaboration among Wisconsin faith leaders. In the fall of 1964, Maurice, already familiar with federal application processes through his efforts on the Migrant Health Act, liaised with Reverend Ralph Maschmeier, a Protestant minister from Waukesha, representatives from the Wisconsin Council of Churches, and regional representatives from the Bureau of Labor Standards to formulate plans to create a Community Action Program for the state. The following December, Maurice and Maschmeier met in

---

[76] Dennis Nodín Valdés, *Al Norte: Agricultural Workers in the Great Lakes Region, 1917-1970* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991), 171.

[77] Office of Economic Opportunity, "The Migrant and the Economic Opportunity Act, 1965," Box 19, Folder 1, Wisconsin Division of Economic Assistance: Economic Opportunity Section Administrative Subject Files, 1964-1978, WHS.

Madison at the Wisconsin Migrant Labor Conference, a convening organized by the Governor's Commission on Human Rights and the Governor's Committee on Migratory Labor (GCML) focused specifically on organizing and mobilizing community resources to "take advantage of the programs" envisioned in the federal War on Poverty. In attendance were more than one hundred representatives from state and national level organizations, including the Catholic Bishops' Committee on Migrator Labor and the Wisconsin Council of Churches.[78]

Following the December meeting, the effort to craft an OEO proposal for a Wisconsin Community Action Program focused on migrant workers became a collaborative endeavor. The designated application committee relied heavily on the expertise of individuals and organizations that had been involved in Wisconsin's migrant reform and migrant ministry over the last decade. Maurice and Maschmeier consulted with Genevieve Medina, a settled-out former migrant worker from Crystal City, Texas, who offered vital personal background on migrant conditions in the state. Together, Maurice, Maschmeier, and Medina conceived of an organization that would move beyond health initiatives and religious outreach. This new enterprise would offer daycare and educational opportunities for children and would also help relocate and house migrant families in urban centers across the state. Vitally, the agency proposed a system of continued support after the settlement experience, providing aid for newly-settled-in adults through adult education and literacy programs, employment services, and a support system.[79]

Maurice and Maschmeier also turned to governmental officials at the state and federal level for advice on their funding application. In Wisconsin, the clergy contacted Professor

---

[78] Governor's Commission on Human Rights, "Proceedings of the Migrant Labor Conference (To consider a Wisconsin program for migratory workers under the provisions of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 and the Migrant Health Act)," December 4, 1964, Box 1, Folder 9, Records of Wisconsin Governor's Committee on Migratory Labor, WHS.

[79] Marc S. Rodriguez, "Defining the Space of Participation in a Northern City: Tejanos and the War on Poverty in Wisconsin," in *The War on Poverty: A New Grassroots History, 1964-1980,* ed. Annelise Orleck and Lisa Gayle Hazirjian (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 110-132.

Elizabeth Brandeis Raushenbush, chair of the GCML, and received the committee's full support to "carry out this project to fruition."[80] After an initial proposal for $175,000 was rejected in June of 1965, the application committee looked for support from within the OEO office. Most vital was Margaret Garrity, a former Bureau of Labor Standards staffer employed at the Washington office. In her former role, Garrity had collaborated with interfaith groups in Wisconsin, and was familiar with many of the migrant reform efforts already underway in her home state. Garrity offered Maurice advice through final application preparations and served as a booster for the Wisconsin effort to her OEO superiors at the federal office, where she sold the program as a unique opportunity for cooperation between religious organizations and state agencies.[81]

The efforts of clergy, migrants, and government officials finally proved fruitful in July of 1965. After decades of ministering to migrant workers through diverse but scattered education- and health-based programs, the newly-formed United Migrant Opportunity Services (UMOS) received its first federal OEO grant to provide services to migrant families.[82] An initial grant of $31,000 funded four month-long daycare programs for migrant children in rural communities

---

[80] John R. Maurice to Elizabeth Brandeis Raushenbush, February 8, 1965, Box 4, Folder 5, Records of Wisconsin Governor's Committee on Migratory Labor, WHS. In the spring of 1965, Maurice provided periodic updates to the GCML, including reports of his consultations with Chicago representatives from the Department of Labor. See "Minutes of Semi-Annual Meeting Governor's Committee on Migratory Labor," April 29, 1965, Box 1, Folder 10, Records of Wisconsin Governor's Committee on Migratory Labor, WHS.

[81] Jenny J. Lind to Reverend John R. Maurice, May 11, 1965, Box 19, Folder 1, Wisconsin Division of Economic Assistance: Economic Opportunity Section Administrative Subject Files, 1964-1978, WHS; Reverend John R. Maurice to Members of UMOS Advisory Board, January 3, 1966, Box 19, Folder 1, Wisconsin Division of Economic Assistance: Economic Opportunity Section Administrative Subject Files, 1964-1978, WHS; "Survey of Programs for Agricultural Migrant Workers Families, 1963-1965," Box 18, Folder 5, Wisconsin Division of Economic Assistance: Economic Opportunity Section Administrative Subject Files, 1964-1978, WHS.

[82] UMOS applied for OEO funding under Title III of the EOA. Section 311 under Title III allowed for the creation of "Special Programs to Combat Poverty in Rural Areas," which included "Migrant and other seasonally Employed Agricultural Employees and their Families." This section provided federal assistance for public and private programs working to improve the "housing, sanitation, education, and day care" for migrant populations. Jenny J. Lind to Hugh D. Allen, September 19, 1966, Box 19, Folder 1, Wisconsin Division of Economic Assistance: Economic Opportunity Section Administrative Subject Files, 1964-1978, WHS; Governor's Committee on Human Rights, "Migrant Labor in Wisconsin," (May 1965), 4, Box 1, Folder 3, Wisconsin Department of Industry, Labor and Human Relations, Committee and Task Force Records, 1943-1973, WHS.

across southern and southeastern Wisconsin.[83] With an original board of directors that included three representatives from the Wisconsin Council of Churches, three members from the Episcopal Church, and three delegates from the Roman Catholic Church, UMOS dedicated itself to the improvement of migrant farmworkers' lives through a variety of avenues, including working with canneries and growers to improve housing arrangements; resettling farmworkers out of the migratory stream and into urban areas; and, expanding educational opportunities in both urban and rural settings.[84] The board's incorporators, which included representation from Milwaukee, Fond du Lac, Madison, and the Racine-Kenosha area, appointed Maurice as the first chairperson of the board. Maurice, who initially operated UMOS out of the Spanish Center, declared that the program was "proof positive that there are many areas in which groups can work on an interfaith basis and still respect each other's religious beliefs."[85]

UMOS parlayed a successful 1965 model program into committed federal funding for the following year. In 1966, the agency, now settled in Waukesha (an adjoining county to Milwaukee), received an OEO grant of $979,226 to work across thirteen Wisconsin counties. Of the twelve thousand migrants laboring and travelling across the state that year, nine thousand

---

[83] UMOS staff received federal funding on a Friday afternoon and began operations on the following Monday in July of 1965. With an average attendance of 185 students per center, these initial programs emphasized remedial academic work and English-language expansion and included medical examinations for children and family nights and picnics. Reverend John R. Maurice to Jenny J. Lind, August 6, 1965, Box 19, Folder 1, Wisconsin Division of Economic Assistance: Economic Opportunity Section Administrative Subject Files, 1964-1978, WHS; "Summary of 1965 UMOS Program," Box 19, Folder 1, Wisconsin Division of Economic Assistance: Economic Opportunity Section Administrative Subject Files, 1964-1978, WHS.

[84] The national Episcopal Church had begun outreach to Spanish speakers as early as the 1920s, when they established a border ministry in El Paso, Texas. By the late 1950s, they had evangelization outposts among Mexican American scattered across the American Southwest, as well as congregations in growing Puerto Rican communities in the Northeast like the Dioceses of New York and Long Island. At the start of the 1960s, branches of the Episcopal Church in the Midwest began new missions as well. See Peyton G. Craighill, "The Ministry of The Episcopal Church in the United States of America to Immigrants and Refugees: A Historical Outline," *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 51, no. 2 (June 1982): 203-218; Will Wauters, "The Borderland Cultures Encounter the Church and a Church Gave Birth to a new Chicano Culture," *Anglican and Episcopal History* 82, no. 4 (December 2013): 393-408.

[85] Maurice quoted in "Funds Sought to Aid Migrant Workers," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* May 1, 1965. See also "Children of Migrants Take Culture Tour," *Milwaukee Journal,* August 18, 1965; "Grant Will Aid Farm Recipients," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* June 18, 1966.

worked in counties covered by their charge. UMOS's executive director William G. Kruse believed Tittle III of the EOA gave the Wisconsin organization a strict mandate: "To offer an alternative way of life to migrant families who would leave the migrant stream and get out of poverty." Each program UMOS developed, according to Kruse, would thus need "to offer the whole migrant family a practical alternative to unemployment, poverty, and eventual economic obsolescence."[86] Along with daycare services and adult education programs, a support staff of nearly two hundred workers provided classes on voting rights, social security benefits and workmen's compensation, community health services, and consumer protection.[87] Most vital for outreach purposes, however, was UMOS's system of roving counselors, individuals trained by the University of Wisconsin who could serve as both teachers and counselors to migrant families.[88] With the support of the roving counselors, more than 230 migrant families made the decision to settle out of the migrant stream and establish permanent homes in Wisconsin by the end of 1967. Half of the workers registered with UMOS enrolled in a stipend-supported adult education program, and many of those students would continue with specialized vocational training after their initial classes. Following their registration, students received periodic check-ins and continued advice on applying for federal benefits from roving counselors.[89]

UMOS was just one of many ecumenical migrant collaborations developing across the Midwest during the mid 1960s. Throughout the region, Protestant and Catholic organizations that

---

[86] United Migrant Opportunity Services, Inc., "Annual Report, 1967," Box 1, Folder 13, Wisconsin Department of Industry, Labor, and Human Relations, Committee and Task Force Records, 1943-1973, WHS.
[87] Early classes offered in Milwaukee were held in the former parish home of Our Lady of Guadalupe. "Migrant Aid Will Turn to Classroom," *Milwaukee Journal,* October 10, 1966.
[88] "Federal Grant to Benefit Migrants," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* July 2, 1966.
[89] UMOS offered families a $65 per week stipend while they begin the initial process of finding permanent housing in urban areas and enrolling in classes. "234 Migrant Families Choose New Life," *Esperanza: Published by United Migrant Opportunity Services,* February 1967, Box 19, Folder 1, Wisconsin Division of Economic Assistance: Economic Opportunity Section Administrative Subject Files, 1964-1978, Wisconsin Historical Society; Wisconsin Office of Economic Opportunity, "Migrant Programs in Wisconsin, 1968," Box 18, Folder 37, Wisconsin Division of Economic Assistance: Economic Opportunity Section Administrative Subject Files, 1964-1978, WHS.

had previously operated in siloes and often in direct conflict with each other began interdenominational initiatives with an eye towards securing federal grants. Besides Wisconsin, perhaps the most notable of these efforts developed in Lansing, Michigan. Nearly six thousand children of migrant workers participated in programming led by the United Migrants for Opportunity, Incorporated, an agency jointly organized by the Michigan Catholic Conference and the Michigan Council of Churches.[90] With federal funding available in the mid 1960s, organizations like UMOS and the United Migrants for Opportunity, Inc. grew across the Midwest, including in Indiana (the Indiana Citizens' Advisory Committee on Farm Labor and the Associated Migrant Opportunity Services), Illinois (the Migrant Council), and Minnesota (Migrants, Incorporated).[91]

Over the next two years, UMOS continued to grow their footprint and services across Wisconsin. In 1967, the organization received $1.2 million in federal funding, which allowed staff to develop programming in seventeen Wisconsin counties.[92] With expanding programming and a growing staff, the UMOS board purchased a building on Milwaukee's south side in 1968 to serve as an organizational headquarters and home for a local day care program. The relocation coincided with the expansion of the UMOS's adult education programming, now an intensive twenty-week set of courses at Milwaukee Technical College. Migrants, newly settled-in from agricultural work, enrolled in English courses and received instruction in arithmetic and job

---

[90] With an OEO grant that financed 90 percent of the $1,300,000 project, the agency established regional offices in four cities, with nearly one hundred daycare centers and youth education programs in thirty-five Michigan counties. "Inter-Faith Plan Aids Migrants," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* August 21, 1965.

[91] Eduardo Moralez, "From Tejano to Latino in Indiana: The Evolving Class and Ethnic Identity of Mexican Migrants to the Great Lakes, 1900-2000," (PhD diss., Southern Methodist University, 2010), 96-111, 168-199; Dennis Nodín Valdés, *Al Norte: Agricultural Workers in the Great Lakes Region, 1917-1970* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991), 173; Harvey M. Chodin and Grafton D. Trout, *Mexican Americans in Transition: Migration and Employment in Michigan Cities* (East Lansing, MI: Rural Manpower Center, Michigan State University, 1969).

[92] "US to Help Aid Migrant Farmhands," *Milwaukee Journal,* June 9, 1966; "Inter-Faith Plan Aids Migrants," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* August 21, 1965.

skills. Some students would go on to receive more schooling via the federal Manpower Development Training Act with hopes of learning trade-based skills. By the end of the 1968 harvest season, UMOS operated in thirty Wisconsin counties.[93]

While providing direct educational and employment services for migrants, the new Wisconsin organization also debated the extent to which it might advocate for structural changes in the living and working conditions of laborers and their families. Marc Rodriguez notes that UMOS's founders conceived of the organization not as an activist agency, but as a clearinghouse for OEO-funded migrant programming. The agency's board thus envisioned the organization's charge as one that would provide social services and practical tools to migrants.[94] This mission was partially pragmatic, as members of the board worried that overt political organizing would call into question their not-for-profit status and thus jeopardize access to federal funding, as well as potentially draw the ire of the state's growers. Beyond practicality, however, the decision to avoid overt activism reflected the earlier missions of migrant ministry programs in the 1950s, typically grounded in conceptions of reform, hospitality, and service.

With a board of directors consisting mostly of clergy, many of whom expressed apprehension with direct action organizing, UMOS toed the line between advocacy and activism through the mid 1960s. The emergence of Obreros Unidos, the migrant farmworker union based out of the central Wisconsin county of Wautoma, in 1966 tested the limits of the agency's taste for community organizing. In July of 1967, Obreros Unidos' Jesus Salas appealed to the UMOS board for public support for their unionization efforts. Salas implored the clergy to stretch beyond the aims of simply educating migrants in preparation for the day automation forces them

---

[93] "Migrant Workers' Gains Through Schooling Cited," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* May 27, 1968; United Migrant Opportunity Services, Inc., "Annual Report, 1968," Box 1, Folder 13, Wisconsin Department of Industry, Labor, and Human Relations, Committee and Task Force Records, 1943-1973, WHS.
[94] Rodriguez, *The Tejano Diaspora,* 108-109.

from the field, stating, "social injustice is much more of a menace to the migrant worker than the machine." He was ultimately rebuffed by UMOS's leadership, who worried what impact a public statement might have on their ability to secure funding and work with growers to reform working conditions. The organization's chairman, Father Maurice, warned that Salas' proposal might extend beyond UMOS' authority, and that if their agency "got overly aggressive as an OEO project," they'd be in danger of losing federal support. Instead, Maurice advised board members and UMOS staff to fight against social injustice *outside* of UMOS's institutional framework as individuals, as the active priest had done in 1966 when he spoke on the union's behalf to state legislators.[95] In his capacity as a Catholic priest and not the leader of a federally-funded Community Action Program, Maurice held charity events for Obreros Unidos in the summer as director of the Spanish Center on Milwaukee's near south side.[96]

While avoiding overt political organizing as an organization, UMOS leadership expressed no illusions of the difficulty they'd face in both serving Wisconsin's migrants and working for piecemeal reforms in these laborers' living and working conditions. As chairman of the executive committee, Maurice understood that maintaining UMOS's access to federal funding would be difficult and would be met with some of the same hostility that reform efforts had brought in the late 1950s and early 1960s. In his opening letter to UMOS's first annual report, Maurice thus adopted a combative tone that imitated the language of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society programs, stating "We need strong, courageous leaders willing to fight for a better

[95] "Migrants' Leader Appeals for Help," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* July 27, 1967.
[96] "Meeting Minutes, July 17, 1967," Series 1, Box 1, Folder 2, Council on Urban and Rural Life Records, MUDSCUA.

way of life for migrants. We must be ready to face opposition; we are truly in a war on poverty."[97]

Fears of employer retaliation proved to be well-founded. As early as 1966, growers blamed organizations like UMOS and Obreros Unidos for aggravating the state's employment situation, most importantly of disrupting their ability to recruit and retain laborers. Farmers large and small pointed to workers' demands for higher wages as the impetus for their push towards further mechanization. Dean Kincaid, a farm operator in Palmyra, complained that organizations like UMOS were "breaking" the workers themselves rather than the poverty cycles they purported to disrupt. The sudden growth in the state's migrant rights groups, according to Kincaid, forced growers to contemplate "either getting out of the farming business or going to complete mechanization." Kincaid protested that a farmer had "plenty of headaches as it is with labor and now he's got all kinds of agencies and church groups on his back telling him how bad he's treating his workers." Wisconsin growers grappling with worker unionization promised to move towards as full of mechanization as possible because a machine could, in Kincaid's words, "work 24 hours a day and it's not going to tell you your wages are too low."[98]

Threats and the eventual execution of mechanization strategies on the part of growers accelerated a rapid rise in Tejano farmworkers "settling out" of the migrant labor stream by the late 1960s. A 1968 report prepared by UMOS detailed a growing displacement among Wisconsin's Mexican-descent migrant workers, as well as troubling trends in employment standards. That year, UMOS staff had prepared for the arrival of 1,300 Latino workers to the Milwaukee metro area, three hundred of whom settled permanently in the city after the end of

---

[97] United Migrant Opportunity Services, Inc., "Annual Report, 1967," Box 1, Folder 13, Wisconsin Department of Industry, Labor, and Human Relations, Committee and Task Force Records, 1943-1973, WHS.
[98] "Resettlement Aids Migrants," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* September 30, 1968.

the crop season. The in-migration to the city tracked a declining number of overall migrant workers who had made their way to Wisconsin that year. According to the report, one thousand fewer migrant workers had come to the state than in previous years due to rising mechanization. State employment agents predicted that by 1972, 98 percent of the present migrant jobs would be eliminated in the state, with most remaining positions located in the much harder to automate section of canning. Despite the daunting shifts, UMOS expressed optimism in its capacity to accommodate all incoming migrant workers and aid them as they worked to incorporate their families into the larger Milwaukee community.[99]

Conclusion

As an increasing number of migrants left Wisconsin's fields and moved towards urban centers like Milwaukee in the late 1960s, new settlers encountered a rapidly changing landscape for the city's Latino population. The relocation of Tejano migrants, newly-arrived Mexican immigrants as well as their second- and third-generation compatriots, and a growing Puerto Rican population continued the transformation of the city's economic, social, cultural, ethno-racial, and religious identity that had begun in the early 1920s. While organizations founded by religious groups like UMOS, the Spanish Center, and the United Spot grappled with how best to offer services to these residents, those accessing these agencies also began to ask what role they might play in leading the missions of the institutions that proved so vital to their survival.

The growth of Milwaukee's Latino community in the final years of the 1960s coincided with a new, simmering sense of activism and protest across various residents. Within Milwaukee's Spanish-speaking population resided a growing contingent of activists deeply influenced by activism in the city's African American community and anti-Vietnam War

[99] "Migrant Services Prepares to Aid 1,300 Workers," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* June 24, 1968.

protests. Marc Rodriguez notes that of those people turning to Latino-serving social service agencies developed in the early and mid 1960s, many were heavily influenced by an "increasingly complex social movement milieu" brewing in Milwaukee during the period.[100] The spirit of social activism and direct protest often brought previously distinct communities into closer collaboration and contact by the end of the decade, helping transform understandings of service and hospitality towards Latino migrants and settlers within religious settings.

One such organization that served as a bridge between the concepts of charity advocated by such religious leaders as Archbishop William Cousins at the 1962 National Conference of the Catholic Council for Spanish Speaking and a more radical understanding of service and community development was the Catholic Worker Movement-affiliated Casa Maria. Founded in 1966 by Michael and Annette Cullen, Casa Maria served as a temporary refuge for Milwaukee's Spanish-speaking migrants, newcomers, and homeless. Cullen was an Irish-born former seminarian who had given up a middle-class career to join the Catholic Worker Movement, an international collection of lay social action communities committed to communitarianism and helping those marginalized by society. While working as an insurance agent in southeastern Wisconsin, Cullen found himself driving thirty miles from his home in Cedarburg every Sunday to attend Mass with Father James Groppi at St. Boniface Church. Spurred on by Groppi's calls for action in the streets, Cullen began reading the Catholic Worker newspaper, becoming acquainted with the organization's guiding ideals. The combination of Groppi's fervent sermons denouncing racism and housing restrictions and the Catholic Worker's call to live in accordance

[100] Rodriguez, *The Tejano Diaspora,* 107.

with the justice and charity of Christ prompted Cullen to identify a specific need amongst the growing Spanish-speaking migrant worker community beginning to settle in Milwaukee.[101]

With the blessing of the Milwaukee Catholic Archdiocese and Father Maurice, Cullen opened a Catholic Worker house called Casa Maria in the former rectory of Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in the fall of 1966. Within its first nine months of operation, Casa Maria served over three hundred people with food and lodging. Of those receiving assistance, more than 70 percent were Latino.[102] Cullen saw his ministry on the city's south side as helping fulfil both the spiritual and physical needs of the despondent and homeless in the area. Upon opening the doors of Casa Maria in October of 1966, he explained to the *Milwaukee Journal,*

> These are great human needs. We've got to make people aware of them. These are people who have to live in any corner they can find and we can't wait for the government to do something about it. We've got a duty to share our fortune, our abilities, our education. We don't have a right to freedom until all men are free.

To achieve this vision, the Cullens opened the doors of their new home, sharing their privacy, their baby's clothing, their linens, and their money with any passerby who might need aid.[103]

Cullen's unorthodox style of ministry, however, soon became a liability for clerical leaders. Despite the initial success of the program, the archdiocese ordered Casa Maria to close its operations in the old Guadalupe rectory in May of 1967, citing violations of the city's fire,

---

[101] "Casa Maria – Christian," *Kaleidoscope* (Milwaukee)*,* June 21-July 11, 1968. Cullen attended the St. Lawrence Seminary in Mount Cavalry, Wisconsin, in the early 1960s. He recalled the impact of the Second Vatican Council on his burgeoning sense of religiosity infused with social justice initiative, but realized that the strict hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church would not allow him to pursue his desired form of apostleship, explaining, "To be a real priest you would have to be a daring priest, a rabble-rousing priest, ostracized by the rest of the Church, even its clergy and its hierarchy." Mike Cullen, *A Time to Dance: The Mike Cullen Story as told to Don Ranly* (Celina, Ohio: Messenger Press, 1972), 58-59.

[102] Carolyn J. Matthiasson, "Coping in a New Environment: Mexican Americans in Milwaukee, Wisconsin," *Urban Anthropology* 3, no. 2 (Fall 1974): 262-277. Casa Maria's other clients were twenty percent American Indian and ten percent African American.

[103] "Casa Maria Provides Shelter, Friends for Spanish Speaking," *Milwaukee Journal,* October 5, 1966. See also "Children of Migrants Have an Early Christmas," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* December 11, 1966; "Songs of Salvation Featured at Benefit," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* May 30, 1967.

housing, and health codes.[104] Casa Maria's leader believed the shuttling of his ministry, however, could be better attributed to his growing radicalism and connection to other social justice movements growing in Milwaukee. While acknowledging the housing violations after the organization had grown faster than he had expected, Cullen believed that trouble had begun with archdiocesan leaders after he'd joined a Holy Week fast at St. John's Cathedral in protest of the Vietnam War. Cullen sensed that Maurice and his superiors worried about the "political voice" Casa Maria had assumed in recent months.[105]

Casa Maria's move to a three-story residential home in the struggling Avenues West neighborhood accompanied a swift move leftward in their activist orientation. The Cullens embraced a form of voluntary poverty that the *Catholic Herald Citizen* referred to as "a kind of Christian communism" intent on "literally liv[ing] out 25th chapter of Matthew on a very personal basis." Those who gathered at Casa Maria considered themselves "first cousins to the Hippies," and Cullen explained that for the "radical" Catholics who met for fellowship at his home, their drugs were "the words of Jesus Christ – you can get just as high on them and be just as challenged."[106] The house became a home for organizing against the Vietnam War and racial discrimination, with Cullen offering classes on the intellectual roots of nonviolence. Students and social workers who gathered there called their assembly a "resistance community" devoted to forging a fellowship among poor white, black, indigenous, and Latino Milwaukeeans. Cullen and

---

[104] Coan, "The History of the Spanish Center," 10. With forty-five people packed into small rooms at any given time, and some staying in the rectory for more than a few months at a time, Maurice feared that the center was helping foster a sense of "dependency" among residents when they should be "rely[ing] on their own strengths" to survive in their new urban settings.

[105] "Milwaukeean Is Losing His Own Private War on Poverty," *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern,* May 16, 1967; "New Quarters Sought For Refuge Center," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* May 20, 1967.

[106] "At Casa Maria 'God Provides' for Unexpected Dinner Guests Seeking Refuge," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* January 27, 1968. Michael used most the wages he drew as teacher of basic skills to unemployed workers at Project CITE, a Wisconsin Employment Service, to pay for fixing code violations at the new Casa Maria site. See also "Casa Maria's New Home Will Open on North Side," *Milwaukee Journal,* June 2, 1967; "Casa Maria's a Bit Chaotic, But Roomier, Still 'Your House,'" *Milwaukee Sentinel,* June 12, 1967.

center volunteers published a newspaper called *The Catholic Radical*, a weekly periodical saturated in psychedelic colors that often quoted progressive and radical Catholic philosophers. The publication's editorial staff dedicated the paper to "the principles of nonviolent revolution, to the brotherhood of all men, to man's freedom and dignity, and to the teaching of Jesus – most especially – to love others as He has loved us."[107]

In 1968, Cullen and Casa Maria staff intensified their antiwar directs action protests, beginning with a fast and call for world peace in vigils in front of the Milwaukee Federal Building during the Lenten season.[108] In September, forty antiwar protestors stormed the sanctuary of St. John's Cathedral during a Mass while calling for peace in Vietnam, an action that Cullen referred to as a "culture shock" to the community. Archbishop Cousins denounced the protest, describing the deeds as "disgraceful, unwarranted, and completely irreverent."[109] That same week, Cullen ramped up his remonstrations by joining other Catholic clergy and lay protestors in breaking into the city's Selective Service office to steal and burn draft documents in protest against the Vietnam War. Known as the "Milwaukee 14," the Catholic antiwar protesters gained national fame for their actions and the ensuing trials. Cullen was convicted of destroying government property and served nearly a year in federal prison before being deported to his native Ireland in 1973.[110] Despite the departure of Michael and Annette Cullen, Casa Maria

---

[107] "Casa Maria Begins Weekly Newspaper," *Milwaukee Journal,* September 21, 1968; "Summertime Hippies Keep Distance," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* September 3, 1969.
[108] "Staff members," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* April 20, 1968.
[109] "Archbishop describes protests at cathedral as 'disgraceful' action," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* September 28, 1968; "Seven protesters found guilty and fined; charge against priest is dismissed," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* February 22, 1969.
[110] "Six Set Fire to 'Draft Cards' at Mass," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* October 28, 1968; "Defense based on religious belief fails; Cullen guilty of card burning," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* March 28, 1970; "Have to pay price for Gospel's stress on peace, bishop agrees," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* April 4, 1970; "Cullen Sentenced to Year in Prison," *Milwaukee Journal,* May 7, 1970; "Hundreds Gather to Bid Michael Cullen Farewell ," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* August 1, 1973; Charles A. Meconis, *With Clumsy Grace: The American Catholic Left, 1961-1975* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), 26-31.

continued its outreach to those who lived on society's margins throughout the end of the twentieth century.[111]

The intensified spirit of social justice activism spreading across various causes and communities in Milwaukee in the late 1960s and early 1970s made their way into the three Latino-serving social agencies originally founded by Catholic and Protestant organizations. Latinos of different national, generational, and faith backgrounds drew from these movements, as well as their own past experiences in direct action mobilizations in protests such as migrant farmworker organizing, to organize their communities and transform the institutions that provided economic, educational, and social sustenance to Spanish speakers across the city. In the process of rallying Spanish speakers in Milwaukee, activists increased their capacity for political protest within the confines of faith-based organizations and expanded the realm of possibility for leadership and empowerment in Latino communities across the state.

[111] "Casa Maria seeks facilities to use as new feeding center," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* January 10, 1970; "In the cold of evening, men gather for the meal," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* January 24, 1970; "Humble house offers king-sized charity to people needing help," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* October 12, 1974.

CHAPTER 5

"The priests said the church should not be used for political purposes": Latino Social Justice Movements and Milwaukee's Religious Communities, 1968-1980

In February of 1971, the Milwaukee-based Latin American Union for Civil Rights (LAUCR), a grassroots activist organization of Chicanos and Puerto Ricans created in the late 1960s, submitted an appeal for funding to the Milwaukee Catholic Archdiocese. Entitled "A Proposal for the Organization of the Latin-American Community of Milwaukee, Wisconsin," the application requested more than $6,000 in support from the church to alleviate the "broad social ills" affecting the estimated twenty-five thousand Latinos residing in Milwaukee and surrounding urban areas. The proposal outlined issues affecting the city's Spanish-speaking community, including a lack of adequate representation in Milwaukee's social, economic, and political spheres of influence, and discrimination in employment, education, social services, and business contracts due to racial and language barriers. Only activism initiated *by* Latinos *through* Latino-led organizations, according to the LAUCR, would effectively dismantle the barriers that prevented Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, and other Latinos from advancing in society. Issuing a clarion call for self-determination in all aspects of the Latino community, the grant applicants wrote:

> The multi-faceted problems of poverty, racism and the unlivable urban environment can only be addressed in a meaningful way when the victims of society's failures have been effectively organized to speak for themselves. Only then can the problems be adequately described and solutions effectively implemented. Only then can open channels for vital communications be established. Only then will the minority communities have the independence to assess their own needs and determine their own priorities. Only then can the victims of our society's failures play a meaningful role in re-establishing a democratic society.[1]

[1] "A Proposal for the Organization of the Latin-American Community of Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Submitted to the Archdiocese of Milwaukee by the Latin-American Union for Civil Rights, Inc., February 17, 1971," Folder 25, Box 1, *La Guardia* Records, in possession of author.

LAUCR's leaders may have felt confident that the city's Catholic archdiocese would provide the requested funding. Just three years earlier, Archbishop William E. Cousins had approved more than $30,000 to help the upstart group begin organizing within the Latino community, allowing them to lay a strong foundation for years of grassroots activism that was to follow. Since its founding in 1968, LAUCR fought to expand bilingual and bicultural education in the city's elementary and secondary schools and university, marched against police brutality and cuts in welfare support, opened voting channels for Spanish speakers through voter mobilization drives and bilingual voting centers, and supported boycotts of grape, lettuce, and beer distributors who discriminated against Latino workers. LAUCR's accomplishments led multiple Milwaukee religious organizations to donate thousands of dollars for programming, including more than $6,000 in support from Protestant groups in the previous calendar year.[2]

The Milwaukee Catholic Human Development Committee ultimately granted $4,000 of the LAUCR's requested $6,000 for funding for the 1971-1972 fiscal year, supporting clerical and programming initiatives for the following the year. In an accompanying letter announcing the award, Cousins expressed his hope that the funds would "indeed serve as productive seed money for self-help projects to eliminate the root causes of poverty in this area."[3] The archdiocese's financial backing in 1971 and the early 1970s represented a continued commitment to the city's Mexican-American and Puerto Rican community on behalf of Milwaukee religious organizations that had expanded dramatically, if erratically, since the beginning of the 1960s. Catholic hierarchy, along with numerous Protestant denominational leaders, had created the framework

[2] Ibid.
[3] "Self-Help Money Disbursed," *Sheboygan Press,* June 24, 1971.

for social service agencies that in many ways facilitated the nascent spirit of social activism represented by LAUCR that had begun to flourish in the city by the end of the decade.[4]

The 1971 funding request mattered most, however, because it heralded a change in the nature of the leadership structures of church-founded organizations that served Spanish-speaking communities. Over the previous three years, organizations like LAUCR had fought vigorously to transform the leadership of neighborhood agencies such as the Spanish Center, the United Migrant Opportunities Services (UMOS), and the United Spot, all originally founded by Catholic and Protestant organizations. These agencies were originally led by boards of directors consisting primarily of white clergymen. They faced protests, pickets, and sit-ins during the late 1960s and early 1970s by young Latinos who demanded more control over programs serving their community. The public battles between activists and religious organizations helped define the prospects of these organizations, as well as the future of Latino political activism in the city.

Considerable demographic shifts set the stage for the social and cultural activism that flourished within Milwaukee's Mexican-American and Puerto Rican communities during the late 1960s and early 1970s. With mechanization cutting farm labor needs in the fields surrounding Wisconsin's metro area, Mexican-descent migrant workers began moving into urban settings like Milwaukee, Racine, and Appleton. The decrease in agricultural work accelerated the desire of former migrant laborers to find higher paying, industrial positions, as well as more stable work that was not dependent on harvest seasons and annual migrations. Mexican-descent urban in-migration was accompanied by the development of other Latino communities in the city, most importantly a rapidly expanding Puerto Rican community on the city's north and east sides.

---

[4] Jesus Salas, former migrant farmworker unionizer, served as an officer of the Human Development Committee's proposal review board in 1971-1972. See "Establish procedures on how to apply for poverty grants," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* February 6, 1971; "Poverty funds allotted to four local projects," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* October 14, 1972.

The growth of Latin American-descent communities coincided with a new spirit of political activism flourishing among Mexican-American and Puerto Rican youth in the late 1960s. Young Milwaukee Mexican Americans came to identify with the burgeoning cultural-nationalist Chicano movement, joining activists in barrios across the country calling for greater ethnic solidarity and political action to unsettle the historically subordinated status of Mexican-descent people in the United States. Chicano activists united with militant Puerto Ricans in pan-Latino coalitions to confront economic, social, and cultural issues afflicting both national-origin communities. During a five-year period of vibrant activism, Milwaukee Spanish-speakers of different national and documentation backgrounds successfully navigated interethnic cultural and political differences to connect their battles under a common banner. In urban centers across the country with large Mexican and Puerto Rican populations, Latinos likewise made tentative but often successful efforts to collaborate under a shared banner of Latinidad. Historian Michael Staudenmeier notes that by the late 1960s, generational shifts and a common understanding of "being neither black nor white helped prompt the deliberate construction of a new Latina/o ethnoracial identity" that served as the base for social activism.[5] In Milwaukee, Chicano activist Ernesto Chacón explained to the *Milwaukee Journal* in 1970 that every Latino deserved a seat at the table: "We think the community – the whole community – is important. Everybody ought to be able to help decide what we ought to be doing and who should do it."[6] The best intentions of leaders like Chacón to form a unified movement, however, would ultimately prove to be tenuous and provisional. One member of the movement, Chicano Juan Alvarez, described coalitions built between Mexican-descent and Puerto Rican activists as a "fragile unity" that was often based on

[5] Michael Staudenmeier, ""Mostly of Spanish Extraction": Second-Class Citizenship and Racial Formation in Puerto Rican Chicago, 1946-1965," *The Journal of American History* 104, no. 3 (December 2017): 705.
[6] "Latin Groups Hope to Combine Efforts," *Milwaukee Journal*, November 22, 1970.

mutual accommodation and shared goals.[7] Ethno-cultural distinctions, along with internal quarreling over leadership positions in community organizations and the allocation of federal, state, and city funding would prove too disruptive to maintain a cohesive voice for the city's Spanish-speaking community by the late 1970s. Despite the temporary nature of these political coalitions, the pan-Latino organizing that occurred in the late 1960s and early 1970s left lasting impacts on Milwaukee Latinos' conceptualizations of shared political objectives and the possibility of future intra-ethnic mobilizations.

Historians have begun to recognize Milwaukee as an important site of civil rights activism during the 1960s, focusing specifically on open housing marches during the period that earned the city the moniker of the "Selma of the North."[8] Besides Marc Rodriguez's expansive study of Chicano farm worker mobilization in central and southeastern Wisconsin, however, most studies of civil rights struggles in Milwaukee have focused on African Americans.[9] Throughout the period, Chicano organizations worked to coordinate their social activism with the city's African-American and Puerto-Rican communities. Many of the Latino community's concerns during the 1960s and 1970s reflected the grievances of other contemporary social movements. Like African-American civil rights activists, Latinos in Milwaukee fought to control programs that affected their housing, education, health, and economic opportunities, as well as equal access to voting and political representation. Latino activists, however, also marched for

---

[7] Juan Alvarez Cuahtemoc, "Latinos in Milwaukee During the Late 1960s, Notes, August 6, 2004," Series 4, Box 22, Folder 19, Marc S. Rodriguez Papers, Julian Samora Library at the Institute for Latino Studies, University of Notre Dame (hereafter referred to as JSL).

[8] Patrick D. Jones, *The Selma of the North: Civil Rights Insurgency in Milwaukee* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

[9] Mark Edward Braun, *Social Change and the Empowerment of the Poor: Poverty Representation in Milwaukee's Community Action Programs, 1964-1972* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2001); Jack Dougherty, *More Than One Struggle: The Evolution of Black School Reform in Milwaukee* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Barbara J. Miner, *Lessons from the Heartland: A Turbulent Half-Century of Public Education in an Iconic American City* (New York: The New Press, 2013); Marc Simon Rodriguez, *The Tejano Diaspora: Mexican Americanism and Ethnic Politics in Texas and Wisconsin* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

issues particular to the Spanish-speaking community like bilingual education and migrant worker rights. This study thus broadens the scope of our understanding of grassroots activism in Milwaukee, expanding research into both pan-Latino and interracial activism in the period.

Focusing on Milwaukee also reorients our understanding of the geography of Latino social movements. Within the study of these mobilizations of the 1960s and 1970s, scholars have focused their attention primarily on regions with the highest concentration of Mexican and Puerto Rican populations. All too often they have ignored urban centers in the Midwest as sites for grassroots activism. As with most histories of people of Mexican descent in the U.S., the scholarship on the Chicano Movement has been focused on southwestern states like California and Texas.[10] The historiography on Puerto Rican social movements during the same period have been somewhat more varied, with most studies centering on either New York or Chicago.[11] Marc Rodriguez argues that, like Chicano movements in Texas and California, Milwaukee's activism found a foundation in War on Poverty initiatives and farm worker organizing. Rodriguez, as well as Lilia Fernández, have also demonstrated how Midwestern Spanish-speaking communities in cities like Chicago and Milwaukee were distinct in the diversity of Latino identities created by

---

[10] Marc Simon Rodriguez, *Rethinking the Chicano Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 77-80. The historiography on the Chicano Movement is long and well-documented. See, for example, Rodolfo F. Acuña, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos* (8th ed., New York: Pearson, 2014); F. Arturo Rosales, *Chicano! The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1996); José Angel Gutierrez, *The Making of a Chicano Militant: Lessons from Cristal* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998); George Mariscal, *Brown-Eyed Children of the Sun: Lessons from the Chicano Movement, 1965-1975* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005); Lorena Oropeza, *¡Raza Si! ¡Guerra No!: Chicano Protests and Patriotism during the Viet Nam War Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); David Montejano, *Quixote's Soldiers: A Local History of the Chicano Movement, 1966-1981* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010); Maylai Blackwell, *¡Chicana Power!: Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011). There have been notable exceptions to the southwestern historiographic focus, including studies on movements in Chicago. See Leonard G. Ramirez, *Chicanas of 18th Street: Narratives of a Movement from Latino Chicago* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011); Lilia Fernández, *Brown in the Windy City: Mexicans and Puerto Ricans in Postwar Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 207-238.

[11] Fernández, *Brown in the Windy City,* 173-206; Sonia Song-Ha Lee, *Building a Latino Civil Rights Movement: Puerto Ricans, African Americans, and the Pursuit of Racial Justice in New York City* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Frederick Douglass Opie, *Upsetting the Apple Cart: Black-Latino Coalitions in New York City from Protest to Public Office* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014); Darrel Wanzer-Serrano, *The New York Young Lords and the Struggle for Liberation* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015).

large Mexican and Puerto Rican communities.[12] This chapter develops this new regional scholarship, demonstrating the manner in which Milwaukee can offer new perspectives on grassroots pan-Latino engagement in urban spaces.

Beyond these geographic considerations, this chapter calls for historians to understand that religion was not just an additive component in Latino civil rights movements, but a constitutive aspect of broader mobilizations within Spanish-speaking communities. While growingly more militant movements for civil rights, an end to the war in Vietnam, feminism, and a variety of other issues marked the late 1960s and early 1970s as an era of general upheaval in U.S. civil society, Grace Yukich offers that the country concurrently entered an "era of religious change" that fostered a "period of major restructuring of American religion."[13] Felipe Hinojosa, in demonstrating how many of the larger societal shifts of the period played crucial roles in altering Spanish-speaking religious organizations across the country, also reminds scholars of Chicano and Latino history that "integrating religious studies can create exciting possibilities for expanding the thematic boundaries" of the field, offering new avenues to recognize "the political and religious heterogeneity of the Latina/o community, and most importantly, blur the lines between the secular and the sacred."[14] In Milwaukee, Latino civil rights activists engaged the

---

[12] Rodriguez, *Rethinking the Chicano Movement*, 77-80; Fernández, *Brown in the Windy City,* 14-17. For an introductory survey of Midwestern political mobilization throughout the twentieth century, see Richard Santillan, "Latino Politics in the Midwestern United States: 1915-1986," in *Latinos and the Political System,* ed. F. Chris Garcia (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 99-118.

[13] Grace Yukich, *One Family Under God: Immigration Politics and Progressive Religion in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 61-62. See also Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); R. Stephen Warner, *A Church of Our Own: Disestablishment and Diversity in American Religion* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 69-82.

[14] Felipe Hinojosa, in demonstrating how many of the larger societal shifts of the period played crucial roles in altering Spanish-speaking religious organizations across the country, also reminds scholars of Chicano and Latino history that "integrating religious studies can create exciting possibilities for expanding the thematic boundaries" of the field, offering new avenues to recognize "the political and religious heterogeneity of the Latina/o community, and most importantly, blur the lines between the secular and the sacred." Felipe Hinojosa, "Sacred Spaces: Race, Resistance, and the Politics of Chicana/o and Latina/o Religious History," in *A Promising Problem: The New Chicana/o History,* ed. Carlos Kevin Blanton (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016), 111-134.

city's religious community in public debates in the late 1960s and early 1970s over their obligation to fight side-by-side with social justice movements. While a minority within the community did accuse city churches of being irresponsive to Latinos' needs and thus irrelevant to social justice initiatives, for most, the fundamental question centered on how churches could do *more* to assist the city's Spanish speaking. Milwaukee Latinos, including young radical Chicanos and Puerto Ricans, expected that the clergy who led Catholic parishes and Protestant churches along with their parishioners would be recognized voices in their struggles. Milwaukee's young Latino activists thus did not ignore churches – they actively engaged with them to reform essential community institutions and make them attentive to the needs of the city's Spanish speaking. This chapter thus argues for scholars to better incorporate religious organizations and religiosity as aspects of the nuanced and asynchronous development of communities and social movements through the era.

As of late, historians of the Chicano Movement have begun to acknowledge the important role religious faith played in the lives and organizing strategies of several of the most consequential civil rights leaders of the era. Previous chapters in this study have detailed the importance of faith to national Chicano forerunners such as United Farm Worker leader Cesar Chavez, but the labor organizer was not the only movement activist whose religiosity played an important role in mobilization efforts. Reies López Tijerina, the New Mexican Chicano leader most well-known for fighting land reclamations and for his armed occupation of the Tierra Amarilla courthouse in 1967, had previously served as an itinerant Pentecostal preacher and religious commune founder before turning to community organizing. Gordon Mantler comments that Tijerina, whose dynamic preaching background catapulted him to the front of the movement as a provocative speaker, imagined himself as a modern-day Moses or Joshua who was destined

to lead Chicanos in their struggle to regain property rights across the U.S. Southwest.[15] Beyond leaders like Chavez and Tijerina, historians such as Lara Medina, Richard Martínez, and Mario García have traced the intersections between radical Latino organizing and likeminded religious orders in the Catholic Church in rich studies of organizations like Las Hermanas and PADRES (Padres Asociados para Derechos Religiosos, Educativos y Socialies, or Priests Associated for Religious, Educational, and Social Rights), indicating that social activism in the streets found its way into the pews of Latino congregations during the era.[16] This chapter will contribute to this growing historiography, revealing the expansive relationship between lay and religious leaders in Milwaukee in the late 1960s and 1970s.

This chapter also interrogates the spectrum, ranging from incrementalism to more radical approaches, within which both religious and secular community members fought for expanded economic and social rights in Milwaukee. While parish pastors and lay councils may have apprehensively challenged the larger societal structures and institutions that maintained and promulgated economic inequality within Latino communities, religious organizations within the Milwaukee Catholic Archdiocese and the Milwaukee Christian Center, as well as individuals like Reverend John Maurice and Reverend Gil Marrero, saw openings within more moderate avenues to enact important reforms. Beginning in the early 1960s, churches and religious organizations established social service agencies for Latinos in Milwaukee that continue to serve as

---

[15] Gordon K. Mantler, *Power to the People: Black-Brown Coalition and the Fight for Economic Justice, 1960-1974* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013). See also Rudy V. Busto, *King Tiger: The Religious Vision of Reies López Tijerina* (Albuqurque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006); Lorena Oropeza, "The Heart of Chicano History: Reies López Tijerina as a Memory Entrepreneur," *The Sixties: A Journal of History, Politics and Culture* 1, no. 1 (June 2008), 49-67.

[16] Lara Medina, *Las Hermanas: Chicana/Latina Religious-Political Activism in the U.S. Catholic Church* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005); Richard Edward Martínez, *PADRES: The National Chicano Priest Movement* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010); Mario T. García, "PADRES: Latino Community Priests and Social Action," in *Latino Religions and Civic Activism in the United States,* ed. Gastón Espinosa, Virgilio Elizondo, and Jesse Miranda (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 77-96.

foundational community organizations to this day. Through institutions like the Spanish Center, UMOS, and the United Spot, clergy established the social structures and funding apparatuses that would prove crucial for grassroots organizing by young Chicanos and Puerto Ricans in the late 1960s and early 1970s.[17]

Through the course of community struggles against employment and welfare discrimination and police brutality, numerous clergy were drawn closer to radical movements for Latino self-determination, while others were forced by activists to confront their own race and class positionalities as congregation leaders in predominately Spanish-speaking communities. Contemporary sociologist Patrick McNamara dubbed those clergy who joined grassroots activism in the 1960s "social action priests," individuals within religious organizations who devoted considerable amounts of time and material interests to activities targeted at improving the socioeconomic status of marginalized communities. These clergy engaged in what McNamara referred to as "challenge activities," many of which were not approved by their church's hierarchy and that at times fell outside of accepted social norms. These activities included direct action tactics like marching, sit-ins, and picketing, to more administrative roles like applying for federal anti-poverty grants on behalf of communities and helping direct referral services and social justice organizations.[18] A new form of radicalism flourished among Catholic clergy such as Daniel and Phillip Berrigan, brothers and antiwar priests, across the 1960s and early 1970s, who drew upon the church's encyclicals on social teaching. The Second Vatican Council's renewed emphasis of Catholics to embrace new directions as a "servant church" combined with calls for an "apostolate of the laity" prompted calls for congregants to become

[17] Braun, *Social Change and the Empowerment of the Poor,* 169-170.
[18] Patrick H. McNamara, "Social action priests in the Mexican American community" *Sociology of Religion* 29 (1968): 177-185.

more involved with secular economic and social issues affecting parishioners of all racial and class backgrounds. This, in turn, affected future doctrinal decisions on war and peace, nuclear proliferation, racism, church-state relations, women's rights, and religious freedom.[19] Gilbert Cadena notes, however, that unlike black clergy, who played a significant role in the civil rights movements, Latino social justice mobilizations of the period did not receive the broad support of Catholic leadership. Only a small minority of active Chicano clergy participated as individuals in organizing and protests, and not as part of a collective effort across the national church structure.[20] Mario García refers to members of religious communities that did actively participate in efforts like the United Farm Workers, la Raza Unida Party, the Crusade for Justice, and grape and lettuce boycotts as "community priests," who redefined the "church" as "people" and "reemphasized Catholic social doctrine, as well as civil and human rights principles."[21]

Pastors of the Catholic faith, however, were not the only clerical leaders to join Milwaukee's social movements. Clergy from various Protestant churches such as Reverend Gil Marrero, founder of the Latino-serving The Spot, played a pivotal role in connecting religious organizations (and their resources) to budding Latino activism. Marrero's successor at the near south side Spanish Baptist Church, Reverend Orlando Costas, perhaps best exemplified the "social action" pastor of the era. Born in Puerto Rico to a Methodist family, Costas emigrated to New York at the age of twelve, the first in a series of "uprootings" in his life. He underwent his first conversion in 1957 during a Billy Graham revival, an experience that burned into him an "emphasis on the transforming power of the Gospel" and served as the origin of his "deep

---

[19] John T. McGreevy, "Racial Justice and the People of God: The Second Vatican Council, the Civil Rights Movement and American Catholics," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 4, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 221-254; Mary Mollin, "Communities of Resistance: Women and the Catholic Left of the Late 1960s," *The Oral History Review* 31, no. 2 (Summer-Autumn 2004): 29-51.
[20] Gilbert R. Cadena, "Chicano Clergy and Liberation Theology: A Descriptive Analysis," Stanford University Center for Chicano Research, Working Paper Series No. 23 (August 1988), 1.
[21] García, "PADRES," in *Latino Religions and Civic Activism in the United States,* 77-79.

commitment to the centrality of evangelism for the life of the church." Costas pursued undergraduate studies at Graham's Bob Jones University where, in fellowship with a Puerto Rican colleague, he developed what he called "a passionate concern for the communication of the Gospel." After brief stints as a pastor at storefront churches in Connecticut and New York, the young Costas returned to Puerto Rico for a full immersion in Latino culture and the Spanish language. His time on the island helped him rediscover his Puerto Rican identity and affirm his Latin American cultural heritage and pushed him "to begin to question the political hegemony of the United States in Latin America and to consciously break with its culture."[22]

Following stops at several divinity schools across the Midwest, Costas was called to pastor the Latino congregation of the Spanish Baptist Church in Milwaukee in 1966. It was at this predominately Mexican-American and Puerto Rican congregation that the reverend brought together his spiritual understandings of mission and ministry with community activism to, in his words, "do theology." His first interaction with secular advocacy came early in his tenure at the Spanish Baptist Church, when congregants asked the pastor to represent them before the Milwaukee Commission for Social Development, a local council responsible for administering Office of Economic Opportunity funds.[23] Reflecting on this first step into community work, Costas noted, "I immediately discovered that I was in a loaded political situation. The Latin community was a minority among a minority." Costas' time in service as pastor in Milwaukee reinforced his belief that mission work to the Latino community would always be "a conversion to the world, especially the world of the forgotten and exploited."[24]

---

[22] Costas quoted in Samuel Escobar, "The Legacy of Orlando Costas," *International Bulletin of Missionary Outreach* 25:2 (April 2001): 50-56.
[23] "Refusal to Confirm Brown Stirs Challenge," *Milwaukee Journal,* December 14, 1966.
[24] Orlando Costas, "Conversion as a Complex Experience," in *Down to Earth: Studies in Christianity and Culture*, ed. John R. W. Stott and Robert T. Coote (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1980), 181.

Under Costas, the congregation rechristened the Spanish Baptist Church as the Evangelical Baptist Church, or la Iglesia Evangélica Bautista, in January of 1967. The new name represented the full transition to an English *and* Spanish ministry – the term 'Baptist' represented the church's denominational affiliation, while 'Evangelical' described its Latin American Protestant heritage. Costas preached every Sunday in Spanish and English, lay leaders conducted catechistic classes in both languages, and all hymnals, church documents, and Sunday school curricula were bilingual. The reverend expressed a desire for the congregation to serve as a bridge between different cultures neighboring the church. The congregation's new motto, "Interracial, intercultural, ecumenical, and Christ-centered," heralded a new commitment to pan-Latino spiritual outreach.[25]

Costas believed his pastoral work at Iglesia Evangélica by necessity expanded beyond the walls of his church. While serving as a community representative on the Milwaukee Commission for Social Development and teaching Latin American history courses at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, the pastor also helped organize protests and pickets at the Allen-Bradley Company in 1968, joining hundreds of Latino and black community members in demanding just hiring and employment practices. Costas would go on to be a founding member of LAUCR, the organization's radical newspaper *La Guardia,* and the Mexican American Political Education Committee. He would also serve in politically-appointed roles such as representative to the Wisconsin Equal Rights Council and the State Commission on Human Rights.[26]

---

[25] "Bigger Name, Bigger Job For Church," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* January 28, 1967; "'Spanish' Church Responds to Change," *Milwaukee Journal,* February 4, 1967.

[26] David R. Schwartz, *Moral Minority: The Evangelical Left in an Age of Conservatism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 120-123, 126; David R. Schwartz, "Global Reflex: International Evangelicals, Human Rights, and the New Shape of American Social Engagement," in *The New Evangelical Social Engagement,* ed. Brian Steensland and Philip Goff (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013): 221-241.

In 1970, the Costas family left Milwaukee to engage in mission work in Costa Rica. From this Latin American vantage point, the young pastor partook in conversations with liberation theologians, and continued to write, teach, preach, and create spaces for discussion on the interconnections between social advocacy and spirituality.[27] Costas' academic interests eventually brought him back to the U.S., where he served as a professor and dean at several divinity schools, and became one of the earliest Latino theologians in print.[28] Later writing as an academic, Costas believed his pastoral work in Milwaukee ultimately prepared him to "read history not from the perspective of the cultured and well-to-do, but rather, from the perspective of the uncultured, of the despisers of the world, of the people on the fringes of society." The socio-political "conversion into the world of the forgotten and exploited" that Costas experienced spiritually counseling Milwaukee Latinos while also organizing for social and economic change pushed him to identify the poor and oppressed as the "fundamental reference point of the Gospel." It made concrete his mission to prepare his congregation for self-determination. When preaching to his congregants, he emphasized the "common historical situation" of people of Latin American descent, identifying the communal experiences of colonial oppression, revolution against European and U.S. colonialism and imperialism, and shared belief in the central tenets of Christianity.[29]

In the 1960s and 1970s, the emergence of religious leaders like Costas – along with the increased migration of Latinos to urban centers and an increasingly more militant civil rights movement – supported the growth of Chicano and Puerto Rican movements for economic,

---

[27] "Farewell Sunday for Costas," *Milwaukee Journal,* December 20, 1969; "Costas to 'Invade' Costa Rica Soon," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* December 20, 1969.
[28] Jeffrey E. Tippner, "The Third World Evangelical Missiology of Orlando E. Costas," (PhD diss., University of St. Andrews, 2012), 1.
[29] Orlando Costas, "Conversion as a Complex Experience: A Hispanic Case Study," *Occasional Essays* 5, no. 1 (1978): 23-31.

cultural, and social justice in Milwaukee, both within sacred and secular spaces. Religious leaders of different Christian denominations played a role in nearly every protest and mobilization within the city's Latino community, many of whom had been engaged in work within Spanish-speaking social service agencies for nearly a decade. As Latinos of diverse national descents came together under a shared pan-Latino identity, they worked in concert to pressure city officials, state agents, and church leaders to confront racial injustice and urban poverty and in the process "situate[d] the church as a site of struggle."[30]

The Allen-Bradley Fight: Black and Latino Coalitions for Jobs

In the summer of 1968, the *Milwaukee Journal* assigned reporters to document the growth of what it called the city's "New Minorities." In a multipage report on the city's rapidly diversifying community – now including more than ninety thousand black residents, fifteen thousand Spanish speakers, and two thousand American Indians – the newspaper announced that the "workers who power the great machine that is Milwaukee are the product of a cultural melting pot diverse as the products they produce." The reporters' supposition that these populations were "new" was of course ahistorical – indigenous communities had called the region home long before colonial European settlement, while African Americans and Latinos had made Milwaukee their home since the nineteenth and early twentieth century. However, the newspaper's observations surrounding the economic and social status of these communities was telling. Describing Milwaukee as a "giant machine" that sustained the lives of its three-quarters of a million inhabitants, the report remarked that many of the older European ethnic groups had been assimilated into the larger "community cauldron" of the "workingman's town" over the

[30] Hinojosa, "Sacred Spaces: Race, Resistance, and the Politics of Chicana/o and Latina/o Religious History," 112.

preceding decades, but new minorities like African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans still faced obstacles – especially in employment – to becoming integrated.[31]

Consulting workforce development reports, the *Journal* estimated that 85 percent of Milwaukee's Spanish-speaking workers and a commiserate number among black and Native American workers were employed in unskilled positions in tanneries and factors. The article speculated that the "reasons for the chasm between the white majority and the new minorities" were complex but offered that the gap had nothing to do with "any lack of individual worth or native ability." Instead, the report attributed the persistent economic divide to prejudice and discrimination on the part of the city's older European-descent residents. Within employment opportunities, the periodical singled out trades like plumbing, engineering, and brewing, where Milwaukee's "new minorities" had no insiders to open occupational doors. The descendants of European immigrants continued to monopolize these highly-coveted, well-paying and secure jobs because the requisite skills and entry positions had been handed down from father to sons through closely guarded apprenticeships. Surveying Milwaukee's shifting labor landscape, the *Journal's* reporters focused nearly entirely on the relationship between workers of different racial and ethnic backgrounds and their interactions with city employers, but failed to interrogate the power of federal legislation such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 in dismantling these employment barriers.[32] Despite these obstacles, the *Journal's* reporters optimistically ventured that that the "wheels [had] begun to turn" for the "new minorities," with the city's business

---

[31] "The New Minorities," *Milwaukee Journal,* May 5, 1968.

[32] Nancy MacLean, *Freedom is Not Enough: The Opening of the American Workplace* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 157. Nancy MacLean has demonstrated how Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, which barred discrimination on the grounds of race, created legal justifications and avenues for redress for marginalized communities to demand full participation in the country's economic mainstream. According to MacLean, Title VII's specific stipulations regarding racial background "provided a practical incentive" for Latinos to identify as people of color and thus allowed them to "position themselves as "brown" counterparts to blacks in a vigorous assertion of their right to good jobs."

community, unions, and government officials aware that they needed to open more prospects for skilled positions for black, Latino, and American Indian workers. Heralding a new decade to come for all the city's workers, regardless of their racial or ethnic background, the article concluded with the promising impression that "progress may be slow, but it is inevitable."[33]

Despite the *Journal*'s sanguine outlook regarding the "inevitable" nature of full economic inclusion for the city's minority communities, realities in employment and housing for the city's Latinos suggested a much more dismal future. Wisconsin State Employment Service specialists estimated in 1970 that the unemployment rate on the near south side hovered at approximately 20 percent, while the city aggregate sat at 6 percent. Latinos also faced disproportionately higher rates of overcrowding (30 percent higher than the rest of the Milwaukee metropolitan area), and median property values that were nearly 50 percent lower than that of other Milwaukeeans. Latinos also faced disparate housing realities in comparison with the rest of city. A 1969 study conducted by the Department of City Development classified nearly 7 percent of the residential units in the area as blighted, compared with 2 percent for the rest of the Milwaukee.[34]

These housing numbers were even more troubling when placed in the context of the "urban renewal" fights of the 1960s that had forced many Latinos to abandon their homes for the development of a new expressway system that ran over their south side neighborhoods. While black activists had marched against the expansion of business developments and highways through the city's north side neighborhoods in the early and mid 1960s – political mobilizations that protestors often connected to desegregation and educational reform fights across the decade – these debates had often been framed within a north side/south side (and black-white) axis along

[33] "The New Minorities," *Milwaukee Journal,* May 5, 1968.
[34] John Gurda and Byron Anderson, *The Near South Side: A Delicate Balance* (Milwaukee: 1971), Archival Resources on Hispanics in Wisconsin, Wisconsin Historical Society (hereafter referred to as WHS).

the imposing 16th Street Viaduct that ignored the increasingly destructive effects on the Latino near south and east side neighborhoods. Between 1960-1970, the five census tracks where most Milwaukee Latinos lived witnessed the loss of 1,615 of the available 6,398 housing units due to the expansion of the Interstate 94 expressway, industrial parking lots, and businesses, while in the area directly east of these neighborhoods, almost as many units were destroyed – 1,526 – as were preserved – 1,597. As a result, Latinos were forced to move west and south of the area of South 20th Street and West Mitchell Avenue, leading to increased overcrowding in already heavily-populated quarters. This overcrowding was further exacerbated as more Tejano migrant workers left the fields in central Wisconsin in search of industrial work metropolitan areas like Milwaukee.[35]

Urban renewal also moved beyond the south side where much of the city's Latino population resided. In the early 1960s, the City of Milwaukee began to implement plans that called for the demolition of most buildings between Kilbourn and Ogden Avenue and Milwaukee and Van Buren Streets, in the heart of the city's largest Puerto Rican community. Throughout the decade, the city acquired properties across the neighborhood, evicting tenants and tearing down their homes. Officials faced minimal resistance from Puerto Ricans, many of whom didn't have knowledge of local government structures to take advantage of the city's obligation to pay for relocation, and some who believed due to false rumors that the city would replace the dilapidated housing with new apartment structures for Spanish-speaking residents. The demolition process practically erased the Puerto Rican community on Milwaukee's near east side, as many displaced Spanish-speakers were forced to relocate either to Merrill Park (west of 27th Street and south of

[35] The 1960 census found that 68 percent of homes were listed as deteriorated or dilapidated in the fourteen blocks surrounding the Holy Trinity Catholic Church on Fourth Street, a stark distinction with the city average of 12 percent for this standard. "Use of Boys' Tech Area Argued as Blight Grows," *Milwaukee Journal,* May 1, 1968; "They Don't Want to Live in a Slum Area," *Milwaukee Journal,* September 30, 1971.

Wisconsin Avenue) where a small Puerto Rican community had earlier settled, or to the heart of the city's Latino community on the near south side. Others moved north across the Milwaukee River to the Riverwest neighborhood, where the small Puerto Rican barrio served as buffer between the north side-black and south side-white communities. Maria Ortiz, reflecting on her youth in the growingly diverse but evermore segregated neighborhood, described growing up on Holton Street in Riverwest as a "brick wall between the white people and the black people," where Puerto Ricans' multiracial identity placed them squarely between the two communities.[36]

Latino community members joined with clergy to protest the city's housing decisions in the mid to late 1960s. South side Latino residents pushed back against what one study termed a "stubborn conservatism" among elected officials and community figureheads, where those in positions of power were reluctant to deal with structural economic inequalities for fears of upsetting white residents and losing their electoral support. In a meeting of the Governor's Coordinating Committee on Services to Minority Groups in Milwaukee in February of 1966, Spanish-speaking residents complained that city officials disregarded the problems faced by Latinos. Community members complained that Spanish speakers faced subtle discrimination in employment, housing, and education that was oftentimes difficult to document.[37] Father John Maurice, director of the Spanish Center, made a name for himself as an outspoken opponent to highway expansion by attending nearly every public hearing on expressway planning that affected the city's near south side. Maurice reminded city political leaders that the area of South 6th Street and West National Avenue, where the Spanish Center was located, had a higher pollution index than any other section of Milwaukee. He advocated for city officials to establish

---

[36] Tom Tolan, *Riverwest: A Community History* (Milwaukee: Past Press, 2003), 92-95.

[37] Despite critical housing shortages, for example, local and state politicians continually opted to only allocate funding for public housing for units for the elderly, and not for minority families in need. See Gurda and Anderson, *The Near South Side*; "Problems Pointed Out by Spanish Residents," *Milwaukee Journal,* February 23, 1966.

a comprehensive relocation program that would include access to public housing to assist those forced to move due to new construction, explaining that, "expressways serve suburbanites and as they pass by they ignore the people in the inner city."[38]

The housing and employment disparities that had wracked the city's Latino community in the first half of the twentieth century spurred activism from area residents in the final years of the 1960s. Protests and pickets at the Allen-Bradley Company, an electric manufacturing and automation producer and iconic Milwaukee corporation, served as the spark for mobilization in 1968. Milwaukee's largest manufacturer and a beneficiary of over $30 million in federal contracts, the company's expansive facilities and historic Clock Tower dominated the near south side neighborhood and skyscape. Despite sitting adjacent to a Latino community in which more than 15,000 Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans resided, however, the firm merely employed a handful of Spanish speakers – of the company's six thousand employees only twenty-five were African American and only fourteen were Latino. These employment discrepancies were exacerbated by the company's recent physical expansion into the Spanish-speaking community. In the preceding decade, Allen-Bradley had nearly doubled its real estate on the near south side, replacing residents' homes with parking lots and new facilities. Unfortunately for the low-income Latino residents living near the company, Allen-Bradley's expansion coincided with highway construction forcing the bulldozing of large parts of the barrio, destroying hundreds of housing units, small businesses, and recreational spaces. A housing survey conducted by the

[38] In late 1960s and early 1970s, expressway construction had forced the dislocation of St. Stanislaus, St. Patrick's, and St. Josephat Basilica. By winter of 1970, the Council on Urban Life began publishing a bi-monthly report entitled "Expressways and the Housing Problem," which provided an overview of the effects of local expressway construction and advocated for a halt in expansion until the city developed a more uniform policy for community relocation. "Freeway building makes bad housing situation worse, Fr. Maurice says," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* February 7, 1970; "Freeways and housing are probed in council report," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* December 26, 1970; Steven M. Avella, *Confidence and Crisis: A History of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, 1959-1977* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2014), 252-253.

Milwaukee Journal uncovered a loss of 2,641 homes during the 1960s in the eleven census tracts in which south side Latinos lived in considerable numbers. Avelardo "Lalo" Valdez, an area resident, noted that Latino residents had thus been "caught between expansion of industry and a freeway system."[39]

Mexican-American and Puerto Rican protestors joined African-American civil rights activists in the late summer of 1968 to demand more employment opportunities and fairer hiring practices at the Allen-Bradley Company. Prompted by conversations with Father James Groppi and the NAACP Youth Council (also known as the Commandos), leaders from the United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers Local 1111 (UE) – the union representing four thousand Allen-Bradley employees – requested a sit-down meeting with management to insert a clause in their contract prohibiting discrimination against minorities. Although known across the city as one of the more leftist members of Milwaukee's labor movement, Local 1111's decision to stand by black and Latino workers was also motivated by fears of losing more than a thousand positions for being out of compliance with federal hiring regulations. Over the previous year, the U.S. Department of Justice had advised Allen-Bradley management to improve their employment practices to include preferential affirmative action hiring or risk surrending government contracts. The employer, however, had failed to move to institute even a facile policy to address the hiring discrepancies following warnings from federal regulators.[40]

---

[39] "Latin Community Involved in Housing Controversies," *Milwaukee Journal,* August 30, 1971; "Comentario Editorial: La Lucha De Ayer…Es La Lucha De Hoy," *La Guardia,* January 1974; Lalo Valdez, "A Narrative History of the Latin Community Since 1968," *La Guardia,* November 1974.

[40] The Johnson administration had sent a warning to Allen-Bradley officials after reviewing five test cases of discrimination in the summer of 1968. Following a failure of conciliation efforts, the national labor relations board initiated federal hearings to review the further claims of hiring discrimination, while the labor department's contract compliance office to threatened to withdraw all government contracts if non-discrimination clause were not adopted. "Allen Bradley Get US Warning on Bias," *Milwaukee Journal,* August 6, 1968; "The Allen Bradley Case," *Milwaukee Journal,* January 15, 1969. See also Robert Earl Baker III, "Push Back: Race, Jobs, and the Struggle for Power in the Late Twentieth Century," (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2013), 191-193.

Working alongside union activists, the Commandos threatened pickets against the company if negotiations didn't produce more opportunities for black workers. Within a few days, Latino leaders such as UMOS area coordinator and Costa Rican Armando Orellana and Mexican American Roberto Hernandez formed a new community advocacy group called the "Latin American Community" to work alongside the Commandos. Hernandez hoped the young Latinos that had agreed to join the protests might benefit from the Commandos' experience in conducting demonstrations, realizing through example that "we have to fight to get what we want." The new coalition insisted that Allen-Bradley hire enough black workers to equal 12 percent of its workforce and enough Mexican and Puerto Rican workers to equal 5 percent.[41]

While Allen-Bradley officials met with UE representatives to hash out new anti-discrimination contract language, more than 150 Spanish speakers held a heated two-and-a-half-hour strategy meeting at the Spanish Center in mid-August of 1968. As several members of the Commandos and other English speakers sat quietly in attendance, Orellano stressed unity with other affected minority groups to present a united front. Reverend Orlando Costas of la Iglesia Evangélica Bautista (the Evangelical Baptist Church) added that the Latino partnership should join the NAACP Youth Council and "be ready to respond to whatever the situation calls for." Not all Latino community members, however, agreed that coalition building with Milwaukee's black activists was the best path for community activation. Some in the audience disagreed with both the strategy and the protest in general. One community member rose to say that there were enough Latinos in the community to carry out the demonstrations and "do the job alone" without having to join with black activists. Another said Latinos should learn to speak English and further their own education before demanding more from employers. Surveying the wide variety

[41] "Latins Join Blacks in A-B Complaints," *Milwaukee Journal,* August 12, 1968; "Scuffle Leads to Arrest As Allen-Bradley Picketed," *Capital Times* (Madison, WI)*,* August 22, 1968; Jones, *The Selma of the North,* 243-246.

of opinions and strategies voiced during the meeting, Orellana asserted, "I hope that we will keep together to accomplish our dream and achieve justice in America."[42]

With negotiations between the company and the union stalling, Latino volunteers received training from the Commandos in peaceful protest tactics. Groppi, marshalling the protestors for a prolonged fight, held a Mass and rally in support of the union's efforts at St. Boniface Church. Addressing the assembled protestors and their supporters, he declared, "They ought to make a restitution to the community…I ask you, what do they call preferential hiring when they have 99.5% white Anglo Americans?" Responding to claims from Allen-Bradley officials that only applicants with high school diplomas would be considered for hiring, Groppi sought to connect the rising unemployment among Milwaukee's minority workers and Vietnam War, continuing, "I wish they'd ask every black man and Mexican American who has to go down to the draft board, 'Do you have a high school diploma?'" Following the service, the ad hoc Spanish-speaking organization and the Commandos agreed to escalate their demonstrations by organizing an eight-mile march and picket of nearly four hundred people for late August.[43]

While these Latino leaders nurtured partnerships with the city's black civil rights activists and their clerical allies, they increasingly grew frustrated with the what they deemed as "timid" responses from traditional power brokers in the Spanish-speaking community and Democratic legislators representing their neighborhoods. Lalo Valdez, a student at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, noted that those Latinos who had first met with the Youth Council in the storefront offices of the Spanish Center weren't the "conservative Spanish-speaking Democrats," referring to an older generation of Latino power brokers that often represented the Spanish-

---

[42] "No Progress Evident in A-B Bias Talk," *Milwaukee Journal,* August 13, 1968.
[43] "Latins, Others Join March Against A-B," *Milwaukee Journal,* August 14, 1968; "275 March To A-B in Jobs Protest," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* August 14, 1969.

speaking community to the city's white power elites. Instead, he noted that the meeting consisted of "recently returned Vietnam veterans, college students, Puerto Rican ex-gang leaders and recently arrived Chicanos from southwest Texas, turned on to the politics of the sixties." According to Valdez, the Latinos who joined the "Latin American Community" represented a minority in a "basically conservative Latino community," but importantly served as "a vanguard in that they were, perhaps unconsciously, sensitive to the likely future course of community politics on the southside." Activists within the new grassroots imitative noted that before the protests, the "dominant Anglo society of Milwaukee" had viewed Latinos as "passive," but coalition building "thrust [Milwaukee Latinos] into political activism."[44]

Despite the reticence of some within the Latino community to join the protests, the interethnic coalition continued to make overtures to city and religious leaders through the final months of the summer of 1968. In late August, representatives from the black and Latino coalition addressed a meeting of clergy at St. Boniface Church, the pastoral home of Groppi and the Commandos. In opening remarks, Father Patrick Flood of the Council on Urban Life (CUL) traced the background of the current anti-discrimination drive to 1941, when President Franklin D. Roosevelt had issued an executive order that enabled government to investigate hiring practices of companies which held federal contracts. Despite the federal action, Allen-Bradley had failed to hire a black worker until 1951. Armando Orellano implored the religious in the room to act beyond simply preaching to their congregations, sharply stating, "Why don't you make a little effort to communicate with your own people, with your own congregation and tell them that the gospel is not just blah-blah-blah." Following Orellano's comments, Groppi added

[44] "Comentario Editorial: La Lucha De Ayer…Es La Lucha De Hoy," *La Guardia,* January 1974; Avelardo Valdez, "Selective Determinants in Maintaining Social Movement Organizations: Three Case Studies from the Chicano the Chicano Community," in *Latinos and the Political System,* ed. F. Chris Garcia (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 241-242.

that activists like those leading the charge against Allen-Bradley were leaving the church because the church refused to stand by its community. In a unanimous vote, the fifty assembled clergymen voted to support the coalition and pledged to "carry out the message of social justice to all our various constituencies and to mobilize more clergy and churchmen to participate in this drive for equal employment opportunities." The clergy also appointed a select committee to serve as moderators between Allen-Bradley management and the coalition, as well as to have a strong presence at future hearings on federal charges of discrimination at the plant.[45]

Despite numerous invitations to join the St. Boniface meeting, Father Dimas Becker of the CUL noted that no representatives from the five Catholic near south side Latino-serving parishes had bothered to attend the assembly. While no parochial leaders of the parishes such as Our Lady of Guadalupe and St. Patrick's offered reasoning for their absence, Father Maurice of the Spanish Center did explain to Latino activists why he could not join them in pickets or planning against Allen-Bradley. In a letter addressed to the "Latin American Community" coalition, Maurice explained that for too long he had served as their "gringo priest" in both his role as director of the Spanish Center and UMOS, as well as the countless city, county, and state commissions he sat on. He believed it was time, however, for Latinos to step forward and begin serving as the primary leaders in direct action and community protests.[46]

In response to the pickets and the ensuing negative media attention, Allen-Bradley agreed to scrap a policy that prioritized the hiring of friends and relatives of employees as well as high school diploma requirements by late 1968. Unwilling to insert explicit nondiscrimination language into employee contracts or actively recruit minority workers, however, this proved to

---

[45] "75 Clerics Join Drive to Alter A-B Job Policy," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* August 17, 1968; "50 clergymen vote to join coalition seeking more jobs for minorities," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* August 24, 1968.
[46] "No Progress Evident in A-B Bias Talk," *Milwaukee Journal,* August 13, 1968.

be the only concession management would offer the protesters.[47] Finding the hiring agreement piecemeal and Allen-Bradley management negligent in implementing even these minor changes, the demonstrators returned to the picket line in August of 1969, even more militant and intent on achieving their aims. Borrowing from Black Power activists, young Latinos and Latinas in attendance wore brown berets with buttons on their headwear identifying them as members of the Latin American Youth Organization, a newly-formed Milwaukee chapter of the Brown Berets. Hoping to increase the publicity of their efforts, the marchers expanded their protesting to include the homes of Allen-Bradley executives in the affluent Milwaukee suburb of Fox Point. The pickets at the company gates turned violent in September of 1969 when a group of white workers attacked the picketers with rocks. Federal mediators for the Department of Labor would ultimately decide the fate of the community's complaints, approving only portions of their proposed fair-hiring proposals. Despite the less-then-satisfactory stipulations put forth by company management, Latino protestors identified the Allen-Bradley protests as a dramatic shift in the leadership structure of Milwaukee's Latino community, as well as the beginning of a new wave of grassroots activism within the city's Mexican and Puerto Rican communities.[48]

A New Generation of Latino Activists: The Latin American Union for Civil Rights (LAUCR) and the Milwaukee Young Lords Organization (YLO)

The late 1960s and early 1970s witnessed a generational shift in the ways in which people of Latin American descent identified themselves and their place in larger American

---

[47] "Youth Council Not Alone in Job Drive," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* August 23, 1968; "A-B Meeting Set Today on Hiring Spanish," *Milwaukee Journal,* October 17, 1968.

[48] The youth were joined by community leaders including Assemblyman Lloyd Barbee, executive director of the Milwaukee Urban League Wesley Scott, Alderwoman Vel Phillips, and UMOS director Jesus Salas. "A-B Agreement Weak, Groppi Says," *Milwaukee Journal,* August 19, 1969; "Groppi Group Resumes Allen-Bradley Picketing," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* August 22, 1969; "Groppi Eyes Extension of A-B Picketing," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* August 26, 1969; "Groppi, Others Picket at Home of A-B Chief," *Milwaukee Journal,* August 31, 1969; "Minorities Unit Decries Allen-Bradley Stand," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* September 6, 1969; Jesus Salas, interview by author, Milwaukee, WI, April 1, 2010; Jones, *The Selma of the North,* 246.

society, not just in Milwaukee but across the nation. Those who identified themselves as Chicano expressed a deep pride in their cultural heritage. But crucially, they advocated for a stark departure from previous generations of Latinos' efforts to cope with discrimination in the workplace and in larger society. Chicanos and young Puerto Ricans alike critiqued earlier *sociedades mutualistas* (mutual aid societies) for celebrating cultural achievements without confronting larger societal constraints that preserved economic and social prejudice against Latinos. They held even harsher disapproval for organizations that advocated assimilation and integration as the only path to full American rights and citizenship. These younger Latinos believed *mutualistas* relied too readily on a form of passive resistance, and that rather than confront structural issues within larger society, *sociedades* withdrew into their own culture and submerged themselves in the nostalgia of *la patria* (the homeland). While young Latinos criticized *sociedades'* inward looking methods, they held the sharpest critiques for organizations like the Milwaukee chapters of the League of Latin American Citizens (LULAC) and the Puerto Rican Democratic Organization, Incorporated (PRDO). Unlike *mutualistas*, groups like LULAC and the PRDO stressed a middle-class approach to integration that required U.S. citizenship, English-language acquisition and preached full assimilation into Americanism society as a paramount goal. Unlike assimilationists, this new generation of community leaders insisted that it wasn't Chicanos or Puerto Ricans who needed to change to achieve acceptance, but rather that society needed to transform itself to accept Latino-descent people of different national and migration backgrounds. Their brand of cultural nationalism insisted that fighting for "*la raza*" need not have to fall within institutional parameters. Advocating for civil rights could also mean pushing back, rejecting, or re-conceptualizing America's social and cultural traditions.

Milwaukee's new activists also took aim at an older generation's practice of fixating on an idealized concept of Latino culture instead of understanding of *la raza* as a living, changing cultural project. Instead, younger Latinos believed in active forms of resistance to enact culture for social action, not simply for preservation. A deep-felt pride in *la raza's* rich cultural heritage spurred Chicanos' and young Puerto Ricans' demands that American society shift immediately to accept and incorporate Latinos. Identifying with causes of oppressed people across the world, this younger generation's anger at racism and discrimination in the U.S. often led them to adopt more militant and confrontational strategies to achieve wholesale societal change.[49] Milwaukeean Juan Alvarez, a 23-year-old artist and Vietnam War veteran who grew up in Texas and Mexico, found an outlet for this new sense of cultural nationalism through art. Painted on the walls of buildings across the south side of Milwaukee, Alvarez's murals drew upon the tradition of renowned Mexican muralists like Diego Rivera and José Orozco, whose art was concerned with improving the lot of the working-class people they immortalized. Alvarez explained that the phrase "*la raza*," which had become a rallying cry for Chicanos throughout the United States, defined every aspect of his art and social activism: "To me, it means my people, especially the underprivileged, those who in Mexico are called '*los de abajo*' (those on the bottom). It is an emotion that I feel. I will keep doing and working for my people until their problems are solved. I have given all myself to this – *la raza*."[50]

The generational divide in Milwaukee between younger Latinos and the older *mutualistas* and assimilationist organizations was distinct from other regions of the country because the city had never been home to a vibrant form of civil rights activism within the larger Latino community. Unlike in California, Texas, or New Mexico, Milwaukee Latinos had not coalesced

[49] "What is a Chicano?" *La Guardia,* October 1970.
[50] "Young Latin Leaders Serve People," *Milwaukee Journal,* June 3, 1969.

to advocate for concerted civil rights activism before the late 1960s. While Mexican Americans in southwestern cities had formed a brand of "civil rights unionism" in the 1940s and 1950s, creating organizations such as the Community Service Organization, El Congreso del Pueblo de Habla Español, Asociación Nacional México Americana, and Mexican American Political Association, most activism for southeastern Wisconsin's Latino community had arisen from migrant ministry endeavors, the majority of which was led by white clergy and laity.[51]

With little indigenous grassroots political leadership in place, Milwaukee's Latino movement relied upon transplanted Mexican-American and Puerto Rican community activists recently arrived in southeastern Wisconsin. Marc Rodriguez has documented in detail the political connections and experience Texas-born Mexican American migrants brought with them to Wisconsin in the mid-twentieth century. Tejano migrant workers originally from Crystal City, Texas had been travelling to Wisconsin's farms since the 1930s. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Crystal City became a hotbed of Chicano activism, as grassroots mobilizers successfully seized control of local government through city elections. Young activists such as Jesus Salas and Ernesto Chacón soon contributed to Wisconsin's own political and social activism, first as migrant labor organizers in areas like Wautoma through Obreros Unidos and then in fights for the self-determination of urban agencies in Milwaukee. These activists contributed significantly to the growing militancy within Milwaukee's Latino community upon moving to the city in the years following organizing in central Wisconsin, adding to a spirit of mobilization as well a growing understanding of an ethno-political identity. Juan Alvarez explained the indigeneity of the rising sense of political activism among Mexican-descent Milwaukeeans:

---

[51] Gordon Mantler borrows the term "civil rights unionism" from Robert Korstad's study of union organizing among North Carolina tobacco workers beginning in the 1930s. See Mantler, *Power to the People*, 24-25; and, Robert R. Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism: Tobacco Workers and the Struggle for Democracy in the Mid-Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

> Texas migrant farmworkers and former migrants did not need a university course in urban politics to examine their place in the world. All we had to do was look around and see factories, tanneries, and other dead-end jobs or the Milwaukee County Welfare System. The opportunity structures in institutions of higher education were for all practical purposes closed to us. Institutional racism and cultural insensitivity was alive and well in schools as well as in the Milwaukee Police Department. As we constructed our own Chicano identity and appropriated a new reading of Chicano history and culture against Anglo structures of oppression and domination, we forged an oppositional consciousness and an attitude of defiance and resistance.[52]

Those migrants who made their permanent homes in Wisconsin, a population that Marc Rodriguez has referred to as part of a "Tejano diaspora," successfully transmitted the political fervor and activism of their home towns to their new northern residencies in the late 1960s.[53]

Of the more than fifteen thousand Latinos in Milwaukee by the late 1960s, more than six thousand were of Puerto Rican birth or heritage. During this period, Puerto Ricans had begun to move beyond their older neighborhood on the lower east side after plans for redevelopment in the area resulted in the removal of deteriorating housing, forcing them into existing concentrations of Latinos on the south and west sides of town as well as along new Latino concentrations on North Holton Street on the northeast side of Milwaukee. Notably, the median age of Puerto Ricans in the city – under twenty years of age – was markedly lower than that of the general city population, which had aged considerably due to continued suburbanization.[54]

Puerto Rican activists who arrived in Milwaukee during the 1960s brought their own organizing experience from the island and other U.S. urban centers.[55] University students across

---

[52] Juan Alvarez Cuahtemoc, "Latinos in Milwaukee During the Late 1960s, Notes, August 6, 2004," Series 4, Box 22, Folder 19, Marc S. Rodriguez Papers, JSL.
[53] Rodriguez, *The Tejano Diaspora.*
[54] The Puerto Rican Organization of Milwaukee, "A Survey of the Puerto Rican Community on Milwaukee's Northeast Side in 1976," (Milwaukee: The Milwaukee Urban Conservatory, 1977), 1, Local History Reference Collection, Milwaukee Public Library Archives (hereafter referred to as MPL); Anne Akulicz de Santiago, "The Puerto Rican Community of Milwaukee: A Study of Geographic Mobility," (Milwaukee: Spanish Speaking Outreach Institute, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 1977), 19-35, Local History Reference Collection, MPL.
[55] Approximately eight out of ten Puerto Ricans residing in Milwaukee had migrated to the city from other American cities like Chicago and New York, or to a lesser extent, directly from the island itself. Akulicz de Santiago, "The Puerto Rican Community of Milwaukee," 50-52.

Puerto Rico had begun mobilizing during the late 1950s and early 1960s against what they viewed as a repressive and interventionist American government, going as far as refusing to serve in the U.S. Armed Forces. Between 1964 and 1968, students at the University of Puerto Rico staged protests opposing the draft and increased militarism across the island, at times facing bloody repression from campus and city police. Community activist Tony Baez, transplanted to Milwaukee in 1970, was a student at the University of Puerto Rico during the mid-1960s and described the campus as highly politicized and a breeding ground for grassroots activism.[56]

The political unrest exploding on Puerto Rican college campuses occurred simultaneous to activism in Puerto Rican communities on the U.S. mainland, as Puerto Rican youth living in major metropolitan areas began organizing to combat police discrimination and neighborhood redevelopment forcing them out of their homes. In Chicago, young Puerto Ricans, formerly members of a street gang, developed into an ethno-nationalist organization in 1965 called the Young Lords Organization (YLO). The YLO of Chicago along with a newly-formed chapter in Harlem, New York, fought against family evictions, police abuse, and gentrification. The Chicago group gained national attention in spring of 1969, when members of the organization occupied the Lincoln Park Presbyterian McCormick Theological Seminary and established a "People's Church" with demands for increased community resources and services from the city's religious organizations.[57] The YLO also allied itself with the Puerto Rican independence movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s, combining the fight for self-determination in a neo-colonial setting with fights for control of community organizations in U.S. urban centers. Tony

---

[56] Baez had joined El Partido Independista Puertorriqueño, a social-democratic political party that advocated independence from the U.S., in high school before continuing his activism at the University of Puerto Rico. He was forced to flee the island for Chicago after becoming a target for police harassment. Tony Baez, interview by author, Milwaukee, WI, March 30, 2010; Michael Gonzales, "Ruffians and Revolutionaries: The Development of the Young Lords Organization in Chicago," (Master's thesis, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2015), 20-21.

[57] "Church Backs YLO," *El Young Lord* 1, no. 2, April 15, 1971; Karen S. Secrist, "Construyendo nuestro pedacito de patria: Space and Dis(place)ment in Puerto Rican Chicago," (PhD dissertation, Duke University, 2009), 38.

Baez, recently arrived in Chicago from the island in 1970, joined the YLO within three days of settling in the city. Acting as an intermediary between the Chicago YLO and the local Black Panthers Party in his position as the organization's minister of education, Baez had his first experience with interracial coalition building, an experience that would serve him well when he made his way to Milwaukee just a few months later.[58]

Similar to other Midwestern cities like Chicago in the middle decades of the twentieth century, Milwaukee was not dominated by one Latin American-descent community. Published reports estimated that around twenty thousand Latinos lived in the Milwaukee area in 1970, of which eleven thousand were of either Mexican or Mexican-American and the remaining nine thousand Puerto Rican or of other Latin American origin. Distinctions in national origins, documentation status, and cultural and linguistic heritage surely existed among the city's Latinos. The panoply of Mexican-descent identities in Milwaukee, for example, ran considerably deep, ranging from newly-arrived immigrants to third-generation Mexican Americans to Tejanos to politically active Chicanos. Despite the diversity of experiences among Latin American-descent communities, most Milwaukee Latinos shared concerns over education, employment, housing, and ethno-racial discrimination. Commenting on these binding threads, Puerto Rican Hollis Stewart, program director at the Spanish Center, explained to a Milwaukee County citizens' human rights subcommittee investigating employment discrimination in 1968, "A Spanish speaking person from Texas, or a Puerto Rican is still seen as a foreigner in Milwaukee," while Luz Burgos, a counselor for a youth opportunity center on the city's north side added that an applicant's Spanish accent – regardless of their country of origin – could be

[58] Baez, interview by author. See also Miner, *Lessons from the Heartland,* 138-139; Darrel Enck-Wanzer, "Decolonizing Imaginaries: Rethinking "the People" in the Young Lords' Church Offensive," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 98, no. 1 (February 2012): 1-23; Gonzales, "Ruffians and Revolutionaries," 61-75.

enough to disqualify them for employment in many Milwaukee industries. In the late 1960s, differences in national identity often stood as surmountable barriers for collaboration between Latino activists, as members of Milwaukee's Spanish-speaking communities fought alongside each other to secure federal, state, and local funding for their initiatives and crafted movements calling for full rights and participation in American political, economic, and social life.[59]

The Allen-Bradley fight of 1968 coalesced the rising spirit of activism within Milwaukee's Latino communities. Activist Lalo Valdez believed the collaboration with the Young Commandos and the ensuing coalition-building among young Chicanos and Puerto Ricans helped spur a "collective consciousness in the value of community, political cooperation and group action, expressed through the phenomena of community control and self-determination."[60] To help galvanize the energy created after the protests, Latino activists came together to create a new organization called the Latin American Union for Civil Rights (LAUCR) in late 1968. The organization's original leaders – Armando Orellana, Ernesto Chacón, Valdez, Roberto Hernandez, and Juan Alvarez – all brought experience from other campaigns, including migrant labor organizing, fights against urban renewal, and protests for expanded opportunities in public education. Promising to work with the Latino communities of Milwaukee, Waukesha, Racine, and Kenosha, LAUCR employed direct action strategies to build what they referred to as a "viable Latin community" for southeastern Wisconsin. The organization's original leaders agreed that "the community had been abused [by] governmental institutions and victimized by industry and business" for far too long and came together to devise

[59] Hollis and Burgos quoted in "Work Bias Blamed on Spanish Accent," *Milwaukee Journal,* June 11, 1968. See also Juanita Renteria, "La Causa," *UWM Magazine* (Summer 1970): 14-19, Archival Resources on Hispanics in Wisconsin, WHS; "Youthful Latins Fight to Keep La Raza Unida," Milwaukee *Sentinel,* October 16, 1971.
[60] Lalo Valdez, "A Narrative History of the Latin Community Since 1968," *La Guardia,* November 1974.

strategies to protect neighborhoods from what they viewed as "parasitic business interests, a violent police force, and inadequate educational systems."[61]

LAUCR styled itself as an explicitly *Latino*, and not Mexican or Puerto Rican, organization. Marc Rodriguez argues that Milwaukee's pan-Latino activism fostered a "creative mélange of movement forces" that "blended several key streams of Mexican American and pan-Latino politics thousands of miles from Los Angeles or San Antonio, or San Juan, Puerto Rico, for that matter."[62] LAUCR's charge included reaching out to other marginalized communities in the city, but their ultimate goal lay in bettering the lives of Milwaukee's Spanish speakers. Discussing how best to build an organization *of* Latinos who could deal with issues the entire community, LAUCR president Miguel Rodriguez explained in 1969, "To show people we are not a racist group, we welcomed Anglo and black members. We are seeking the free exchange of ideas. But they only have a voice at our meetings. When the decisions are made, it is the Spanish members who have a vote. It is they who speak then." The organization's work within the community comprised a wide assortment of initiatives, including police harassment and discrimination against Latinos; a bilingual/bicultural school; harassment by immigration officials; better access to health services; discriminatory hiring practices at local companies; and, budget cuts in social service programs.[63] While learning from African-American civil rights and black power activists, members of the LAUCR were determined to remain a strictly Latino organization. Reverend Orlando Costas explained, "We have learned a lot from the black community. To a great extent, it is a matter of black and brown together. But we are not going to

---

[61] Latin American Union for Civil Rights, "Bylaws," Folder 57, Box 1, *La Guardia* Records, in possession of author; "Comentario Editorial: La Lucha De Ayer…Es La Lucha De Hoy," *La Guardia,* January 1974.
[62] Rodriguez, *Rethinking the Chicano Movement*, 79.
[63] "'Anglo Advice' Is Enough for Latins," *Milwaukee Journal,* June 2, 1969; "ACLU Offers Aid in Police Complaint," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* February 8, 1969; "Chicanos spearheading boycott of Pabst beer at local bars," *Oshkosh Advance-Titan,* May 6, 1971; "Latin American Union For Civil Rights – building institutions, identity, respect," *IFCO News* 3 (November-December 1972): 10, Archival Resources on Hispanics in Wisconsin, WHS.

accept tokenism from those who have complained of tokenism from whites." LAUCR president Miguel Rodriguez explained, "We are not against anyone. But we are tired of taking leftovers and we are not going to continue to take handouts. We want to make decisions."[64]

In their search for institutional support and funding to provide for programming and organizing, LAUCR turned to several nonprofit organizations engaged in philanthropy work in urban areas, including religious institutions in Wisconsin and across the U.S. The organization received $2,500 in funding per year for three years from the national United Church of Christ (UCC) at the end of 1969, along with an additional $5,000 annually for three years from the Wisconsin conference of the UCC. LAUCR also received financial support from the Presbyterian Church, using much of the initial funds from religious organizations to hire Ernesto Chacón as a full-time community organizer.[65]

LAUCR leaders also hoped to secure a large amount of their financial resources from the city's Catholic Archdiocese, arguing that the Church had a particular obligation to support grassroots initiatives among the predominately Catholic Latino community. In late 1969, LAUCR petitioned Archbishop William Cousins to make the archdiocese a more active part of the south side community through a sustained monetary commitment to the new organization. In response, a church spokesman explained that the archdiocese had already spent nearly $40,000 a year among the Spanish-speaking people on the south side – through the Spanish Center and Maurice's initiatives, in aid to Holy Trinity-Our Lady of Guadalupe, and in allowing use of church-owned buildings for Latino programs. While LAUCR acknowledged the work of Maurice and the Spanish Center and noted the broader Latino community's appreciation for its services, Ernesto Chacón believed the Church should double their monetary commitment to the

[64] "'Anglo' Advice Is Enough for Latins," *Milwaukee Journal,* June 2, 1969.
[65] "Church Votes Aid for Pair of Agencies," *Milwaukee Journal,* November 4, 1969.

community for new initiatives like bilingual and bicultural education, "block-to-block" education on discrimination in welfare, leadership training for Spanish-speaking youths, and general community organizing. Chacón explained, "The church should help us in these efforts. For years our people have given to the church – maybe only nickels and dimes, but that's a lot to poor people. Now we should get some of the services."[66]

LAUCR's public demands for increased archdiocesan support proved successful by the summer of 1970. The Milwaukee Archdiocese agreed to contribute over $30,000 to the organization, funneled through the New York-based Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization (IFCO).[67] The ecumenical IFCO funded self-determinative projects among minority communities across the country working towards peace and social justice. Founded in 1966, the IFCO engaged in direct fund-raising to broker grant distribution among Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish organizational donors and receiving agencies. Originally a predominately-white-led group, by 1973 the IFCO's twenty-seven member organizations included representation from black, American Indian, and Latino communities.[68] The organization was at the time under the direction of Lucius Walker, a minister and civil rights activist who had served as the youth director of the Milwaukee Christian Center earlier in the decade and who was familiar with the city's Latino community.[69] The IFCO-Milwaukee connections extended beyond Walker, as Father Patrick Flood, director of the Milwaukee CUL, also served on the organization's executive board of directors. Flood used his influence on the board to help obtain

---

[66] "Spanish Ask $39,000 From Archdiocese," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* February 14, 1970.
[67] Patrick R. Flood to Edward Chalmers, May 8, 1970, Series 2, Box 10, Folder 10, Council on Urban and Rural Life Records, Marquette University Department of Special Collections and University Archives (hereafter referred to as MUDSCUA); "Link Rights Fund, Archdiocese," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* June 9, 1970.
[68] "A Report of the IFCO, April 1970," IFCO, 1970-1973, Box 322, Folder 2, Carl A. and Frank P. Zeidler Papers, Local History Manuscript Collection, Milwaukee Public Library Archives.
[69] "Lucius Walker – Still Militant and Still Controversial," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* June 7, 1969. Walker relocated to New York in 1967, where he was named the founding director of the IFCO. See "Walker fought for civil rights, foreign aid," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel,* September 12, 2010.

funding for organizations like LAUCR in the late 1960s.[70] In addition to the archdiocesan support, the ICFO also granted LAUCR a $2,300 grant in 1969 and a $6,351 grant in 1970. For the following three years, the Milwaukee Catholic Archdiocese continued to contribute thousands of dollars to the LAUCR through the Campaign for Human Development fund. Throughout this period, the committee responsible for allocating the fund's resources included Jesus Salas, then serving as the director of the Community Development Association; Carlos Sevilla, executive director of the Spanish Center; Father Jerome Thompson, associate pastor at St. Andrew Church in Delevan and coordinator of the archdiocesan activities for the Spanish speaking; and, Father John Murtaugh, director of the Racine office of Urban Concerns and outreach director to the county's Spanish speaking. Both Thompson and Murtaugh had gotten their start in work among the area Latinos by serving as migrant ministers in the 1960s.[71]

With funding secured, members of LAUCR turned to publishing an independent monthly newspaper called *La Guardia* during the winter of 1969. Staffed by volunteers and working with donated equipment, *La Guardia* ("the guard" or "the watch" in Spanish) was an explicitly radical, *Latino* newspaper working to fill a void in press coverage of the state's Spanish-speaking communities. Contributor John Torres described news reporting in the city as being "crisis oriented," which meant that it usually took "a crisis situation, such as a shooting, bombing or some type of protest to get the news media into the Latino community." Declaring that they would "not be dehumanized" by Milwaukee's papers of record, contributors aimed to preserve the community's native language while promoting Latin American culture, creating awareness among young Latinos of their cultural heritage, and organizing for community protests and

[70] "Report of the Council on Urban Life, Milwaukee Catholic Archdiocese, 1968," Series 1, Box 2, Folder 4, Council on Urban and Rural Life Records, MUDSCUA.
[71] "Catholics Give $55,792 For Poor; 15 to Allot It," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* January 15, 1971; "Self-Help Seed Money Disbursed," *Sheboygan Press,* June 24, 1971.

actions. The newspaper's call to arms with phrases such as "*En la Unión está la fuerza*" and "*Arriba el poder Latino*" marked it as a pan-Latino publication.[72]

Initially directed by Roberto Hernandez, the paper's editorial board envisioned *La Guardia* serving the "dual purpose" of informing the community of local and national news while creating "an awareness in [Latinos] of their rich cultural heritage and the subtle ways in which this system tries to sterilize them as it has so well done to its vast majority."[73] Vowing to stand against "any act of injustice or discrimination towards our people," the periodical's contributors understood their charge as working to support the "cause of humanity and social justice for all people" in Milwaukee. In an open letter to "politicians, poverticians, police, teachers, city officials, and businessmen," *La Guardia*'s editorial board explained:

> We may appear content, even passive, but we also have an anger inside. An anger that comes from being looked at and treated like a foreigner in our own country, an anger that comes from working at the lowest paying, most boring jobs around, an anger from living and going to school in second rate, unsafe buildings, an anger from remembering that Puerto Rico is a colony and South Texas a national disgrace while we humbly send our best young men to fight and die in a senseless war. A deep anger that will accept only so much before it blows up…We are not threatening anyone but rather, stating what our reaction will be in the future. We are both serious and determined to push for social justice. We are through waiting for the mythical American Dream to become a reality. We are going to make it happen, one way or another…[74]

Like many community and radical newspapers of its time, *La Guardia* operated on a shoestring budget with a volunteer staff. It turned to a diverse set of organizations for financial support in the 1970s, including the Milwaukee Archdiocese's Campaign for Human Development and the Division of Migrant Ministries of the Council of Churches.[75] Hoping to

---

[72] "A Proposal to Fund the La Guardia Ltd. Newspaper," in "La Guardia Records," Archival Resources on Hispanics in Wisconsin, WHS.
[73] Ibid. See also "La Guardia afirma su proposito," *La Guardia,* October 1969; "Sixth Anniversary," *La Guardia,* August 1975; "Latins Spread the Word in La Guardia," *Milwaukee Journal,* January 12, 1977.
[74] "…and one from us," *La Guardia,* October 1969.
[75] "A Proposal to Fund the La Guardia Ltd. Newspaper," in "La Guardia Records," Archival Resources on Hispanics in Wisconsin, WHS; "Proposal for La Guardia Newspaper, submitted to the Division of Migrant Ministries, Council

avoid being beholden to any donor's political agenda, the paper's editorial board was selective in where it pursued funding. Valdez explained to all potential benefactors from the onset that *La Guardia* was a Latino paper for Latinos, "not fat-assed bureaucrats or political 'poverty' flunkies." By necessity, the paper also served as an educational center. With a limited number of community members with journalism experience, it trained its volunteers in writing, photography, and periodical layout techniques. As a mostly volunteer effort, Valdez explained that the newspaper thus brought "a lot of pride" to its contributors. Hoping to expand the number of young Latino journalists in the city, *La Guardia* staff volunteered at the Centro Cultural Educativo Chicano Boricua, a community-based high school, where staff conducted workshops in cinema, photography, and writing, and began a film series and community theater group.[76]

LAUCR was but one of the many Latino organizations that was born in the aftermath of the Allen-Bradley fights. In late 1968, young Milwaukee Latinos formed a chapter of the Brown Berets, joining the more than thirty national chapters that had organized in fights for adequate educational opportunities for Chicano students, against continued police harassment of Mexican-American communities, and in opposition to the Vietnam War.[77] Like the LAUCR, the Milwaukee Brown Berets were led by both Chicano and Boricua youth who believed that interethnic unity would be necessary to advance the economic and social status of Milwaukee Latinos. Proclaiming themselves to be "articulate, informed, aware, and intellectually inclined"

---

of Churches, June 10, 1970," Folder 25, Box 1, *La Guardia* Records, in possession of author; "CHD Allots $42,000 To 'Poor,'" *Milwaukee Sentinel,* June 15, 1974.

[76] "Briefing Paper: Proposal for the development of workshop in photography for Youth in the Spanish-Speaking community of Milwaukee," in "La Guardia Records," Archival Resources on Hispanics in Wisconsin, WHS; "La Guardia," *Kaleidoscope* (Milwaukee), June 12-25, 1970.

[77] Borrowing from the burgeoning Black Power movement and their adoption of more militant tactics (as well as their headwear), young Chicanos in Los Angeles formed the Brown Berets in 1967. During the late 1960s, branches of the Brown Berets sprung up across the U.S. Southwest and Midwest. Ernesto Chavez, "*¡Mi Raza Primero!" (My People First): Nationalism, Identity, and Insurgency in the Chicano Movement in Los Angeles, 1966-1978* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 51-59; Oropeza, *¡Raza Si! ¡Guerra No!,* 131-140.

in a press announcement released in 1969, the Milwaukee Brown Berets also set as their primary goal "self-determination" in all matters regarding employment, housing, and education for the city's Latino community.[78] Led by Juan Alvarez, Ernesto Chacón, and Irma Diaz, the thirty-member strong Milwaukee Brown Berets took part in Latino demonstrations and led security efforts, most importantly in calming tensions between youth and aggressive police officers during marches and protests.[79] *La Guardia* referred to the group as the "*cuidanderos de la comunidad*" (guardians of the community).[80]

LAUCR and the Brown Berets organized walkouts of hundreds of Milwaukee high school students in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Coinciding with the Mexican Day of Independence and the Puerto Rican Grito de Lares in September, these protests called for more Spanish-speaking teachers, expanded Latin American history in regular history courses, and bilingual counselors. At the September 1969 protest, Reverend Orlando Costas addressed the assembled students and community members, declaring, "This is not just any day. It is the day that the first Spanish-speaking country in the western hemisphere gained independence. People must know that we have a history. Latin people have a proud ancestry." The students marched from the south side's Walker's Square to neighborhood high schools, carrying banners that read "Viva La Raza," "Latin Power to the Latin People," and "Power to the People," as well as large Mexican and Puerto Rican flags.[81] Prompted by the walkouts, LAUCR helped form the Council for Education of Latin Americans (CELA) in 1970, an organization that worked to improve

---

[78] "'Brown Berets' Speak," *La Guardia,* December 1969.
[79] Questions submitted by Marc S. Rodriguez to Juan Alvarez and answered on March 9, 2004, Series 4, Box 22, Folder 19, Marc S. Rodriguez Papers, JSL.
[80] "Anuncio locales…" *La Guardia,* June 1971; "Latin Youth in Summer Program," *La Guardia,* July 1971.
[81] "100 Pupils Back Latin Study Plans," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* September 17, 1969; "Students 'Walk-Out,' S-Side Celebrates Mexican Independence Day," *La Guardia,* October 1969; "Students Walk –Out," *La Guardia,* October 1970; "Sept 16 & 23…Students Walkout!" *La Guardia,* October 1971; "Comentario Editorial: Meta Principal En Marcha Perdido," *La Guardia,* September 1974.

Latinos' access to the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and to develop community education programs. CELA would later attempt to "Latinize" university institutions to provide educational opportunities for young Latinos across Milwaukee, successfully establishing new parameters for expanded Latino admittance to Wisconsin's state higher education system.[82]

Along with LAUCR and the Brown Berets, young activists within Milwaukee's Puerto Rican community began a chapter of the Young Lords Organization (YLO) in the fall of 1970. Led by island-transplant Tony Baez and young Milwaukeeans Carmen Cabrera, Lloyd Guzior, and brothers William and Eddie Quiles, the group held workshops across the city through the winter of 1970 and 1971 to expand their membership, meeting at churches in predominately Puerto Rican neighborhoods like St. Rose Catholic Church and the parochial school of St Michael's Catholic Church. Workshops focused on the social and economic problems of Latinos in the city, police harassment against Latino communities across the country, and the continued colonial status of Puerto Rico. Each session also emphasized a renewed Latino cultural nationalism and were followed by cultural program featuring Spanish-language plays and poetry. Open to the entire Latino community, these meetings often included representation from other Latino organizations such as the LAUCR. One member of the Milwaukee YLO branch explained, "We want a program that is oriented towards action. We do not want to talk."[83] The YLO, like many of their allies in the LAUCR, believed radical action would ultimately be necessary to jolt the city (and country) into reformulating how it treated its Latino population.

---

[82] After months of pickets, protests, and sit-ins in Chancellor J. Martin Klotschhe's office, CELA pressured UW-Milwaukee to open the Spanish Speaking Outreach Institute to serve Milwaukee's Latino population in November of 1970. "Latin Groups Hope to Combine Efforts," *Milwaukee Journal,* November 22, 1970; Joseph A. Rodríguez, "Latinos at UWM: A History of the Spanish Speaking Outreach Institute and the Roberto Hernandez Center." 19.

[83] Baez's first job when arriving in Milwaukee was as co-editor of LAUCR's *La Guardia.* "Young Lords Work to Build Ethnic Pride," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* November 21, 1970; "Puerto Rican Disaster," *Kaleidoscope* (Milwaukee), November 13-19, 1970; "Young Lords Organization Workshop," *La Guardia,* December 1970; "Young Lords Conference," *La Guardia,* March 1971; "Lords," *Kaleidoscope* (Milwaukee), March 22-28, 1971.

While believing that "the replacement of the whole economic and political system" would garner the surest path to a more equitable society, the YLO also understood the power of "reformist activity" to gain allies within a broader base of community members who might not be prepared for a full-scale overhaul of society. Baez explained, "reformist actions and views are important because they educate people, they make them progressive…people change gradually. You can't just go crazy and say you're going to make revolution tomorrow."[84]

Milwaukee YLO's first project was to collect funds for flood victims in Puerto Rico in the final months of 1970, coordinating a citywide fundraising campaign in conjunction with other YLO branches around country. The small organization went on to support drug rehabilitation programs in the city, a community park for youngsters on the east side, and the expansion of Puerto Rican and Chicano history courses at south side schools. Like the LAUCR, the Milwaukee YLO also started a bilingual newspaper called *El Young Lord: Latin Liberation News Service.* The periodical, which had a limited run through the early 1970s, advocated a united "Latin" identity and included articles detailing Chicanos and Black Power movements across the U.S., updates on Puerto Rican self-determination protests on the island, and educational historical pieces describing the continued colonial relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico. The fledgling YLO ultimately garnered a much smaller contingent of support from the Latino community, perhaps because of its outwardly socialist orientation.[85]

While focused on building capacity within their own organizations, members of grassroots groups like the LAUCR, the Brown Berets, and the YLO proved more than willing to criticize Latino leadership within the community they felt were unwilling to confront engrained, systemic issues for fear of losing their own vaunted positions as "representatives" or

---

[84] "Spanish Colony Says it With Marches," *Milwaukee Journal,* October 1, 1971.
[85] "Young Lords Work to Build Ethnic Pride," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* November 21, 1970.

intermediaries for Spanish speakers. Radical community activists identified this middle-class concessionary style of negotiating as a form of "misleadership" that did more harm by refusing to disrupt and overturn classist, racist, and misogynistic institutional constructs. Grassroots organizations often found, however, that despite their fervor (or perhaps, because of it), fights over the respectability of direct action tactics often blunted the support from the larger Latino community. One Milwaukee YLO member explained that his comrades expected opposition, "even from our own people. Our parents are so colonized that they think anybody with a radical idea is a Communist or no good."[86] LAUCR and YLO specifically struggled against what they interpreted as a politics of accommodation established by earlier groups and more temperate religious leaders, attitudes which they believed had become solidified in many of the social service agencies serving Milwaukee's Spanish-speaking communities. Intent on challenging this form of leadership, Latino activists placed their sights on taking control over the programs and organizations administering to their community in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Necessary for the "mere factor of our survival": Fights for Self-Determination Within Latino-Serving Organizations

LAUCR, the Brown Berets, and the YLO quickly turned their sights on the institutions most deeply embedded in their community's social and economic structures: programs originally created by faith organizations via funding from religious and federal sources. While these institutions had created points of access to resources for Milwaukee Latinos, these new advocacy organizations expressed deep concern with the lack of Latino leadership at the helm of community agencies in the mid to late 1960s. While Mexican and Puerto Rican community members served as employees or volunteers for groups like UMOS, the Spanish Center, and the

[86] Ibid. See also Valdez, "Selective Determinants in Maintaining Social Movement Organizations," 244-245, 247.

United Spot, each of these organizations continued to be managed by boards and program directors of predominately white clergymen. Veterans of recent social mobilizations expressed dissatisfaction with a sense of paternalism that permeated some of these organizations, as leaders such as Jesus Salas explained, "There are a lot of people who really don't feel we can do things ourselves, who feel we Latins are children."[87] Led by a generation of young Chicano and Puerto Rican activists who refused to accept that poor housing, dead-end jobs, and political powerlessness were inevitable, Milwaukee Latinos issued calls for self-determination and community ownership of these agencies. Grassroots groups like LAUCR and YLO drew inspiration from the Allen-Bradley fight and a growing sense of cultural nationalism in the city and became outlets for demanding control of all Latino-serving and War on Poverty organizations on Milwaukee's south side in the late 1960s.[88]

Many Latino activists understood that religious groups had taken the lead in establishing the first Spanish-speaking-serving agencies in Milwaukee, and credited organizations like the Spanish Center for creating much-needed educational programming for the community. Jesus Salas, newly-arrived in Milwaukee after years of organizing migrant workers in central Wisconsin, recognized that in the city, "the church spoke first."[89] He alleged, however, that while religious organizations had "been the source of the most sincere effort from the largest organized group to assist poor people," they had also "been too long in a position of 'patron.'" While Salas believed that some clergy had "learned how to overcome their impulse to run

[87] "Spanish Speaking Want to Control Own Destiny," *Milwaukee Journal,* June 1, 1969.
[88] Rodriguez, *Rethinking the Chicano Movement,* 80.
[89] Jesus Salas, "Reflections on Urban Life," in *Teaching About Life in the City,* ed. Richard Wisniewski (Washington, D.C.: National Council for the Social Studies, 1972), 61-73, Archival Resources on Hispanics in Wisconsin, WHS.

everything" and remained Latinos' "friends and true sources of help," there continued to be too many "churchmen who approach people in the old role of shepherd of the flock."[90]

While Salas may have held a tempered perspective on church-led initiatives, the editors of *La Guardia* offered a more biting assessment of religious organizations – singling out the Catholic Church – and their relationship with the city's Latino community. Instead of platitudes and sermons, the editors of *La Guardia* demanded that religious organizations reinvest in their congregants by supporting grassroots activism and efforts to dismantle those systems that held their community in poverty. The paper's editors noted that to best understand the relationship between "the Church" and Chicanos and Puerto Ricans, currently "a subject of great concern and discussion" across the country, Latinos needed to recall the colonial memory of Spanish missionaries who had "attempted to "civilize" and help the people to believe in their God and become "good Christians."" The editors believed that most Milwaukee priests continued to "live in the days of old," attempting to "civilize" Latinos and expecting Chicanos and Puerto Ricans "to pay them for doing it." *La Guardia* explained that a generational sense of reverence but also fear towards men and women of the cloth allowed for this form of relationship to continue:

> Since they have God and the Bible on their side, they feel that everything they say and do is always "right." So they deceive and manipulate us and our children into worshipping them and the Church and fearing their authority. No question about it. Most of us are just plain scared of Priests and Nuns. Although fewer and fewer people actually believe their spiritual language and laws, we accept it. Why? Because our parents did, and we'd better, or else…[91]

The newspaper's critique of the church exposed a divide in both strategy and content between young activists and a significant segment of the larger Latino community. Father Loren Koziel, associate pastor of Holy Trinity-Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, believed that the direct-

---

[90] "'Anglo' Advice Is Enough for Latins," *Milwaukee Journal,* June 2, 1969.
[91] "La Iglesia y La Gente," *La Guardia,* May 1970.

action tactics advocated by young Chicanos and Boricuans could potentially alienate his politically temperate congregants, who shied away from civil disobedience for fear of being perceived as a nuisance or a threat by the larger city community. Koziel explained to the *Milwaukee Journal* that "just the revolutionary pictures in some of the offices of the organizations sponsoring demonstrations cause reaction and distrust among many people. A lot of people don't understand their goals. They just see the external activities, the marching, the demonstrating, and disapprove."[92]

While perceptions of the church were varied among Latino activists, ranging from skepticism to outright hostility, most younger protestors agreed that the church had not done enough to foster leadership within the Latino community. As remediation, they argued for increased funding from Catholic and Protestant organizations for nascent grassroots efforts, as well as expanded use of church facilities for community meetings. They also requested funding for alternative educational programs that emphasized bilingual and bicultural instruction, which could be initially accomplished by hiring more Latino staff to work in parochial schools. Perhaps most importantly, young Chicano and Puerto Rican activists called on churches to apply their political and economic power within the city to enact meaningful economic changes for Latinos, most concretely by denouncing employers that failed to enact non-discrimination employment practices and by publicly criticizing social service agencies that disproportionately allocated resources.[93]

For their part, many of the clergy that had been involved in community service work within the Latino community since the early 1960s had come to reassess their own roles within organizing and activist initiatives. Reverend Orlando Costas of the Evangelical Baptist Church

---

[92] "Spanish Colony Says it With Marches," *Milwaukee Journal,* October 1, 1971.
[93] "Proposed Resolutions – Youth Workshop," Folder 25, Box 1, *La Guardia* Records, in possession of author.

agreed with Salas' sentiment that religious men and women should not assume that their revered space in a church automatically qualified them for leadership roles, stating, "If we clergymen are going to be effective, we are going to have to stop being prima donnas and take only advisory roles."[94] Working with LAUCR, Costas had come to view a pan-Latino grassroots movement – what he called "brown power" organizing – as the most effective strategy to build community power and "bargain for [our] rights with the power structure."[95]

With the growth of LAUCR in Milwaukee, Costas's Catholic colleague, Reverend John Maurice of UMOS and the Spanish Center, also began to reassess his own role as a white cleric in charge of Latino-serving institutions. Addressing a liturgical weekend session at the suburban Immaculate Heart of Mary parish in West Allis in spring of 1969, Maurice explained that the growth in movements for "black power and brown power" represented inner city residents' desire to shape their own destinies. Reflecting on the distinction between charity and service, Maurice suggested that instead of simply donating "a basket of food" to those living in impoverished areas, well-intentioned white middle-class suburbanites like those who sat in the pews that day could best serve these movements by seeking to change the attitudes of their neighbors and convincing them "that prejudice is not Christian." When congregants expressed their unease with the rising militancy in black and Latino organizations in the inner city, Maurice exhorted the assembled congregants that more and more Latinos felt "powerless" in the face of consistent inaction on the part of politicians, and ended by asking those assembled, "What would your frustrations be in the same circumstances?"[96]

---

[94] "'Anglo' Advice Is Enough for Latins," *Milwaukee Journal,* June 2, 1969.
[95] "'Action' Fruit of Education for Spanish," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* April 3, 1969.
[96] "Inner city residents anxious to shape destiny, priest says," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* April 5, 1969.

While clerical leaders like Costas and Maurice reconsidered their changing roles in Chicano and Boricuan movements in Milwaukee, grassroots Latino community activists began formulating their own strategies to drastically remake many of the south side organizations first founded in the early 1960s. The move to replace leadership of south side Latino-serving organizations was part of a larger project of self-determination for Latinos. Activists argued that community control was fundamental for advancing Latino's economic position in the city as well as preserving Chicano and Puerto Rican cultural heritage. *La Guardia* contended that complete community control of these institutions was necessary for "the mere factor of our survival." The newspaper's editors maintained that the agencies serving the Latino community had historically "been run and administered by Anglo-Americans who don't understand our problems, who live outside the community and who take a middle class approach and position to dealing with us. To make it worse, some don't even speak our language." To create attentive community organizations, the community would need resources, thoughtful planning, and responsive community participation. Most importantly, however, the flourishing of these organizations – and of the Milwaukee Latino community as a whole – would be dependent on the ability of "indigenous community people" to "partake in [organizational] planning and administration."[97]

Out with "los gabachos": Migrant Leadership at the United Migrant Opportunity Services (UMOS)

The first fights for self-determination in Milwaukee's Latino-serving institutions in the late 1960s began at the United Migrant Opportunity Services (UMOS), spurred on by labor organizing among migrant workers in central Wisconsin. As Marc Rodriguez has demonstrated in his study of migrant farmworkers and War on Poverty programs in Wisconsin, the UMOS

[97] "Community Control and The Spot," *La Guardia,* December 1972.

fight represented a clash between migrants and progressive administrators over contentions surrounding notions of belonging and leadership across Wisconsin's Mexican-American community. The militant organizing initiated by Jesus Salas and Obreros Unidos in Waushara County had helped transform the political environment for migrant workers across Wisconsin, shifting their expectations of social service agencies receiving federal funding to serve Latinos.[98]

By the late 1960s, UMOS still failed to employ any Mexican Americans in management positions, despite moving its central offices into the heart of the state's Latino community on the south side of Milwaukee. Programs funded through the federal Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) were required to include local community leadership in their decision-making processes, a requirement they referred to as "maximum feasibility participation." OEO programs were thus expected to perform two important functions within minority communities, not only providing social services in areas such as education, health and employment, but also helping train local leaders within communities to eventually take control of these programs. Concerned that UMOS was not fulfilling the goal of "maximum feasible participation" among the state's Latino community, OEO officials warned program directors to make efforts to include more migrant workers in its management process in 1967. Mexican-American employees, under the leadership of initial founder and internal liaison Genevieve Medina, turned to veterans of the migrant worker organizing campaigns in central Wisconsin and LAUCR leaders to agitate for expanded control of the organization in 1968.[99]

In November of 1968, Mexican-American UMOS staff and south side Latino residents met with agency directors to request more responsive management along with an expanded voice

---

[98] Rodriguez, *The Tejano Diaspora,* 98-127.
[99] Marc S. Rodriguez, "A Movement of "Young Mexican Americans Seeking Change,": Critical Citizenship, Migration, and the Chicano Movement in Texas and Wisconsin, 1960-1975," *Western Historical Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (Autumn 2003): 287-289.

in the allocation of federal funding to migrant services. Opposition leaders such as Medina, field operations coordinator Salvador Sánchez, and Carlos Salas (brother of Jesus) expressed anger at the levels of mid-level management that existed between migrants and program directors, forms of bureaucracy they believed made UMOS less attentive to migrants' needs. They asked for more Latinos to be hired beyond entry-level positions in the organization and for former migrants already within UMOS to be promoted to leadership roles.[100] Militant community members such as Lalo Valdez described UMOS' executive leadership as "*gabachos*" (Chicano pejorative for an English-speaking non-Latino) with public relations backgrounds and little community involvement, while the administrative assistants consisted of "liberal Anglo ex-clergymen." Community members also expressed concern that the agency continued to function under the direction of a board of directors consisting of predominately white, middle-class men along with what Valdez referred to as "Chicano individuals with similar orientations."[101]

The few Mexican-Americans that sat on the UMOS board of directors drafted a twelve-point memorandum of criticisms against leading administrators. Their complaints included that the agency was more concerned with quotas than with people, that the staff was not large enough to serve the community effectively and that the basic program goals of providing decent housing and jobs were not being met. Dante Navarro, one of UMOS's more critical board members, stated that the community only asked that UMOS administration "perform their duties in the areas of housing and jobs, which the [Latino] community feels have been neglected."[102] Board

---

[100] "UMOS in Real Dialogue," *El Cosechador: A Newsletter for UMOS Staff, Board, and Students,* no. 2, November 26, 1968, Pamphlet Collection, WHS; "More Staff Needed," *El Cosechador: A Newsletter for UMOS Staff, Board, and Students*, no. 3, December 5, 1968, Pamphlet Collection, WHS.
[101] Lalo Valdez, "A Narrative History of the Latin Community Since 1968," *La Guardia,* November 1974.
[102] "Poverty Officials Out After Heated Debate," *Milwaukee Journal,* January 31, 1969. Mexican-American board members and UMOS workers also took umbrage with white board members' public use of terms like "brown power" and "chili power" when referring to criticism lobbed against them. See "Staff Shortages; Debate Goes On," *El Cosechador: A Newsletter for UMOS Staff, Board, and Students* 4, Christmas 1968, Pamphlet Collection, WHS.

meetings in the late winter of 1968 and early months of 1969 were contentious, with community groups demanding that UMOS administrators resign their position and instead appoint Latino community members. Board directors targeted for replacement by activists, such as executive director William Kruse, complained that tensions between more militant Latino staffers and administration had created an air of "mounting Latino-Anglo tension" within the agency that was fostering insubordination between management and staff members. Mounting criticism prompted the five white administrators of the governing board to resign their positions in January of 1969, ultimately transferring control of the organization to Latino leadership.[103]

The sudden board transition and loss of institutional knowledge brought a brief era of uncertainty to the migrant agency in early 1969. Madison Auxiliary Catholic Bishop Jerome J. Hastrich advised the new Latino administrators commence a swift training period, warning the activists that he had spoken to OEO officials in Washington and UMOS would "be finished if you walk in and try to take it over tomorrow" if they couldn't prove their ability to right the ship.[104] After a brief period of temporary management administered by a team from the OEO division of migrant services, the board of directors hired Jesus Salas as executive director in April of 1969. Salas had recently left his duties as a union organizer to lead the state's grape boycott effort at the behest of United Farm Worker (UFW) leader César Chávez. Salas organized actions across Wisconsin, focusing on buyers and grocery stores as well as providing picketing support against those stores that refused to respect the boycott. As the nation's largest consumer of brandy, Wisconsin stood as a particularly ripe target for the protests. Salas, along with other

[103] Kruse quoted in "17 Threaten to Resign From United Migrant Opportunity Services," *Milwaukee Journal,* January 19, 1969. See also "Five Administrators Quit Migrant Services Program," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* January 19, 1969; "Migrant Board to Mull Vacancies," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* January 22, 1969.
[104] "Poverty Officials Out After Heated Debate," *Milwaukee Journal,* January 31, 1969.

veterans of the Wisconsin migrant farmworker movement such as Ernesto Chacón, established a Milwaukee boycott base at the Solidarity House, a large duplex on the city's north side.[105]

The boycott drew supporters from across the state, ranging from clergy and middle-class suburbanites to unions and students.[106] The Council on Urban Life (CUL) sent mailers to Milwaukee priests, urging them distribute literature to their parishioners promoting the boycott and farmworkers' efforts to "bring the Good News of Christian justice and dignity to the poor of our land."[107] At a special Mass held at St. Patrick's Catholic Church on Milwaukee's south side in November of 1968, twenty members and allies of Obreros Unidos broke a forty-eight-hour fast to take communion during a Thanksgiving service. With Reverend John Maurice presiding, fasters entered the church under the banner of Our Lady of Guadalupe and a red flag emblazoned with the black thunderbird of the farm worker movement. The protestors, accompanied by two Spanish guitars, were dressed in serapes and colorful shawls and sang "Huelga en General" (General Strike), a song describing the vineyard struggle. At the offertory of the Mass, the group placed serapes, shawls, a loaf of bread, picket signs, and pictures and newspaper clippings on the altar as symbolic gifts, while the congregation sang the unofficial anthems of the farm workers movement, "De Colores." Salas took the pulpit to lead the congregation in prayer, reciting the boycott petition's demands in English and Spanish. His prayer covered a wide range of pleas, including a call for the resolution of the California strike, understanding and brotherhood among all members of the city's population, and an end to the war in Vietnam.[108]

---

[105] "US to Run Center Here," *Milwaukee Journal,* February 5, 1969; "Wary Salas Debuts Before US Board," *Milwaukee Journal,* November 27, 1969.
[106] See "California grape strikers gain support," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* August 3, 1968; "Don't Buy Rotten Grapes!" *Kaleidoscope* (Milwaukee), August 9-22, 1968; "Rally Protests Sale of Grapes," *Milwaukee Journal,* October 9, 1968; "Boycott continues," *UWM Post,* October 11, 1968.
[107] Patrick Flood to Milwaukee Area Priests, undated letter, Series 1, Box 2, Folder 4, Council on Urban and Rural Life Records, MUDSCUA.
[108] "Special Mass Held For Grape Boycotters," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* November 28, 1968.

Under the direction of the Salas, UMOS reshaped their staff and mission. Salas believed that UMOS needed to be an agency run *by* Latinos and *for* Latinos for it to ultimately be successful. While recognizing the "excellent" programs and services church-sponsored agencies had created on the south side, Salas believed it was time for religious leaders to "realize that the self-determination and self-survival of our community must come from the community itself – *from ourselves!* Therefore, for whatever anyone brings us or whatever form of assistance they provide, we are eternally grateful. But only we can help ourselves."[109] To that end, monolingual white social workers were replaced with bilingual community workers, many of whom were of Mexican descent and had once been a part of the migrant stream to the state. The organization also shifted their focus from a casework approach to forming advocacy groups. This shift included a move away from focusing on migrant children to serving the migrant community at large, as new leadership argued that early childhood education would not be enough to combat the economic and political structures that kept migrants in impoverished conditions.[110]

The new agency leadership also moved to decentralize the hierarchical structure of the organization they felt consolidated power with the board of directors. Board members established advisory committees in counties outside of Milwaukee and Waukesha and empowered them to elect their own local leadership. They removed barriers for visitors to talk to administration, renamed 'directors' into 'coordinators,' replaced administrators who only spoke English with bilingual personnel, and offered any participant in the agency's programming the opportunity to review funding proposals and provide input. The new leadership hoped that as migrant workers learned more about the structures of federal funding and workplace protections, they would be better able to step into leadership positions and advocate at the local level.

---

[109] Salas, "Reflections on Urban Life," 61-73.
[110] "Salas to Coordinate Migrant Projects," *Milwaukee Journal,* March 18, 1969.

Workplace power created by migrants themselves, Salas explained, would ideally then replace referral agencies as vehicles for change and "eventually erase the usage of UMOS at all."[111] Ultimately, a retooled UMOS yearned to offer former migrants the opportunity of self-determination in choosing employment and finding housing.[112]

The shift in the composition of UMOS's staff and board was accompanied by a more activist strain in the organization's advocacy. After years of organizing among migrant laborers, Salas believed that direct action and confrontation were the only effective ways in which minority communities could exact results from society's economic and social power structures. He cited specifically the example of civil rights and black power advocates in Milwaukee, who demonstrated the efficacy of protest when political avenues proved obstructed. While UMOS as an organization continued to face limitations in its ability to sponsor marches and pickets due restrictions tied to its federal funding, the Chicanos that staffed its centers around the state identified more strongly as activists and joined direct action in school walkouts, the grape boycott, and welfare rights as they arose across Milwaukee and Wisconsin.[113]

While the board transition had been initially controversial and left some original directors dissatisfied with the political maneuvering leading to their ouster, UMOS continued to receive support from southeastern Wisconsin's religious community. The Milwaukee *Catholic Herald Citizen* offered a glowing review of Salas' leadership style in the late summer of 1969, citing a quote from Pope John XXIII they felt demonstrated the new director's importance to the Latino community: "We are all equally responsible for the undernourished peoples. It is necessary to educate one's conscience to the sense of responsibility which weighs upon each and every one."

---

[111] "Head of migrant group provides understanding, determined leadership," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* August 8, 1969; Jesus Salas, interview by author, Milwaukee, WI, June 4, 2015.
[112] "The Migrant's Union Comes to Pickle Country," *Chicago Tribune,* October 20, 1968.
[113] "Confrontation Produces Results for Minorities, 3 Activists Say," *Milwaukee Journal,* April 22, 1969.

When asked by the newspaper what Christians' responsibility to migrants should be and how the undernourished and underprivileged could be assisted, Salas responded that Catholics had already reacted to appeals for help from migrants in some important ways, citing the national and Wisconsin bishops' public support for farm workers' right to organize and their boycott of grapes. He continued, however, that one of the Church's greatest failings was it continuing "paternalistic attitude" towards migrants, acting "protective towards its poor" rather than empowering them to make enable change on their own terms. Salas cited as an example missionaries entering dilapidated camps and prioritizing religious education to youth, all the while workers labored in unsafe conditions and earned wages well below the minimum wage. Salas commented, "to teach CCD is fine, but to teach these people that they need to know to right themselves is, at the moment, of prime importance."[114]

The swift turnover in leadership and staff provoked concern and some scrutiny from federal officials. The federal management team sent to Wisconsin to aid in the transition prior to Salas' tenure recommended a series of changes to the agency's structure and outreach program. Their suggestions included management and staff improvement plans and mandatory trainings for new administrative leadership.[115] The OEO also reduced federal funding in 1969 and 1970, a series of cutbacks that if only briefly impaired UMOS's plans to expand their services to other sites in the Wisconsin. Despite these reductions, staff continued to provide job and language skills to a growing number of migrants moving into urban centers across Wisconsin and

---

[114] "Head of migrant group provides understanding, determined leadership," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* August 8, 1969.

[115] Peat, Marwick, Mitchell & Co, CPA, "Final Report, Management Improvement Plan, United Migrant Opportunity Services, Inc., 1970," Box 1, Folder 13, Wisconsin Department of Industry, Labor, and Human Relations, Committee and Task Force Records, 1943-1973, WHS; "US Advises Changes in Migrant Program," *Milwaukee Journal,* February 21, 1969.

scrambled to find employment opportunities for Latinos who continually faced higher unemployment rates in the city.[116]

The shift in administration at UMOS also drew the ire of growers across central Wisconsin, many of whom had spoken out vehemently against Salas' efforts organize migrant farmworkers in the state just years earlier. Opponents of Salas' appointment sent petitions to the offices of the OEO, while some growers wrote telegrams and letters to President Richard Nixon, their federal congressmen, and local newspapers. In a letter to the *Waushara Argus,* one Wautoma resident referred to UMOS' new director as "an agitator" whose history with Obreros Unidos and the farmworkers' grape strike disqualified him to lead a "responsible organization that is supported by United States taxpayers."[117] Salas and the organization's new leadership received public backing, however, from supporters and religious leaders across the state. Jenny Lind, supervisor of field services of the Wisconsin Department of Health and Social Services' Division of Family Services and member of the Governor's Committee on Migratory Labor, gathered letters from backers to send to Washington, D.C.[118] William H. Koch, board president of UMOS and director of community development for the Division of Home Missions for the National Council of Churches, issued a letter in the spring of 1969 defending the board's decision to hire Salas. Koch explained that to carry out the aims of the Economic Opportunity

---

[116] "Migrant Project Fears Loss of Federal Funds," *Milwaukee Journal,* June 27, 1969; $700,000 OK'd To Aid Migrants," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* June 11, 1970.
[117] Donald W. Weyenberg, "Letter to the Editor: Salas Poorly Qualified," *Waushara Argus,* April 3, 1969. See also "Minutes of Meeting of Governor's Committee on Migratory Labor," July 30, 1969, Box 1, Folder 14, Records of Wisconsin Governor's Committee on Migratory Labor, WHS.
[118] Jenny J. Lind to Noel Klores, March 18, 1969, Box 19, Folder 1, Wisconsin Division of Economic Assistance: Economic Opportunity Section Administrative Subject Files, 1964-1978, WHS. See also Margien L. Lund to Representative Robert J. Kastenmeier, April 4, 1969, Box 19, Folder 1, Wisconsin Division of Economic Assistance: Economic Opportunity Section Administrative Subject Files, 1964-1978, WHS; Senator William Proxmire to Robert J. Kuechmann, May 5, 1969, Box 19, Folder 1, Wisconsin Division of Economic Assistance: Economic Opportunity Section Administrative Subject Files, 1964-1978, WHS; Senator Gaylord Nelson to Robert J. Kuechmann, May 12, 1969, Box 19, Folder 1, Wisconsin Division of Economic Assistance: Economic Opportunity Section Administrative Subject Files, 1964-1978, WHS.

Act, the UMOS board had long aimed to identify potential leadership among the residents it served. Through "education, employment and participation in agency affairs," Koch clarified that the board had "sought to encourage those with talent and skill to take increasing responsibility for the programs which affect the welfare of their people." As UMOS had "sought to develop citizenship among" those it served by encouraging them to participate in program development, the appointment of Salas was "realization of this goal." Koch explained that Salas, culled from a field of thirty-five candidates, had been chosen because of "his demonstrated ability to lead his people, his acceptance by migrant workers as one who is genuinely concerned for their welfare, and his thorough knowledge and deep understanding of the lives and problems of his people."[119]

Navigating the political machinations of federal funding with the support of Wisconsinites, UMOS also turned towards creating new housing initiatives to prepare migrants who had lived most of their lives in rural areas moving into urban spaces. Staff assisted workers by relocating them to smaller towns like Beaver Dam, Hartford, and Oshkosh instead of cities like Milwaukee and Madison that faced higher unemployment rates. Migrants found, however, that they weren't always welcomed in their communities. While Spanish-speakers didn't face active discrimination in their search for housing, Reverend John Maurice, who continued to work with migrants even after leaving his position as director of the agency, believed the "insidious nature of prejudice" across Wisconsin prevented migrants from arranging living spaces comparable to their white peers. Maurice pointed to the hypocrisy of small Wisconsin towns, actively waging campaigns to attract industries which would need to employ the very people for whom there would no housing: "This is prejudice. People think they can make money off the

[119] William H. Koch, "United Migrant Opportunity Services, Inc. – Statement, undated," Box 19, Folder 1, Wisconsin Division of Economic Assistance: Economic Opportunity Section Administrative Subject Files, 1964-1978, WHS.

poor, but they don't want the poor to come and live with them." Those Latinos that did decide to settle in Milwaukee faced the prospect of a tightened housing market on the near south side, where freeway construction and industrial expansion had led to the teardown of entire blocks of homes.[120] For many former migrants, UMOS stood as the only organization advocating on their behalf in Wisconsin throughout the twentieth century.

Not a "haven for hoodlums": Youth Tumult at The United Spot

While opposition at UMOS regarding its mission and leadership arose mostly from Latino community members, other Latino-serving organizations such as the United Spot on Milwaukee's south side also faced criticism from their funding sources. In the fall of 1969, conservative state politicians turned their sites towards the youth-serving agency, directing their ire at what they believed to be an unlawful spirit of activism in a government-sponsored organization. In voting against continued funding for the center, Assemblyman Ronald Parys (D-Milwaukee) accused the United Spot of not accomplishing its purpose as a community center but instead serving as a "haven for hoodlums" and a "gang hangout," while Assemblyman Byron Wackett (R-Watertown) expressed suspicions that the center was used as a base to build political dissidents. Officials at the Milwaukee Christian Center (MCC), the United Spot's parent agency, defended the center against the politicians' claims, clarifying that one thousand teenagers, mostly Latinos, were now participating in its activities instead of loitering in the streets or becoming involved in "antisocial behavior." According to its supporters, the United Spot, operated by a staff that was nearly 90 percent Latino, had become "the only place in the entire city of Milwaukee that Latin American youth, and for that matter the Latin community in general, can truly call their own." The directors warned that without appropriate funding and support from the

[120] "Housing, Jobs Closely Tied in Latin Community," *Milwaukee Journal,* June 6, 1969.

state, delinquency among Latino youth in the area would skyrocket and the city's Latinos would become further embittered and alienated from the larger Milwaukee community.[121]

Support for the Spot extended beyond the Latino population it served. One local union newspaper commented that within the last few years of the decade, the Spot had "increasingly moved more and more from a youth center to a community center serving entire families in the area," and had become a crucial service for a neighborhood experiencing unrest "intensified by expressway dislocation, industrial encroachment," and the failure to integrate Latinos into the larger Milwaukee community. Harold C. Schrubbe, United Community Services director and member of the Milwaukee County Labor Council, called the "do-nothing" state legislature's decision to withhold funding "short-sighted" and likely to produce "disastrous" consequences for the entire south side community, not simply Latinos.[122]

Confronting a depleted budget and the possibility of having to close the Spot's doors at the end of 1969, the MCC board of directors approved a stopgap grant of $6,380 to keep the center open for the following two months. The grant fell well below the $177,000 budget proposed by United Spot staff that would be needed to carry out programming for 1970. In presenting the full budget to the board, the center's administrative supervisor and spiritual director Reverend Orlando Costas explained that the requested funds represented a minimal funding commitment as the Spot was Milwaukee's only agency explicitly serving Latino youth. In a prepared statement, Costas explained, "For too long Milwaukee's Spanish speaking residents have been ignored and denied an equal opportunity by our governmental, educational

---

[121] "State Board Cuts Off Funds for 2 Inner City Project," *Milwaukee Journal,* October 9, 1969; "New Funds Sought for United Spot," *Milwaukee Journal,* October 24, 1969; "The Spot," *Milwaukee Journal,* November 3, 1969.
[122] Harold C. Schrubbe, "Community Service," *AFL-CIO Milwaukee Labor Press,* December 4, 1969, in Office of the Mayor – Milwaukee Commission on Community Relations, 1941-88, Box 29, Folder 31, MPL.

and social institutions." Full financing of the Spot, per Costas, was thus "not only fair…but urgent." Despite their pleas, the board of directors' reduced budget remained in place.[123]

Facing attacks on their funding sources in 1969, the United Spot's directors also grappled with a growing air of militancy amongst its young members. In the fall of 1969, Latino youths working at the agency voted to go on strike and picket the organization, demanding higher wages and more control over the center's direction. Organizing through the LAUCR offices, the striking workers demanded access to the Spot's financial records from the "mostly old Anglo middle class Baptists" on the organization's board, and called for immediate independence from its "conservative parent organization the Milwaukee Christian Center." Upon learning of the strike, Reverend Costas exclaimed that he was "tickled to death" at the youth's engagement and called it "one of the most creative things the teens had ever done." Costas noted with some satisfaction that the students' protests were proof of the effectiveness of developing community leaders among the teenagers. He rewarded their initial actions with a small pay raise and suggested that the young workers form a union to solidify their proposals. Over the next year, the youth organization and their community allies from the LAUCR and the Brown Berets continued to engage in protests and confrontations with Center leadership in efforts to prompt a board of directors meeting to address a broader range of complaints beyond wages.[124]

The student protests, along with extended conversations with Milwaukee Latino leaders, prompted the MCC board of directors to explore the prospect of making the United Spot an independent agency under complete Latino community control in the spring of 1970. Reverend Jaime Davila, MCC board member and newly-installed pastor of la Iglesia Evangélica Bautista,

---

[123] "Grants to United Spot for 2 Months Favored," *Milwaukee Journal,* November 5, 1969; "Spot Funds Cut," *La Guardia,* December 1969.
[124] "Accent on the News," *Milwaukee Journal,* August 4, 1969; Reverend Kevin Smith interview by Sarah Filzen, Milwaukee, February 22, 1999, in possession of interviewer.

announced the board's decision at an open house attended by more than one hundred neighborhood residents after community members had presented a list of demands for expanded funding, staff hiring, and an independent youth center. In order to garner full investment from both the community and funding sources, the board created an ad hoc committee with constituent representatives, including two members of the Spot's Youth Council, two elected community members, and two professional and business representatives appointed by the MCC.[125] At a fall 1970 meeting to discuss the future of the organization, Spot youth, along with representatives from the Milwaukee Brown Berets, spurred on heated exchanges that included insults between the board and community members. Despite the contentious nature of the meeting, the dissatisfied youth successfully forced the incorporation of their demands into a plan that called for the Spot to become independent from the MCC by the beginning of 1971. A transition committee composed of Latino community members was charged with solidifying the organization's finances, finding new leadership, and organizing a new community board of governors. After numerous open forums to garner community input on the changeover, the transition committee successfully guided the United Spot's switch to an independent, non-profit, community-based organization by the end of 1970.[126]

The newly-independent United Spot opened under new management and a new board on January 1, 1971. *La Guardia* heralded the beginning of a new "independent" Centro de la Comunidad Unida/United Community Center (UCC) under the leadership of a "Latin community board." The radical Latino newspaper's editorial board believed that under the MCC board, the Spot's only objective had been to "keep the youth off the streets," while "responsible

---

[125] "The 'Spot' for Youths to Cut Ties," *Milwaukee Journal,* April 27, 1970.
[126] "Huelga en el Spot," *La Guardia,* September 1969; "Spot Youth Awaken," *La Guardia,* October 1970; Rodriguez et al., *Nuestro Milwaukee,* 21-22; Reverend Jaime Davila interview by Sarah Filzen, Milwaukee, May 3, 1999, in possession of interviewer.

self-direction was not allowed due to the paternalism among the elderly Baptist Board." The new leadership consisted of an equal number of adult and youth members, including Reverend Jaime Davila of la Iglesia Evangélica Bautista.[127] Davila, who had arrived in Milwaukee in 1969 to replace Costas as the pastor of church, would demonstrate over the next decade a passion for social justice and direct-action activism that followed closely in his predecessor's footsteps.[128]

The transition to an independent non-profit brought with it new difficulties in securing financing. New funding from the United Community Services (UCS) only provided about half of the Spot's original capital resources, leading to continuing staff shortages and a rotating door of individual program directors. Problems were compounded in the spring of 1972 when a suspicious fire gutted the UCC's main facilities. A large grant from UCS made possible the purchase of a new home at the former site of St. John the Evangelist Church in late 1972, while grants from the United Way and the city of Milwaukee's Department of Community Development allowed for the completion of renovations. Davila proved instrumental in shepherding the transition to the new building in 1972, assisting with fundraising and renovations. That same year, with the urging of officials in the Department of City Development, Davila and other UCC members began a feasibility study for low-income housing in the neighborhood surrounding the community center. The study would later serve as the basis for securing local, state, and federal funding for the construction of apartment units for low-income families on the Latino south side.[129]

---

[127] "The 'Spot' for Youths to Cut Ties," *Milwaukee Journal,* April 27, 1970; "Spot Gains Independence," *La Guardia,* December 1970.

[128] Davila was a graduate of the University of Puerto Rico and had spent time as a pastor in the Mexican Baptist Church during his years as a student at seminary. Davila interview; "Rev. Davila Honored," *La Guardia,* April 1975; "Milwaukee Christian Center Annual Meeting, January 1975," Local History Pamphlet Collection, MPL; Rodriguez, "Latinos at UWM," 10-11.

[129] "Spot finds new location," *La Guardia,* November 1972; "Spot Faces Difficulties," *La Guardia,* July 1972; "He works through church to aid Hispanic community," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* October 11, 1982.

New leadership at the UCC initiated several innovative programs in the early 1970s, including the United Community Spot Independent Learning Center (Centro Cultural Educativo Chicano-Boricua), an alternative form of culturally responsive education for South Division High School students that served as a credit-granting satellite school. The founders of the new school charged the Milwaukee Public School District of providing a "factory" education that only taught "racism, capitalism, competition" and "conformity," and which only provided sufficient education to train Latino teenagers to work in tanneries and foundries like their parents. Milwaukee schools, critics alleged, did nothing more than contribute to a centuries-long repression by the "dominant Anglo society to unsuccessfully attempt to eradicate Mexican and Puerto Rican culture from their respective countries and communities in the United States."[130] Centro Cultural moved into its refurbished facilities on South 2nd Street, a building purchased with funds received from the National Commission on Spanish Affairs of the Episcopal Church in New York. Teachers created curriculum with the intent of "maximiz[ing] Latin cultural values which have to be preserved in order for youth to survive in the city and to grow, personally integrated, in their cultural self-identity." The first class at Centro Cultural began with sixteen Chicano, Puerto Rican, and white students, most dropouts or truants from South Division or Lincoln High. A volunteer staff of teachers taught Chicano and Puerto Rican history, English, Spanish, algebra, journalism, geography, public speaking, and high school law, and allowed students to choose the classes that most interested them.[131]

---

[130] United Community Spot, "Proposal for Centro Cultural Educativo Chicano-Boricua," (Milwaukee, 1972), Archival Resources on Hispanics in Wisconsin, WHS.

[131] Ibid., 10-13; "Spot High School," *La Guardia,* June 1971. A volunteer staff brought part-time college students and accredited teachers to help students work toward a high school diploma at the alternative learning center. Students worked with Spot counselors through a school council to select staff, admit future students, and co-plan curriculum, as well as establish the general policy of the program. The educational center soon added programming such as the Opportunities Industrial Center, which offered weekly training in auto mechanics, drafting, and welding.

Walking "the tightrope of responsibility": Transferring Control of the Spanish Center

Administrative changes at the Spanish Center in the late 1960s proved to be much less antagonistic than those at UMOS and the United Spot. Like many of the federal economic programs established in the mid to late 1960s, the Spanish Center emphasized the hiring and training of community members to better build what directors referred to as "indigenous leadership." To create programming that truly served the city's Spanish speakers, staff hiring for office and instructor positions were filled based on who most needed a job in the community, not necessarily on the person's educational or employment background. Through provisional apprenticeship schedules, paraprofessionals received training from the Center's staff and volunteers learned on the job. Evelyn Figueroa, for example, began working at Centro as a clerical assistant in 1966 while carrying a full high school course load, but progressed rapidly to become a teacher's aide and then an instructor of an ABE course of her own design. Reverend John Maurice, the Center's director, estimated that a great number of the city's Latino leaders in the late 1960s started their careers as unpaid volunteers for various programs at the agency.[132]

Like UMOS and the United Spot, the Spanish Center had navigated a complicated relationship with direct community action through its early years. The Center largely refrained from overt community organizing until 1968, when Maurice hired Hollis Stewart as a program director. Stewart, who had previously organized and worked with cooperatives in Syracuse, New York, initiated cooperative initiatives on Milwaukee's south side like the Concerned Consumers League (CCL) and urged the Center's board of directors to take "an active role in consumer protection," an avenue that would further the "quest for power for the Spanish community." The

[132] Milwaukee Council for the Spanish Speaking, "Adult Basic Education Annual Report, July 1, 1967-June 30, 1968," (June 1968); Howard Coan, "The History of the Spanish Center," Unpublished typescript (Milwaukee: 1972), 12-14, Archival Resources on Hispanics in Wisconsin, WHS.

CCL became a bilingual direct-action consumer group that sought to obtain fair settlements for consumers who had grievances against merchants, either through written complaint and fair settlement or through picket lines. The CCL was specifically not a service organization, as those who joined were expected to take personal responsibility in moving through the grievance procedure and working with other League members to secure a just settlement. Concerned with expanding the community's economic buying power and developing community-grown entrepreneurs, the Center's staff also successfully initiated a food buyer's club called the Wholesale Buying Club, a cooperative grocery store called The Grocery Bag, a thrift store supplied with items from area parishes, and a people's craft shop.[133]

From the Center's inception, Maurice had purposefully shied away from direct action and had instead focused on a service-oriented model as a referral agency. This decision was in part motivated by political considerations, as it allowed the Center to attract older, conservative Latinos who might have objected to confrontational and direct-action tactics. Maurice also worried that overt political organizing would dissuade entrepreneurs and local businesses from investing and supporting the Center's Credit Union. In addition, as much of the Center's funding came directly from the Milwaukee Archdiocese, Maurice worried about upsetting his superiors, especially in light of Father Groppi's more public fights with archdiocesan officials. Aside from governmental funds for specific programs such as Adult Basic Education (ABE) classes and Head Start, Centro relied almost entirely on archdiocesan support to cover all overhead costs – from the original seed allotment of $6,000 granted in 1964, Catholic funding had grown to over $63,000 by the end of the decade. While church money carried less restrictions on direct

[133] "Co-op store cuts food bills for poor," *UWM Post,* November 21, 1969; Coan, "The History of the Spanish Center," 14-15; "Report to the Board, March 3, 1969," Series 1, Box 2, Folder 4, Council on Urban and Rural Life Records, MUDSCUA.

community organizing than federal OEO funds (or, as Maurice noted, with "less strings attached"), the specter of blowback from Milwaukee's Catholic community following Groppi's protests continually loomed over projects at Centro.[134]

The Center's reticent attitude toward activism was perhaps also a reflection of its director's own sentiments towards direct action. During the tumultuous open housing marches of 1967, Maurice had joined Reverend George Kolanda, his mentor in migrant outreach and former director of the archdiocese's Spanish-Speaking ministry, in criticizing Groppi's aggressive tactics during a Milwaukee Priest Senate meeting. Maurice expressed dismay at the militant language used by the Young Commandos during the marches, often directed at white counter-protesters and the city's police. Maurice, like many Milwaukee Catholic priests, feared that Groppi's marches might create the unintended consequence of alienating parishioners from urban churches, and ultimately, their efforts to expand racial justice in the city.[135]

Maurice's efforts to provide a nuanced critique of Groppi's protest tactics didn't have save him from reproach from the city's more reactionary clergy, however. In early 1968, Reverend Lawrence S. Brey, assistant pastor of St. Rita's in suburban West Allis, issued a searing letter to the Priest Senate, Archbishop William Cousins, and the city's mayor and police chief criticizing both Groppi and Maurice's "activist tendencies." In a blistering screed denouncing a wide range of enemies, including Groppi, the Council on Urban Life (CUL), the "creeping liberalism" of Vatican Two, and a general sense of "anarchy and social revolution" brewing amongst the city's more progressive clergy, Brey reserved special venom for Maurice and what he termed his "left-bent ideology." Denouncing Maurice's support of such anti-Vietnam War figures as Casa Maria's Michael Cullen and the nationally-active Jesuit priest

---

[134] Coan, "The History of the Spanish Center," 16-17.
[135] Avella, *Confidence and Crisis,* 138.

Daniel Berrigan, Brey called for the Spanish Center director's removal as head of Spanish Speaking Apostolate.[136] The following year, Monsignor Alphonse Popek of Our Lady Queen of Peace in Milwaukee accused Maurice and other social justice-minded priests such as Reverend Patrick Flood of the CUL as dancing to "the poverty drums [which] beat for the almighty dollar," implying that these priests would willingly compromise their moral and theological principles for money, and specifically, federal funding for their community programs.[137]

The complex relationship between protest and proselytization extended to the Center itself. While himself not a participant in many of the marches and pickets initiated by activists in the city, Maurice did allow the Center to be used as an organizing space for other community initiatives during the late 1960s. Along with his cooperative initiatives, Hollis Stewart invited Milwaukee organizers of the UFW grape boycott to hold meetings at the Center and opened the agency's doors for voter registration and union organizing. Community organizations also knew they could turn to Maurice for resources and support when they had trouble securing funds – the agency provided printing services for *La Guardia* in its early years, as well as startup funds for a breakfast program at the Guadalupe Center and sandlot baseball teams for Puerto Ricans. Throughout the decade, the Center also mediated conversations between governmental bodies, labor organizations, employers, and civic organizations. By the end of the 1960s, the building had hosted a diverse set of groups that included the Inner City Advisory Council of the Department of Local Affairs, the Governor's Committee on Migrant Labor, the Milwaukee Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunity in Employment, the Expressway Relocation Committee, Project Equality of Wisconsin, the Ecumenical Urban Cadre, the Greater Milwaukee

[136] "Rev. Lawrence S. Brey to Milwaukee Priest Senate, February 28, 1969," Series 1, Box 2, Folder 14, Council on Urban and Rural Life Records, MUDSCUA.
[137] "Msgr. Alphonse Popek to Milwaukee Priest Senate and Social Action Committee, March 23, 1969," Series 1, Box 2, Folder 14, Council on Urban and Rural Life Records, MUDSCUA.

Conference on Religion and Urban Affairs, the Parents Advisory Council of Head Start, the Midwest Committee on Spanish Speaking, and the South Side Housing Council.[138]

Maurice's need to serve many masters was not lost on the grassroots activists asking for his support. *La Guardia* noted the while the Center had "served as a base of operations for most social action that has happened in our community," its director was constantly forced to "walk the tightrope of responsibility" between radical activists who viewed him as "conservative" or "traditional" on the one hand, and more conservative members of the wider Milwaukee community who criticized him for being too progressive in his initiatives.[139] Despite this acknowledgment, younger community members associated with the growing sense of cultural nationalism and self-determination stirring among Latinos continued to push Maurice and the Center to be more outspoken on hiring discrimination, harassment from the police, and funding of grassroots organizations. Maurice believed, however, that a move towards protest politics would require a full commitment from the organization and its staff, stating, "You have to make a choice. When you get into direct action you're going into another direction…You can't lead people down a path to community organizing unless the community is ready for it. A demonstration against the police is no good because you can't win that kind of battle."[140]

As a younger generation of activists within the Latino community came to the fore, Maurice's own perspective on direct action and "indigenous leadership" shifted. By the early 1970s, he noted as one of his deepest regrets not having provided potential leaders in the Latino community with the requisite training to organize for structural change. Reflecting on the

---

[138] "Problems Pointed Out by Spanish Residents," *Milwaukee Journal,* February 23, 1966; "History of El Centro Hispano," *La Guardia,* October 1970; "Children's Clinic," *La Guardia,* February 1971; Council for the Spanish Speaking, Inc., "Newsletter," October 1972, Pamphlet Collection, WHS; Jesus Salas, interview by author, Milwaukee, WI, June 24, 2015.
[139] "History of El Centro Hispano," *La Guardia,* October 1970.
[140] Coan, "The History of the Spanish Center," 15.

Center's early days, Maurice identified as his principal mistake not having enrolled himself and Latino leaders for organizing training at an institute such as Saul Alinsky's Industrial Area Foundation in Chicago, noting that "organizing people isn't something you pick up." Acknowledging the growing number of Latino activist organizations in Milwaukee, Maurice identified a distinction between a *community leader* and a *community organizer*:

> In Milwaukee there has been confusion between what a community organizer is and what a community leader is. That's a different ball game because a community organizer's job is to play his role and stay in the background. He's supposed to build up community leaders who go in front of their people. You can't do both – be a leader and build up leadership – at the same time.[141]

By the end of the 1960s, Maurice came to realize that he couldn't lead the Center and build leadership within the Latino community at the same time. The director seized the opportunity to attend training under Alinsky at his Chicago foundation in January of 1970. After Father Patrick Flood, head of the CUL, secured a grant for Milwaukee Latinos to attend the training, Maurice selected twelve men from the community who he believed could become leaders, focusing specifically on those who had previously had run-ins with law enforcement authorities. Maurice joined the community members for the two-week seminar in Chicago.[142] The training included seminars on communication and organization strategies, methods to build a cohesive "Latin organization" that could include the voices of a majority of the community in order to avoid divisiveness and internal struggle, and conversations on future fundraising plans to allow the organization to remain independent of institutional agendas.[143]

Maurice had identified a shift occurring in the city's Latino community and positioned himself to be on the side of the new, young activists. In June of 1970 the Milwaukee chapter of

---

[141] Ibid., 16.
[142] Avella, *Confidence and Crisis,* 281-282.
[143] Patrick R. Flood to Edward Chalmers, May 8, 1970, Series 2, Box 10, Folder 10, Council on Urban and Rural Life Records, MUDSCUA.

B'nai B'rith bestowed Maurice with their annual Human Rights Award. The priest, however, refused to accept the award, instead publicizing the achievements of Spanish-speaking community members. Maurice suggested that worthy recipients would have instead been Delfina Guzman of the Spanish Center, "one of those people who is very active behind the scenes for many years and who is seldom recognized," and Santos Godoy of the Milwaukee Brown Berets, who had sought to teach children of Milwaukee minority groups about their cultural background. He also singled out William Quiles of the Puerto Rican Youth Organization and the Inner City Development Project, which had provided drivers education program and recreation opportunities for east side residents. Maurice ultimately felt that white organization leaders had for too many years received accolades when Latino community members had "done the work, run the risks, fought the fights and must continue the struggle for change."[144]

It was at the Chicago training where Maurice concluded that he could no longer lead a Spanish-speaker serving organization. Maurice, intent on empowering Latinos to take the reins of their own institutions, stepped aside as director of Centro and the Milwaukee Catholic Archdiocese's Council for the Spanish Speaking, Incorporated (the organization's governing body) in late summer of 1970 and handed the reins of the agency to Carlos Sevilla, son of one Milwaukee's *primeros*. Sevilla had arrived in Milwaukee in 1960 and was the first Latino graduate from the Milwaukee Area Technical College, receiving a degree in accounting. He first worked at the agency after Maurice asked for help to place the Credit Union's finances in order. The volunteer position eventually led Sevilla to the directorship of the Credit Union, and then

[144] "Priest Ducks Honor, Names Others for It," *Milwaukee Journal,* May 29, 1970; "Priest refuses human rights award; singles out leaders," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* June 6, 1970.

Centro. Like Maurice, Sevilla believed in a fusion of social action and social services to bring to light economic inequities between Milwaukee's Latino and broader community.[145]

The often-contentious battles that transformed the leadership structures of the Spanish Center, UMOS, and the United Spot laid bare the shifting grounds of activism within Milwaukee's Latino community. Calls for self-determination from both within and outside of these organizations were but one facet of growing grassroots protest among the city's Spanish speaking, however. Many of the same community leaders who had agitated for greater control of Latino-serving agencies engaged in organizing around a litany of issues affecting their neighborhoods during the late 1960s and early 1970s. They joined with black and white communities to protest cuts in welfare support as well as against police harassment. In building their campaigns to expand the power of Milwaukee's Latino community, activists continually called upon religious leaders to provide institutional support for their efforts, as well as join in their protests, marches, and pickets. Responses from Catholic and Protestant clergy to join these fights were varied, laying bare many of the disagreements in method, tone, and intent that arose during the period between militant Latino organizers and the city's clergy and institutions.

"The important thing is to struggle together": Multiracial Coalitions and the Fight for Welfare Rights

The first arena upon which these newly-reorganized Milwaukee Latino organizations entered were battles over federal and state social safety net programs. By the late 1960s, with a rise in war spending in Vietnam and a decline in funding for War on Poverty programs, states across the nation were increasingly called upon to pay for many of the programs serving poor

[145] Upon resigning his post, Maurice joined Project Equality of Wisconsin, a statewide employment agency affiliated with numerous national religious organizations designed to take advantage of the purchasing power of Catholic churches. "Father Maurice Resigns," *La Guardia,* August 1970; "Priest Quits Latin Center Directorship," *Milwaukee Journal,* August 25, 1970; "Spanish Center Picks Director," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* October 2, 1970.

and working-poor communities of color. A national backlash against War on Poverty funding provided President Richard Nixon with the political cover to first transition control of programs from the local to the federal level, and then eventually begin dismantling the federal apparatuses that supported many of these programs. As early as December of 1968, the incoming Republican administration expressed a desire to transfer the supervision of federal aid Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) programs from affected communities to professional bureaucrats and politicians in Washington, D.C..[146]

With control consolidated at the federal level, Nixon and Republican legislators slashed funding for social safety net programs in late 1960s. By 1973, Nixon had effectively terminated federal funding sources that supported thousands of local community agencies and human service programs across the country, including the executive branch structures that maintained the OEO. In Milwaukee, *La Guardia* anticipated a dim future for anti-poverty programs in the city's Latino community and eventual "tragedy" for its most impoverished. The newspaper especially feared the effects of the cuts to the city's El Centro Credit Union and LAUCR's Bilingual Bicultural Program and health clinic, each of which received substantial federal support. Responding to the funding reductions in early 1973, LACUR representatives Ernesto Chacón and Lalo Valdez delivered testimony to the U.S. Senate subcommittee on Employment, Manpower, and Poverty. Chacón explained that in Milwaukee, where before the Latino community "had little, now we have nothing," and that Nixon's strategy for addressing urban

[146] In a 1968 meeting of the nation's mayors at the National League of Cities, Vice President-elect Spiro Agnew suggested that local control of social safety net programs had brought "the greatest waste of duplication and inefficient use of federal money, and more than occasional corruption and perversion of purpose." He instead suggested a "patient-doctor relationship" for federal aid, where those for whom programs had been designed would simply describe their symptoms, leaving the choice of treatment to the experts at the federal level. Milwaukee mayor Henry Maier served as one of most outspoken mayors in opposition to the Nixon administration's proposed transfer of control, noting that the incoming Republican administration's goal was to "clip the wings of citizen participation" in OEO programs. "Agnew: Poor Funds to Experts," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* December 10, 1968.

poverty was "comparable to eliminating hunger by killing the hungry." While grappling with changes at the federal level, Wisconsinites who depended on support from state funding sources for food, housing, and employment training also found their lives dictated by the political whims of legislators in Madison, who during the end of the 1960s threatened to slash state support for many of these programs. Even while fearing cuts to services that helped feed and educate their families, welfare recipients also faced complicated bureaucracies and oftentimes uncompromising welfare offices within their local communities, a daily struggle that could turn a search for state aid into a humiliating and debilitating experience.[147]

Grassroots organizations arose across the country in response to attacks on welfare funding at the federal and state level. By the late 1960s, "welfare rights" groups in major northern cities coalesced to form the National Welfare Rights Organizations (NWRO). Drawing from a tradition of organizing for the country's impoverished first initiated during the Great Depression, the NWRO aimed to expand relief for the country's poor via community mobilization. Sociologists Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward note that organizations like the NWRO worked against "the ethic of self-reliance and the denigration of the pauper" by instead advocating for communal aid and support from the federal governmental. As poverty emerged as a national political issue under the presidential administrations of John F. Kennedy and even more acutely under Lyndon B. Johnson, organizations in cities across the country mobilized impoverished communities to apply for and access programs, expand welfare relief, and organize against proposed cuts[148] Joining this incipient national movement, poor Latina, black, and white women in Milwaukee organized and marched at the front of the welfare rights

[147] "Latin Agencies to Lose Funds," *La Guardia,* February 1973; "Federal cutbacks," *La Guardia,* March 1973.
[148] Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 267.

movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Through their organizing, these women actively resisted stigmas – many times promoted by local and state politicians – that welfare recipients were drains on society who were simply looking for a free ride on the government dole, and instead advocated for full access to economic citizenship in their communities. Drawing upon the spirit of grassroots activism growing in the city, Milwaukee welfare recipients organized and lobbied for legislation addressing welfare, health care, education, and housing.[149]

Churches and religious organizations across the country supported local and national welfare rights movements, helping inform clients of their rights, educating them about the forms and bureaucracy that structured state aid, and encouraging them to confront disobliging welfare departments with direct action. Protestant denominations including the United Church of Christ, Methodists, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians offered financial support for the NWRO, providing funds for nearly half of the organization's budget in 1968, while Catholic and Jewish groups supplied additional funding. The Interreligious Foundation for Community Organizations (IFCO), which had proved crucial in funding the LAUCR in its early years, served as one of the NWRO's largest donors in the late 1960s and early 1970s.[150] Piven and Cloward note that in many cities, clergy became "the most ardent advocates and organizers of welfare rights groups," providing start-up funds and supplies, as well as joining demonstrations and pickets.[151] In Milwaukee, organizations like the Catholic Council on Urban Life (CUL) and the Protestant ecumenical Greater Milwaukee Council of Churches (via their Department of Christian Social

---

[149] Annelise Orleck, *Storming Caesar's Palace: How Black Mothers Fought Their Own War on Poverty* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005); Jackie Pope, "Women in the Welfare Rights Struggle," in *A New Introduction to Poverty: The Role of Race, Power, and Politics,* ed. Louis Kushnick and James Jennings (New York: NYU Press, 1999), 287-306; Felicia Kornbluh, *The Battle for Welfare Rights: Politics and Poverty in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).
[150] Premilla Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors: The Welfare Rights Movement in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 36-37; Premilla Nadasen, *Rethinking the Welfare Rights Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 25-26.
[151] Piven and Cloward, *Poor People's Movements,* 321.

Concerns) provided material aid – through funding of organizations such as the United Welfare Recipients – and public support, rallying congregants to join public demonstrations and petition their legislators.[152] The Milwaukee archdiocese's main promoter of welfare rights was Reverend Dismas Becker, a program director for the CUL assigned to the city's south side who often served as spiritual advisor and political mobilizer for welfare organizations. Becker's principal goal, as expressed in fliers mailed to supporting organizations, was to unite poor Latinos, whites, and blacks in the city to coordinate "their own resources to better their neighborhood and their own status." Access to welfare benefits, according to the priest, served as only one of many avenues for self-determination available for marginalized communities.[153]

The growth of national welfare organizations coincided with the acceleration of an ever-perilous economic situation for many poor and working-poor Latino communities across the country. By the end of the 1960s, the median annual family income for Latinos in Milwaukee had fallen to $7,731, compared to $10,262 for all Milwaukeeans. Meanwhile, nearly 20 percent of Latinos subsisted below the federally established poverty level, compared to only 11 percent of all city residents.[154] For those on public support, any reduction to welfare funding might prove the difference between survival and starvation. In Milwaukee, members of the Latino community invested in ensuring economic subsistence for their families found allies among black civil rights activists in their fight against state cuts to social service and welfare benefits. In 1969, conservative legislators' concern with inflation and the high level of welfare budgets had led the Milwaukee County and Wisconsin state government to slash welfare assistance to needy

[152] "Statement of the United Welfare Recipients," May 12, 1968, Series 1, Box 3, Folder 12, Council on Urban and Rural Life Records, MUDSCUA.
[153] Reverend Dismas Becker to supporting organizations, October 1968, Series 1, Box 3, Folder 12, Council on Urban and Rural Life Records, MUDSCUA.
[154] John Gurda, "The Cohesiveness of the Latin Community on Milwaukee's Near South Side," Course paper, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 1976, Archival Resources on Hispanics in Wisconsin, WHS.

families, at time when an estimated 27,000 children in Wisconsin were being raised in homes with incomes below the poverty level.[155]

Within the Latino community, new organizations arose to press local and state politicians to live up to their promises of serving all citizens of the state through equal access to welfare benefits. The Unión Beneficia Hispana, a Latino welfare rights and housing advocacy organization, pushed for the Milwaukee welfare department to provide Spanish-speaking caseworkers and bilingual forms for Latino families. Unión member and mother of five Clementia Castro explained that the group reaffirmed her dignity and self-determination. She was drawn to the organization for its ability to unite Spanish speakers around the city, stating, "They cannot hurt us, if there are thousands of us struggling together they cannot stop us. The important thing is to struggle together, knowing what we are struggling for."[156] The Unión was led by Ted Uribe, a former Air Force medic and welfare recipient. Uribe, a staffer at the Inner City Development Project, explained to state legislators that recent budget cuts to welfare programs had made living poor even more difficult for Latino Wisconsinites as parents struggled to provide food and warm clothing for their families.[157]

Welfare rights organizations like Unión Beneficia Hispana's first major struggle with state politicians began in the spring of 1969. In its proposal for a biannual budget, legislators on the state's joint finance committee recommended the slashing of hundreds of thousands of

---

[155] "Slashes in welfare benefits 'shock' Catholic social service directors," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* September 13, 1969; "Welfare Cuts Hurt Children," *La Guardia,* October 1969.
[156] "Mis hijos son mi vida…" *La Guardia,* December 1969. See also Clementia Castro, "Spanish-Speaking People and the Welfare System," in *Welfare Mothers Speak Out: We Ain't Gonna Shuffle Anymore*, ed. Thomas H. Tarantino and Dismas Becker (Milwaukee: Milwaukee County Welfare Rights Organization, 1972), 66-71.
[157] Union Beneficia Hispana was one of ten welfare rights organizations in Milwaukee in the early 1970s. "Welfare Chief Asked for Forms in Spanish," Milwaukee *Journal,* June 19, 1969; "Hiring of Spanish Asked at County," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* July 2, 1969; "Poor People Know Uribe Understands," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* June 29, 1970; "Latins Storm Language Barrier," *Milwaukee Journal,* November 30, 1970; 2nd Annual Milwaukee County Welfare Rights Organization Testimonial Dinner and Dance, November 11, 1972," Local History Pamphlet Collection, MPL; "A Cry for Justice!" *La Guardia,* October 1981.

dollars in the budgets of departments responsible for welfare, education, and children's health care.[158] Conservative legislators at various levels of municipal governance – many of them from suburban and rural sections of the state – expressed a frustration with the amount of state resources committed to Wisconsin's impoverished, especially those residing in urban areas. John Niebler of Menominee Falls, a Waukesha county supervisor, believed that the proposed welfare budget represented "the allocation of a considerable proportion of our state resources toward the survival of the unfittest."[159] Assemblyman Russell A. Olson of Bassett noted that those voting in favor of welfare reductions were merely providing the state's poor with the motivation to find gainful employment, stating, "When they're hungry, that's an incentive to work."[160] Legislators in support of reductions to state funding drew upon a rising discontent within Wisconsin's rural and suburban communities, an attitude that viewed with suspicion and resentment the increasing amount of taxpayer support to urban areas like Milwaukee and Madison. As Niebler's comments suggest, these debates often signaled larger assumptions of who voters believed were most deserving, or "fit," to receive state support.

In response to the proposed cuts, more than five hundred black, Latino, and white "mourners" led a funeral procession for welfare recipients from Milwaukee to Madison in April of 1969. Organized by the "Concerned Wisconsin Citizens for Justice for the Poor," an ad hoc group of activists and religious organizations, community members and clergy from Milwaukee's north and south sides and surrounding suburbs solemnly rode in two hundred cars

---

[158] The cuts included eliminating Medicaid access to 75,000 persons, of whom 45,000 were children and 20,000 elderly; reducing overall welfare grants to 10 percent above the national average; eliminating aid to children of unemployed parents; terminating vocational rehabilitation and reduce federal-state work incentive program funding; eliminating $2.1 million from urban planning; and, cutting $1 million from the Milwaukee School Board budget. Council on Urban Life, "Memo on Wisconsin State Legislators' Efforts to Slash 1969 Wisconsin Budget," April 17, 1969, Series 1, Box 3, Folder 12, Council on Urban and Rural Life Records, MUDSCUA.
[159] "State Official Defends Welfare for Children," *Milwaukee Journal,* February 22, 1969.
[160] "Legislators Slash Aid for Job Training," *Milwaukee Journal,* March 29, 1969.

with black flags tied to radio aerials while a leading vehicle carried a coffin on its hood.[161] The CUL provided financial and spiritual support for the riders, with Father John Maurice in attendance on their behalf. Upon arriving in the state's capitol, Father Groppi, president of the Milwaukee NAACP Reverend Walter Hoard, Alder Vel Phillips, UMOS director Jesus Salas, and various welfare recipients addressed the assembled crowd, while Madison's only black alderman, Eugene Parks, extended a welcome. After the rally, the marchers carried the coffin into the joint finance committee's in-session meeting. Groppi, Hoard, Phillips, and Salas met with legislators and voiced their concern to the committee while outside the room the crowd – now joined by more than three hundred University of Wisconsin-Madison students who called themselves the "Madison Resistance" – remained orderly. The day ended with a procession to St. Raphael's Cathedral, where the marchers enjoyed refreshments, respite, and greetings from Bishop Jerome J. Hastritch, auxiliary of Madison, long active in establishing migrant centers.[162]

With Wisconsin's political leaders debating the severity of cuts they planned to make to social service programs in the summer and fall of 1969, Milwaukee public officials and clergy made a personal plea to both middle-class Catholics and legislators for expanded funding. Father Maurice warned Milwaukee's Republican political operatives that cuts to welfare and education would punish the poor, elderly, children, and "most helpless members of society." He cautioned the leaders that stifling the hope of a better life would lead to resentment and more frustration in the inner city, an open invitation to vent their anger in more forceful, and perhaps destructive, methods.[163] Milwaukee Auxiliary Bishop Leo J. Brust co-signed a letter to all archdiocesan

---

[161] "News Release: Concerned Wisconsin Citizens for Justice for the Poor," April 16, 1969, Series 1, Box 3, Folder 12, Council on Urban and Rural Life Records, MUDSCUA.
[162] "Caravan Protests Aid Cuts," *Milwaukee Journal,* April 22, 1969; "Protests to Aid Cuts Called Success, More Promised," *Milwaukee Journal,* April 23, 1969; "Welfare 'mourners' find warm welcome at Madison's cathedral," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* April 26, 1969; "The caravan journeys to Madison," *Soul City Times* (Milwaukee), April 26, 1969. See also Avella, *Confidence and Crisis,* 145.
[163] "Priest Warns of Effects of Welfare Cuts," *Milwaukee Journal,* May 21, 1969.

priests urging them to petition state legislators to restore cuts in the welfare budget or pass new legislation restore welfare aid levels, while the CUL distributed a "model" meal plan demonstrating the difficulties of living on a welfare food budget of 49 cents a day. The CUL also made a direct appeal to middle-class Catholic families to join the welfare fight by organizing "Friends of Welfare Rights" groups across southeast Wisconsin that could raise seed money for grassroots welfare organizations engaged in advocacy work.[164] Milwaukee's Catholic clergy drew upon church social action doctrine, and specifically it's call for a humane and just form of economic humanitarianism, to justify their advocacy:

> Our concerns cannot be based solely on the profit motive. We cannot or should not treat men as mere tools of industry that can be discarded when they are no longer profitable. Our affluence and economic life "could diminish social inequalities if that development were guided and co-ordinated in a reasonable and human way." (Vatican II's Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Part II: Problems of Special Urgency)[165]

Hoping to humanize the experience of welfare even more, the CUL invited legislators from around the state for a bus tour of the near north and near south side – areas most politicians had never set foot in – through neighborhoods where freeways had displaced hundreds of families and state support of many kinds were most needed. The tour stopped by the Spanish Center and The United Spot, where Maurice explained to the politicians, "I hope you do look at the community and see what happens when we just think about roads and construction and not about people. The people have been forgotten." The radical newspaper *Kaleidoscope* sarcastically reported that Maurice's words so moved Senator Ray Heinzen of Marshfield that he boarded the bus and dozed off intermittently until the caravan left the south side.[166]

---

[164] "Ask priests to 'live' on welfare diet," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* November 1, 1969; "Superiors protest welfare slashes," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* November 8, 1969; "Council on Urban Life asks middle class families to join welfare fight," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* November 15, 1969.
[165] Council on Urban Life, "Report to Membership Regarding Welfare," May 29, 1969, Series 1, Box 3, Folder 12, Council on Urban and Rural Life Records, MUDSCUA.
[166] "Legislators Sleep," *Kaleidoscope* (Milwaukee), July 4-17, 1969.

Despite the April protests and attempts at personal appeals, Republican legislators in the statehouse moved forward with their draconian cuts to Wisconsin's welfare, employment, and education programs by the end of the summer. State senators scheduled a special session for September of 1969 to debate and pass the new budgetary measures. Conservative legislators such as Assemblyman Kenneth Merkel from Brookfield, recently appointed to Governor Knowles' Urban Task Force, believed eliminating Aid to Families with Dependent Children (ADC) would provide "greater incentive to recipients to seek jobs." Welfare rights activists, however, sensed in the cuts an effort to punish the state's poor communities of color.[167]

Milwaukee's Latino and African-American communities again mobilized, this time in a seven-day "Welfare Mothers' March on Madison" in September of 1969.[168] Led by mothers and their children and supported by Groppi, Salas, clergy, and students, the marchers were backed from the LAUCR, the Brown Berets, and Unión Beneficia Hispana.[169] More than one hundred seminarians from Oconomowoc's St. Francis Seminary fasted the length of the march and brought meals they had prepared to the activists. Upon arriving at the state capitol, more than one thousand people gathered at Library Mall at the University of Wisconsin-Madison to hear mothers demand that the legislature restore funding. Unión member Clementia Castro addressed the crowd in English and Spanish, explaining that she had brought her children to show them "how our government's representatives treat poor people." Recounting the disastrous effects the

---

[167] "Slashes in welfare benefits 'shock' Catholic social service directors," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* September 13, 1969; "Welfare Cuts Hurt Children," *La Guardia,* October 1969.

[168] The march was announced at a press conference held at the Spanish Center. "Another trip to Madison," *Soul City Times* (Milwaukee)*,* May 17, 1969.

[169] "Police Arrest Groppi, 4 Others," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* September 22, 1969; "Marchers keep on keeping on," *Soul City Times* (Milwaukee)*,* September 27, 1969.

welfare cuts would have on her family, Castro told the crowd, "My children are my whole life, my children are before everything else. The south side is condemned. Can't you see it?"[170]

The next day, marchers and several hundred supporters wearing buttons declaring "I Support Guaranteed Adequate Income for All Americans" and "Welfare Rights Now" entered the state capitol and occupied the Assembly chambers, disrupting the start of the special session. The activists were led by Groppi and Salas and flanked by Brown Berets and NAACP Young Commandos chanting "Power to the people." One student stood near the Assembly speaker's desk playing his guitar and led the room in singing "Which Side Are You On, Boy" and "We Shall Overcome," while other protesters posted signs throughout the hall that read "We May Be On Welfare, But We're Something." University students took out their school books and got to studying, while others prepared sandwiches on the clerk's desk. State Senator Nile Soik (R-Whitefish Bay), fleeing the chambers and incensed at the takeover, called the protesters' actions "mobocracy," while State Senator Ernest (R-Sheboygan) proclaimed that it was "about time people start[ed] standing up to Groppi." When Governor Warren Knowles called upon the Wisconsin National Guard to help quiet the situation, protesters left peacefully before any arrests were made and retreated to the capitol-adjacent Evangelical United Brethren Church.[171]

The following day, protesters were served with restraining orders barring them from activities in and around the capitol, while legislators moved to hold Groppi in contempt and have him jailed for the duration of the Assembly session. Under orders from the Assembly, police

---

[170] "People in Step With Welfare March to Madison," *Milwaukee Journal,* September 24, 1969; "Marchers Sight Gilded 'Forward' on Capitol Dome," *Milwaukee Journal,* September 28, 1969; "Welfare Mothers March Draws 1,000 in Madison," *Milwaukee Journal,* September 29, 1969; Mis hijos son mi vida…" *La Guardia,* December 1969; Jones, *The Selma of the North,* 236-239.

[171] "Marchers' Occupy' Capitol, Demand Aid," *Milwaukee Journal,* September 29, 1969; "Protesters Turn Decorum at Capitol Into Turmoil," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* September 30, 1969; "Protest Raises Legislators' Ire," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* September 30, 1969; "Police, Deputies Route Protestors at Capitol," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* September 30, 1969; "Guard Fixes Bayonets to Stop Crowd," *Milwaukee Journal,* September 30, 1969.

took Groppi into custody, finding him just after celebrating a Mass with Salas at St. Paul's Catholic Chapel on the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus.[172] Despite Groppi's arrest, a volunteer staff made up of Brown Berets, Commandos, and UW students kept their temporary office at Evangelical United open in early October. Bracing for a long campaign, the activists lined up transportation for mothers to testify before the Assembly, set up baby sitters to take care of children, and took care of housing for visiting protestors. The protesters were ultimately unable to halt the state cuts as the Wisconsin legislature passed their reduced budget in the early fall of 1969.[173]

The legislature's welfare reductions cut especially deep with the oncoming cold weather in the winter of 1969 and 1970. Drawing no reprieve from state legislators, Reverend Dismas Becker of the CUL warned Milwaukeeans that the "reality" of diminished state support would "force many recipients to seek new means of self-expression."[174] That "self-expression" would ultimately manifest in innovative forms of protest. Faced with the prospect of limited funding for heating and clothing in January of 1970, the Milwaukee chapter of the NWRO petitioned the Milwaukee County Board for emergency clothing grants for children. During the hearing, Clementia Castro told supervisors, "You can't see when children don't get to school because they have no clothes. You can't see because you're here in your beautiful halls." When their plea was denied, five hundred black, Latino, and white welfare demonstrators marched from St. Benedict the Moor Catholic Church to downtown department stores, where they entered and gathered winter clothing, demanding that the Milwaukee County Welfare Department cover all

---

[172] "Judge Issues Temporary Order; Writ Bans Capitol Protest," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* October 1, 1969; "Groppi Arrested in Madison Chapel," *Milwaukee Journal,* October 1, 1969; "Bible in Hand, Groppi Awaits Arrest," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* October 2, 1969; Jones, *The Selma of the North,* 236-239.
[173] "A Long Campaign," *Milwaukee Journal,* October 9, 1969; "Supervisors to Be Target of Protestors," *Milwaukee Journal,* October 11, 1969.
[174] Reverend Dismas Becker, "Crisis in Welfare," Council on Urban Life, November 5, 1969, Series 1, Box 3, Folder 12, Council on Urban and Rural Life Records, MUDSCUA.

expenses for their children's attire. A fracas soon ensued between the protestors and police, resulting in the arrest of thirty-seven protestors including a bloodied Becker. While most faced fines for disorderly conduct, Latino protestors Ernesto Chacón and Jose Puente, along with Ruth Pollard, an eight-month pregnant African-American woman, were charged with assaulting a police officer. Despite the physical confrontations between demonstrators and law enforcement, similar welfare rights protests continued in 1970, as grassroots groups like the NWRO and Unión Beneficia worked with religious leaders and organizations to partially restore funding cuts within the state's budget.[175]

"The cops regard us as the enemy": Organizing and Marching to Protest Police Harassment

The arrests of Chacón and Puente during the welfare rights marches spurred a new community issue for organizing and political mobilization within the city's Latino community: police harassment and brutality against Milwaukee's Mexican-American and Puerto Rican population. Like Milwaukee's African American community on the north side, Latinos from Milwaukee's various Spanish-speaking communities alleged persistent harassment from the city's law enforcement in the 1960s and early 1970s. Led by Chief Harold A. Breier, an uncompromising administrator who had little patience for any form of activism in the city's streets, Milwaukee's police department earned a reputation on the Latino south and east side for their unprompted brutality against area youth.[176] As early as 1966, Father John Maurice had petitioned elected officials for changes to police policies from his position as a member of the

---

[175] "500 Invade Boston Store in Aid Protest; 37 Seized," *Milwaukee Journal,* January 27, 1970; "Downtown: A Prime Target," *Milwaukee Journal,* January 27, 1970; "Protesters Invade Store," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* January 27, 1970; "Deny welfare recipients receive adequate income," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* February 14, 1970; State v. Chacon, 50 Wis. 2d 73 (1971).

[176] Miner, *Lessons from the Heartland,* 102-103; Andrew Witt, *The Black Panthers in the Midwest: The Community Programs and Services of the Black Panther Party in Milwaukee, 1966-1977* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 44; Jones, *The Selma of the North,* 148-150.

Council on Urban Life (CUL). Along with assistant director of the south side Inner City Development Project center John Rowen, Maurice sent a strongly-worded letter to the Milwaukee Commission on Human Relations pleading that the city's police department be more proactive in solving frayed relations between officers and the city's Spanish-speaking youth. Spurred on by Latino youth's anger towards trumped-up loitering charges and constant "stop, frisk, and questioning" tactics employed by south side police, their letter advocated for initiatives like problem-solving sessions with youth, seminars for patrolmen on Latino culture and language, and active recruitment of policemen of Latino descent.[177]

Worried about the increasingly antagonistic relationship between law enforcement and minority communities, the CUL hosted community forums on the city's north and side sides and produced several critical reports in the early 1970s detailing the Milwaukee Police Department's relationship with communities of color, offering such remedies as protracted hiring of officers of color and more community input in policing.[178] The fact that most police officers were white was not lost on the Latino community. During the 1960s, nearly 98 percent of the city's police force was white and working class, most whom did not live in the neighborhoods they patrolled. Records indicated that the city's department in fact only employed one Latino police officer until 1975.[179] Jesus Salas explained that within the Spanish-speaking community, policemen were "out-and-out foreigners. They are not from our families, they do not speak our language, and

---

[177] "Repair Frayed Relations, Police Urged," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* October 20, 1966.

[178] In May of 1970, Jesuit seminarian Kenneth Feit published a highly-critical report of Breier's tenure as Milwaukee police chief. The nine-month-long study was sponsored and published by the CUL. Kenneth Feit, S.J., "CUL Report: The Milwaukee Police Department: An In-Depth Study, March-April 1970," Folder 72, Box 1, *La Guardia* Records, in possession of author; Kenneth Feit, S.J., "CUL Report: The Milwaukee Police Department, Part II, November-December 1971," Folder 72, Box 1, *La Guardia* Records, in possession of author; "Report Rip's Breier's Power," *Milwaukee Journal,* May 31, 1970.

[179] See Ronald H. Snyder, "Chief for Life: Harold Breier and His ERA," (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2002), 50; "Repair Frayed Relations, Police Urged," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* October 20, 1966; "Breier Tries to Improve Relations with Public," *Milwaukee Journal*, October 20, 1966; "Latins Complain to Breier," *Milwaukee Journal,* September 20, 1973.

they are not from our national origin." With little shared background between police and residents, Salas believed there was "no so-called middle-ground. They make our lives difficult, and the only reason for reducing the number of confrontations is our passion to survive."[180]

Latinos – especially younger Chicanos and Puerto Ricans involved with organizations like the LAUCR and the United Spot – complained that police singled them out for unwarranted harassment and violence. Members of the Milwaukee Police Department's Tactical Squad sporadically raided the United Spot's offices in search of weapons or suspects of vagrancy charges. One beat cop, referred derisively as "Dogface" by Latino activists, had a reputation for beating young Latinos seemingly without provocation.[181] In a meeting with the governor's metropolitan study committee in 1971, Lalo Valdez explained to state officials that "the cops regard us as the enemy" and patrolled the south side with "shotguns hanging out [police car] windows" as if they were planning for "an armed coup."[182] William Quiles, another LAUCR member, submitted that "metropolitan government and government in general [hadn't] met the needs of the Latin American community," and had instead replaced support for adequate housing and anti-discrimination economic policies with expanded funding for police forces.[183]

A report from the LAUCR prepared in the early 1970s described a growing cleavage within the Latino community towards the city's police department, ranging from "conservative Law-And-Order-Support-Your-Local-Pig" to "Off-The-Pigs-In-The-Streets-And-From-Ambush" sentiments. The report's writers identified groups such as the LAUCR, the United Spot, and the Young Lords as allies in the struggle against police oppression, while other organizations such as CEP, UMOS, and the Spanish Center, as well as religious bodies like Holy Trinity-Our Lady of

---

[180] Salas, "Reflections on Urban Life," 61-73; Jones, *The Selma of the North,* 149.
[181] "Police Raid Spot," *La Guardia,* December 1970.
[182] "Youthful Latins Fight to Keep La Raza Unida," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* October 16, 1971.
[183] "Harassment Charged by City Latins," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* December 2, 1971.

Guadalupe Catholic Church, had tended to "stay on the side lines" in regard to taking any public positions. Despite this perceived reticence, the plan's writers believed that religious organizations could play a vital role in ending police brutality. Within a multipoint strategy to empower the Latino community against oppressive police actions, the LAUCR called for churches to "be brought into the struggle through a Council of Church structures and individual parishes" because of "their legitimacy in public eyes." The plan's writers advised that religious organizations be approached "along the humanitarian and social justice lines of thought," and while relying on already established allies within parishes, "new faces from the clergy" would also need to "be recruited if possible for some leadership positions to further the look of wide spread penetration into the communities." Besides the cultural capital and public legitimacy they might provide, the proposal's writers believed churches could also serve as "important sources for money and materials needed for the protracted struggle."[184]

Tensions between Milwaukee's Latino community and law enforcement bubbled over in 1971 in a series of confrontations in the city' streets. In February, activists Ernesto Chacón and Jose Puente faced six months in prison for disorderly conduct and criminal damage charges after the Wisconsin State Supreme Court upheld convictions stemming from the 1970 welfare rights march. Rallying around the activists, community members formed a committee called "Free Los Dos de la Raza" and planned future protests on their behalf.[185] *La Guardia*'s editorial board likened the two Milwaukee activists to political prisoners in other Chicano and Black Power movements such as Reis Lopez Tijerina, Bobby Seale, and Angela Davis, remarking, "In the

---

[184] "People Call Him Pig, Because That's What He Is!!!" Folder 72, Box 1, *La Guardia* Records, in possession of author.

[185] "Court drops appeal of protestors," *Kenosha News,* February 3, 1971; "Free Chacon and Puentes," *La Guardia,* February 1971. The two men were accused of pushing a police officer through a downtown store's glass window during the march.

Latin community it is becoming clear that the real criminals in this country are the politicians, judges and businessmen. It is these men who are responsible for the poverty and hunger of poor in this country as well as throughout most of the world. It is these men who are motivated by greed that ought to be put behind bars not innocent men like" Chacón and Puente.[186]

On March 3, over 250 Latino, black, and white protesters marched from the near south side to the Civic Plaza in downtown Milwaukee to demonstrate support for Chacón and Puente's clemency plea. The marchers were led by representatives from the "Free Los Dos de la Raza" carrying "Free Chacón" and "Free Puente" banners, while others carried a coffin with "JUSTICE" painted on its side.[187] The Milwaukee radical newspaper *Kaleidoscope* billed the march as protesting the "death of American justice," and claimed that the city's Latino community had been targeted by the police for their recent and rapid ability to organize against the city's political institutions and law enforcement.[188]

Arriving at Civic Plaza, speeches emphasized solidarity with those engaged in struggles against oppressive governments and police in the U.S. Southwest, Puerto Rico, and throughout the Third World. As demonstrators lit candles for the incarcerated, Tony Baez, chairman of the Free Chacón-Puente Committee, took time to chide the Police Department for sending out "25 [officers] to control 200" marchers. As the speakers addressed the audience, police surrounded the growing crowd. When protestors attempted to burn the coffin to symbolize the pyric death of "Justice," police rushed through the crowd with clubs raised in the air. *La Guardia* and *El Young Lord* alleged that police officers "attacked and brutalized" the marchers with their nightsticks while yelling racial epithets at Latino protesters. By the end of the night, law enforcement had

---

[186] "Comentario Editorial," *La Guardia,* February 1971.
[187] "Police Riot & Attack Latins, What Next?" *La Guardia,* March 1971.
[188] "Spanish Community Invaded," *Kaleidoscope* (Milwaukee)*,* March 15-21, 1971; Braun, *Social Change and the Empowerment of the Poor,* 52-53.

made eighteen arrests – including Jesus Salas and Lalo Valdez – and had left dozens injured and three people lying unconscious at Civic Plaza. After the march, officers armed with shotguns but without search warrants raided the offices of the LAUCR and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's Spanish-Speaking Outreach Institute in search of more "agitators."[189]

The following morning, the *Milwaukee Journal* and *Sentinel*'s coverage of the march focused on the unruly nature of the marchers and the nine policemen that had been injured during the melee at Civic Plaza. *La Guardia* criticized the reporting from the city's press for reinforcing racist stereotypes that Latinos were "a threat to our community, uncontrollable, disrespectful and violent."[190] In their own editorials, *La Guardia* placed the police officers' actions within a broader pattern of antagonisms between Milwaukee's law enforcement and Latino community, what they identified as part of a "racist and repressive war against the Spanish speaking people" of the city. Observing that the "racist police would not have entered a social agency such as the YMCA in a nice white community and treated the youth in the same way," the newspaper's editors declared that the "cancer" of the Milwaukee law enforcement needed to "be destroyed and cut out" to enact actual change in Latino community.[191]

The following night, more than five hundred Latino and black community members representing all generations crowded into Holy Trinity-Our Lady of Guadalupe Church for a "Mass for non-violence" to pray for peace and clemency for Chacón and Puente. Guadalupe's pastor, Father Marion Caruso, led a service in Spanish and English, and was accompanied by a cadre of eight priests, including Father Groppi; Father Dismas Becker, adviser to the Wisconsin

---

[189] "It Was Too Cold, But March Went On," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* March 4, 1971; "Milwaukee: Ataque Policíaco," *El Young Lord,* April 1, 1971.
[190] "Latin Protest March Erupts, 9 Policemen Among Injured," *Milwaukee Journal,* March 4, 1971; "6 Policemen Hurt As Latins Protest," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* March 4, 1971; "'Six policemen injured' *Milwaukee Sentinel*, Thursday March 4 – Bullshit…" *La Guardia,* March 1971.
[191] "Milwaukee Police: Agents of Violence," *La Guardia,* March 1971; Braun, *Social Change and the Empowerment of the Poor,* 53.

Welfare Rights Organization; Father Henry Mahaney, adviser to the Milwaukee County Welfare Rights Organization; and Reverend Patrick Flood of the CUL. Salas addressed an angry and frustrated congregation, delivering a sermon in which he recounted the police violence that had incited the initial march and laying the blame for the numerous injuries suffered by Latino protestors squarely at the feet of law enforcement. He asked those assembled, "How does a minority such as we survive in the face of violence that confronts our daily lives, the violence of poverty, of the lack of education, of joblessness, and of the physical violence we saw last night?" After the Mass, Lalo Valdez read letters calling for clemency for Chacón and Puente, including a plea from Archbishop William Cousins. Cousins' message called on the Latino community to unite in prayer to "inspire those who can pardon to pardon," and explained,

> Here in this sanctuary I now unite my prayers with yours, begging God to inspire those in whose hands clemency rests to exercise it in this case. To these men we particularly address our petition. Amends have been made. Clemency does not destroy justice; it enhances it… justice tempered with mercy is God-like.

Along with the archbishop's request to the governor, the Wisconsin Council of Rabbis unanimously endorsed a resolution for clemency "in view of the serious implications which this kind situation could have in eroding the already shaken confidence which many underprivileged citizens have in the efficacy of our democratic process and the fairness of its institutions."[192]

Just three days after the march that had ended in a free-for-all in front of the Civic Plaza, more than six hundred Latino, black, and white protesters again took to the streets for a second march for clemency for Chacón and Puente. Silently and peaceably, the marchers began their trek behind three banners – a Mexican flag, a Puerto Rican flag, and a sign bearing the legend

---

[192] "A mass for nonviolence," *La Guardia,* March 1971; "Latins Vow to Push for Pair's Clemency," *Milwaukee Journal,* March 5, 1971. Along with letters from Cousins and the Wisconsin Council of Rabbis, Fathers Flood and Becker sent their own petitions for clemency. See Dismas Becker to 'whom it may concern,' October 14, 1970, Series 1, Box 2, Folder 4, Council on Urban and Rural Life Records, MUDSCUA; Patrick Flood to 'whom it may concern,' March 5, 1971, Series 1, Box 2, Folder 4, Council on Urban and Rural Life Records, MUDSCUA.

"Free Chacón and Puente" – on a cold and snowy March 6 at the LAUCR offices. As thirty parade marshals wearing brown armbands patrolled a line of marchers stretching three blocks, march organizer Tony Baez explained to a *Journal* reporter, "In peace, in order, we are protesting political cases of discrimination." To ensure no protester would be jailed without cause, organizers had met with Milwaukee Mayor Henry Maier, the city's district attorney, and Chief of Police Harold Breier to establish march parameters. Maier also expressed his support for clemency for Chacón and Puente, taking time during the meeting to call the governor's office to voice his opinion. Joining the hundreds of marchers were a much smaller law enforcement contingent, as well representatives from the office of the Milwaukee district attorney, the U.S. Civil Rights Commission, the Department of Justice, and lawyers from the Mexican American Legal Defense Fund Committee. The march ended without a single arrest.[193]

The repeated clashes between Latinos and Milwaukee's police officers prompted the city's Community Relations Social Development Commission to initiate an investigation through the Civil Rights Division of the federal Justice Department in mid-March. Father Maurice, serving as a member of the program committee of the Community Relations Social Development Commission, submitted a strongly-worded resolution in support of the inquiry in which he described police surveillance of community members during the clemency Mass at Guadalupe. Maurice explained that "there's just no recourse in this community against this kind of harassment."[194] In December of 1972, the U.S. Civil Rights Commission released its final report, heavily criticizing the Milwaukee Police Department's treatment of minority communities in the

---

[193] Baez quotes in "Latins' March Peaceful," *Milwaukee Journal,* March 7, 1971. "Latins Get March Sanction," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* March 6, 1971; "Latins March," *Madison-Milwaukee Bugle American*, March 11-17, 1971; "Police violence thwarted, 2nd march peaceful," *La Guardia,* March 1971.

[194] "Intervention Sought," *Milwaukee Journal,* March 5, 1971; "Panel Urges Probe of Police, Latin Clash," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* March 12, 1971; "US May Probe Latin Issues Here," *Milwaukee Journal,* March 14, 1971.

city. The report's long list of recommendations included a call for the hiring of more officers of color and more community input in law enforcement matters.[195]

In response to the marches and the federal investigation, Wisconsin Governor Patrick Lucey met with representatives from the LAUCR and Mayor Meier in March of 1971. After hearing support for clemency for Chacón and Puente from Meier and Archbishop Cousins (through a delivered letter), Lucey agreed to establish an investigatory commission charged with examining police-community relations, as well as the efficacy of state programs serving Latinos in Wisconsin.[196] Dubbed the Governor's Investigating Committee on Problems of Wisconsin's Spanish Speaking Community, the group included representatives from state labor and welfare agencies, clergy, and members of Latino communities from across the state. Over the spring and early summer of 1971, committee members held public forums throughout Wisconsin to discuss employment, housing, police brutality, immigration concerns, and other concerns.[197]

After numerous hearings around the state, the commission presented a damning report of state agencies' disservice to Wisconsin's Latino communities, along with a litany of proposals in the summer of 1971. With a title page emblazoned with the UFW and Chicano Movement's iconic thunderbird image, the report detailed the economic, social, and cultural isolation Wisconsin Latinos experienced at the hands of the states' institutions. The state's Latinos,

---

[195] "US Probes Charges of Bias to Latins Here," *Milwaukee Journal,* March 21, 1971; "Minorities Ask Police Changes," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* December 7, 1972.

[196] Lucey granted Chacón and Puente executive clemency through conditional pardons in April of 1971. "Denial of Latin Pair's Appeal Triggers Protests in Community," *Milwaukee Journal,* March 31, 1971; "Lucey Grants Pardons to 2 Latins Here," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* April 7, 1971; "El gobernador concedió clemencia," *La Guardia,* June 1971.

[197] "Lucey's panel on Latins," *La Guardia,* March 1971; "The Governor, Mayor and Latins Confer," *La Guardia,* March 1971; "Governor Orders Probe of Latin Problems Here," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* March 19, 1971; "Unit to Study Needs of Spanish-Americans," *Wisconsin State Journal,* March 20, 1971; "Latins Say Sheboygan Treats Them Fairest," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, March 27, 1971; "Latins vocal effort gains recognition," *Madison-Milwaukee Bugle American*, April 8-21, 1971; Governor Patrick J. Lucey to Joe E. Nusbaum, July 6, 1971, Folder 43, Box 1, *La Guardia* Papers, in possession of author; Governor Patrick J. Lucey to Norman Clapp, July 6, 1971, Folder 43, Box 1, *La Guardia* Papers, in possession of author.

according to the committee members, were "leading lives of quiet desperation" and felt, "with much justification, that they are neglected in the everyday life of their community." The committee called on the Governor's office to "use its vast moral and political influence to obtain immediate positive results based upon the (Latino) community's recommendations." Among fifty-four recommendations covering topics as broad as housing, education, employment, freeway construction, and governmental agencies, the final report included numerous sections specific to community-police relations.[198] After receiving the report, Lucey planned a visit to Milwaukee to present the commission's findings and tour the city's Latino community, with meetings scheduled at the Puerto Rican Self-Help Center, UMOS, the Spanish Center, la Iglesia Evangélica Bautista, Holy Trinity-Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, and the United Spot.[199]

In anticipation of the governor's visit, the LAUCR, the Brown Berets, and the YLO organized a communitywide meeting at Holy Trinity-Our Lady of Guadalupe Church to discuss how Latinos might address continued police harassment in the city's various barrios. Just days before the governor's visit, however, tensions flared anew when police officers accosted, assaulted, and then fired shots at Latino youths playing basketball in a near south side playground they wrongfully believed to be involved in property damage, prompting another set of rallies, marches, and petitions to local political leaders.[200] Community leaders hoped to meet at Guadalupe – the most prominent near south side's Spanish-speaking parish – to discuss the latest incident as well as their larger political strategy towards the governor and state politicians.

---

[198] Governor's Investigating Committee on the Problems of Wisconsin's Spanish-Speaking Communities to Governor Patrick J. Lucey, November 17, 1971, Box 19, Folder 5, Wisconsin Division of Economic Assistance: Economic Opportunity Section Administrative Subject Files, 1964-1978, WHS.
[199] "Lucy's task force," *La Guardia,* June 1971; "Governor Lucey's visit to Latin community, July 7, 1971 – Contents of audio tapes recorded by *La Guardia,"* Folder 43, Box 1, *La Guardia* Papers, in possession of author; "Latins, Pigs, & A Liberal Lucey," *Kaleidoscope* (Milwaukee), July 22-August 4, 1971.
[200] "Latins Push Plea to Oust 2 Officers," *Milwaukee Journal,* July 2, 1971; "Pickets and Plays," *Milwaukee Journal,* July 3, 1971; ""Liberal" McCann ignores demands," *La Guardia,* July 1971.

The *Milwaukee Sentinel* reported, however, that on the day of the proposed meeting, "the doors of Holy Trinity-Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church were closed…to Latin Americans who sought to rally inside to protest alleged police brutality." Finding no sanctuary in the church, more than two hundred Latinos gathered on Guadalupe's front steps with bullhorns in hand. Lalo Valdez declared to the crowd that "the priests said the church could not be used for political purposes." Ernesto Chacón explained that Guadalupe's pastor, Father Marion Caruso, had questioned the validity of the Latino community's allegations against the police department and instead said he knew "nothing of police brutality" on the near south side. In a particularly acerbic account of the protest, *La Guardia's* correspondents reported that the church's more conservative parishioners had armed themselves with clubs in case the protests turned violent while Caruso had stood across the street from the crowd the rally "smiling and nodding seemingly trying to give off spiritual vibrations." Father Loren Koziel, a member of the church's ministerial team, explained to the *Milwaukee Journal* that permission to use the church for a rally had been denied because "basically the community which we consider as the church was not in agreement with the people holding the rally on this issue." Caruso added in an interview with the *Sentinel* that he had refused the protestors permission to use the church because most parishioners "do not go along with this. If the people in the parish were behind this group and there was a blatant injustice, I would be behind this."[201]

The governor's eventual summer trek into Milwaukee's Latino neighborhoods in 1971 brought out hundreds of concerned community members. While Latinos were appreciative of the governor's visit to Milwaukee's barrio – the first time in recent history that a state official had shown such concern for the community, much less visited their environs – discussions regarding

[201] "Latin Protesters Rally Outside Church," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* July 7, 1971; "140 Join Protest," *Milwaukee Journal,* July 7, 1971; "Latins Protest Police Shooting," *La Guardia,* July 1971.

police harassment dogged Lucey at every stop. Lalo Valdez, editor of *La Guardia,* presented the governor with affidavits describing fifty cases of police brutality, and explained that the only time Latinos had not been harassed by law enforcement in recent memory was during the previous summer's police strike. Tony Baez of the Young Lords, who had served on the Governor's Committee, also read a statement demanding the immediate removal of District Attorney Mike McCann and Police Chief Harold Breier as they were "not serving the people" of the south side. Many voiced anger at the presence of the police department's Subversive ("Red") Squad during the governor's tour. Community leader Juanita Renteria explained tersely to Lucey that their presence was "typical" at Latino community meetings, and that "the police are everywhere and constantly trying to intimidate us." With each complaint Lucey explained his limited ability to direct local law enforcement or change police tactics, but offered to meet with McCann, Mayor Maier and Chief Breier in the near future. Following the governor's visit, *La Guardia* captured the Latino community's reception of Lucey's remarks with a quote from the commission's report: "It is understandable that the Latin community might look warily at the efforts of this task force. Government in the past have given little reason to expect positive accomplishments from efforts such as ours. The Latin community wants results."[202]

The governor's visit to the south side of Milwaukee in July did little to alleviate the rising tension between law enforcement and the city's Latino community. During the summer, Latinos continued to file complaints with the city's Fire and Police Commission, often with no tangible results.[203] In August of 1971, a multiracial coalition organized a "people's court" at St. Michael's Catholic Church to investigate continued police brutality across the city. More than 225 black,

---

[202] "Governor Lucey Talks, Looks, Listens And?" *La Guardia,* July 1971; "Angry Latins Plan to See Lucey," *Milwaukee Journal,* July 4, 1971; "Lucey Urged to Help Improve Latinos' Lot," *Milwaukee Journal,* July 7, 1971; "Lucey Hear Complaints of Latins," *Milwaukee Journal,* July 8, 1971.
[203] "See City for Help, Maier Tells Latins," *Milwaukee Journal,* July 9, 1971.

Latino, and white community members sat in attendance to hear allegations of acts of police mistreatment before the "court," while a battery of lawyers from the Milwaukee Legal Services and Freedom Through Equality legal aid programs served as counsel. Despite a personal invitation from Father Groppi to police chief Harold Brier, no police representatives made an appearance for their "hearings" at the show trial. Spokesmen from various community organizations sponsoring the trial made brief statements. Groppi, representing St. Michael's pastoral team, opened the proceedings by stating that the "police department [in Milwaukee] is nothing more than another extension of the US military," and urged that local organizations form an association to demand community control of its own policing. Tony Baez, minister of information for the Milwaukee YLO, added "that you can't live in the South Side Latin community without being a victim of police harassment," and that all forms of police brutality were "political because it is used to harass us…to keep us down."[204]

While making for engaging political theater, the "people's court" garnered more publicity than actual change from the city's law enforcement. Chief Breier vehemently denied the final governor's report's claims, questioning the committee's methodologies and asserting that his officers bared no ill will or animosity towards the city's Latino community. In a letter to Governor Lucey, the chief explained, "judging from citizen co-operation, police relations with the Latin community are no different than with other segments of our great city, which experience has proven to be excellent." The report's allegations, according to Breier, were "vague and unsupported," and the conduct described in the various personal accounts from community members were not in accordance with departmental policies. Breier asked that Lucey

[204] Community members also gave testimonies of their interactions with police, while others met with lawyers to give "depositions" on mistreatment. "People's court to probe brutality," *Soul City Times* (Milwaukee), August 12, 1971; "Defendants Skip 'People's Court,'" *Milwaukee Sentinel,* August 14, 1971; "In the courts: Police under attack," *Madison-Milwaukee Bugle American*, August 12-September 1, 1971.

invite community members to file complaints with the Milwaukee Fire and Police Commission if any incident were to arise, promising to deal with specific issues promptly and with a thorough investigation.[205]

For their part, police officers identified "militants making a stink" as the aggravating issue between the Latino community and the city's police officers. Jerome Dudziak, a veteran patrolman of the Second District (where Latinos were most heavily concentrated) and president of the officer's labor union the Professional Policemen's Protective Association, explained, "I get co-operation from 98% of the people." Dudziak dismissed the governor's report, scoffing, "Who did the governor's task force talk to? They only listened to the militants. If you talk to the hardworking everyday Spanish person you will find they don't like the militants. We are not against the Spanish people. We are against people who break the law." The police union supported Breier's assertion that cops walking a south side or near north side beat acted no differently towards Spanish-speaking residents than they did towards other Milwaukeeans.[206]

Chief Breier's iron hold on the Milwaukee police department proved resilient to community protestations throughout the decade. Historian Frank Snyder notes that Breier was largely unmoved by community activism – regardless of its tone or volume – and seemed intent on not allowing the mayor or the governor to interfere in the control of his department. Investigations initiated by the U.S. Department of Justice, however, proved more effective than marches and pickets. Threats of reductions in federal funding prompted the chief and the city's Fire and Police Commission to reexamine the department's recruitment and hiring practices by the middle of the 1970s. Working with the Spanish Center and Urban League, the Commission developed new examination procedures and test-preparation classes for minority officers

---

[205] "Breier Denies Claim on Latins," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* November 18, 1971.
[206] "Policeman Blames Militants For Tension," *Milwaukee Journal,* September 28, 1971.

beginning in 1974.[207] With hiring practices under federal and local scrutiny, neighborhood members of Milwaukee's black, Latino, and white communities also formed the Citywide Coalition for Community Control of Police (CCCCP) in July of 1974, with representatives from schools, health and tenant organizations, religious organizations, legal services, and labor organizations. Their mission was to work with the state legislature to make the police department more transparent and accountable to the public. The coalition worked with city alders and the Public Safety Committee to create city ordinances and initiate changes to the membership of the Public Safety Board with more seats for minorities.[208] In spite of the intentions of community members affiliated with the CCCCP, Breier dismissed innovative training programs for officers and community policing policies used widely in other cities to foster improved police-community relations as "hogwash" and refused to implement them in Milwaukee. According to a 1975 *Milwaukee Journal* report, as few as seventeen hours of a police recruit's seven hundred hours of training was spent on improved community relations training.[209]

With law enforcement leadership resistant to any form of community input on their training and internal employment procedures, Latino and black Milwaukeeans continued to distrust the mechanisms built within city government to investigate police harassment and misconduct. Minority communities viewed the Fire and Police Commission, responsible for hearing complaints charged against individual officers, with a certain level of distrust – one Latino community member active in police brutality marches viewed the commission as "a eunuch of an organization, a rubber stamp for the Police Department and worse." In the first half

---

[207] Snyder, "Chief for Life," 55, 100.
[208] "Coalición Municipial Confrontan al Jefe de Policias," *La Guardia,* August 1974; "Communities Demand Open Door to Police Department," *La Guardia,* November 1974; "Proposals on Police Decried, Endorsed," *Milwaukee Journal,* February 18, 1975.
[209] "A Look Beyond the Badge," *Milwaukee Journal,* February 23, 1975. See also "Filing Complaint Is a Course in Bureaucracy," *Milwaukee Journal,* February 27, 1975.

of the 1970s, the LAUCR pushed for the development of a trial procedure for the commission to hear and adjudicate citizen grievances, but found the resulting protocols adopted by the board to be largely ineffective. Between 1968 and 1975, Milwaukee citizens filed 128 complaints with the commission – 70 percent were dismissed, usually because the complainant had failed to prove their case to the satisfaction of the five-member commission, while the commission dismissed as many as 42 percent of the grievances before a formal investigation could be initiated by its executive secretary.[210]

Even while Latino activists attempted to work within the parameters of city government to initiate reform, interactions between officers and community members continued to be points of conflict during the mid 1970s. Tensions between the city's Latino activists and law enforcement flared in the summer of 1974 with the shooting deaths of two off-duty police officers. James Raymond Mendoza, a young Mexican American man, was accused of killing the two policemen in an alcohol-fueled fight near a south side tavern.[211] Mendoza's arrest and subsequent conviction prompted a new set of protests and marches from the LAUCR, who alleged that the slain officers had initiated the fight when they first drew their service pistols to intimidate the young Chicano. Activists combined their anger towards the Mendoza case with their longstanding objections to the continued harassment of Latinos across the city, which had now grown to include numerous warrantless searches following the shooting.[212] *La Guardia*'s editors believed the outspoken support Latino activists offered for Mendoza in fact aggravated an even more hostile relationship with the city's law enforcement, and noted a swift and steady uptick in "vicious reactionary disregard for the civil rights of innocent people" as police "laid

---

[210] "Value of Police Commission Questioned," *Milwaukee Journal,* February 25, 1975.
[211] "Charge Man in Police Tactics Protested, *Milwaukee Sentinel,* July 12, 1974.
[212] "Latins Rally to Protest Treatment by Police," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* August 14, 1974; "Mendoza Sentenciado Por La Muerte de Dos Policias," *La Guardia,* November 1974.

siege to the Latin Community as a whole." The paper's editors referred to law enforcement as the Gestapo operating with impunity as their superiors rarely if ever investigated community claims of abuse or discrimination, and any Latino walking the streets "was considered a possible suspect and subject to harassment." More specifically, *La Guardia*'s editors alleged that law enforcement was in fact attempting to incite a violent response from activists, as they did in 1971 during the "Free Chacón and Puente" marches, to garner more support from the city's conservative white community members.[213]

Through the end of the decade, Latino activists continued to propose a initiatives to both alleviate police-community relations and better screen law enforcement harassment grievances, at times finding allies among clergy serving within Latino communities. The LAUCR created and sponsored the Community Anti-Crime Program, an effort to reduce crime in near south side neighborhoods. The committee worked with area priests such as Reverend Manuel Marin of the area's Pentecostal Church, Father Roberto Rodriguez of St. Wenceslaus Catholic Church, and Pastors Keith Weaver and John C. Helt of the New Hope United Church of Christ. After gathering neighborhood complaints and priorities, facilitators provided orientation and educational services for area residents about crime prevention and neighborhood improvement through block groups and community meetings. While continuing to confront complaints of harassment and abuse from Milwaukee police, the group also set their sights beyond police relations, emphasizing youth issues like graffiti and vandalism, slashed tires, student truancy, and a growing gang problem in Milwaukee barrios.[214] The committee also directed resources (and

---

[213] "Milwaukee Police: Agents of Violence," *La Guardia,* June 1974. Mendoza's mother worked for some time with the LAUCR, another factor activists pointed to when harassment from the police appeared to accelerate. See Antonio G. Guajardo, Jr., "Incorporation of Latino Police Officers into the Milwaukee Police Department: How a Group of Latino Police Officers Shed the "Blue Shield" for a Latino Identity," (PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2015), 139. Mendoza's conviction was ultimately overturned later in the decade.

[214] "Latin American Union for Civil Rights Foundation, Inc. – Proposal for use of building at 921 West Madison Street, 1980," in Folder 49, Box 1, *La Guardia* Records, in possession of author; José González to Ernesto Chacón,

their ire) towards the police department's Special Tactical Squad, who activists alleged continued to illicitly spy and keep secret files on neighborhood groups and individuals critical of Breier, including the LAUCR and politically-active clergy in the community.[215]

Tensions between Milwaukee's communities of color and city police reached a breaking point in July of 1981 with the death of Ernest Lacy, a black man mistakenly arrested during a sexual assault investigation who ultimately died under the custody of the police department's Special Tactical Squad. Breier's refusal to investigate or suspend the responsible officers prompted a new set of protests in black and Latino communities. During a march that brought out many of the same activists that had been fighting against police harassment since the late 1960s, Ernesto Chacón explained to the *Milwaukee Journal,* "the police to me is an army in itself. It's not any more a police department. It's a repressive force that was organized by local and federal government to control, and not protect."[216] The months of protests that followed along with a mounting number of community complaints against Milwaukee police officers prompted state lawmakers to intervene and finally confront Breier's unyielding control of the city's law enforcement. In 1984, the Wisconsin legislature stripped the chief's office of much of its autonomous authority, and that same year the seventy-two-year-old Breier unceremoniously retired from the post he had held for two decades.[217]

January 29, 1981, in Folder 50, Box 1, *La Guardia* Records, in possession of author; Guajardo, "Incorporation of Latino Police Officers into the Milwaukee Police Department," 107.

[215] The Milwaukee Citizens' Coalition – a new iteration of the Citywide Coalition for Community Control of Police – called on the Fire and Police Commission to hold hearings on the possibility of disbanding squad in 1979. "Surveillance by Police Stirs Protest," *Milwaukee Journal,* August 16, 1979. See also "Police in the Community," *Soy Yo* (Milwaukee)*,* November 1978.

[216] Reymundo Morales, member of the Milwaukee employment advocacy agency Esperanza Unida, explained that "minorities don't identify police as public servants, but more as a threat" and a "gang" unto itself. "Minorities see police as brutal," *Milwaukee Journal,* July 30, 1981.

[217] Miner, *Lessons From the Heartland,* 101-107.

Conclusion

Despite the intermittent victories Milwaukee Latino activists achieved in agency management, welfare rights, and police-community relations during the 1970s – at times with the support of clergy from different faiths, in many instances without – much of the organizing successes by groups like the LAUCR failed to unsettle the larger institutional concerns that continued to constrain the community's full entry into the city's economic and political mainstream. As early as 1974, *La Guardia's* editors lamented that while Latinos had risen to positions of authority in many of the organizations they had targeted in the late 1960s for regeneration, most of the fundamental societal structural issues that perpetuated poverty and enabled discrimination against Spanish speakers remained in place: "industry continues to erode our neighborhoods by purchasing properties and homes only to destroy them for parking lots…the police department invades homes and taverns without consideration of our fundamental rights…companies throughout the city refuse to hire Latinos at any significant rate…[and] our children continue to receive inadequate education in spite of increased Latino teachers and bilingual programs." The paper's editors, however, reserved their harshest criticism for the new directors of Latino-serving community agencies, who at times seemed "more concerned with their own petty internal problems or complacent with the salary they are receiving" than with alleviating suffering among the city's most impoverished. These managers, as well as the activists who had first pushed for their appointments, would need to reevaluate their tactics and recommit themselves to "building a realistic political consciousness" among all Milwaukee Latinos in order to envision a new economic and social reality for Spanish speakers.[218] Just one year later, the radical Latino newspaper issued an even more dire reading of the political

[218] "Comentario editorial: La lucha de ayer…es la lucha de hoy," *La Guardia,* January 1974.

landscape for the city's Spanish speaking, announcing that "the movement" fueled by Latino activism that had been born just years earlier was now either "dead" or in a state of "political hibernation." Noting that there was "nothing going on [in the Milwaukee Latino community] which challenges the fundamental political and economic structure of our society," *La Guardia's* editors accused activists of "surrendering" by having decided to "work within the system for modest goals" instead of working to overturn the entire political and economic order.[219]

"Political hibernation" seemed to be just one of the issues plaguing Latino activist organizations by the end of the decade. The fragile political partnerships Chicano and Puerto Rican activists had struggled to build to unite the city's more than 39,000 Spanish speakers were also beginning to fray by the late 1970s. Despite their best efforts to present a unified pan-Latino identity to bridge divides of nationality and cultural distinction, most Milwaukeeans – Latinos and otherwise – had come to recognize the LAUCR as a Chicano run and staffed organization most preoccupied with Mexican-descent community concerns. The city's Puerto Rican activists lamented that just years earlier, both Chicanos and Puerto Ricans had marched hand in hand protesting against the same injustices and making similar demands to local institutions, and that both Spanish-speaking groups had been instrumental in the creation and Latinization of organizations like the Spanish Center, the United Migrant Opportunity Services, and the United Community Center, as well as activist groups like the LAUCR. What were at first only internecine fights within Milwaukee Latino-serving organizations eventually bled into more public conflicts. In 1977, Chicano and Puerto Rican organizers came together to plan the cultural celebration Midwest Canto Al Pueblo, a Latino arts festival held in Milwaukee that drew poets, painters, and playwrights from the around the country. The yearlong preparation for the event

[219] "Comentario editorial," *La Guardia,* August 1975.

produced what Puerto Rican activists Tony Baez and Reverend Jaime Davila referred to in a strongly-worded public letter as "bitterness and resentment" in their community, as Chicano and Puerto Rican organizers grudgingly fought over resources, locations, and presenters. Puerto Rican leaders accused Chicano organizers of dominating the event as they had come to dominate the city's Latino political scene, disrupting what had once been a fruitful pan-Latino collaboration among Milwaukee's Spanish-speaking communities.[220] A contentious April 1977 meeting between Puerto Rican and Chicano activists at the LAUCR offices instigated by the Canto Al Pueblo controversy exhumed rifts long since simmering within the city's Latino movement. Discussion quickly turned to whether the linguistic and cultural similarities shared between the nationality groups would be enough to unite the two communities[221] Following the multiday Midwest Canto al Pueblo, *La Guardia* lamented that what had originally been billed as a "solidarity day" and a "source of greater inspiration" to celebrate Latino identity and culture ultimately became for many Boricuas "no more than a semblance of rhetorical appeasement."[222] Over the next few years, a schism slowly developed between Chicano and Puerto Rican activist leadership in many of the organizations that had once championed shared militant and radical solutions to the community's greatest economic and social ills.

Beyond the gradual breakdown of activist Latino organizations in the city, many Milwaukee Latinos reconsidered how best to initiate change through either the political process or by assuming administrative roles in local governmental roles. Several community members

---

[220] "An Open Letter to the Members of the "Canto Al Pueblo" Steering Committee and to Concerned Members of the Milwaukee Latino Community," March 28, 1977, Archival Resources on Hispanics in Wisconsin, WHS. For more on the growing perception within Milwaukee's community that LAUCR had become a *Chicano* organization, see The Puerto Rican Organization of Wisconsin and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, "A Survey of the Puerto Rican Community of Milwaukee's Northeast Side in 1976" (Milwaukee: The Milwaukee Urban Conservatory, 1977), 28; "Milwaukee Latinos Work Together," *Milwaukee Journal,* March 20, 1977.
[221] Notes from meeting between Latino community leaders regarding Midwest Canto Al Pueblo held at LAUCR offices, April 27, 1977, Archival Resources on Hispanics in Wisconsin, WHS.
[222] "A Beginning," *La Guardia,* May 1977.

questioned the efficacy of aggressive direct-action tactics and called for more moderate strategies. Francisco Rodriguez, liaison to the Latino community under Wisconsin Governor Tony Earl in the early 1980s, believed that while "confrontational politics" served a purpose, the "community as a whole has to go beyond that. There is a time to confront, there is a time to negotiate and a time to utilize other avenues, such as the vote." Additional cuts in federal support for community agencies under the administration of President Ronald Reagan – especially those that engaged in any form of activism or advocacy – further tempered much of the activism that had bloomed just a decade earlier. Community agencies that had once imagined themselves as engines for social change soon refocused their efforts toward service-based assignments. The organizational structures of these organizations slowly shifted to consist of boards of directors and staffs with more specific educational training and ties to corporate funding. The organization's programmatic priorities also changed by the early 1980s, with radical activism now replaced with a new spirit of creating associations among Latino lawyers, physicians, accountants, and other professionals.[223]

The professionalization of Latino organizations originally born of direct-action mobilizations and grassroots organizing was not met with support from all of their former frontrunners. Reflecting on shifts within the community in which he had called home since the late 1960s, Juan Alvarez expressed dismay in watching "the post-LAUCR Latino leadership in the community became transmogrified into creatures with narrow fields of vision." He accused these agencies of adopting "an innate survival instinct" and a "non-profit organizational

[223] Rodriguez quoted in "Chacón to confront a new task," *Milwaukee Journal,* February 15, 1983. See also Baez interview; "Earl provides challenge, opportunity for Hispanics," *Milwaukee Journal,* November 24, 1982; "Hispanic group seeks political togetherness," *Milwaukee Journal,* June 1, 1983; "Success a burden to some Hispanics," *Milwaukee Journal,* July 19, 1983; "Hispanics begin the turn to politics," *Milwaukee Journal,* July 29, 1983; "Hispanic organizers look at once-hated ballot box," *Milwaukee Journal,* September 14, 1983.

proclivity for a narcissistic "empire-building" agency ideology" that did more to promote the maintenance of funding channels and less to empower Latino communities. Instead of movement leaders responsible to their constituents, veterans of the late 1960s and early 1970s activism like Alvarez saw "non-profit executive directors almost overnight became de facto leaders" and filling the void left by organizations like LAUCR.[224]

As former activists moved on to new professional roles in social service agencies across southeast Wisconsin, organizations like the LAUCR and the initiatives they had founded slowly shuttered. By the early 1980s, the pan-Latino organization first founded in the aftermath of the 1968 Allen-Bradley pickets managed only a limited number of federally- and locally-funded community programs and had curtailed much of its direct-action activism. *La Guardia*, its official newspaper and the firebrand voice for militant Latino activism, ceased publication in 1983. Ernesto Chacón believed that the periodical's end was in part a success story, as many of the concerns writers had addressed in its pages had made their way onto both public and private agendas. The newspaper's end, however, also reflected the dwindling political activism that had united Milwaukee Latinos for more than a decade.[225]

While organizations like the LAUCR and *La Guardia* felt careworn by the end of the 1970s, many of the "social action priests" who had joined the social justice organizations and the movements they sprang from likewise found themselves somewhat marginalized within their religious communities by the close of the decade. Several dissident voices within Catholic archdiocese like Fathers James Groppi and John Maurice made the difficult decision to leave the Church and abandon their clerical collars. After serving thirteen years as a priest in Spanish-

[224] Juan Alvarez Cuahtemoc, "Latinos in Milwaukee During the Late 1960s, Notes, August 6, 2004," Series 4, Box 22, Folder 19, Marc S. Rodriguez Papers, JSL.
[225] "La Guardia readies last issue," *La Guardia,* January 26, 1983.

speaking communities, Maurice transitioned to the laity in 1970. He married in 1971, and left Milwaukee with his wife in 1974 to direct a mental health program in Appleton serving a largely Latino community in Appleton. Others within the archdiocese, however, continued the fight to push the Catholic Church to be more responsive to Milwaukee's marginalized communities. Father Patrick Flood, director of the Council on Urban Life (CUL), defended the Church's sustained role in supporting grassroots organizations and community self-determination as part of "its theological perspective on the importance of man as a responsible human being who has a right and an obligation to act responsibly." According to Flood, if a person was "unable to make decisions and choices in his own life," he would thus be "unable to grow in his freedom."[226]

Pastors of other Christian denominations also carried on their activist work in the Latino community during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Reverend Jaime Davila of Iglesia Evangélica Bautista continued to serve on the boards of directors for community agencies as well as counsel activists fighting for expanded economic and social opportunities for Latinos.[227] His ministry called upon all Milwaukee Latinos to "combat the exploitation of man wherever it may exist," and to "became effective messengers for social justice, fighting to eradicate hunger and misery in the world."[228] Latinos who professed a true devotion to Christ, according to Davila, had an obligation to lead the fight against exploitation wherever it may exist:

> La revolución de Dios va a continuar con usted. Yo no me quiero quedar atras. Que esta sea nuestra oración: "Dios, comienza una revolución en la comunidad Latina de Milwaukee, y comienza en mi." (The revolution of God will continue with you. I don't

---

[226] "Priest defends community organizers," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* June 23, 1973.
[227] During the 1970s, Davila served as the board president of the United Community Center; member of the board of directors for the LAUCR; commissioner for the Social Development Commission; member of the local branch of the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) advisory committee; representative to the Governor's Council for Spanish Speaking People; and, administrative consultant for the Puerto Rican Organization of Wisconsin. See "Rev. Davila Recruited," *Soy Yo* (Milwaukee), October 1978; "Immersion in Activism Awaited Him," *Milwaukee Journal,* August 19, 1979.
[228] Reverend Jaime E. Davila, "Desde Mi Esquina," *La Guardia,* January 1975.

> want to be left behind. Let this be our prayer: "Lord, start a revolution in the Latino community of Milwaukee, and let it begin with me.")[229]

Through both his spiritual and secular outreach, Davila thus affirmed what he referred to as a "Hispanic theology" that aimed to unite Latinos of all nationalities to struggle for the full inclusion of all Spanish speakers in American life. When asked in why he devoted so much of his energies to marches, protests, and community agencies, Davila replied, "Always a Christian influence ought to be in those places where sometimes the going gets tough."[230]

[229] Reverend Jaime E. Davila, "Desde Mi Esquina: El Cristiano y La Reforma Social," *La Guardia,* February 1975.
[230] "Passive Era Ends for Latin Community," *Milwaukee Journal,* September 26, 1971.

CHAPTER 6

"We have the right in the name of God to protect these people": Milwaukee's Sanctuary Movement and Transnational Interfaith Collaboration, 1980-1990

On December 2, 1982, more than seven hundred Milwaukeeans filed in solemn procession into the Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist, the episcopal see of the city's Catholic Archdiocese. Led by Archbishop Rembert Weakland, the celebrants had gathered to declare three archdiocesan parishes as sanctuaries for undocumented refugees fleeing political persecution from Central America. Representing forty-one Christian and Jewish congregations, religious communities, and groups endorsing the burgeoning national sanctuary movement, parish members carrying candles formed an arc around the altar. Addressing the assembly in Spanish, Weakland stated, "[We] truly believe in the sanctity and sacredness of all human life. I had to weigh this act of civil disobedience with the very real threat to these people's lives if they were to return to their homeland." Weakland, in recounting his own religious order's medieval practices, noted that the Benedictine tradition was to accept all those who knocked on the door of the monastery seeking shelter and food. In the spirit of Christian hospitality, no questions were asked of the stranger and one was to treat each guest as Christ. Quoting Leviticus, the archbishop reminded parishioners that the "foreigner residing among you" should be treated as a native-born citizen, loved as they would love any other member of the congregation, for all Christians had been "foreigners in Egypt once."[1]

The December 1982 vigil sparked a decade-long campaign in Milwaukee, one that had begun on the U.S-Mexico border and spread across the United States, to aid the hundreds of thousands of undocumented Central American refugees fleeing civil war in their home region. What launched in the spring of 1982 with the declaration of sanctuary in six congregations in

[1] "Weakland to let Catholic churches harbor refugees," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, November 12, 1982.

Arizona and California grew to include more than five hundred faith communities across the country within just five years.[2] Of the hundreds of thousands of Salvadorans and Guatemalans fleeing their home countries, hundreds risked detention and deportation by publicly sharing their stories of war, repression, flight, and their search for safe haven. Faith communities in places as geographically dispersed as the U.S. Southwest, Pacific Northwest, and upper Midwest – often consisting of white, middle-class congregants with little experience with social movement work or prior interaction with Latin Americans – listened to the refugees' stories and opened their congregational spaces and homes in defiance of U.S. immigration policy. Functioning in concert with liberal-leftist movements against U.S. intervention in Central America, the U.S. transnational solidarity movement became the largest and most sustained protest movement against U.S. foreign policy since the campaign against the Vietnam War.[3] During the 1980s, refugees and Americans alike worked together to shift American foreign and immigration policies and, in the process, reorient the moral compass of the nation.

Despite being thousands of miles away from the southern border where thousands of Salvadorans and Guatemalans arrived every year, Milwaukee displayed an early and robust level of support for the movement. Beyond its geographic distinction, Milwaukee was remarkable in that it became home to the first Catholic, Latino, Jewish, and black congregations in the country to open their doors to refugees and became the first city to earn the support of a Catholic archbishop. In this northern Midwestern city, congregations of color often led the way in pushing Milwaukeeans of faith to acknowledge their role in creating more just national immigration

---

[2] The regional diversity and breadth of the movement is worth noting here. While California, a border state, had the largest concentration of sanctuary congregations by late 1987 with 160 sites, the second most-represented state was New York with 38 sites, followed by followed by Illinois (26), Pennsylvania (22), Arizona (19), and Wisconsin (18). That year, 40 states participated in the movement. See "Summary of Sanctuary Sites," *Basta! National Newsletter of the Chicago Religious Task Force on Central America*, December 1987.

[3] Margaret Power and Julie A. Charlip, "Introduction: On Solidarity," *Latin American Perspectives* 36, no. 6 (November 2009), 3-9.

policies. As it had throughout the twentieth century, collaboration between Latino, white, and black congregants proved crucial for creating the spark needed to initiate change in parishes across the city. Along with hundreds of churches and synagogues around the country, Milwaukee's activists invoked, recombined, and reinterpreted preexisting theological practices to defend their decision to break federal law in harboring and aiding refugees. The movement allowed activists to articulate a shared moral consciousness built upon a publicly expressed and politicized devoutness in support of Central American refugees.

Milwaukee's Sanctuary Movement was particular in that it enjoyed the strong support of Catholic leadership, a factor that helped the undertaking flourish in the 1980s. While the organization of asylum for Central American refugees was born in lay interfaith networks, the promotion and institutional support of the program found some of its most vocal supporters among the city's bishops and prominent clergy. Episcopal leadership demonstrated a willingness to step outside the bounds of "acceptable" public discourse, so defined by politicians and the Curia, to support a movement they deemed to be fully within the bounds of church social teachings. For numerous denominations, especially within the Catholic context, this placed Milwaukee on a very different plane from almost every other major American city. Milwaukee leaders like Weakland, installed as the city's prelate in 1977, had even before the start of sanctuary laid claim as some of the most politically and dogmatically progressive religious administrators in the U.S. Weakland, along with leaders like Lutheran Bishop Peter Rogness and Episcopal Bishop Roger White, were willing to denounce conservative politicians and a Reagan administration that advocated a Central American policy inconsistent with support for the poor, destitute, and those who had been forced to the margins of society.[4]

[4] The *New York Times* referred to Weakland as "the most outspoken defender of American Catholicism against Vatican critics." "A Dissenting Voice: Catholic Theologian David Tracy," *New York Times*, November 9, 1986.

The history of the sanctuary movement provides an important corrective to scholarship detailing the confluence of faith, race, and political movements in the late twentieth century. Historians of American politics and religion have as of late focused their attention on the rise of a new Religious Right and the Moral Majority in the final decades of the century.[5] Those histories, however, only partially illustrate the way in which public religiosity, social movements, and policymaking combined throughout the era. While the religious landscape of the United States in the 1970s and 1980s was marked by a growing relationship between leaders in conservative politics and Christian denominations, it was also defined as a time of exploration in progressive religious ideologies in topics as broad as race and ethnicity, class and economic structures, feminism, homosexuality, and war and pacifism. Movements like sanctuary occurred in a period that left religious magazine *Sojourners* referred to as a time of renewal of a "Christian conscience."[6] Those participating in faith-based social justice initiatives were politically independent and not easily defined by ideological labels, and instead professed a sensitivity to those who they believed were victims of the prevailing political order. During the 1980s, progressive prelates and laity drew upon Scriptural teaching and historical antecedents, most directly from civil rights and antiwar movements from previous decades and reforms initiated within the Catholic Church under the Second Vatican Council.[7] These activist priests and

---

[5] These histories explore how beginning in the years following World War Two conservative Christian and Jewish organizations organized from the grassroots level to the highest offices of American political power. Studies emphasize a broad range of topics, including the growth of the Christian Right, the rise of evangelical pastors such as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, and the linkages between conservative religious organizations, corporations, and conservative politicians. See Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); Daniel K. Williams, *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W.W. Norton Company, 2012); Kevin M. Kruse, *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America* (Philadelphia: Basic Books, 2015).

[6] "The Rise of Christian Conscience," *Sojourners*, January 12, 1985.

[7] David O'Brien, "What Happened to the Catholic Left?" in *What's Left?: Liberal American Catholics,* ed. Mary Joe Weaver (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 255-282.

parishioners were also often in direct conversation with contemporary transformations in faith communities abroad, including most importantly liberation theologies springing from Latin America.[8] Across the United States, laity, clergy, and national church bodies applied the lessons learned from organizing for progressive change in previous decades to discussions surrounding the virtue of civil disobedience against unjust immigration policies as well as nuclear weapons, the defunding of antipoverty programs, and U.S. foreign policy towards Latin America and South Africa, all within the framework of respect for human life and dignity.

Sanctuary, both at the local and national level, was at its core both a religious *and* a political movement. In taking a public stance against what they believed to be the unjust misapplication of refugee and immigration law, laity and clergy who joined Milwaukee's sanctuary movement saw their mission as fundamentally a transnational act of faith and solidarity. The driving influence of sanctuary lay in its ability to intersect borders, be they physical, political, or spiritual. Many of Milwaukee's movement participants had themselves crossed borders throughout their lives, having spent time in Latin America as missionaries or on aid trips, and had first-hand experience with the war ravaging the region. Members of religious orders and lay organizers encountered a growing sense of social justice religiosity, most succinctly framed within the nascent liberation theology movement, that pushed them to reconsider their role as members of global churches and enunciate the concept of a shared communion across the Americas. Upon returning to Milwaukee these leaders brought home with them vivid stories about the violence devastating Central American nations and worked to educate the broader religious community about the U.S.'s role in creating the economic and

[8] For more on liberation theology, see Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987); Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (15th anniversary ed., Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988); Christian Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology: Radical Religion and Social Movement Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

military structures that allowed for such destruction to fester. Sanctuary leaders coordinated the sharing of their own experiences with those of arriving refugees, as the movement was by design formulated to bring congregation members into close contact with victims of persecution in Central American. As asylum seekers arrived in Milwaukee's parishes after 1982, their *testimonios*, or "testimonials," became fundamental for the process of making concrete these cross-border connections. *Testimonios* provided a counter-narrative to the U.S. media's depiction of revolutions in Central America, bringing home for congregants, as legal scholar Sophie Pirie has noted, the realities of rising violence and Salvadoran and Guatemalan death squads in order to "arouse Americans' suspicions about government honesty and provide them with the information – the power – to question and rebut government accounts."[9] Interactions between Central American refugees and communities of faith served to invoke a moral dilemma that invited, indeed required, a decision from Milwaukeeans: would they stand by their complicit federal government, or would they open the doors of their churches and synagogues as spaces of sanctuary to refugees in defiance of immigration enforcement?

Milwaukee's religious leaders and communities of faith understood their involvement in the movement primarily as a confluence of their religiosity and a passion for social justice. During the 1980s, religious communities turned to Scripture to justify civil disobedience against federal domestic and foreign policies they considered both morally and legally unjust and in violation of both higher and earthly power. Sanctuary workers developed educational initiatives to bring to light growing violence and American complicity in Central America, extending a sense of moral outrage to military strategy abroad and refugee policy at home. Civil disobedience through the harboring of undocumented refugees, an act that members referred to

[9] Sophie H. Pirie, "The Origins of a Political Trial: The Sanctuary Movement and Political Justice," *Yale Journal of Law & the Humanities* 2, no. 2 (1990), 394.

as "radical hospitality," was not the only avenue for participation in the movement, however.[10] Congregations joined Sanctuary through several initiatives, including providing financial aid for already established sanctuary; educating congregants and the larger Milwaukee community about Central American violence, U.S. foreign policy, and tensions within immigration law; and, lobbying congressional representatives to end wars in Latin America. Movement participants, both American-born and Central American-transplanted, believed that gathering support for the movement meant evangelization to raise the moral and social justice consciousness of Milwaukee and the greater U.S. Clergy and laity argued that as people of faith they had an obligation to question unjust immigration and foreign policies, and thus justified their actions as unconcealed acts of faith. For these congregations, the movement became a place where morality, and not legality, was the dominant question at hand, challenging churches to recognize their intrinsically political nature as social institutions and forcing congregants to acknowledge, as theologian Gregory Leffel has noted, that "the pastoral (had become) the political."[11]

Milwaukee's sanctuary movement serves as a crucial site for understanding political protest, U.S. immigration policy, and interethnic community formation in the late twentieth century. Analyzing this movement presents new opportunities for historians to interrogate Latino immigration – specifically, migration from Central America – to the United States and better understand, in the words of anthropologist Hilary Cunningham, how transnational movements addressing refugee crises can serve as arenas "in which religious and political concerns have often mixed in the post-World War II era."[12] The historiography regarding the movement begins

---

[10] Michael Dean Matters, "The Sanctuary Movement, 1980-1988: An Organizational Analysis of Structures and Cultures," (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Chicago, 1994), 69-87.
[11] Gregory P. Leffel, *Faith Seeking Action: Mission, Social Movements, and the Church in Motion* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2007), 111-144.
[12] Hilary Cunningham, *God and Caesar at the Rio Grande: Sanctuary and the Politics of Religion* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), xvi.

with a number of contemporaneous studies written by Sanctuary Movement workers such as Renny Golden and Michael McConnell, many of whom either had academic backgrounds or would go on to complete graduate work in subsequent years.[13] Anthropologists such as Cunningham and Susan Bibler Coutin and sociologists Sharon Erickson Nepstad, Robin Lorentzen, and Christian Smith have provided rich studies detailing the political and cultural ramifications of the movement for religious communities in the U.S. and in Central America.[14] Within the field of history, Geraldo Cadava has offered introductory observations on the development of sanctuary practices in Arizona within the context of Latino migration and cross-border politics throughout the late decades of the twentieth century.[15] María Christina García's study of the development of refugee aid networks across Mexico, the U.S., and Canada among church groups and human rights organizations during the 1980s, meanwhile, serves as the only full-length treatment of the movement, and provides valuable insight into how these organizations influenced the development of new national refugee policies through subsequent decades.[16] The case of Milwaukee expands this scholarship beyond the border region, focusing our attention on the local, national, and transnational dimensions of religious solidarity in the final decades of the twentieth century.

---

[13] Renny Golden and Michael McConnell, *Sanctuary: The New Underground Railroad* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986); Renny Golden and Michael McConnell, "Sanctuary in Chicago," in *Yearning to Breathe: Liberation Theologies in the United States*, ed. Mar Peter Raoul, Linda Rennie Forcey, and Robert Frederick Hunter, Jr. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 156-158; Ignatius Blau, *The Ground is Holy: Church Sanctuary and Central American Refugees* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1985).

[14] Cunningham, *God and Caesar at the Rio Grande*; Susan Bibler Coutin, *The Culture of Protest: Religious Activism and the U.S. Sanctuary Movement* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993); Sharon Erickson Nepstad, *Convictions of the Soul: Religion, Culture, and Agency in the Central America Solidarity Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Robin Lorentzen, *Women in the Sanctuary Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991); Christian Smith, *Resisting Reagan: The U.S. Central America Peace Movement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 60-70.

[15] Geraldo L. Cadava, *Standing on Common Ground: The Making of the Sunbelt Borderland* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 198-206.

[16] María Christina García, *Seeking Refuge: Central American Migration to Mexico, the United States, and Canada* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

"What does God want now?": Violence in Central America and the Formation of a Transnational Sanctuary Movement

In the early 1980s, a transnational solidarity movement developed in the United States as a response to an escalating exile crisis caused by the confluence of political revolutions, mass migrations, and U.S. foreign policy in Central America. Since the early twentieth century, American capital interests in the region had dictated interventionist policies, leading to both covert and open military and political intrusion in the affairs of Central American nations.[17] With the beginning of the Cold War in the late 1940s, however, U.S. foreign preoccupations with the region fixated on the fear of spreading communist power in countries south of the border. Political revolutions in Guatemala (1960-1998), Nicaragua (1962-1990), and El Salvador (1980-1990) pitted military dictatorships against leftist rebellions and often served as proxy battles between the United States and the Soviet Union.[18]

As violence and human rights abuses in the region escalated through the late 1970s, U.S. President Jimmy Carter publicly condemned Salvadoran, Nicaraguan, and Guatemalan regimes' reliance on military force to subdue political opponents and reduced American military and economic assistance as a means to force these countries to alter their policies. Increasingly concerned with the success of leftist rebels, however, Carter increased U.S. aid in support of military juntas that promised to bring stability to the war-torn region. With Ronald Reagan's arrival to the White House in January of 1981, the executive branch quickly dispensed with the appearance of interest in human rights that had suffused its predecessor's tenure. Reflecting a

---

[17] Lars Schoultz, *Beneath the United States: A History of U.S. Policy Toward Latin America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 205-271; Michael Grow, *U.S. Presidents and Latin American Interventions: Pursuing Regime Change in the Cold War* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2008).

[18] Gilbert M. Joseph, "What We Now Know and Should Know: Bringing Latin America More Meaningfully into Cold War Studies," in *In From the Cold: Latin America's New Encounter with the Cold War,* ed. Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniela Spenser (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 3-46.

hardline anti-communist stance that defined his foreign policy across the globe, Reagan instituted Central American policies that bolstered local militaries promising to maintain order and stymie the spread of leftist political power in the region. Throughout the decade, the U.S. supported the repressive regimes of Salvadoran president Jose Napoleon Duarte and Guatemalan presidents José Efraín Ríos Montt and Óscar Humberto Mejía Víctores with over $6 billion in military and economic aid. The infusion of U.S. military support to Central America's military juntas and dictators expanded the scope of violence and bloodshed in the region. During the 1970s and 1980s, causalities of war in the area known as the Northern Triangle, both military and non-combatant, grew to include the deaths of more than 140,00 Guatemalans, 70,000 Salvadorans, and 60,000 Nicaraguans.[19] Beyond those killed, the Central American conflicts created massive migration northward. During the second half of the twentieth century, nearly two million fled their homes in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua for safe haven in Mexico, the U.S., and Canada. Between 1980 and 1984 alone, more than 500,000 Salvadorans and Guatemalans entered the United States by crossing into the border states of Texas, Arizona, and California. By the end of the 1980s, more than one million exiles had settled across the U.S.[20]

The arrival of rising numbers of Central Americans in the U.S. coincided with shifting legislation dictating refugee admittance into the country. Following the brutalities of the Holocaust and World War Two, international refugee policy emphasized protections for potential exiles who expressed a fear of persecution in their home countries.[21] Tensions of whether

---

[19] Stephen G. Rabe, *The Killing Zone: The United States Wages Cold War in Latin America* (2nd ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 150-180; García, *Seeking Refuge,* 24-25.
[20] Gil Loescher, "Humanitarianism and Politics in Central America," *Political Science Quarterly* 103, no. 2 (Summer 1988): 296; Garcia, *Seeking Refuge,* 13-43.
[21] The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, formerly established in 1950, first addressed a global policy for refugee admittance at the 1951 Geneva Convention, crafting a multilateral treaty that defined refugee status and what rights potential refugees held in declaring and receiving asylum. International refugee policy held as its core principle the concept of nonrefoulement, protecting refugees from forcible return to a country of origin where they might face persecution. The United States failed to sign onto such multilateral agreements until 1967,

American policy should prioritize offering humanitarian aid to those seeking asylum or if it might primarily serve foreign policy interests lay at the heart of U.S. refugee legislation throughout the second half of the twentieth century. As it had for military and capital interests in Latin America, Cold War ideology ultimately dictated U.S. priorities for refugee admittance. International studies scholars Gil Loescher and John A. Scanlan have demonstrated how U.S. State Department officials prioritized for asylum those refugees arriving from communist regions or nations in danger of "going Soviet" such as Eastern European Bloc states, Cuba, and Vietnam. Granted American protection, these individuals could then serve as "Cold War trophies" and thus valuable assets in America's continuing struggle for dominance on the world stage.[22] With the passage of the Refugee Act of 1980, however, U.S. federal legislators proposed the creation of uniform procedures for screening and admitting refugees more closely in line with international human rights law. The legislation's promise of individualized assessment of refugee applications intended to remove considerations regarding national origin and political ideology that had guided prior U.S. policy, instead requiring persons seeking political asylum to show that they had been victims of political oppression or had "well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion."[23] The vagueness of the term "well-founded fear of persecution," and specifically what Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) could construe as constituting "persecution," however, furnished federal screeners with the flexibility needed to continue prioritizing the admittance of refugees from communist-controlled regions. In the final decades of the twentieth century, over 90

---

doing so with continued discretion for who would be granted admittance reserved for the federal executive branch. Carl J. Bon Tempo, *Americans at the Gate: The United States and Refugees During the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 11-86.

[22] Gil Loescher and John A. Scanlan, *Calculated Kindness: Refugees and America's Half-Open Door, 1945-Present* (New York: The Free Press, 1986), xvii.

[23] Public Law 96-212 ("Refugee Act of 1980"), 8 USC § 1521 (1980).

percent of refugee admissions continued to originate from communist or leftist nations. Migrants fleeing U.S.-supported regimes in El Salvador and Guatemala, however, found little safe harbor in the United States. From 1983 to 1990, while the overall approval rate of asylum applications for refugees stood at 24 percent, U.S. immigration officials only approved 2.6 percent of Salvadoran and 1.8 percent of Guatemalan claims. Beyond not granting asylum, INS on average deported one thousand Salvadorans and Guatemalans every month.[24]

Despite escalating civil wars and the arrival of increasing numbers of refugees at the U.S. southern border, most Americans remained uninformed of events in Central America through the late 1970s. The vicious murders of clergy and American missionaries in El Salvador in 1980, however, moved citizens to question their country's expanded military involvement in Central America. In March of 1980, Archbishop of San Salvador Óscar Romero, an outspoken prelate who railed against poverty, assassinations, and corrupt government in his country, was brutally assassinated while delivering a Sunday Mass. Because of their activist nature, Latin American clergy like Romero who spoke out on behalf of impoverished congregants and their country's prevailing political order were often associated by the state with anti-government rebels and were prone to facing the brutal might of paramilitary forces.[25] American public attention returned to the region with the murder of four missionaries stationed in El Salvador in December of 1980. An increasing number of U.S. religious communities and politicians laid these murders squarely at the feet of the country's rightwing military dictatorship. The discovery of the bullet-ridden, raped bodies of two Maryknoll sisters, one Ursuline sister, and a lay missionary led to rising pubic demands that the United States cut off aid to El Salvador. Historian Amanda Izzo notes

[24] García, *Seeking Refugee,* 90.
[25] Matt Eisenbrandt, *Assassination of a Saint: The Plot to Murder Óscar Romero and the Quest to Bring His Killers to Justice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), 1-37.

that the murders of Romero and the churchwomen "provided a symbolic touchstone" that linked secular liberal-leftist protest movements for peace in Central American with rising 'peace and justice wings' within Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish religious communities.[26] As reports arrived in the United States detailing kidnappings, roving death squads, and violent raids on rural villages, faith-based organizations and a broader American public more visibly examined their country's role in propping up regimes promulgating human rights violations.

Along the U.S.-Mexico border, the confluence of increasing public attention to U.S. involvement in Latin American revolutions, an uneven application of asylum requests, and the rising detention of all-but-in-name refugees prompted religious communities to more strongly consider their role in assisting Central Americans. In the summer of 1980, residents of Tucson, Arizona, grew shocked to learn of the deaths of thirteen Salvadorans, en route to safe harbor in the U.S., in the Sonoran Desert due to heat exhaustion and dehydration.[27] Area churches including Southside Presbyterian Church and their pastor John Fife, along with religious organizations such as the Tucson Ecumenical Council (TEC) and the Manzo Area Council, sought to coordinate a response that could address rising migrant deaths in the Sonoran Desert and help in securing the release of the INS-detained refugees. The religious organizations joined together to form the TEC Task Force on Central America (TECTF), mobilizing area churches to offer legal support, raise bail bonds, and house refugees awaiting deportation hearings. In helping Central Americans apply for asylum, however, the TECTF realized that INS officials summarily dismissed Salvadoran and Guatemalan applications. In May of 1981, TECTF and Jim

---

[26] Amanda Izzo, *Liberal Christianity and Women's Global Activism: The YWCA of the USA and the Maryknoll Sisters* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2018), 191.

[27] INS apprehensions of undocumented Latin American migrants had been a part of life along the U.S.-Mexican border for decades. Many of the churches that would eventually provide sanctuary to Central American refugees had already been engaged in ministries to support undocumented Mexicans for at least a decade. Pirie, "The Origins of a Political Trial," 396; Cadava, *Standing on Common Ground,* 172-200.

Corbett, a Tucson Quaker activist and retired farm rancher with a background in political philosophy, began exploring more direct methods outside of the bounds of the law to ensure Central American would arrive remain safely in the U.S.[28]

Tucson faith leaders' frustration with INS officials' unequal application of asylum law prompted an exploration of more radical methods to aid Central Americans. By early 1982, the TECTF began publicly condemning the federal government, accusing immigration officers of disregarding the 1980 Refugee Act's mandate for an impartial review of claimants' establishment of a "well-founded fear of persecution" in their home country. The city's religious community contended that the Reagan administration had actively misclassified Central American refugees as economic migrants instead of political refugees to conceal the U.S. government's support of rightwing military dictatorships in El Salvador and Guatemala and its role in producing the political circumstances that had led to the migration of thousands of Central Americans. Increasingly frustrated with the ineffective protections offered by U.S. refugee law, Southside Presbyterian contemplated housing undocumented Central Americans within the confines of their church building. Understanding that harboring unauthorized refugees would require breaking federal law, the church community turned to the Biblical practice of sanctuary to justify the opening of congregational doors to those fleeing persecution, regardless of their asylum status.[29] On March 24, 1982, the anniversary of Archbishop Romero's assassination,

---

[28] Cunningham, *God and Caesar at the Rio Grande*, 12-34.

[29] Blau, *The Ground is Holy*, 124-157; Richard H. Feen, "Church Sanctuary: Historical Roots and Contemporary Practice," *In Defense of the Alien* 7 (1984): 132-139. The word 'sanctuary' derives from the Latin term *sanctuarium*, which translates roughly to 'a container for holy things or holy people.' Scriptural justification for sanctuary drew from Numbers 35:11, which reads "The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to the Israelites, and say to them: When you cross the Jordan into the land of Canaan, then you shall select cities to be the cities of refuge for you, so that a slayer who kills a person without intent may flee there. Then cities shall be for you a refuge from the avenger, so that the slayer may not die until there is a trial before the congregation." The right of individuals to seek sanctuary in a church, specifically for those fleeing a punitive application of law, was enshrined in Christian law under the Code of Theodosius in 399, and again by papal decree under Pope Leo I in 460. Churches again served as places of

Southside Presbyterian announced that the church would openly defy federal immigration law and provide sanctuary for Central American refugees. That same day, five churches in Berkeley, California joined the Tucson church in declaring their support for undocumented refugees.[30] Movement participants envisioned sanctuary as a public action, a set of activities to draw attention to and alert the U.S. public of American complicity in Central American revolutions. Faith leaders hoped sanctuary would serve not as a private act but instead as a public platform, a prophetic voice from which to speak. They utilized press conferences and a protracted media campaign to both protect themselves from retribution from the federal government and to amplify the voices of refugees.[31] Speaking in front of banners announcing, "This is a Sanctuary for the oppressed of Central America" and "Immigration: Do not profane the sanctuary of God," Tucson's religious community accused the federal government of breaking not only international and federal human rights law, but of violating the moral law of God.[32]

The sanctuary movement's primary justification for harboring Central American refugees drew from its members' faith traditions and sacred texts. In declaring their congregations as sanctuaries, members of the movement called upon a higher law than the temporal standard set and followed by U.S. immigration enforcement. Pointing to Genesis and the expulsion of Adam

---

asylum centuries later in medieval England. For more on the early Christian practice of sanctuary, see also Karl Shoemaker, *Sanctuary and Crime in the Middle Ages, 400-1500* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011).

[30] An ecumenical assortment of religious communities first offered sanctuary in California's Bay Area. Within one week, churches in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., and Long Island declared themselves sanctuaries. See Van Gosse, "'The North American Front': Central American Solidarity in the Reagan Era," in *Reshaping the US Left: Popular Struggles in the 1980s,* ed. Mike Davis and Michael Sprinker (New York: Verso, 1988), 27-28; Robert Tomsho, *The American Sanctuary Movement* (Austin: Texas Monthly, 1987), 30.

[31] Penny Lernoux, *Cry of the People: The Struggle for Human Rights in Latin America – The Catholic Church in Conflict with U.S. Policy* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991).

[32] While preoccupied with the legal ramifications of housing undocumented refugees, members of the early sanctuary movement in fact contended that they were not engaged in illegal activity but were instead calling upon the federal government to live up to its obligations under federal and international refugee and human rights law. Fife referred to the first declaration of sanctuary as "civil initiative" as opposed to "civil disobedience," describing it as "the legal right and the moral responsibility of society to protect the victims of human rights violations when government is the violator." John Fife, "Civil Initiative," in *Trails of Hope and Terror: Testimonies on Immigration,* ed. Miguel A. de la Torre (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), 172.

and Mary from the Garden of Eden, participants argued that their faiths were *born* in the travail of escape. Across the Old Testament, clergy and laity argued, God had been revealed as the One who liberated his people from the bondage of dictatorship and oppression. For Jewish and Christian members alike, God served as the force that acted in history on the side of refugees to change their plight from slavery to freedom. Sanctuary participants invoked the stories of Exodus and Leviticus, which portray the Israelites flight from Egypt and their search for hospitality, in demanding that American churches act in the liberatory spirit of their faith, or risk remaining in bondage to the strictures of an immoral refugee policy. For movement participants, biblical practice and law thus served as alternative to the federal government's standard for who was deserving of refugee status in the United States.

Beyond rationales supported by Scripture, sanctuary participants also pointed to examples across American history where communities had stepped forward to offer safe harbor to individuals fleeing persecution or reproach from state power. The actions of the abolitionist movement during the nineteenth century through the Underground Railroad served as historical and political legitimation for movement members. Historians Naomi Paik and Eric Foner have demonstrated that abolitionists not only defied federal laws such as the Fugitive Slave Acts of 1793 and 1850 by supporting slaves as they escaped to freedom, but states and courts also challenged the federal government, enacting state laws that barred their officials from as Park suggests "assisting in recapturing escaped slaves and using writs of habeas corpus to prevent the return of recaptured slaves."[33] In more recent memory, sanctuary members also recalled the

[33] Cited in A. Naomi Paik, "Abolitionist futures and the US sanctuary movement," *Race & Class* 59, no. 2 (2017): 6. See Eric Foner, "What the Fugitive Slave Act teaches us about how states can resist oppressive federal power," *The Nation*, February 8, 2017, https://www.thenation.com/article/what-thefugitive-slave-act-teaches/ (accessed February 15, 2017). For an extended conversation on the concept of 'sanctuary' within the abolitionist movement, see Nicole A. Waligora-Davis, *Sanctuary: African Americans and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

actions of antiwar protesters during conflicts in Southeast Asia. Just decades earlier, draft resisters and conscientious objectors to the Vietnam War had found shelter in churches and campuses in places like Madison, Wisconsin and Berkeley, California.[34] Members of the sanctuary movement thus sought to place their new undertaking within a longer U.S. historical tradition of progressive protest against state power.

Within weeks of the first sanctuary declarations, the TECTF began organizing a transnational system of churches that could facilitate migration across North America and provide geographically-dispersed sanctuary spaces for Central American refugees. Stretching from the northern border of Guatemala to Tucson and eventually into Canada, movement workers envisioned their network as a twentieth century "underground railroad" for exiles. U.S. leaders like Jim Corbett travelled to the Guatemalan border region to survey the growing refugee situation, eventually leading caravans of exiles from camps in Chiapas through to Arizona. Sanctuary workers also connected with Mexican Catholic clergy and laity like Dagoberto Quiñones and María del Socorro Pardo in Sonora, who with funding support from the TECTF established migrant centers along the northern border of Mexico. While American sanctuary workers offered financial support and established networks between churches that stretched across Central America, Mexican religious workers proved crucial in expediting the travel and ensuring the well-being of refugees across the border region.[35]

---

[34] In September of 1969, Ken Vogel took sanctuary in Madison's First Congregational Church, fleeing federal authorities for refusing induction into the Armed Services. He lived in the church for twelve days before leaving and eventually turning himself over to federal agents. See "Young Draft Resister Takes Sanctuary In Church Here," *Capital Times* (Madison, WI), September 17, 1969; "Vogel Arrested and Awaits Trial," *Wisconsin State Journal,* October 4, 1969. In the fall of 1971, ten churches in the San Francisco Bay Area declared themselves sanctuaries for sailors awaiting deployment to Vietnam. In support of the conscientious objectors, the Berkeley City Council declared the entire city a sanctuary for war resistors. By the end of the war, nearly thirty Bay Area churches had either declared themselves sanctuaries or voiced their support. See Eileen M. Purcell, *The Public Sanctuary Movement: An Historical Basis of Hope* (San Francisco: Sanctuary Oral History Project, 2007), 5-9.

[35] Cunningham, *God and Caesar,* 16, 34; Smith, *Resisting Reagan,* 67-70.

Organizing an interregional movement, specifically one capable of transporting refugees from border states to areas around the U.S., required broader resources and coordination than individual congregations or citywide coalitions could muster. Tucson leadership turned to the Midwestern Chicago Religious Task Force on Central American (CRTFCA) in the spring of 1982 for assistance in establishing the infrastructure for such a network. The interdenominational CRTFCA had been founded by clergy and activists in late 1980 after the slaying of American missionaries in El Salvador. Before the start of the sanctuary movement, the coalition had worked to turn public attention toward U.S. interventionist policies in Central America. The CRTFCA served a number of organizational roles in building sanctuary across the United States, including coordinating correspondence between local parishes, regional coalitions, and national religious bodies; publishing a monthly periodical called *Basta!*; and, distributing sanctuary 'how-to' manuals for faith communities undertaking the discernment process to joining the movement. Structurally, the coalition was also responsible for managing aid for refugees and organizing their travel arrangements from border states to congregations across the country.[36]

The CRTFCA relied heavily on its volunteers and a small cadre of paid staff to manage this network and remain connected with border congregations. Sister Darlene Nicgorski, a Milwaukee native and Catholic nun, served as perhaps the most crucial intermediary for this work. Nicgorski was a member of the School Sisters of St. Francis, an order founded in Wisconsin in the late nineteenth century by German refugees. The Milwaukee-based School Sisters had enthusiastically embraced the dictates of the Second Vatican Council to more fully engage in secular work, abandoning their traditional habits and sending most of their nuns to work as teachers, lawyers, social workers, and even activists. After graduating from Wisconsin's

[36] Jennifer Lynn Murray, "The Chicago Religious Task Force on Central America: Moral Defiance in the Face of U.S. Policy, 1980-1992," (Master's thesis, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, 2012), 19-42.

Alverno College and completing her novitiate, Nicgorski taught in parochial schools in Milwaukee and Mississippi. She accepted a calling to mission in rural Los Amates, Guatemala, in 1980, where she quickly learned Spanish, taught local women about preventing malnutrition, and founded a preschool. Rising violence in the region, however, prompted Nicgorski to leave Guatemala just seven months into her mission. The vicious murder of the priest supervising her parish along with news that she had been placed on numerous death lists forced Nicgorski to flee to Honduras, along with fourteen young women. Nicgorski and her charges eventually made their way to a refugee camp in Chiapas, Mexico, then home to thousands of Guatemalan refugees. She later recounted that the violence she witnessed while in Central America forced her to "read the Scriptures differently" and reconsider her mission as a Catholic sister, finding instead of comfort in the Bible a challenge to live life "the way of the cross."[37] Reflecting on that pivotal moment her life, Nicgorski explained,

> I had a sense that everything I set out to do was aborted. I started to set up a preschool and that was cut short by the killing of the pastor. I started to work with refugees and that, too, was cut short. I felt a real commitment to what was going on. I couldn't just leave it and go back to teaching school. I thought, what does God want now?[38]

In October of 1982, Nicgorski returned to the United States in October of 1982, where she found herself in search of a purpose that would honor her experiences in Central America. Like a growing number of members of religious orders in the early 1980s, Nicgorski threw herself into Latin American solidarity work. She joined the CRTFCA and quickly became the principal intermediary between sanctuary congregations along the border region and religious communities across the country by assisting with the prescreening and orientation process that facilitated the travel of refugees from Arizona, California, and Texas to other parts of the U.S.[39]

---

[37] Darlene Nicgorski, interview by author, Claremont, CA, July 10-11, 2016.
[38] Nicgorski quoted in Lieblich, *Sisters,* 225.
[39] Nicgorski interview.

With national coordinating budding through the CRTFCA, religious communities across the country entered into discernment processes to determine their level of involvement in supporting the movement. Parishes in the Northeast and Pacific Northwest, many of whom had no daily interaction with Latin American immigrants or Latino residents, voted to join the growing solidarity network during the spring and summer of 1982. In the Midwest, Chicago's Wellington Avenue United Church of Christ became the first asylum site in the region in July of 1982.[40] While sanctuary as a movement remained somewhat disjointed in the early 1980s – no national body or organization spoke on behalf of all faith communities engaging in this work, and political tactics varied significantly in severity and scope – the spark struck at Southside Presbyterian in March of 1982 had lit a fire of progressive religiosity in support of Central Americans across U.S. churches and synagogues.[41]

"The refugees bring us God in their own way": The Declaration of Sanctuary in Milwaukee

Even prior to the declaration of sanctuary in Tucson, Milwaukee's religious community had developed a history of missionary work and outreach to communities in Central America. Catholic orders with branches in Milwaukee had established missions in the region throughout the mid twentieth century, while many Wisconsin institutions, both secular and religious, joined in "twinned" counterpart status with cities and organizations as a result of a direct aid programs

[40] Golden and McConnell, *Sanctuary: The New Underground Railroad*, 48-56.
[41] Coutin and Cunningham have both pointed to tensions in strategy that developed between congregations along the border and those across the rest of the U.S. Activists in Tucson emphasized administering humanitarian aid to *all* Central American refugee crossing into the United States. Religious such as Fife and Corbett and their congregations felt an obligation and Biblical calling to provided legal, financial, and material aid support for any refugee arriving at their doorstep. Congregations remote from the border, however, felt that a movement focused only on humanitarianism would do little to impact the causes of refugee migration. Exemplified in the work of the CRTFCA, this perspective emphasized political education and action around U.S. foreign policy towards Central America. It was an approach that was overtly political in working to stop deportations and American aggression in Central America, focusing on direct action against the government in conjunction with care for refugees. Cunningham, *God and Caesar at the Rio Grande*, 38-43; Coutin, *The Culture of Protest,* 174-192.

begun in the 1970s. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, a number of Catholic orders with missionaries based across Nicaragua advocated for U.S. medical and educational aid to counteract a perception in the country of the U.S. as an imperialistic power solely focused on the expansion of capitalistic endeavors. A coalition of groups concerned with Central American political and social issues worked with the Archdiocese to coordinate aid, as well as providing programing for illiteracy, land use, and food needs. The organization responsible for organizing asylum efforts for Central American refugees, the Milwaukee Sanctuary Coordinating Committee, arose as a spin-off coalition from these initial humanitarian efforts two years later.[42]

Milwaukee's Catholic press tracked growing violence in Central America in the early 1980s. They covered with rapt attention and alarm the murders of Archbishop Óscar Romero and U.S. missionaries across front-page feature stories and criticized the region's increasingly repressive rightwing regimes in pointed editorials. In an April 1980 editorial, the *Catholic Herald Citizen* referred to Romero as a Christ-like martyr who had "battled the established order because he found it corrupt and stifling." The newspaper admiringly noted that for Romero it had been "essential that the Gospel message serve as a leaven in the world" to raise up the concerns of his most dispossessed parishioners.[43] Following the murder of the American missionary women, the newspaper's editorial board called for a cessation of U.S. aid to El Salvador and demanded that the American government take "whatever measures are needed to protect human rights," and noted with concern that "the church in El Salvador suffers because it sides with the underprivileged."[44] DurIn the winter of 1980 and 1981 Milwaukee's Catholic press continued to

---

[42] Anne Bingham, "Church Sanctuary: An Old Tradition Aids Central American Refugees," *St. Anthony Messenger*, July 1983, box 4, folder 11, Chicago Religious Task Force on Central America Records, 1982-1992, WHS; "Nicaragua gives U.S. chance to display 'brighter side,'" *Catholic Herald Citizen*, April 12, 1980.
[43] Quoted in "Like Christ, slain prelate fought injustice," *Catholic Herald Citizen*, 4 April 1980.
[44] "'Bloody' replaces 'banana,'" *Catholic Herald Citizen*, 27 December 1980.

profile mounting violence across the region, often committing a considerable number of pages to criticizing the role of U.S. military aid in exacerbating tensions.[45]

Following the murders of Romero and the American missionaries, Milwaukee's religious community relied on Christian missionaries, aid workers, and recently-arrived Central Americans for information about developing tension in the region, as well as for maintaining connections for continuing humanitarian relief. In late 1980 and 1981, Milwaukee Maryknoll missionaries such as Father Ronald Michels, whose home parish was in St. Mary's Catholic Church in Fond du Lac, reported back to the Milwaukee community on escalating violence across El Salvador. Daisy Cubias, an employment counselor at Milwaukee's United Migrant Opportunity Services (UMOS) who had left El Salvador in 1970, established a Milwaukee branch of the U.S. Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador in 1980. The newly-formed organization was supported by Milwaukee Catholic priests such as Father Eugene Pocernich, who reiterated the call from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops for a complete cutoff of U.S. aid to El Salvador.[46] Solidarity organizations also sponsored talks from Central Americans who spoke out against U.S. military intervention and corrupt governments. In October of 1981, the Coalition to Aid Nicaraguan Democracy, renamed the Central American Solidarity Coalition (CASC) invited Rosa Maria Rivera, a union leader in the National Association of Salvadoran Educators and founder of the Salvadoran organization *Madres de los Desaparecidos* (Mothers of the Disappeared), to address Milwaukee's growing solidarity

---

[45] "Policy in El Salvador truly lethal," *Catholic Herald Citizen*, January 31, 1981; "'Military macho' strategy won't work," *Catholic Herald Citizen*, March 21, 1981; "El Salvador's government 'corrupt,' visitor charges," *Catholic Herald Citizen*, October 29, 1981; "Church suffering in Guatemala," *Catholic Herald Citizen*, December 3, 1981.

[46] Cubias' decision to create the organization grew from personal trauma within her family. She had learned of her brother's death at the hands of paramilitary forces in her home country through a newspaper clipping in 1980. Just a few months following her brother's murder, Cubias was informed through registered mail that her sister had also been killed under mysterious circumstances. "Nicaragua gives U.S. chance to display 'brighter side,'" *Catholic Herald Citizen*, 12 April 1980: "Violence in El Salvador cuts across class lines," *Catholic Herald Citizen*, 2 August 1980; "Salvador strife hits home here," *Milwaukee Journal*, December 5, 1980.

movement. Rivera spoke about the government and press's inability to help her find her son, who had been "disappeared" by Salvadoran right-wing militants. According to Rivera, only through the churches was she "able to use the microphones and tell the people what happened."[47]

The personal stories of violence and repression in Central America proved crucial in assisting Milwaukee's solidarity coalitions in rallying against continued U.S. financial support of Central American regimes. In January of 1981, for example, denominational representatives held a press conference to criticize the federal government's decision to send $5.4 million in aid to the Salvadoran government, believing that the money would ultimately be used against the country's majority-poor population. Jose U. González, the director of the Milwaukee Archdiocese's Office of Hispanic Ministry, denounced the "slaughter of thousands of innocent victims by U.S. weapons," while Rabbi Francis Barry Silberg of the Congregation Emanu-El B'ne Jeshurun spoke against sending any aid to a "government that is repressive to its own people and that holds human rights in such low regard."[48] In spring of 1981, the Coalition to Aid El Salvador and the Coalition to Aid Nicaraguan Democracy organized protests outside the Federal Building to mark the first anniversary of the assassination of Archbishop Romero. Catholic priests and nuns joined hundreds of demonstrators in protesting, waving signs that read "Yanqui Come Home" and "US Guns Kills US Nuns!" while chanting "No Draft, No War, U.S. Out of Salvador!" Representing the School Sisters of St. Francis at a March 1981 rally, Sister Barbara Kraemer identified a growing gap in the region between the "haves and the have-nots," and voiced her order's support for Salvadorans "rising up in order to gain their rights." Kraemer, recently returned from spending two years in Honduras and six months in Nicaragua, believed that the

[47] "El Salvador's government 'corrupt,' visitor charges," *Catholic Herald Citizen*, October 29, 1981.
[48] "Clerics assail decision to El Salvador," *Milwaukee Journal*, January 17, 1981.

U.S. government was searching for communism and finding it where it didn't exist.[49] In May of 1981, the Milwaukee Catholic Archdiocese's Priest Senate passed a resolution condemning U.S. military aid and intervention in El Salvador and joined the U.S. Catholic Conference in asking that American support be directed solely towards humanitarian relief and reconstruction aid. The Milwaukee priests' strong statement stood in stark contrast to the position of the Vatican, who publicly supported in 1981 the U.S. government's position in El Salvador.[50]

Within a few months of the establishment of the first sanctuary site in Arizona, activists in Milwaukee moved to become only the third city in the nation to offer asylum to Central American refugees.[51] In the fall of 1982, Ruth Chojnacki, a Catholic lay worker and former candidate at a Maryknoll novitiate, formed the Milwaukee Sanctuary Coordinating Committee (MSCC) with forty-five members representing faith-based and social justice organizations. Representatives from several church groups met at St. Patrick Catholic Church on the Milwaukee's near south side in the fall and agreed to ask their congregations to consider establishing sanctuaries. Chojnacki contacted representatives from the CRTFCA in Chicago for assistance in developing the structure of Milwaukee's program and recruiting Central American refugees to come to Wisconsin. The group hoped to model their efforts on the work being completed at the Wellington Avenue United Church of Christ in Chicago, which by October housed seven refugees. Wellington's minister, David Chevrier, and Renny Golden, a CRFTCA

---

[49] "Involvement in El Salvador protested here," *Milwaukee Journal*, March 25, 1981.
[50] "End military aid to El Salvador, senate tells U.S." *Catholic Herald Citizen*, June 6, 1981.
[51] Wisconsin congregations had first experimented with sanctuary for Central American refugees in late winter of 1981. Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Manitowoc, a city north of Milwaukee, became the state's first congregation to defy federal immigration policy in November of 1981. Salvadoran Noel Orantes Romero and his younger brother and five sisters had fled to the U.S. without documentation in September of 1980 and been adopted by Robert and Janice Jump, parishioners at Sacred Heart. The children of teachers and political activists, the Orantes children applied for political asylum, but were denied their claim in the fall of 1981. Facing deportation, Sacred Heart offered Orantes and his family political asylum within the church building. Citing the move as a "last resort," Father William Zimmer expressed fears that expatriation would lead to the murder of the Orantes family in El Salvador. "Manitowoc priest offers Salvadoran youth sanctuary," *Capital Times* (Madison, WI), November 14, 1981.

lay leader, travelled to Milwaukee in October of 1982 to advise the new organization. Along with Milwaukee, members of the CRTFCA corresponded with congregations in Madison and Minneapolis to establish new sites in the region.[52] After consulting with the CRTFCA, the MSCC developed a comprehensive discernment process for Milwaukee churches that interested in becoming sanctuary sites. After a failed first attempt at offering asylum to a Guatemalan refugee in the early fall of 1982, Chojnacki and the committee adopted a system by which a Milwaukee congregation would first educate itself on Central American issues and then deliberate the moral and legal consequences of joining the movement. A parish providing asylum would admit refugees to live in the church building for one to two weeks, during which time the church grounds would be "guarded" by the parish community. When refugees felt prepared to leave the church, parish members would help them find housing, as well as financial support.[53]

Spurred on by the activism of laity like Chojnacki and the MSCC, Archbishop Rembert Weakland and the Milwaukee Archdiocese became the first Catholic Archdiocese in the nation endorse church-based sanctuary for Central American refugees on November 12, 1982. The institutional support from the Church hierarchy lent the movement immediate credibility, as well as media attention and scrutiny. With the movement's overtones of civil disobedience and political activism, the archbishop understood that the issue "could easily divide the people of the archdiocese," and stipulated that a parish could only become a sanctuary with the agreement of its parish council. In his public comments, Weakland spoke forcefully against an inequitable federal refugee policy where asylum seekers from countries like Poland were readily accepted into the U.S. while Salvadorans and Guatemalans faced a more rigorous, and ultimately unjust,

---

[52] "Churches to aid Central Americans," *Milwaukee Journal*, October 6, 1982; "Weakland to let Catholic churches harbor refugees," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, November 12, 1982.
[53] "Two parishes offer sanctuary to refugees," *Catholic Herald*, November 18, 1982.

acceptance policy. The movement, according to the archbishop, would thus work to highlight the "selective nature" by which federal officials interpreted the country's immigration laws. Weakland was aware that by endorsing sanctuary, he was also potentially condoning the violation of federal law by his priests and laity but considered the moment an immediate "matter of life and death." Anticipating the possible backlash he might face from Catholics worried about the political nature of the Church's involvement, Weakland stated that "if we say that human life truly counts and we firmly believe in fair process, then this kind of decision has to be made."[54]

Following the archbishop's endorsement, the MSCC looked within their network for congregations that might be interested in becoming the first asylum sites in Milwaukee. Two Catholic parishes, St. Benedict the Moor and Cristo Rey Parish in nearby Racine, offered to step forward immediately. The Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist, the episcopal see of the Milwaukee Catholic Archdiocese and Weakland's home seat, signed as a supporting congregation that would offer monetary and spiritual support. In addition, over thirty churches, religious orders, and church groups, including the School Sisters of St. Francis, the Archdiocese's Sisters' Council, and the Casa Maria Hospitality House the three pioneer parishes, identifying themselves as "supporting" or "secondary sanctuary sites."[55]

In declaring itself a sanctuary, Cristo Rey became the first predominantly Latino congregation in the U.S. to join the movement. Capuchin pastors Kurt and Glenn Gessner had

---

[54] Weakland noted that reactions from Catholics in Milwaukee had been "overwhelmingly positive," with 80 percent of the archbishop's mail favoring his decision. Quoted in "Milwaukee bishop explains sanctuary offer to refugees," *Wisconsin State Journal,* December 4, 1982. See also Archbishop Rembert Weakland interview by author, Milwaukee, February 15, 2016.

[55] The School Sisters of St. Francis sent along a donation for bail bonds in the event that it might be needed for movement members. School Sisters of St. Francis to Milwaukee Sanctuary Coordinating Committee, November 30, 1982, Box 3, Folder 20, Darlene Nicgorski Papers on the Sanctuary Movement, Special Collections, Honnold/Mudd Library, Claremont University Consortium (hereafter referred to as CUCHM); "Sisters council endorses effort to help refugees," *Catholic Herald*, November 18, 1982; "Weakland to let Catholic churches harbor refugees," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, November 12, 1982.

founded Cristo Rey parish in the late 1970s after studying demographic shifts across American Catholicism that showed a move towards a Spanish-speaking dominant Church within the next three decades. The brothers traced their kinship to their Latino parishioners to their Bulgarian background, noting that growing up in an immigrant household helped them understand living in a bilingual and bicultural world. Prior to founding Cristo Rey, Glenn had served as a missionary in Nicaragua for ten years, where he fostered a sense of tradition based in "el pueblo, el comer, el aprecio del tiempo, el respeto al prójimo" ("the people, eating, an appreciation of time, respect for your neighbors"). Having to learn a new language and customs, Glenn felt a sense of being "born again" in Nicaragua. Both brothers traced their support for the movement to these early missionary efforts in Central America.[56]

As a primarily Latino parish, many in the Cristo Rey congregation were once refugees and migrants themselves, and several of those who had voted for sanctuary were presently undocumented immigrants. Rachel Parra, Chicana secretary of Cristo Rey's parish council, stated that undocumented parishioners who had voted in favor of sanctuary, despite holding a tenuous legal standing in the U.S. themselves, were the most "courageous" members of the movement. According to Parra, the parish considered their entry into the sanctuary movement as "small and insignificant when compared to the courageous action taken by the refugees who are willing to risk deportation and death that their people might live."[57] The Capuchin brothers noted that their congregants felt that the U.S. government was wrong in "backing military dictatorships in Central American countries where there is persecution, war, and killing." Parishioners voted to support the movement to break out of a feeling of hopelessness and "protest the injustice our

[56] Gessner quoted in "Los Gessner: sacerdotes y también hermanos," *El Mensajero Católico*, December 8, 1985. See also Father Glenn Gessner interview by author, Appleton, Wisconsin, November 21, 2016; "Commitment to Latins brings priests together," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, November 27, 1982.
[57] Golden and McConnell, *Sanctuary,* 12.

military arms are producing."[58] Expressing their obligation to defend the human rights of Central American refugees, Father Glenn told the *Milwaukee Sentinel*, "We say we are not revolutionaries. We are just defending our Spanish brethren. We have the right in the name of God to protect these people."[59]

For St. Benedict the Moor, entrance into the sanctuary movement fell within a long history of outreach to the most marginalized in the Milwaukee community. The church's pastor, Father Mark Ramion, commented that the parish had "been faithful to the charism of being available to people who have nowhere to go" since the its founding. Initially formed as a mission chapel by Capuchin Franciscans to the city's small African-American Catholic community in 1908, St. Benedict the Moor had gained a reputation as being what Ramion called a "wildlife refuge" for the city's most "unwanted." Inspired by leadership from clergy and laity involved in the Catholic Worker movement in the 1970s, parish leadership had initiated a series of outreach efforts to an increasingly impoverished congregation, including a meal program and ministry to inmates at the County Jail.[60]

Movement participants understood that their involvement in aiding undocumented refugees put them at odds with federal law. Any person party to harboring undocumented aliens could be prosecuted, fined $2,000, and given a five-year prison sentence, while a charge of conspiracy to harbor undocumented aliens would also bring a $10,000 fine and a five-year prison term. Pivotal to the discernment process, then, was the nature of civil disobedience in light of moral and Scriptural teachings. Wisconsin state senator William Braun, recently named as head

---

[58] "Two parishes offer sanctuary to refugees," *Catholic Herald*, November 18, 1982.
[59] "Weakland to let Catholic churches harbor refugees," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* November 12, 1982.
[60] Quoted in "75 years for city parish," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 1, 1983. See also Steven M. Avella, *In the Richness of the Earth: A History of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, 1843-1958* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2002), 353-359, 626-636.

of the Catholic Archdiocese's social ministry program, noted that church officials had discussed the political dimensions of the movement and were prepared for possible legal action by federal officials. Father James Bradley, rector of St. John's Cathedral, stated in an interview with the *Milwaukee Journal* that Catholics needed to "acknowledge civil disobedience as a possible moral stance that doesn't take the law of the land as the final ingredient of moral conscience but Scripture and Gospel values."[61] In an editorial for the *Milwaukee Sentinel*, Reverend William K. Parish of the Summerfield United Methodist Church voiced his congregation's support for sanctuary regardless of the political ramifications. Parish argued that the openly public nature of the movement was one of its strengths, as this was precisely the way "Christian civil disobedience *should* be carried out." According to Parish, participation in an illegal act to counteract what was deemed to be an immoral policy "should be accompanied by an announcement of its intent and of the willingness of those who participate in it to share in the consequences that participation."[62]

Almost immediately following the Catholic archdiocese's endorsement of sanctuary, the city's federal immigration office offered a critical yet measured response. James Rink, assistant officer in charge of Milwaukee's office of INS, stated that the federal government did not recognize any legal understanding of medieval forms of sanctuary, and that clerical support or not, basing the program in churches wouldn't keep the government from acting against participating "illegal aliens" or their collaborators. Ronald Swan, head officer of the Milwaukee INS office, went even further by stating that a parish's intension to offer sanctuary to refugees from El Salvador and Guatemala made them part of "smuggling ring." Swan, critical of Milwaukee churches' motives in declaring asylum and harboring refugees, dismissed the

[61] "Church ready for challenge," *Milwaukee Journal*, November 30, 1982.
[62] "Catholic sanctuary program gets Methodist's approval," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* November 27, 1982.

altruistic elements of the movement by stating, "Normally a smuggler exploits people for financial gain. The church is exploiting people for political purposes." Despite these statements, Milwaukee's INS office refused to conduct raids in the city's churches, fearing the public spectacle such an action would create.[63]

Admonishments from immigration enforcement, however, did not prevent Milwaukee movement participants from opening their church doors in late 1982. On December 2, 1982, St. Benedict the Moor and Cristo Rey declared themselves sanctuaries for Central American refugees. Along with the Very Revered James W. Leech, dean of All Saints Episcopal Cathedral, and Sal Sorrin of the Milwaukee Jewish Council, Weakland presided over an interfaith prayer vigil and candlelight procession at St. John's Cathedral. The ceremony was sponsored by the MSCC and the religious outreach arm of the Central American Solidarity Committee. Organizers chose the date to mark the second anniversary of the murder of the U.S. missionaries in El Salvador. The interfaith ceremony included readings incorporated from the Hebrew Bible and excerpts from Yom Kippur prayers.[64] Speaking to over seven hundred Milwaukeeans representing forty-one congregations, religious communities, and groups endorsing the program, Weakland explained that his decision to support sanctuary drew from precedent in both canonical law and his own order's history. While serving as head abbot of the Benedictine order from 1967 to 1977, Weakland had learned of monasteries that had offered asylum to Jews fleeing the Holocaust. During his time tenure leading the Benedictines, Weakland had also visited nearly a dozen order monasteries in Central America, growing close with episcopal leadership and

---

[63] "Refugee program assailed," *Milwaukee Journal*, November 29, 1982.

[64] Milwaukee's Jewish community was largely represented by members of the New Jewish Agenda, a multi-issue organization for progressive causes that emphasized participatory democracy and campaigned for protected civil rights for all citizens. "Sanctuary: Interfaith concern," *Milwaukee Jewish Chronicle*, December 17, 1982. For more on the New Jewish Agenda, see Ezra Berkley Nepron, *Justice, Justice Shall You Pursue: A History of New Jewish Agenda* (Philadelphia: Thread Makes Blanket Press, 2012).

clergy in the region.[65] Following the archbishop's remarks, parish members carrying candles formed an arc around the altar, creating a 'living sanctuary' that emphasized the conviction that sanctuary was not a place, but a collective will of the faith community.

The vigil included the introduction of refugee families that would be living in sanctuary in Milwaukee through the process of *encuentro*, or spiritual encounter. One by one, asylum seekers approached the altar and delivered their *testimonios* (testimonials) to the assembled congregants, describing in wrenching detail violence thousands of Central Americans faced in their home country. Drawing from liberation theology, the process of *testimonio* serves as for a form of Christian discourse that is overtly political and seeks to engage with the temporal as much as the spiritual. By offering space for and prioritizing the voice of laity in American churches, specifically undocumented Latin American refugees, the practice sought to prioritize the perspectives of marginalized and dispossessed members of a faith community.[66] *Testimonios* offered the potential of constructing empathy and identification between individuals, forcing listeners, as English scholar Marta Caminero-Santangelo has proposed, to "feel a sense of obligation and responsibility for what is [is] happening elsewhere."[67] This form of discourse also had the power of molding counter-narratives to the stories most Americans believed about Central America, ones often defined by the Reagan administration's emphasis on anti-

---

[65] Weakland interview.

[66] Richard Shaull, "A Theology of Sanctuary from a Calvinist Perspective," in *Sanctuary: A Resource Guide for Understanding and Participating in the Central American Refugee Struggle,* ed. Gary MacEoin (New York: Harper Collins, 1985), 65. Central American *testimonios* were a standard practice in sanctuary churches in the 1980s. By standing in front of a congregation and relaying one's individual story, this form of witness provided a systemic analysis of power and politics which sought to show that unlike Christian doctrinal understandings that emphasized that one day the meek would inherit the earth, dispossessed communities would have to mobilize and take it for themselves. As importantly, it offered reflective analysis of economic and political systems that sought to show that every American – political leaders *and* citizens included – were implicated in the structures that allowed for violence to proliferate in Central America, and thus that everyone had a responsibility to address the situation.

[67] Marta Caminero-Santangelo, "Documenting the Undocumented: Life Narratives of Unauthorized Immigrants" *Biography* 35, no. 3 (Summer 2012), 450.

communism, national security, and U.S. foreign policy interests abroad. Sociologist Sharon Erickson Nepstad notes how the visceral stories relayed by Central American refugees through *testimonios* provided a feeling of moral clarity, removing any sense of ambiguity between right and wrong for many movement members. Retellings of rape, mutilation, and violent murder raised indignation and presented a clear choice in a struggle of good versus evil, creating a mission of redemption against injustice. When connected with the assassinations of Archbishop Romero and the four American missionaries, these refugee testimonials presented portraits of individuals who trusted in God and were willing to give up their lives for the safety of their families and the betterment of their communities. The transformative stories of these individuals also worked to engage and educate Milwaukee parishioners unfamiliar with the region, creating a collective identity among the city's faithful.[68]

Accompanied by their three young children, Salvadoran refugees Ramon and Mercedes Sánchez rose to the altar to detail the devastating experience that had caused them to flee their homes. According to Ramon, members of the military had stormed into the family's home in the dead of night, herded up the family of eight into the home's main room, and raped his thirteen-, sixteen-, and eighteen-year old daughters in front of the entire family. The soldiers eventually returned to the family's home to take the sixteen- and eighteen-year old daughters. After several days, the police notified Ramon and Mercedes that both young girls had been killed and mutilated by the military. Fearing for the lives of the rest of their children, the Sánchez family made the decision to smuggle away into Mexico, and eventually paid a coyote to bring them across to the U.S. The Sánchezes were followed by Rene Hurtado, a Salvadoran refugee in sanctuary at Cristo Rey. For seven years, Hurtado had been active in the Salvadoran armed

[68] Nepstad, *Convictions of the Soul,* 104-115.

forces, but defected when he realized that soldiers were being ordered to kill the very people that they were supposedly fighting for. According to Hurtado, the military had become "a monster, a machine of oppression" focused on defending the Salvadoran elite. Speaking directly to American intervention in his country, Hurtado told the crowd that if the U.S. would stop sending "military power" to El Salvador "all this would have stopped. Your country is prolonging the killing of people all over Central America." His mission, now that he had joined the sanctuary movement, would be "to tell the American people what is happening in my country. This time I'm fighting without arms."[69]

After the conclusion of the vigil, representatives from endorsing and supporting congregations embarked on a candlelight procession to the Milwaukee Federal Building. Church leaders delivered and read a letter addressed to U.S. Attorney General William French Smith, explaining why Milwaukee congregations had decided to offer sanctuary to Central Americans. Their statement accused INS and immigration officials of discriminating against refugees from war-torn Central American countries in the application of refugee law, specifically pointing towards a violation of the 1967 United Nations Protocol and the Refugee Act of 1980 that outlined the status of refugees and prohibited the deportation of persons who feared persecution in their homelands.[70]

Milwaukee Catholic parishes continued to vote in favor of joining the sanctuary movement as refugees shared their stories with area congregants. The Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist, which had joined on as a supporting congregation in December, became a full-fledged site after vigorous discussion within the parish council. Archbishop Weakland and St.

---

[69] Hurtado quoted in "Salvadoran refugee fed up with 'military monster,'" *Catholic Herald*, November 25, 1982. See also "Refugees escape horror, but live with memories," *Milwaukee Journal*, January 8, 1983.
[70] "U.S. says churches are smuggling," *Capital Times* (Madison, WI), November 29, 1982.

John's Cathedral welcomed a Salvadoran couple, Felix and Norma (who used no last names for fear of reprisal) and their children to a house adjoining the cathedral rectory. St. Patrick's Church, a predominately Latino congregation on the city's near south side, joined as well and rented a cottage near the church for an incoming family to reside. Both parishes planned their announcement to coincide with the three-year anniversary of the slaying of Archbishop Romero on March 24. Reflecting on the experience of opening the city's episcopal see to refugees, Weakland remarked that it was "soon obvious they were people who had witnessed unspeakable suffering, torture, and violence." Despite the misery they had faced, "the faith of the family was at such a deep level," Weakland stated, that it was people like Felix and Norma who "evangelized me about their country."[71]

While the Latino parishes of St. Patrick's and Cristo Rey served as early entrants and evangelizers for sanctuary, Milwaukee's larger Latino community demonstrated mixed and times vacillating responsiveness to the growing movement. With a population of over 26,000 people, Milwaukee's Latino population in 1980 stood as the third largest in the ten-state region of the Midwest, outnumbered only by Chicago and Detroit.[72] Throughout the decade, no single association or institution spoke with a singular voice for the diversity of voices among Milwaukee's Latinos. Organizations representing the interest of Latinos in faith communities, however, did step forward in support for sanctuary early in the movement's development. Sacerdotes Religiosos Laicos (SARELA), the body representing Milwaukee Catholic Latinos and the advisory body to the archdiocese's Office for Hispanic Ministry, endorsed the program in early 1983 and offered support to those churches that had declared themselves asylum sites.

---

[71] Weakland quoted in Paul Wilkes, *The Education of an Archbishop: Travels with Rembert Weakland* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 99. See also "Sanctuary ranks to grow," *Milwaukee Journal*, February 18, 1983.
[72] "By all counts, Hispanic population rising," *Milwaukee Journal*, May 16, 1985.

SARELA's statement detailed a "special need to be in solidarity with the churches that have offered sanctuary to our Latin brothers and sisters from Central America." The organization's clergy believed Latinos in the Milwaukee area would have a "special "feel" for the plight of the refugees," as many in the community had in recent years personally experienced the struggle of entering a new country and obtaining legal status. Responding to their endorsement, Weakland expressed satisfaction with what he deemed a "certain cooperation" among Latino Catholics that transcended any cultural rivalry between specific nationalities.[73]

The Milwaukee Catholic Archdiocese's entry into the sanctuary movement coincided with a renewed outreach in serving Catholic communities of color, especially among the fast-growing Latino population. In early 1981, Weakland had established the Milwaukee Archdiocese Hispanic Pastoral Commission, a committee tasked with responding to Latinos' spiritual and material needs within the Church. The charge of the new commission publicly aligned Weakland with the city's Catholics of color in their efforts for equal representation in ecclesiastical leadership. It also indicated an evolving support from the city's archdiocese for clergy that hoped to adopt more public stances on exigent contemporary political issues. In establishing the Hispanic Pastoral Commission and a corresponding commission to address issues affecting the small community of city's African American Catholics, Weakland recognized that the treatment of Catholics of color had been a "sore point" for the Church for decades. While individual clergy and organizations like the Spanish Center had focused on the city's Latinos throughout the mid twentieth century, Weakland believed the general archdiocesan structure had either ignored this growing population or insisted that they forsake their culture and language to worship in an "Anglo" tradition. Weakland vowed that pastoral policies developed via the newly formed

[73] "Sanctuary gest endorsement from SARELA," *Catholic Herald*, January 27, 1983.

commissions, in concert with lay leaders, would take the interests of the city's Catholic minorities seriously, promising that Latino concerns, both within the church and in surrounding community life, would become paramount in his administration. While some congregants demurred at the thought of involving the Church in affairs extending beyond parishes walls, the archbishop believed advocating "for the rights of people" and struggling "to make institutions around us more human" would ultimately benefit all Catholics. He explained to the *Milwaukee Journal* just two years before the start of sanctuary in the city, "They tell priests to stay out of politics. But you have to get involved to get your hands dirty."[74]

For some members of Milwaukee's Catholic community, Latino and white included, the sanctuary movement offered the opportunity to create what clergy referred to as "*lazos*," or bonds, with Christian social action across the Americas. Writing on behalf of the Milwaukee Archdiocese's Office for Latin America, Donald J. Mueller implored all Catholics to take a global vision in their ministry. The liberation of all faithful depended on a shared solidarity across national barriers and required all Catholics to extend an embrace that crossed borders. Mueller noted the memory of Archbishop Romero, who served as a profound example to inspire thoughtful reflection for all Milwaukee Catholics to live a purposeful, Christian life.[75] Writers in the recently-established *El Mensajero Católico*, the Spanish-language newspaper for the Milwaukee Catholic Archdiocese, continued the search for "lazos" in commemorations of the four missionaries killed in El Salvador. The article's author noted that the murder of the missionaries disrupted three "truths" that Milwaukee Latinos may have held true: that religion and politics should never mix; that the US. were always "los buenos" (the good ones) in global conflicts; and, that the most important thing was to always work "dentro del sistema" (within the

[74] "Archdiocese moves to give Latinos, minorities better deal," *Milwaukee Journal*, January 14, 1981.
[75] "Lazos entre las Americas," *El Mensajero Católico*, April 10, 1988.

system) to better life for one's family. These women, however, had never presented themselves as controversial figures and yet had paid the ultimate price as Christian missionaries. Referring to the slain missionaries as "cuatro rosas de sangre" (four blood roses) that had blossomed "en nuestra tierra hispana" (in our Hispanic land) just as the Virgin of Guadalupe had done four hundred years earlier, the article called upon Milwaukee Latinos to continue their fight for justice and love both within the city and in peace work for Central America.[76]

The city's Latino religious community also attended educational initiatives organized by groups like the MSCC to learn more about the ongoing war and violence in Central America. Guatemalan human rights activist Rigoberta Menchú visited Cristo Rey parish in July of 1985 after having recently presented at the United Nation's Refugee Commission. Josie Saenz, born in Mexico and a parishioner at Cristo Rey, said she empathized with Menchú's struggle and hoped that more Americans could come to understand the stark differences between life in Central America and the U.S. Roberto Fuentes, another parish member, called on Latinos specifically to speak out on behalf of Guatemalans, saying "Nosotros como pueblo hispano debemos unirnos para ayudarles contra esa guerra, este sufrimiento" (we should, as a Hispanic people, unite to help them against this war of suffering). Those interested in helping were pointed to La Casa Guatemala of Milwaukee, a center established in 1984 to promote information on culture, social life, and history, as well as educate the public on violence in Guatemala.[77]

Despite early involvement in the movement, sanctuary did not necessarily receive the full-throated support of the city's Latino communities. Father Glenn Gessner, pastor at Cristo Rey, expressed some disappointment with the local Latino community's attitude toward refugees

---

[76] "Estas mártires fueron mujeres de hoy," *El Mensajero Cátolico*, January 13, 1985.
[77] Quoted in "Menchú: Sigue la violencia en Guatemala," *El Mensajero Católico*, July 14, 1985. See also "La Casa Guatemala busca miembros y voluntaries," *El Mensajero Católico*, August 11, 1985.

and their reservations about the program. According to Gessner, Latinos had failed to invite Central Americans as "a part of the family," leaving refugees living in a certain state of "community limbo." Gessner recognized that many Latinos themselves were struggling economically to survive, and some feared legal prosecution if they became identified with the program. Milwaukee Latinos' sometimes ambivalent stance towards the movement suggested larger apprehensions regarding confrontation with federal immigration enforcement in the city. By the early 1980s, INS officials estimated that Wisconsin's undocumented population ranged from twelve to fifteen thousand, the majority of whom lived in the Milwaukee metropolitan area.[78]

Living in cities like Milwaukee without legal documentation often meant creating a life in the shadows and living in constant fear: fear of deportation and the economic hardship that might befall families if wage-earners lost their employment; fear of employers who abused their knowledge of workers' immigration status and used it as a tool to dismiss surplus laborers and disrupt worker organization; and fear of a general American public that often considered undocumented immigrants at a minimum unwelcome guests and at worst "illegals" that posed a risk to local and national security. These anxieties permeated all aspects of life and work for those who lived in the city's legal margins. A Mexican father who had migrated with his family to the Milwaukee without documentation explained, "You are lonely and afraid because you are not in your own country. You feel angry, but there is nothing you can do. There is nowhere to run."[79] Undocumented immigrants' apprehensions were often exasperated by increased federal immigration crackdowns at worksites in southeast Wisconsin in the early 1980s, including a set of raids during National Hispanic Heritage Week in September of 1983 that drew the ire of

[78] "Illegal aliens see land of promise," *Milwaukee Journal,* December 22, 1981.
[79] "Bad times plague illegal aliens," *Milwaukee Journal,* December 30, 1981.

community leaders for their particularly cruel nature and timing.[80] Father Bill Pauly, administrative representative at St. Patrick's Catholic Church, understood those fears of escalated attention from immigration enforcement as guiding his parish's measured support for sanctuary. Mexican-descent and Puerto Rican parishioners at St. Patrick's, according to Pauly, eyed nervously anything which "smacked of civil disobedience" and might place parishioners in the scopes of INS agents.[81]

Despite the reticence of some Milwaukee Latinos to join sanctuary work, in 1983 members of the MSCC, Latinos and white alike, continued to engage the city's religious community in conversations surrounding the plight of Central American refugees. Within a few months of the founding of the first sanctuary congregations in the city, MSCC had spoken to over fifty area churches to solicit money, food, clothing, and general support. Donna Palmer, a lay member leading many of the network's outreach efforts, noted that she no longer felt "powerless anymore" to affect change in the hearts and minds of Milwaukee's religious community, as meetings with new congregations demonstrated "that each individual's response does matter."[82] By the end of the summer of 1983, the national movement had grown to include seventy-five congregations in twenty-four cities across the United States, with nearly thirty thousand church members involved in sanctuary work. The CRTFCA reported that the pace parish endorsements continued to gain traction with every passing month, with an average of one congregation per week signing on to join the movement.[83]

---

[80] The March 1983 raids prompted Mexican-American leaders to contact Governor Tony Earl to demand that he intervene against roundups that were "worse than a slap in the face" of the community. Quoted in "Timing of alien raids draws fire," *Milwaukee Journal,* September 14, 1983. See also "Seizure of illegal aliens spreads fear among the already frightened," *Milwaukee Journal,* June 14, 1981; "Bad times plague illegal aliens," *Milwaukee Journal,* December 30, 1981; "Roundup of aliens to continue," *Milwaukee Journal,* September 15, 1983.
[81] "Slain pastor's family received sympathy," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, December 7, 1984.
[82] "West Bend church hears of refugees' plight," *Milwaukee Journal*, June 28, 1983.
[83] "More Churches Join in Offering Sanctuary for Latin Refugees," *New York Times*, September 21, 1983.

A "leap of faith" and the "courage to care": Interfaith Support and the Growth of Milwaukee's Sanctuary Movement

In its first year of organizing, the Milwaukee Sanctuary Coordinating Committee (MSCC) was led by the city's lay and clerical Catholics, a denominational characteristic that distinguished it from every other Protestant-led sanctuary coalition in the country. Over the next two years, support for sanctuary expanded beyond the Milwaukee Catholic Archdiocese to include a wider collection of Christian and Jewish congregations. Protestant leaders from the American Lutheran Church, the Methodist Church, the United Church of Christ, the Lutheran Church of America, and the Episcopal Diocese of Milwaukee all either contributed monetarily to the MSCC or passed resolutions in support of the movement, while citywide organizations such as the Ecumenical Refugee Council and the Greater Milwaukee Conference on Religion and Urban Affairs worked to publicize the efforts of the network. In joining the movement, these organizations articulated a form of solidarity to support Central American refugees and shift the country's immigration priorities.

Like their Catholic co-religionists, Milwaukee's Jewish communities turned to a combination of Scripture and historical precedent in voting to support the sanctuary movement. Rabbinical scholar Gunther Plaut argues that throughout the twentieth century, American Jews developed a "distinct ethical approach to the question of dealing with strangers in society" that drew upon both Biblical tradition and a shared communal migratory experience. A diasporic history of exile and refugee life, according to Plaut, prompted Jewish activists involved in movements like sanctuary to believe that the ultimate imperative lay with "the injunction to treat strangers like the home-born" and open congregational spaces to arriving refugees so that they

might "find a new and sustainable experience."[84] Beyond a Scriptural justification that drew from the Old Testament books of Leviticus and Exodus, the all-too-recent memory of American refusal to aid Jewish refugees also motivated Milwaukee Jews. Members of the Milwaukee Jewish Council saw in the plight of Central American refugees startling parallels and memories of the United States' shirked responsibility of helping millions of European Jews fleeing the Holocaust just decades earlier. In late winter of 1982, members of the New Jewish Agenda pushed within the Reform Temple Emanu-El B'ne Jeshurun in nearby Brown Deer to become the first synagogue to join sanctuary in the United States by providing financial and legal resources for a family of Salvadoran refugees.[85] In less than a year, over twenty synagogues were active in the sanctuary movement across the U.S., thanks in large part to the advocacy work of organizations like the New Jewish Agenda.[86]

For Jewish leaders like Rabbi Ronald Shapiro of Congregation Shalom and Rabbi Francis Barry Silberg of Temple Emanu-El B'ne Jeshurun, the Reagan administration's policies toward Central American refugees represented a moral failing that belied larger spiritual and religious deficiencies. Silberg noted that the sanctuary movement put to the test President Reagan's frequent pronouncements that politics and morals had become "intertwined" in the 1980s. According to Silberg, the moral imperative of Christianity and Judaism lay "in weighing the merit of political options against moral options," and always choosing the "moral options."

---

[84] W. Gunther Plaut, "Jewish Ethics and International Migrations," *International Migration Review* 30, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 18, 25. Nationally, Reform and Reconstructionist synagogues were the most active Jewish denominations involved in sanctuary work.

[85] Sarah Goldstein and Glenn Stein, ed. Rabbi David Sapperstein, "Providing Sanctuary: The Jewish Role, A Practical Guide for Congregations and Individuals," (Washington, D.C.: Union of American Hebrew Congregations for the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism, 1987), 3, in possession of author.

[86] The New Jewish Agenda distributed educational packets on Central America to over two thousand rabbis and synagogues and published articles and letters to the editor in national and local newspapers. "Sanctuary: Interfaith concern," *Milwaukee Jewish Chronicle*, December 17, 1982; "Rabbi wants synagogue to be sanctuary," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, December 21, 1982.

Noting a duplicity in the president's public sentiments, Silberg asked, "How can we possibly make a case against the absorption of human beings who are clearly fleeing for their lives? It seems absolutely preposterous to me." Looking within Jewish history, the rabbi found direct parallels between the actions of Reagan's administration and those of the American government in the years leading up to World War II. Less than five decades removed from the atrocities of the Holocaust, Silberg warned Milwaukeeans of the stakes at hand:

> This is the leitmotif. This is the DNA of Jewish social experience. The Spirit of St. Louis was the ship which left Bremerhaven back in 1939 and was sent back to Nazi Germany with about 438 Jews on it to perish because it could get asylum in absolutely no port in the world. Going to New York and Philadelphia, and to Baltimore, and Havana and Buenos Aires, and being turned away. 'You don't have the proper papers.' 'We don't know whether or not you're political refugees,' these people said, as these Jews were fleeing the Fuhrer.

According to Silberg, Milwaukee Jews should be called to offer sanctuary not only because of the horrific conditions Central Americans were fleeing from, but also because of their community's own history of "being turned away at neighboring borders and neutral cities." The rabbi believed that the "high ground" of Judaism lay "not in its capacity to discern," but instead in its "courage to care – to care deeply and to feel intensely the pain of others."[87]

The Board of Trustees at Emanu-El B'Ne Jeshurun voted on December 27, 1982, and again on February 21, to join the movement to aid Central American refugees, but did so by avoiding the issue of civil disobedience.[88] Calling their approach "sanctuary stewardship" and a "variation on a theme," Emanu-El voted to help Salvadoran and Guatemalan families file for asylum through legal channels, specifically through the formal application for refugee status. This format allowed for congregants to give food, clothing, and employment and legal aid to the

---

[87] Sandy Tolan, "The Strangers Among Us: Milwaukee churches are at the forefront of the controversial Sanctuary Movement," *Milwaukee Magazine*, December 1984.
[88] Congregation Emanu-El B'ne Jeshurun, "Resolution of the Board of Trustees, February 21, 1983," in Goldstein, Stein, and Sapperstein, "Providing Sanctuary: The Jewish Role," 64-65.

movement, but closed the option of harboring undocumented refugees within the walls of the synagogue. The trustees also voted to allow the congregation's Social Action Committee to pursue ways of altering U.S. policy towards refugees through political action, including: public forums for discussion of current U.S. policy toward Central American refugees; "grassroots lobbying efforts" to effect changes in policy; and, the "direct lobbying of responsible government officials." The decision to work through legal channels came after consultation with Richard Chernov, a member of Emanu-El and an immigration lawyer, who argued that the quasi-legal status afforded to registered asylum seekers also made them eligible for employment authorization and access to medical and educational facilities without fear of deportation. The synagogue's decision was met with some ambivalence by the MSCC, who were convinced that legal channels were ineffective and ultimately stacked against Central American applicants seeking asylum. While Ruth Chojnacki was "delighted" that Emanu-El saw "the necessity of exercising political pressure to get the government to change its policy," she expressed frustration that the format the congregation had endorsed was precisely the "package" that had caused seventy-six acceptances and 22,342 "applications pending" as of November of 1982."[89]

Jewish leaders across Milwaukee debated the extent to which their congregations might involve themselves with the movement. Rabbi Jay R. Brickman of Congregation Sinai formally endorsed the principle of sanctuary in a letter addressed to Ruth Chojnacki but advocated for the city's Jewish community to take a "supportive role" rather than one of leadership. Brickman feared that too forward of a position in opposition to American foreign policy from his community would lead to an anti-Semitic backlash. Robert Herbert Pantich of Congregation

[89] "Emanu-El would house refugees," *Milwaukee Jewish Chronicle*, March 4, 1983; "Congregation pursues the legal route with Salvadoran refugees," *Milwaukee Journal*, February 4, 1985; "Sanctuary needn't be illegal," *Milwaukee Journal*, February 4, 1985. For more on Silberg and Temple Emanu-El, see John Gurda, *One People, Many Faiths: A History of Jewish Milwaukee* (Milwaukee: Jewish Milwaukee Museum, 2009), 218-220.

Beth Israel expressed concern over the legality of the movement, instead encouraging that area Jews become involved by developing legal means to counter deportations.[90] Congregational leaders also encouraged their parishioners to take political action during the 1980s. Silberg joined seven other religious and human rights leaders in June of 1984 in testifying to the House of Representatives Subcommittee on Rules of the House, advocating for a three-year extension of the time Salvadoran nationals seeking asylum would be allowed to stay in the U.S. without deportation. Representing both Congregation Emanu-El and the Reform Union of American Rabbis, Silberg spoke in support of House bill 4447, also known as the Extended Voluntary Departure Act, legislation that aimed to extend the stay of some five hundred thousand Salvadorans and save them from "certain harassment and possible death."[91]

Milwaukee's African-American faith communities also debated the extent to which they would become involved in the movement in the early stages of its development. Less than one year after the first Milwaukee Catholic churches had declared themselves sanctuaries, Cross Lutheran Church on the city's predominately black north side joined on September 15, 1983 in what Reverend Joseph Ellwanger called a "leap of faith" for his congregation. Cross' experience with hospitality towards refugees began before 1983. The church had first initiated ministry programs to refugees in 1972, when the congregation sponsored the arrival of Laotian families to Milwaukee. Members of the Cross Church Council had attended the December 2, 1982 convocation that initiated sanctuary in the city, signing Cross on first as an endorsing congregation. Community member Carolyn Jackson had been active with the MSCC through earlier efforts to provide medical aid to Nicaragua and invited Ellwanger and others at Cross to

---

[90] "Religious leaders wrestle with moral dilemma," *Milwaukee Jewish Chronicle*, January 7, 1983; "Support, therapy for refugees," *Milwaukee Jewish Chronicle*, January 7, 1983.
[91] "Allow Salvadoran nationals to stay in US: Silberg," *Milwaukee Jewish Chronicle*, June 29, 1984; "Helping refugees legally," *Milwaukee Jewish Chronicle*, January 25, 1985.

become more active in the committee. For many, including the reverend, this initial work with the MCCC was their first interaction with Central America; before getting involved, Ellwanger and his wife, Joyce, had to consult a map to learn where exactly Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala even were![92] Ellwanger, a white pastor who had served at Cross since the early 1970s, offered that African American churches had been slow to enter the sanctuary movement across the country because the "black community [had] its own problems." He believed, however, that black Christians would soon enough follow Cross' lead after they'd had time to reflect on their own "long history of relating to the exiles and outcasts."[93]

The predominately African-American congregation became the first Protestant church in the city and the first black church in the country to declare itself an asylum. The decision to join the movement came after numerous discussions within the Church Council. While some parishioners worried about the risk of illegally housing refugees and others feared they might be inviting revolutionary or communist subversives into their congregation, most members saw the move toward sanctuary as one deeply connected to the United States' own abolitionist history. Ellis Coleman, an African American member of the Board of Elders, recalled that many Cross parishioners had "foreparents who made it to freedom back in the days of slavery, precisely because some people of faith took the risk of going against their government" in offering protection to runaway slaves making their way to liberty on the Underground Railroad.[94]

If the abolitionist movement served as a crucial referent for many black parishioners at Cross, another more recent events connected to the civil rights movement of the 1960s provide a

---

[92] Reverend Joseph Ellwanger and Joyce Ellwanger interview by author, Milwaukee, January 5, 2016. See also Carolyn Jackson interview by author, Nashotah, Wisconsin, February 4, 2016; Joseph Ellwanger, *Strength for the Struggle: Insights from the Civil Rights Movement and Urban Ministry* (Milwaukee: Maven Mark Books, 2014), 153-157.
[93] "More Churches Join in Offering Sanctuary for Latin Refugees," *New York Times,* September 21, 1983.
[94] Coleman quoted in Ellwanger, *Strength of the Struggle*, 161. See also "Church will aid refugees," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, September 14, 1983; "City church offers new place of refuge," *Milwaukee Journal*, September 16, 1983.

visceral association to the sanctuary's search for justice. In deciding to open their congregational doors to Central American refugees, Cross Lutheran parishioners chose September 15 to declare their intention to join the movement. The date coincided with a commemoration of the 1963 bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. Reverend Ellwanger, leading the night's service, had served as pastor to a Lutheran congregation in Birmingham just a few blocks away from the Sixteenth Street Baptist church in 1963. Thirty years later, three hundred Milwaukeeans joined in communion at Cross Lutheran to remember those lost in efforts to achieve equality for African Americans and to pray for a more just future for Central American refugees in their present movement. The opposite walls flanking the altar that night were adorned to honor the two struggles: on one side hung eight drawings showing the four Birmingham girls that had died during an act of white supremacist terrorism, and on the other wall were the images of the four American missionaries murdered in El Salvador at the hands of a repressive military government just two years earlier.[95]

As the service at the church began, a family from El Salvador and a young man named Jorge from Guatemala took their turn at the pulpit, sharing their stories of violence and repression, and then migration and exile, with the Cross Lutheran community. Following their *testimonios*, the service ended with congregants singing "We Shall Overcome" and listening to quotes from the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Pat Coleman, a Cross Lutheran committee member, was interviewed after the service. Born in Mississippi in 1930, Coleman had come to the Midwest in 1950, and told the reporter:

> I know all about oppression. In my case, if I were in trouble, and if I got to someone's house that was my same ethnic background – black people – then I knew I had some kind of shelter. I was deathly afraid until I left Mississippi in 1950 and came to Chicago and then Milwaukee. I remember my folks being afraid. So it wasn't an effort at all for me to be supportive of Cross becoming a sanctuary. After listening to Jorge, it was like I felt the

[95] Tolan, "The Strangers Among Us," *Milwaukee Magazine*, December 1984.

> spirit of the Lord there with us as we pledged to serve and help those people and try to make our government aware of how we felt. And I guess that I felt that night that it had to be said to everybody that Christianity reaches out all over the world. And at that time, it was just a feeling that I've never felt. And as we sang "We Shall Overcome," I was holding Jorge's hand and I just can't tell you how I felt. The sensitivity I felt for him, all the hurt that he had been through as I held his hand and we sang that song. And I just knew that it will happen. There will be a better day.

Carmen Falson, another committee member who helped Cross Lutheran through the discernment process, added, "Somebody helped us, and we have to feel as people, black or whatever color you are, that you have to put yourself on the line and help someone who's in need. And these people are in need."[96] Both Coleman and Falson drew lineages of oppression and protest between the history of African American struggle in the U.S. and the present fight to aid Central Americans in their search for safe harbor. Their inclination to find a way to "overcome" depended on an interethnic understanding of solidarity, one that extended a helping hand to those in need regardless of documentation status or race.

Over the next few years, Cross' sanctuary committee extended educational outreach to congregants, as most parishioners entered movement work with limited familiarity with Central America, its political revolutions, or the U.S.'s role in military interventions. The process of consciousness raising included public seminars and Bible classes infused with Scriptural callings for social and economic justice, as well as continual guidance from the Ellwangers on the question and merits of civil disobedience. Jorge Betancourt, one of the original refugees welcomed into Cross in 1983, served as a crucial educator for his new home parish and in the larger Milwaukee community. His lectures at churches and community centers emphasized the role of U.S. corporations such as the United Fruit Company in dominating the economic and political structures of Central American nations. Because of the church's involvement in

---

[96] Ibid.

sanctuary, Cross also incorporated new observances into their liturgical schedule, including the Sunday before March 24th (the day of Archbishop Óscar Romero's assassination), and the Sunday before December 2nd (the day of the murder of the four American missionaries in El Salvador). In addition, congregation members such as Carolyn Jackson traveled on mission trips to the region, bringing back their own testimonials to the Milwaukee community. According to Ellwanger, these mission trips were "food for the soul" that gave the congregation "perspective and strength to walk more closely with the poor."[97]

Educational sessions, missionary trips, and continued coalitional work facilitated a sense of interfaith solidarity within Milwaukee's sanctuary movement. Organizations like the MSCC emphasized the ecumenical nature of this work through interfaith religious services through the mid 1980s. These vigils incorporated Scriptural readings from different faith traditions in both English and Spanish and emphasized an explicit connection between the moral teachings of denominations and the obligation of Milwaukeeans to find more just solutions to the country's immigration and refugee policies. One such January 1984 service organized by Chojnacki and the MSCC at St. John's Cathedral was presided over by Archbishop Weakland and Sal Sorrin of the Milwaukee Jewish Council. During the opening prayer, Reverend Ellwanger took to the altar and called on the assembled congregants, "Sisters and Brothers arise." As sanctuary workers and refugee families alike rose from their seats, they responded,

> Arise and lift your hearts/arise and lift your eyes/arise and lift your voice. The living God/the living moving spirit of God/has called us together/in witness/in celebration/in struggle/to be the light. Reach out toward each other/Our God reaches out toward us/Let us worship God![98]

---

[97] Quoted in Ellwanger interview. See also Jackson interview; Ellwanger, *Strength of the Struggle,* 164-170; "Church to commemorate the harboring of a refugee," *Milwaukee Journal*, September 14, 1985.
[98] "Worship service order," St. John Cathedral, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, January 27, 1984, Box 6, Folder 21, Darlene Nicgorski Papers on the Sanctuary Movement, CUCHM.

Working in fellowship in this "struggle," Milwaukeeans of faith blurred the lines between denominational boundaries and political ideologies. The call for the "living moving spirit of God" expressed a recognition that in order to serve "witness" to the struggle of Central Americans, those engaged in sanctuary work would ultimately be required to commit faith to deed through physical action.

"Faith is not only of the mind, but also of the heart and hands and feet": Progressive Prelates, Social Justice Theologies, and Sanctuary as a Political Movement

The activist orientation expressed at interfaith sanctuary services in Milwaukee represented a progressive turn across a notable number of religious communities and organizations in the 1980s. During this decade liberal churches and clerical leaders adopted a particularly confrontational and at times militant position towards the U.S. government. In a period that historians have often tabbed as a revival of right and far right religiosity – most prominently in the Moral Majority that helped propel Republican politicians like Ronald Reagan to power – left-leaning religious organizations also focused their sights on a wide slate of domestic and international issues. Stateside, they promoted the importance of federal support for domestic programs and assailed reductions in social services and oversight over fair housing policies. These organizations understood, however, that a narrow focus on national issues belied larger structural concerns beyond the borders of the United States. They thus turned their sights towards critiquing America's role on the international stage, emphasizing a transnational form of religiosity focused on supporting human rights and protections for society's most disinherited. They lobbed their sharpest critiques against U.S. foreign policies propping up military dictatorships, joining a growing chorus of voices critical of American intervention in Latin America. Historian Van Gosse refers to the larger network of U.S. leftist and religious

organizations critical of these interventionist policies as the "Central American solidarity movement." During the 1980s, Americans came to accept responsibility for their country's role in creating the circumstances in Latin America responsible for the death of nearly a quarter million people and the exile of two million Central Americans.[99] Sanctuary was thus part of what sociologist Christian Smith has identified as a broader political battle over U.S.-Central American policy, one that mobilized activists and generated political conflict stateside for peace in Latin America. Organized primarily by people of faith and within churches and synagogues, these efforts were, like most social movements, not always unified or coordinated, but instead represented a wide mustering of individual and collective initiatives. Along with networks like Witness for Peace and Pledge of Resistance, sanctuary activated thousands of congregations and church groups across the nation for civil disobedience and political action.[100]

Sanctuary and other left-leaning religious movements drew inspiration from both homegrown and international shifts in Christian theology. The doctrinal underpinnings and movement ideology for the movement drew in large part from the burgeoning liberation theology of Latin America. Throughout the mid twentieth century, Catholic priests and bishops critical of the institutional Church's disconnection from Latin America's majority population – mostly poor and often politically disenfranchised – had called for a realignment of their faith's priorities. Emboldened by the progressive reforms of the Second Vatican Council and its call to connect with the secular modern world, bishops aggressively debated the extent to which Christians should involve themselves in politics and the rationale and justification for revolution in

---

[99] Gosse, "'The North American Front': Central American Solidarity in the Reagan Era," 14-31.
[100] Smith, *Resisting Reagan*, 59-70. See also Edward T. Brett, "The Attempts of Grassroots Religious Groups to Change U.S. Policy Towards Central America: Their Methods, Successes, and Failures," *Journal of Church and State* 36, no. 4 (Autumn 1994): 773-794. See also Molly Todd, ""We Were Part of the Revolutionary Movement There": Wisconsin Peace Progressives and Solidarity with El Salvador in the Reagan Era," *Journal of Civil and Human Rights* 3, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2017): 1-56.

impoverished nations at the 1968 meeting of the Latin American Episcopal Conference (CELAM) in Medellin, Colombia. The Medellin conference marked a radical departure for an institutional church that had, over the previous four centuries, defended the killing of indigenous populations and offered legitimation for hierarchical social systems across Latin America. Bishops indicted the Latin American church for propping up a system of "neocolonialism" that created exploitative systems "and a situation of injustice that can be called institutionalized violence" against the region's most impoverished. Calling for Catholic clergy to adopt a "preferential option for the poor," the conference served as a clarion call for Latin Americans of Christian faith to radically reorder the social structures and order of their countries.[101]

U.S. clergy and laity considered, processed, and absorbed the teachings of liberation theology as missionaries in the 1970s and early 1980s. Milwaukee's religious interacted with this evolving strain of religiosity through mission trips and by participating in clerical conferences held across Latin America, and returned home to 'missionize' their brethren in their home congregations. During his tenure as a missionary in Nicaragua from 1963 to 1972, Father Glenn Gessner, later pastor of Racine's Cristo Rey Catholic Church, attended several post-Medellin clerical sessions where he felt "born again" in an understanding of Catholicism where religious communities might serve as vehicles for emancipation for poor congregants. He described the theology as "freeing men and women from anything that can hinder their full development as human beings" including poverty, illiteracy, and repressive governments.[102] Archbishop Rembert Weakland, an avid consumer of theology, became interested in liberation theology at its launch and explained that he "read it all" when it came to publications emanating from Latin America in

[101] Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops, *The Church in the Present-Day Transformation of Latin America in the Light of the Council: Conclusions,* vol. 2 (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, Latin American Bureau, 1970).
[102] Gessner interview.

the 1970s. In his visits to the region as head abbot for the Benedictines, he found religious communities transformed by clergy who'd adopted the theology.[103] During her tenure as a missionary in Guatemala, Sister Darlene Nicgorski became inspired by the spirituality and tenacity of her congregants, what she called "a feeling of peace, aliveness, wholeness, holiness, goodness," and the devotion of laity and clergy alike in spreading a message of the Gospel centered on teaching "the people to work towards their own liberation."[104]

Liberation theology served as just one of many primary drivers for doctrinal support for sanctuary organizing. Within the U.S. Catholic Church, clerical leaders drew upon a centuries-long history of social teaching along with the recent transformations of Vatican Two to justify a new impulse for progressive causes.[105] Two particular Catholic organizations with episcopal representation stood out during the 1980s in their outward stances on a number of domestic and foreign issues: the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) concentrated on internal ecclesiastical concerns, while the United States Catholic Conference (USCC) looked towards initiatives in society at large.[106] Several outspoken progressive bishops served within both organizations, including Milwaukee's Weakland, Bishop John E. McCarthy of Houston, Archbishop Raymond G. Hunthausen of Seattle, Archbishop James A. Hickey of Washington, and Bishop Raymond Alphonse Lucker of New Ulm in western Minnesota. The bishops' causes were diverse and many and included critiques of American domestic and foreign policy as well as reforms within the structures of the Catholic Church. Progressive clerical leaders publicly questioned American domestic and international economic policies, with pointed critiques of late

---

[103] Weakland interview.
[104] Julia Lieblich, *Sisters: Lives of Devotion and Defiance* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992), 220.
[105] Charles E. Curran, *Catholic Social Teaching, 1891-Present: A Historical, Theological, and Ethnical Analysis* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2002). See also Weakland interview.
[106] The NCCB and USCC joined under the umbrella organization of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) in 2001.

twentieth-century capitalism; advocated for the use of civil disobedience against the proliferation of nuclear weapons; called for equal rights for homosexuals, both within the church and in American society; and, criticized runaway defense spending that sapped domestic initiatives to aid the poor. These bishops also proposed pastoral reforms they believed would bring the Church more in line with contemporary society, including the ordination of women, the reconsidering of clerical celibacy, a reform of catechesis, and questioning centralized administrative control within Catholic archdioceses. According to Weakland, by the early 1980s, American bishops felt freer to question the "moral stance" of the U.S. and came to believe the Catholic Church needed to become the "moral conscience of the country" or risk becoming irrelevant.[107]

The NCCB became a forceful opponent of the Reagan administration's Central American policy as U.S. military funding to the region grew. Through a series of official statements and Congressional testimony, members of the Conference spoke against increased military aid to repressive regimes in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala, and presented alternative policies that drew upon the Second Vatican Council's appeal for human rights as well as Pope Paul VI's 1967 encyclical on social justice, *Populorum progressio* (The Development of the Peoples), both of which called for renewed outreach to developing regions around the world. Weakland, one of the Conference's most prominent leaders, described American foreign policy in the region as an unbridled strategy of anti-Communist witch-hunts that placed U.S. economic interests above the human rights of the nation's citizens. Dismissing claims that the NCCB veered too closely to leftist politics (or that is was openly advocating for communist programs), Weakland called "for a new, realistic policy" that observed no attachment to ideology but instead sided with the ignored poor.[108] The bishops' attention to the region also drew from Pope John XXIII's 1961 call

[107] Wilkes, *The Education of an Archbishop,* 19.
[108] "U.S. Catholic Bishops Opposing Administration's Salvador Policy," *New York Times*, February 21, 1982.

for missionary initiative to Latin America, a directive that resulted in hundreds of U.S. clergy and laity serving in parishes across the continent under the direction of bishops and abbots that often traveled on missions to witness firsthand the area's problems. Weakland, who had served as head of the Benedictine Order prior to his ordination as Milwaukee's archbishop, came to understand Latin American from what he called an "experiential basis." His time as the leader of an international order, as he explained it, "took the church out of its inner circle to another part of the world," and gave him "knowledge and courage to take stands" he otherwise wouldn't have felt comfortable championing. Because of their time administering orders in Latin America, prelates also developed relationships with people they could trust in the region, empowering them to, in the words of Weakland, "speak forcefully and feel good about speaking out."[109]

While the NCCB challenged foreign policy at the federal level, the USCC looked to spur discussion across parishes by challenging all U.S. Catholics to "take stands…become involved…and inform your conscience" on political issues. Public statements like the 1984 USCC document "Political Responsibility: Choices for the 1980s" called on Catholics to speak out against the U.S.'s policy towards Central America, specifically the "imperative need for fundamental change" and the "futility, not to say immorality" of proposed military interventions in the region. In April of 1985, the USCC opposed as "immoral" and "illegal" any U.S. military aid to Nicaraguan contras or to "any party to the conflict in Nicaragua." Archbishop James A. Hickey of Washington, recently returned from a delegation of U.S. bishops touring Central

[109] Ibid. See also Weakland interview; James F. Garneau, "The First Inter-American Episcopal Conference, November 2-4, 1959: Canada and the USA Called to the Rescue of Latin America," *Catholic Historical Review* (October 2001): 662-687.

America, took this message to U.S. political leaders in testimony to the House subcommittee on Western Hemispheric Affairs in speaking in opposition to continued military aid to the region.[110]

The more public pronouncements from left-leaning bishops drew the indignation of conservative politicians and members of the Reagan administration in the 1980s. Frustrated with church leaders they believed to be stepping outside their episcopal purview, prominent conservatives like William E. Simon, former Secretary of the Treasury, and Michael Novak, resident scholar in religion and public policy at the conservative think-thank American Enterprise Institute in Washington, D.C., led the charge against prelatic leadership perceived to be too far leftist in their politics. Their criticisms at times openly turned to red-baiting, as officials within the Reagan administration insinuated that the Catholic Church's policy in Central America was working to serve communist interests, and detractors asked whether clerical leaders were flirting too closely with Marxist solutions to social and economic problems in the U.S. Despite being tabbed as radicals by the more conservative members of the Catholic Church and members of the Reagan administration, most of these bishops self-identified as moderates who hoped to push the Church to embrace a tradition of Catholic social teaching that opposed social orders that licensed, generated, and normalized military and economic oppression.[111]

Bishops advocating for public engagement with issues related to social and economic justice also invited the ire of more conservative sectors of the Church. Most Catholic bishops expressed discomfort with the outright political nature of the sanctuary movement, believing that priests should confine their sermonizing within the walls of their parishes. Several church leaders outwardly spoke against the work of bishops like Weakland, arguing that Catholics should aid

---

[110] "Bishops want American Catholics to take political stands and get involved in process," *Catholic Herald*, May 10, 1984; "Bishops reject any military assistance plan as "'immoral,'" *Catholic Herald*, April 25, 1985.
[111] "Allegations of Catholic-Marxist alliance rejected by archbishop," *Catholic Herald*, March 17, 1983; "America's Activist Bishops," *New York Times*, August 12, 1984.

refugees through legal channels and lobby when possible to change laws, not break them.[112] The unease of most episcopal leadership often mirrored the perspective of many Catholics uncomfortable with the changes brought by the Second Vatican Council. These conservative Catholics, according to religious studies scholar Mary Jo Weaver, had grown frustrated with a liberalization process they had expected would bring "renewal and reform" to the Church but had instead invited "revolution" and the degradation of what they held to be traditional Catholic teachings and practice. Concerned with defending a religious orthodoxy of the pre-Vatican Two years, these Catholics often conflated fast-moving changes within the confines of their parishes as connected to larger societal shifts, including legal protections for abortion, rising crime rates, and what they perceived as a general breakdown of respect for the rule of law.[113]

Milwaukee's sanctuary movement at times encountered resistance from within the city's Catholic community. In working to provide information to the metropolitan area's parishes, members of the MSCC sometimes faced skepticism or at times outright hostility about violating federal immigration law. Others questioned the archdiocese's support for undocumented refugees considering the city's prevailing concerns surrounding high unemployment and rising poverty. Quentin L. Quade, professor of political science and executive vice-president of Marquette University, spoke out strongly against the Archdiocese's support for the movement in editorials in the *Milwaukee Sentinel*. Calling sanctuary "criminal anarchism," Quade bemoaned the Archdiocese's support of measures that were "encouraging parishes to break the law" by offering "illegal sanctuary to illegal refugees." Unlike the movement's supporters, who he

---

[112] Cardinal Joseph Bernadin of Chicago, Archbishops John Roach of St. Paul-Minneapolis, and James Hickey of Washington criticized the sanctuary movement for advocating extra-legal activities. In April of 1983, Roach's opposition to sanctuary went as far as to annul an earlier vote by his archdiocese's commission of urban affairs to support sanctuary. Richard N. Ostling, ""Betray Not the Fugitive": Churches defy the law to give sanctuary to Salvadoran exiles," *Time,* April 25, 1983.

[113] Mary Jo Weaver, "Introduction: Who Are the Conservative Catholics?" in *Being Right: Conservative Catholics in America,* ed. Mary Jo Weaver and R. Scott Appleby (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1995), 3.

accused of employing literature that was "one-sided, romantic, and utopian" to justify their actions, Quade believed that mainstream Catholics in the city opposed to sanctuary relied upon political reasoning that was "self-effacing rather than self-righteous" and built upon democratically-constructed laws.[114]

Statements from progressive prelates and movements like sanctuary also drew the attention and denunciation of organizations and intellectuals affiliated with a growing and prominent religious right of the period. Promoters of free-market capitalism and ardent critiques of Marxism, these organizations were part of what political activist and essayist George Weigel has referred to as "neoconservative Catholicism."[115] While often reserving their disdain for perceived left-leaning episcopal leadership to academic tracts or editorials in newspapers, "neoconservative Catholics" also organized challenges to leftist clerics. One such effort, a Washington, D.C.-based organization called the Catholic Center that served as an arm of the Free Congress Research and Education Foundation founded by New Right veteran Paul Weyrich in 1974, began holding national workshops for lay Catholics in 1984. Supported by Joseph Coors, president and co-owner of Coors Brewery, a central funder of conservative causes, and an informal member of President Reagan's "kitchen cabinet," the Catholic Center held one such workshop in Milwaukee in May of 1984 at the Marc Plaza Hotel, mining conservative mailing lists for conservative Catholic participants. The workshop aimed to create "troublemakers" out of attendees who could then "be in the business of creating crises" for liberal church administrators. Participants were taught organizing tactics such as petition circulation, letter writing, and financial boycotts designed to confront "progressive bishops," portray them as "frustrated

---

[114] "Writer sees anarchism in sanctuary for illegal refugees," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, March 26, 1983.
[115] George Weigel, "The Neoconservative Difference: A Proposal for the Renewal of Church and Society," in *Being Right: Conservative Catholics in America,* 138-162.

politicians," and ultimately create networks to "force change" within dioceses. Weakland became the first prelate to criticize the Center's tactics after learning about their workshop in Milwaukee, condemning their "politicization" of the church through "dubious moral means." The archbishop was confident that the city's faithful would recognize the Center's strategies as "slander and injustice" and reject them for not "being in the Spirit" of Christianity.[116]

Despite rebukes from conservative segments of the religious community, Christian clergy representing several denominations revived a spirit of activism with roots in the civil rights movement that aimed to push religion from the pulpit into the streets. In the 1980s, pastors rallied against apartheid in South Africa, rising military spending, the proliferation of nuclear weapons, and a lack of food and shelter for the city's poor. Reverend William Parrish, pastor at Summerfield United Methodist Church, saw a resurgence for progressive activism in the rallies protesting the U.S.'s Central America policies that would often draw hundreds of Milwaukeeans. At one protest outside the Reuss Federal Plaza, Parrish found himself in what felt like a "big reunion," as clergy who had been active in the civil rights and anti-war movements of the 1960s came out once again against what they viewed as immoral federal policies. Reverend Joseph Ellwanger of Cross Lutheran felt a stronger sense of activism than that of the "civil rights days," identifying a "growing awareness and sensitivity to justice in churches." Ellwanger believed clergy had more successfully articulated a "theological understanding of the need for some public protest" in the decade, drawing more diverse coalitions to their causes. Father James Groppi, prominent veteran priest and leader in open housing protests in the city through the 1960s and 1970s, attributed the rise in activism directly to the foreign and domestic policies of

[116] Quoted in "Bishops targeted by 'New Right,': Milwaukee among locations of seminars on 'pressure,' revealed," *Catholic Herald*, August 2, 1984. See also Richard H. Feen, "The Sanctuary Movement: A Time for Reappraisal," *Religion and Democracy*, March 1985, box 5, folder 19, Chicago Religious Task Force on Central America Records, 1982-1992, WHS; Weakland interview.

the Reagan administration, which had brought together different grassroots communities in opposition to federal policies and the politicians crafting them.[117]

Within the archdiocese, Weakland encouraged clergy to speak out when they saw injustices in their local communities or across the world. According to the archbishop, to fall into line and avoid conflict, or only speak towards issues officially sanctioned by the Vatican, would not be in the spirit of reforms introduced during the Second Vatican Council. Responding to criticisms that he had become too outspoken and political in his time in leadership, Weakland stated that he welcomed a church hierarchy that struggled with the "moral issues in our political life" and tried to "reflect with all the faithful on them in concrete situations in the light of the Gospel and Christian teaching and tradition." Such open discussions would only serve to reawaken in all Christians, according to the archbishop, "a sense of the urgency in our day to regain moral values in our political decision-making." Weakland believed that, if it truly saw its mission as one of preaching the Gospel message, the Catholic Church could only create a "community of love and healing" by "working for a just and peaceful society." Faith understood in this way was "not only of the mind, but also of the heart and hands and feet."[118]

While Weakland took the concerns of the archdiocese's parishioners seriously, he seemed generally unfazed by conservative criticism of his support for more progressive causes, warning against efforts to impose orthodox views on clergy and laity. Weakland questioned the Vatican's efforts to impose stricter doctrinal authority on U.S. churches by disciplining leaders who dissented, going so far as to challenge the Curia in two columns published in the *Catholic Herald* entitled "The Price of Orthodoxy." Weakland warned in his public comments as well that disciplinary action taken against outspoken Catholic leaders in the U.S. would alienate everyday

---

[117] "Back to activism: Tactics may change, but clergy resurrect a way of life," *Milwaukee Journal*, April 27, 1985.
[118] "Church and politics – some afterthoughts," *Catholic Herald*, February 3, 1983.

Catholics and cause them to drift away from the Church. As if to provide a guiding light by which to carry out his ministry, above the archbishop's desk hung a quotation from Archbishop Óscar Romero that spoke to his sympathies for developing regions around the world: "The cry of liberation of these people is a clamor that ascends to God nothing nor no one can stop." By Weakland's understanding, bishops had not taken these stances for political reasons, but instead to "begin serious discussions from a moral viewpoint on the major issues of our times."[119]

Public statements from Milwaukee's episcopal leadership dovetailed with the continued efforts by solidarity organizations to educate the city's religious community. Led by the testimonials of refugees living in asylum in Milwaukee, the MSCC presented around the city and the surrounding area, speaking to congregations in Racine, Madison, Grafton, and West Bend.[120] The Central America Solidarity Coalition (CASC) also worked to promote sanctuary to two hundred area churches, unions, schools, community groups, and the media.[121] A network of religious and social justice organizations, the CASC moved to more actively denounce the Reagan administration's military aid to repressive forces in Central America and connect American foreign policy with the current refugee crisis. Speaking to the *Milwaukee Journal*, Ruth Chojnacki and Reverend Ellwanger stated that beyond their effort to aid asylum seekers, they would continue to fight back against the federal government's intrusive and ineffective "gunboat diplomacy" in Central America.[122] Disgust with the Reagan administration's Central American policies led several sanctuary movement members to publish a public letter in the

---

[119] Quoted in "America's Activist Bishops," *New York Times*, August 12, 1984. See also "Bishop bashing: Milwaukee's archbishop stands 'center ring' as conservatives join with liberals in tossing blows," *Catholic Herald*, December 13, 1984; "Leading Archbishop Challenges Vatican on Silencing Dissent," *New York Times*, September 24, 1986; "The Vatican and Dissent in America," *New York Times*, September 27, 1986; "Archbishop Warns Vatican May Alienate Many in U.S.," *New York Times*, October 9, 1986.
[120] "Appeal for refugee aid gets mixed response," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, March 22, 1983; "West Bend church hears of refugees' plight," *Milwaukee Journal*, June 29, 1983.
[121] Tolan, "The Strangers Among Us," *Milwaukee Magazine*, December 1984.
[122] "Coalition rips Reagan," *Milwaukee Journal*, July 21, 1983.

Milwaukee Journal in 1984 supporting those who refused to pay their federal income taxes in protest of U.S. foreign policy. The movement had transformed from simply a form of humanitarian aid to a more complex political network that directly challenged the Reagan administration's Central American and immigration policies.[123]

These organizations also organized solidarity trips to Central America that served both educational and spiritual ends, spurring anger towards American foreign policy among delegates and reinforcing feelings of agency among activists. National ecumenical networks such as the Salvadoran Humanitarian Aid, Relief, and Education Foundation (SHARE), founded in 1981 as a transnational solidarity association, helped organize some of the largest expeditions to Central America. Through the process of *acompañamiento*, or accompaniment, delegations of North American religious activists to Central America witnessed the violence of destruction of local communities and learned to "walk" with Salvadorans, Nicaraguans, and Guatemalans in their suffering. Newly politically mobilized, these activists would then return home to share their stories in an act of "witness" with their home congregations and wider city communities.[124]

Mission trips also became opportunities for Milwaukeeans to learn about and experience the growing movement of liberation theology in action. U.S. missionaries incorporated Latin American clergy's marked turn toward a pastoral preoccupation with the poor and underserved. Embracing a liberation framework involved adopting a three-step process of evaluation, repositioning, and action known as "see-judge-act" within the background of moral and practical engagement with situations of social inequality. This new liberatory understanding of faith expressed solidarity with the poor and disenfranchised that, according to anthropologist Hilary

---

[123] "A Statement of Concern," *Milwaukee Journal*, April 15, 1984.
[124] Héctor Perla, Jr., "Si Nicaragua Venció, El Salvador Vencerá: Central American Agency in the Creation of the U.S.: Central American Peace and Solidarity Movement," *Latin American Research Review* 43, no. 2 (2008): 136-158.

Cunningham, "transcended national cultures, identities, obligations," and even at times, national sovereignty.[125] Contact with oppressed communities in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala taught Milwaukee missionaries to emphasize action, or "praxis," over a passive experience to create a more just society for all. One way that adherents of the new theological turn put faith into action was through Christian base communities (CEBs). Established originally to supplement a limited pastoral presence in rural areas, CEBs became spaces where liberation theology could be discussed, sharpened, and implemented among local parishes. Within these communities, Catholics learned how colonialism and capitalism had created systems of poverty and oppression within which the clear majority of the region's population lived and discussed how to faithfully live a Christian life that could combat these social, economic, and political oppressions.[126] In February of 1986, the Milwaukee Catholic Archdiocese began planning for the implementation of CEBs in Milwaukee. Pedro Martínez, director of the Archdiocese's Office of Hispanic Ministry, argued that "el pueblo Hispano," regardless of national borders, needed to commit to creating and maintaining active Christian communities across the Americas. Through these small groups of socially-activated religious, Milwaukee Latinos gathered weekly in their parishes to discuss daily life via Scripture and learn to "aplicar el evangelio y la paz y justicia social creando un mundo nuevo sin reconres y atropellos" ("apply the Gospel and peace and social justice to create a new world without rewards and abuses").[127]

Mission trips also served to connect Americans' understanding of the refugee experience across the Americas, and sharpened movement participant's criticism of U.S. Central American foreign policy. In November of 1985, ten members of the Wisconsin Interfaith Committee on

---

[125] Hilary Cunningham, "The Ethnography of Transnational Social Activism: Understanding the Global as Local Practice," *American Ethnologist* 26, no. 3 (August 1999), 592.
[126] Nepstad, *Convictions of the Soul*, vii-viii.
[127] "'Comunidades de base' aumentan número de laico activos," *El Mensajero Católico*, March 9, 1986.

Central America spent a week in El Salvador to gather information regarding the internal refugee crisis. Father Eugene Pocernich, director of the Catholic Archdiocese Office for Justice and Peace and representative for Archbishop Weakland, returned to Milwaukee prepared to discuss the "many civilians being killed because of the Salvadoran government's air warfare" against guerrillas. Salvadorans he spoke to repudiated President Reagan's assertion that El Salvador was a self-governing democracy with a democratically-elected leader, as newly-elected president José Napoleón Duarte was the in fact the U.S.'s preferred candidate, willing to implement U.S.-friendly anti-communist policies. Representatives from the committee also met with San Salvador's Archbishop Arturo Rivera y Damas, the successor to Archbishop Óscar Romero, who had achieved some success as a mediator between the government and guerrillas.[128] These critiques grew ever louder in 1985 and 1986, as the Reagan administration covertly funneled millions of dollars in military aid to the Central American nation. In an article in the Milwaukee *Catholic Herald*, Sister Betty Wolcott of the School Sisters of St. Francis, referred to Reagan's proposal to send more money to Nicaragua as "immoral," recounting atrocities carried out by U.S.-supported *contra* forces against civilians. Wolcott stated that "all U.S. citizens must face up to the terrorism daily visited upon innocent people in Nicaragua," and let the president and "their congresspersons know how they feel about such lawless and immoral practices."[129] Warren Braun, the episcopal delegate for the Catholic Archdiocese's Office of Social Ministry, added that Catholic bishops in the U.S. had maintained a consistent policy "that only a political situation can finally be successful in Nicaragua as in Central America generally; there is no acceptable military solution." Direct military aid to any force attempting to overthrow a government with which the U.S. was not at war with was "illegal," and in the judgment of

[128] "El Salvador remains volcano of violence," *Catholic Herald*, December 5, 1985.
[129] "Reagan's policy on Nicaragua is called immoral," *Catholic Herald*, February 6, 1986.

Catholic bishops, "immoral." Braun called on Milwaukee's Catholics to contact their legislators, arguing that government policy should never be "exempt from ethical scrutiny."[130]

"A church that doesn't denounce injustice and oppression is a sold-out church": Federal Crackdowns and the Sanctuary Trials

The sanctuary movement's civil disobedience and vocal denunciations of U.S. foreign and domestic policy did not go unnoticed by federal officials. In the movement's early years, directors from Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) submitted mild public statements arguing against the legality of sanctuary practices but on the whole allowed it to expand without reprimand or censure. As the movement's public profile grew, however, federal officials moved to enact what legal scholar Sophie Pirie has called a form of "political justice" against the movement. Along with initiating a crackdown on the transportation and harboring of Central American refugees, detaining movement participants at the U.S.-Mexico border and even infiltrating sanctuary coalitions, the federal government litigated the legality of sanctuary outside of the courtroom. Within the public square, representatives from INS, the State Department, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) depicted movement participants as human smugglers and violators of federal law, and dismissed their claim of being accountable only to a higher power. In referring to clergy and laity as "leftist radicals" and Central American refugees as "illegal aliens," the federal government offered a narrow conception of "legality" denying the power of Scripture and defined solely by temporal law.[131]

The federal government initiated concerted action against sanctuary in early 1984. In Texas, Border Patrol officers arrested movement workers Stacey Merkt and Jack Elder, charging

---

[130] "Nicaragua's bishops and Reagan appear willing to let rich and upper middle classes gain control," *Catholic Herald*, February 13, 1986.
[131] Pirie, "The Origins of a Political Trial," 381-416.

them with conspiracy and transporting undocumented Salvadoran families. Both were convicted in December of 1984, with Merkt serving a seventy-eight-day sentence in a Texas prison. Along with these convictions, INS agents arrested sixty-four Central American refugees in protective sanctuary in churches in a nationwide sweep through the early fall of 1984.[132] In Milwaukee, thirteen people involved with the MSCC and the CASC reported harassment from the FBI in March of 1984. Daisy Cubias, a member of St. Patrick's parish, reported that since January of 1984 agents had come to her home multiple times and harassed her at work. Agents questioned Cubias on her affiliation with the CASC and whether any of its members were involved in terrorist activities, alleging that the organization had Soviet connections. Thomas Cannon, Marquette University law professor and legal counsel for the CASC and MSCC, noted that the agency had no legitimate law enforcement purpose in questioning sanctuary movement workers. Patrick Flood, director of the Greater Milwaukee Conference on Religion and Urban Affairs, noted with alarm the federal government's harassment of lay leaders, remarking that the "unclear allegations" smacked of "unwarranted political interference" by the Reagan administration in "promoting its foreign policy."[133]

Federal authorities brought their full power to bear on movement activists in January of 1985 with the indictment of sixteen sanctuary workers in Tucson, Arizona. Going so far as attending Sunday night Bible study and wearing priests' collar, federal officials had infiltrated sanctuary networks throughout the U.S. Southwest and Mexico by posing as people of faith in a sting procedure dubbed Operation Sojourner. Facing seventy-one counts of conspiracy,

---

[132] Paul Burks, "This is Sanctuary: A Reformation in Our Time," in *Churches in Struggle: Liberation Theologies and Social Change in North America*, ed. William K. Tabb (New York: Monthly Press Review, 1986), 291-300.
[133] Cannon and Flood quoted in "Organization says it is harassed by FBI," *Milwaukee Journal*, February 11, 1984. See also "Sanctuary backers say FBI visited them," *Milwaukee Journal*, March 22, 1984; "Sanctuary leaders fear crackdown," *Milwaukee Journal*, May 9, 1984; Movement Support Network, "Chronological List of FBI and Other Harassment Incidents," (New York), box 5, folder 1, Chicago Religious Task Force on Central America Records, 1982-1992, WHS.

harboring, and encouraging or aiding the entry of undocumented aliens into the U.S., national leaders such as John Fife, Jim Corbett, Sister Darlene Nicgorski, and Father Ramon Dagoberto Quiñones emerged on the national stage as the faces of the sanctuary movement. Instead of a protest movement, government representatives presented sanctuary as a gross and blatant violation of immigration law. Federal prosecutors accused the indicted of running an operation akin to drug-smuggling ring, transporting unauthorized economic migrants across the U.S-Mexico border and facilitating their harboring in states across the nation. Along with Fife and Corbett, Nicgorski was portrayed by prosecutors as a chief "ringleader" of the movement, earning the moniker of the sanctuary movement's "travel agent" for her work in coordinating border-to-sanctuary congregation movement for refugees. The Milwaukee native and member of the Milwaukee-based School Sisters of St. Francis saw the indictments as a clear challenge to her personal faith and churches across the country, but more importantly represented a failing of faith communities across the U.S. Following the filing of charges, Nicgorski told reporters, "The church in Latin America has some real lessons it could teach the church here. I was led by the Latin American church to identify more and more with the poor and oppressed." In what famously came to be known as the Sanctuary Trials, Nicgorski announced at her arraignment hearing, "If I am guilty of anything, I am guilty of the gospel."[134]

The Milwaukee-based School Sisters of St. Francis, Nicgorski's order, came forward to back not only their sister but the entire movement. The School Sisters quickly passed a resolution in support of Nicgorski and her fellow defendants and began fundraising for her mounting court

[134] Darlene Nicgorski's sentencing statement, read on July 1, 1986, to the Federal Court in Tucson, AZ, before Judge Earl H. Carroll, box 4, folder 65, Chicago Religious Task Force on Central America Records, 1982-1992, WHS. See also Nicgorski interview; "Nun sees indictment as church challenge," *Milwaukee Journal*, January 19, 1985; "Indicted nun urges unity on sanctuary," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, January 19, 1985 "Sanctuary trial frustrating for city-born nun," *Milwaukee Journal,* June 2, 1985.

costs.[135] The order lent spiritual and physical care, sending Sister Anne Taveirene to Arizona to accompany Nicgorski for the duration of the trial. Taveriene prepared summaries of court proceedings, wrote press releases, coordinated correspondences with the motherhouse in Milwaukee, and served as an anchoring presence for Nicgorski when legal proceedings became contentious.[136] The order issued public statement after public statement during 1985 in support of their fellow sister. In letters to Milwaukee's newspapers, the order reminded the city of the atrocities that had led to the large migration of Central American refugees to the U.S. and emphasized America's complicity in allowing the violence to continue. The Sisters remained in constant contact with Nicgorski during the trial, providing updates on fundraising efforts and letters of appreciation from fellow sisters from across the country.[137] Sister Barbara Kraemer, vice president of School Sisters of St. Francis, presented documents in court stating that Nicgorski's work was in line with order's mission statement and that the order Sisters would continue to support sanctuary.[138] In its official statement to the court, the order reasserted their commitment to Nicgorski's work with the CRTFCA and supported her ministry to "the economically poor, the unloved, the powerless." Their statement reiterated the belief that "the commitment to work for justice is not optional; it is a demand of the Gospel commitment."[139]

Following the federal crackdown and INS sweeps, Milwaukee sanctuary sites tightened security to protect refugees and movement workers. In response to the indictment of the Tucson

---

[135] "Donations for S. Darlene Nicgorski, Sanctuary Defense Fund," Box 1, Folder 5, Darlene Nicgorski Papers on the Sanctuary Movement, CUCHM.
[136] Lieblich, *Sisters,* 25-251.
[137] Nicgorski interview.
[138] Sister Barbara Kraemer interview by author, Chicago, January 22, 2016; Barbara Kraemer to Darlene Nicgorski, October 22, 1985, Box 1, Folder 21, Darlene Nicgorski Papers on the Sanctuary Movement, CUCHM.
[139] "Statement from the United States Provincials of the School Sisters of St. Francis, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, regarding the Sanctuary Program in the United States," January 16, 1985, Box 3, Folder 12, Darlene Nicgorski Papers on the Sanctuary Movement, CUCHM. See also "Sanctuary movement endorsed by delegates to SSF assembly," *Catholic Herald*, April 4, 1985.

Sixteen and the arrest of refugees nationwide, most refugees in Milwaukee were moved out of church buildings and into the homes of volunteer parishioners or into their own apartments. Cross Lutheran's Reverend Joseph Ellwanger noted that many refugees had secured employment in the city, making them more visible and raising safety concerns within the city.[140]

In response to the indictments, Milwaukee religious leaders, led by Weakland, held prayer vigils and spoke out publicly throughout the 1985 trial. Reverend Fred Trost of the Wisconsin Conference of the United Church of Christ told the *Milwaukee Journal*, "Mr. Reagan and Mr. Bush never tire of referring to the United States as a beacon on a hill, a guarantor of freedom and justice to the world. Nothing, in my view, could be further from the truth at this moment." The reverend criticized the federal government for indicting members of Christian communities for aiding refugees at the same time the government "aid[ed] and abet[ed] a policy that kills, that rapes, that brutalizes the Salvadoran people." Proclaiming the sanctuary movement "alive" and "growing," Trost promised that the work of solidarity organizations would "not be crushed nor intimidated" for they were built "not only on the strong ideals that gave birth to our nation, but also to the teachings of the Savior Jesus Christ, who weeps and bleeds with the refugees."[141] Turning to the Christian church's history of sanctuary, Reverend Ellwanger added, "We deem it the responsibility of the faith community to offer refuge to all whose lives are in danger, just as the faith community has done through the ages – from the 'cities of refuge' in ancient Israel to the underground railroad during the time of slavery in the United States."[142] Judy Mann of the Milwaukee Jewish Council cited refuge as an "essential" element of her faith, noting two instances over the last fifty years where Jews had looked to the U.S. for asylum: the

[140] "Sanctuary aides tighten security," *Milwaukee Journal*, January 17, 1985.
[141] "Sanctuary for Latins reaffirmed by group," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, January 21, 1985
[142] "Sanctuary movement earns renewed support of churches," *Catholic Herald*, January 24, 1985.

disastrous voyage of the *St. Louis* in the 1930s, and the more successful aid offered to Russian Jews fleeing the Soviet Union in the late 1970s and early 1980s.[143]

Milwaukee allies of the defendants also rallied in support through public vigils. Two hundred protestors gathered at St. John's Cathedral in late January of 1985 to denounce the recent crackdown on sanctuary in Arizona, singing in Spanish "A church that doesn't denounce injustice and oppression is a sold-out church." Peggy Kendrigan of Milwaukee joined the protest because of worries about the federal government's growing antipathy against religious movements for social justice, stating that she'd observed the growth of sanctuary from the periphery, but that it was now "time to get more involved." James Williams, also of Milwaukee, expressed a certain appreciation for the government's crackdown on the sanctuary movement, as it forced "people to take sanctuary seriously too." As a black man, Williams identified parallels between the movement and the Underground Railroad of the nineteenth century, claiming that the nation was stuck in a "time warp" in its search for social justice.[144]

Despite the protests and public statements in support of sanctuary, seven of the Sanctuary Trial defendants, including Nicgorski, were found guilty of alien smuggling charges in May of 1986. In hearing the verdict, Nicgorski stated, "sometimes we have to stand up to a government that is immoral. The only conspiracy we were involved in is a conspiracy of love."[145] Milwaukee's religious leaders responded to Nicgorski's with renewed support for the movement. In an interview with Milwaukee's *Catholic Herald,* Archbishop Weakland expressed his dismay

---

[143] "Refuge urged for Salvadorans," *Milwaukee Jewish Chronicle*, January 25, 1985.
[144] "200 meet to protest US stance on sanctuary," *Milwaukee Journal*, January 28, 1985.
[145] "Nun from city guilty of smuggling aliens," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* May 2, 1986. Despite receiving the support of a handful of clerical leaders like Weakland, Nicgorski expressed disappointment in the U.S. Catholic hierarchy's inaction throughout the trial. Most bishops had followed legal counsel in avoiding any advocacy of extra-legal action by their archdioceses, while the U.S. Catholic Conference had followed a closely-guarded legal memo that considered the legal ramifications of support too treacherous to provide outright support. See "Convicted nun scores bishops on sanctuary," *National Catholic Reporter*, May 16, 1986; Lieblich, *Sisters,* 259-260; Nicgorski interview.

but not surprise at the decision. In light of the indictment, Weakland reaffirmed his belief in the movement, and answered the question of whether or not those participating in the movement were morally justified by stating, "I would put the question the other way around: Is the inactivity of those who stand by and do nothing while they see the lives of fellow human beings put into jeopardy morally justifiable? If a group of bystanders see someone's life being threatened by others and can do something about it and don't, what is their moral responsibility?"[146] Betty Chrustowski, chair of the World Jewry and International Concerns Commission of Milwaukee Jewish Council, similarly reiterated the Jewish community's commitment to asylum as it lay deeply "ingrained in the Jewish tradition."[147]

Nicgorski's religious order spoke out forcefully for a shared sense of complicity in the breaking of federal law in the name of a higher moral order. Sister Elaine argued that when the jury convicted Nicgorski, they also convicted the 1,500 members of her order's North American province. Speaking at an interfaith prayer service at St. Joseph's Convent Chapel, the home of the School Sisters of St. Francis, Nicgorski reasserted that the U.S. government had been unsuccessful in its attempts to intimidate the those seeking justice through the faith-based undertaking. Regardless of the indictments, Nicgorski declared that sanctuary would continue, as the government had "greatly misjudged the faith…of the people involved in the movement." Following the trial, the Schools Sisters welcomed Nicgorski back to St. Joseph Convent, the international headquarters of the order, where she lived for some time.[148]

---

[146] "Sanctuary issue: Weakland disappointed in guilty verdicts in Tucson," *Catholic Herald*, May 15, 1986.
[147] "Council supports cause of convicted sanctuary worker," *Milwaukee Jewish Chronicle*, July 11, 1986.
[148] Nicgorski quoted in "US intimidation won't halt sanctuary efforts, nun says" *Milwaukee Sentinel,* May 19, 1986. See also "All nuns in order share in Nicgorski's conviction," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, May 3, 1986; "Convent ready to welcome convicted sanctuary nun," *Milwaukee Journal*, May 18, 1986.

The trial and convictions raised the profile of the sanctuary movement, bringing the realities of the Central American refugee crisis to the homes of countless Americans. The Catholic Social Services launched a billboard campaign to promote the resettlement of immigrants and refugees in Milwaukee County, paying for fifteen billboards across the city that read, "Refugees are our newest immigrants. Welcome them."[149] The MSCC acknowledged that the prosecution of sanctuary workers might continue but were determined to expand their work regardless of indictments, trials, or convictions. Ruth Chojnacki noted that the government now contended with a movement that had grown to "thousands and thousands of people like us who are in effect implicated in what the government regards as crimes."[150] For Chojnacki, only two things could possibly stop the movement: an immediate end of deportations of Guatemalan and Salvadoran refugees; and, the U.S. government honoring the 1980 Refugee Act. For sanctuary movement workers like Jack Champagne, a permanent deacon at St. Benedict the Moor, the convictions were "merely the consequences of living the Gospel in the 1980s."[151]

Across the country, municipalities and statehouses offered their support for the movement through legislation aimed at curtailing the power of federal immigration enforcement. While these actions were often largely symbolic, they offered a message of opposition by Americans to their country's policies in Central America and the unequal application of immigration law. By 1985, nearly twenty cities across the country, including Madison, Wisconsin, had voted to declare themselves "cities of refuge," instructing public employees to not cooperate in activities that might lead to the detention and deportation of Central American

[149] "Give me your tired, hungry, etc.: Catholic Social Services launches effort to spark interest in refugees," *Catholic Herald*, July 10, 1986.
[150] "Sanctuary to survive, workers says," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, July 4, 1986
[151] "Support for sanctuary pledged," *Catholic Herald*, July 10, 1986.

refugees.[152] In September of 1986, Wisconsin Governor Tony Earl announced his administration's support for the movement by declaring Wisconsin a "state of sanctuary" for Guatemalan and Salvadoran refugees. In a two-page proclamation, Earl commended the efforts of civic and religious organizations working to extend sanctuary in the state, and condemned the INS's "discriminatory behavior" in denying protection to many Central American refugees while welcoming political refugees from nations such as Iran, Cuba, and Poland.[153] Not intended as a legal challenge to federal immigration policies, Earl's statement served as a political statement and a "strong statement of values" for the state.[154] Several of Wisconsin's sanctuary leaders responded to Earl's proclamation with support in an editorial published in Madison's progressive newspaper the *Capital Times*, writing that "there is every reason for Wisconsin citizens – religious or not – to be proud of the Sanctuary Movement in this state." The religious leaders contended that they would have been proud if the people of Wisconsin had "defied the mood of country" during World War II to offer shelter to thousands of European Jews denied safety in U.S. and would have likewise been honored to have been at the "heart of the Underground Railroad" in sheltering escaped slaves. According to episcopal leadership, these historic examples demonstrated that the movement was not simply a contemporaneously political one, as "providing sanctuary for those unable to protect themselves [had] been the business of religious communities from the earliest of recorded history."[155] In signing their letter of support for the

---

[152] "Sanctuary vote gave wrong impression," *Wisconsin State Journal*, March 14, 1985. From 1983 to 1987, fifteen congregations and supporting organizations hosted fifteen Central American refugees in the Wisconsin's capital city. See "Salvadoran finds haven in Madison," *Wisconsin State Journal,* March 8, 1987.

[153] Proclamation from Governor Anthony S. Earl, State of Wisconsin, September 1986, Box 6, Folder 27, Darlene Nicgorski Papers on the Sanctuary Movement, CUCHM. New Mexico became the first "state of sanctuary," doing so during the Easter season in March of 1986. See "New Mexico Declared Sanctuary for Refugees," *New York Times,* March 29, 1986; Amy Villareal Garza, "Places of Sanctuary: Religious Revivalism and the Politics of Immigration in New Mexico," (PhD diss., University of California-Santa Cruz, 2014), 124-210.

[154] "Haven declared for Latin refugees," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, September 20, 1986.

[155] "State's 'sanctuary' status should be source of pride," *Capital Times* (Madison, WI), October 22, 1986. Co-signers of the letter included: Rabbi Charles Feinberg (Beth Israel Center, Madison), Reverend Frederick Trost

governor's proclamation, the state's bishops and rabbis reiterated a central tenet of the sanctuary movement that had driven participants since its inception in Tucson in 1982: the desire to bridge values of faith and morality, those that respected the lives of the society's most marginalized, into political action in the secular world.

Conclusion

Despite federal surveillance and prosecution, the national sanctuary movement continued to grow and gain legislative victories in the 1980s. By 1987, the national network had expanded to include ninety-three Protestant churches of various denominations, sixty-seven Unitarian Universalist congregations, fifty-seven Quaker churches, sixty-four Catholic parishes, thirty-seven Jewish synagogues, and more than three thousand supporting organizations.[156] Due in large part to continued protests surrounding the U.S.'s role in Central America, the Reagan administration passed executive actions allowing two hundred thousand Nicaraguan exiles to remain in the country that same year. To the leaders of Milwaukee's sanctuary movement, the federal government's decision to provide temporary legal status for Nicaraguans who could demonstrate well-founded fears of persecution was bittersweet news, as thousands of Central American refugees from El Salvador and Guatemala continued to live throughout the U.S. in constant fear of deportation. Sally Pettit of the Ecumenical Refugee Council and Ruth Chojnacki of the MSCC expressed irritation with an incomplete asylum plan that seemed to continue to value the lives of some refugees over that of others.[157]

(president of the Wisconsin Conference of the United Church of Christ), Reverend John Fischer (executive director of the Wisconsin Conference of Churches), Reverend Peter Rogness (bishop of the American Lutheran Church, Southern Wisconsin District), and Right Reverend Roger J. White (bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Milwaukee).

[156] Cunningham, *God and Caesar at the Rio Grande*, 65; Golden and McConnell, *Sanctuary*, 54-64.

[157] "Asylum plan incomplete," *Milwaukee Journal*, July 8, 1987.

In 1990, sanctuary activism and protracted legal efforts from religious organizations spurred two significant victories for Central American refugees. First, federal legislators supportive of expanding asylum opportunities for Salvadorans and Guatemalans successfully included provisions to allow these two nationality groups to apply for eighteen-month protections under temporary protected status (TPS) provisions. The TPS victory was followed by a major court decision just a few weeks later known as the ABC Agreement. A coalition of more than eighty religious and refugee organizations secured an out-of-court settlement with the federal government in the civil suit of *American Baptist Churches et al. versus Thornburgh*, allowing Salvadorans who had been present in the United States since September 1, 1990, and Guatemalans who been in the country since October 1, 1990, the right to apply anew for asylum interviews.[158] These legal efforts at the federal level along with the reduction of migration from Central America with the beginning of peace processes in El Salvador and Guatemala brought the national sanctuary movement to a slow end by the early 1990s.

Milwaukee's religious leaders continued to speak out on behalf of Central American refugees and against American foreign policy in the region through the end of the decade. Bishop Peter Rogness of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and Bishop Roger White of the Milwaukee Episcopal Diocese travelled to El Salvador in December of 1989 as part of a delegation offering "protection" for Salvadoran Bishop Medardo Gomez, reentering the country after some months in exile due to threats of assassination following public statements in support of the poor. Rogness hoped the trip would make a statement that the "religious community has been a point

[158] The ABC Settlement allowed for the readjudication of nearly 150,000 asylum requests and opened the door for more than 350,000 refugees who had previously never applied for refugee status to seek hearings. Carolyn Patty Blum, "The Settlement of American Baptist Churches v. Thornburgh: Landmark Victory for Central American Asylum-Seekers," *International Journal of Refugee Law* 3, no. 2 (1991): 347-356; Susan Bibler Coutin, "From Refugees to Immigrants: The Legalization Strategies of Salvadoran Immigrants and Activists," *International Migration Review* 32, no. 4 (Winter 1998), 901-925.

of solidarity with the poor and cannot be discredited or isolated as the government is trying to do."[159] In November of 1990, Archbishop Weakland also joined a Wisconsin Interfaith Committee on Central America trip to El Salvador, agreeing to join the delegation to "stand with and to be a sign of hope" to the people of the war-torn country. Celebrating a mass commemorating the killing of six Jesuit priests by paramilitary forces in San Salvador, Weakland stated the families of the slain clergy represented the spirit of the Salvadoran people, who believed "you can cut me down, but we're going to be back."[160]

Participation in the movement prompted Milwaukeeans to answer the question, in light of entering into civil disobedience and fears of federal prosecution, of whether religious communities would be willing to stand up for those living on the margins of society in the affirmative. Sociologist Colleen Greer has demonstrated how interactions in social networks developed through sanctuary prompted participants to reimagine "theological interpretations about the oppressed, government policies on refugees, and concerns about rights" throughout the development of the movement.[161] Through testimonials from and fellowship with refugees arriving in the city, Milwaukee's religious community learned that they could play a role in alleviating the destruction of Central American nations. For Tom Cannon, a Marquette law professor, attorney for the MSCC, and Milwaukeean who traced his family's roots in Wisconsin to the pre-statehood era, the movement represented the natural tension between morals and politics and was an evolution in his own progressive reinterpretation of the Bible. Cannon stated:

> If we look at ourselves, not merely as cogs in a secular political machine, but as people of faith who are trying to live the Scriptures, then I think we have to take a different look. We have to look at it in an ethical, a moral context. And if we look at it in that context, then I think we have to care for these people. I think it's really part of our highest

[159] "State group, Moody to visit El Salvador," *Milwaukee Journal*, March 22, 1990
[160] "Weakland says he'll keep in taking on hot issues," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, November 24, 1990.
[161] Colleen Greer, "Ideology as Response: Cultural and Political Process in the Sanctuary Movement," *Social Thought & Research* 20, no. 1 (1997): 109-128.

> national aspirations that this country has acted as a refuge to people fleeing political oppression, fleeing economic oppression, fleeing religious persecution. We've been a haven, a safe haven, to people throughout the world. America really is a sanctuary.[162]

Commenting on the political nature of the movement, Darlene Nicgorski remarked that the "spirit is moving in the church, but is now a movement from the South to the North…what appears to be religion is politics, what appears to be political is faith lived in public forum."[163]

The process of raising political and spiritual consciousness through the sanctuary movement had longstanding effects on Milwaukee's religious community, serving what Reverend Joseph Ellwanger referred to as an "experiential baptism" into transnational movements for social justice that spanned across political and religious boundaries. Leaders involved in sanctuary continued working in transnational peace efforts connected to Latin America in the decades following the end of the movement. Ruth Chojnacki, who had left graduate studies just a few years before starting her Central American mission, returned to academic work and completed a doctoral dissertation on social justice efforts in the Chiapas region of Mexico. The Ellwangers were drawn to protest the continued military interventions in Central America, and made yearly pilgrimages to Fort Benning, Georgia to rally against the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation as a part of School of the Americas Watch. Carolyn Jackson continued her work in securing medical aid to Nicaragua, the initial spark to her involvement in sanctuary. Her numerous mission trips to the country brought her contact with communities in need of both temporal and spiritual support, a reality that helped guide her decision to adopt two young children from Nicaragua.[164]

---

[162] Tolan, "The Strangers Among Us," *Milwaukee Magazine*, December 1984.
[163] Sister Darlene Nicgorski, "Statement of Faith of the CRTF," *Basta! National Newsletter of the Chicago Religious Task Force on Central America*, January 1985, 6.
[164] Chojnacki interview; Ellwangers interview; Jackson interview.

Milwaukeeans' demand for just and equitable immigration procedures and humane foreign policies through the sanctuary movement offers scholars a significant opportunity to interrogate interfaith and interracial collaboration and the development of solidarity movements that stretch beyond political borders in the late twentieth century. Historians must continue to investigate the transnational dimensions of networks like the sanctuary movement to better understand how, in the words of Hilary Cunningham, communities have used cross-border organizing to challenge "the hegemony of boundaries between church and state, First and Third Worlds, citizenship and discipleship, and private conscience and public law."[165] Rooting their movement in concepts of accompaniment and solidarity, those fighting for just and humane refugee policies came to see their experiences as Americans, and members of their religious communities, as deeply tied to the lives of Central Americans during the 1980s. The study of Milwaukee's sanctuary movement reminds scholars that transnational movements must be analyzed within both local and international frameworks to better understand how solidarity for social justice is created, fostered, and advanced.

[165] Cunningham, "The Ethnography of Transnational Social Activism," 587.

CONCLUSION

Faith and Movement Building in Latino Milwaukee

"So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the household of God."

Ephesians 2:19

In the spring of 2017, Cross Lutheran Church, a leading voice for sanctuary for Central American refugees in 1980s Milwaukee, voted to recommit itself to offering asylum to undocumented immigrants. The decision to stand in opposition to the government's execution of immigration policies was part of broader conversations congregants had been engaged in light of the anti-immigrant and xenophobic rhetoric of the 2016 presidential election and subsequent executive actions by newly-elected President Donald Trump. According to Pastor Michelle Townsend de López, in deciding to once again potentially violate federal immigration law in order to support their undocumented neighbors, the congregation had chosen solidarity over division. Speaking at the 2017 Milwaukee May Day rally in support labor and immigrant rights, Townsend de López noted, "It would appear that the present governmental administration has pitted the U.S. working class against migrant workers and refugees, and so we as the faith community must strive to create bridges, not bans or walls, to connect our struggles together."[1]

Cross Lutheran joined a resurgent national sanctuary movement that spring. The spirit of sanctuary in religious spaces had never completely disappeared after the successful court cases of the early 1990s. Through the turn of the twenty-first century, federal executive and congressional leadership supported immigration policies that further criminalized undocumented immigration and created a growing population of residents living in the country's shadows. Punitive immigration enforcement had the effect of creating what immigration scholar Rachel

[1] Reverend Michelle Townsend de López, "Cross Lutheran Church Newsletter: Pastor's Corner," May 2017, in possession of author.

Buff refers to as a "deportation terror" among immigrant communities, where individuals and families lived in constant fear of detention and deportation.[2] Congregations remobilized in the early twenty-first century as deportations accelerated under the administrations of Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama. In early 2007, religious leaders from eighteen cities convened to establish the New Sanctuary Movement, a loose coalition of faith communities that professed a commitment to engage in public ministry in support of immigrant communities. Religious leaders pledged, as Reverend Alexia Salvatierra, executive director of Los Angeles' Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice, noted, to offer sanctuary to undocumented immigrants and spread "the living story of the families broken by a broken system."[3]

Milwaukee's New Sanctuary Movement joined this national coalition in 2007, operating as a faith-based component of Voces de la Frontera, a member-driven, non-profit immigrant and workers' rights center that is today a leading voice on the national stage in the fight for immigrant justice. With more than ten Milwaukee congregations as members, the new coalition represents a diverse creedal and ethno-racial makeup akin to its 1980s predecessor. Its goals and tactics in many ways likewise mirror the early movement. Working to building its voice and base, the coalition prepares "predicadores de justicia" ("preachers of justice") to be spokespeople for the movement in the broader Milwaukee faith community, evangelizers for sanctuary who speak at Masses and services on the importance of connecting religious faith with social and immigrant justice in the city. Education for the community surrounding immigration rights with an eye towards empowerment and self-determination serves as a primary objective. The coalition facilitates leadership development seminars and "Know Your Legal Rights" trainings, has

---

[2] Rachel Ida Buff, *Against the Deportation Terror: Organizing for Immigrant Rights in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2017).
[3] Alexia Salvatierra, "Sacred Refuge," *Sojourners* 36, no. 9 (September/October 2007): 12-20.

established a free legal aid clinic, and holds monthly vigils at the local ICE office, where community members pray for those facing detention and deportation proceedings.[4]

If the light of sanctuary was rekindled in response to expanding immigration enforcement in the first decade of the twenty-first century, its flame burst to a searing brightness following the 2016 presidential election. The xenophobic rhetoric espoused by Trump during his campaign and in his first year in office – spurious accusations that the Mexican government was "sending people that have lots of problems" to the United States and that those immigrants were "rapists" "bringing drugs" and "crime" to their new homes – placed immigrants again in the center of conversations regarding criminality, employment, citizenship, and national belonging.[5] Across the nation, Latinos found themselves newly-vilified, made part of a new "problem" whose legal standing was cast in doubt and whose very right to exist in this country was called into question. In response to the threat of potential largescale deportation raids, religious communities across the country answered the call of immigrant rights organizations to fortify sanctuary efforts. Following the election, the number of congregations committed to offering sanctuary to undocumented immigrants across the country rose from 400 to more than 1,100 within one year. As of January 2018, thirty-six individuals were living in public sanctuary, supported by sanctuary coalitions across forty states.[6]

---

[4] Milwaukee New Sanctuary Movement, "Sanctuary Not Deportation: A Faithful Witness to Building Welcoming Communities," accessed January 30, 2018, http://newsanctuarymke.org/en/resources/. The group's Mujeres Líderes or "Women Leaders" program is designed to build the leadership capacity of Milwaukee immigrant women who have been affected by the deportation process or want to work toward immigration reform through community organizing.

[5] "Full text: Donald Trump announces a presidential bid," *Washington Post,* June 16, 2015, accessed April 1, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2015/06/16/full-text-donald-trump-announces-a-presidential-bid/?utm_term=.589106927548.

[6] Myrna Orozco and Reverend Noel Anderson, "Sanctuary in the Age of Trump: The rise of the movement a year into the Trump administration," (Church World Service, January 2018), https://www.sanctuarynotdeportation.org/sanctuary-report-2018.html.

The spirit that moved in churches and synagogues during the 1980s sanctuary movement – a kindling of political and social consciousness – is alive again in religious spaces in Milwaukee and across the country. There are of course distinctions to be made between these movements: the countries from which refugees are arriving today in some cases are different; the policies that have prompted mass exiles abroad and detention and deportation in the U.S. are unique; and, many of the policymakers and movement participants have changed. Perhaps most notably, unlike the 1980s iteration, which aided newly-arrived refugees from Central America, the New Sanctuary Movement of the twenty-first century seeks to address the concerns of undocumented immigrants from around the world who have lived within their communities in the U.S. for extended periods of time, some even for decades. If the guiding scriptural backing for the original movement drew from Leviticus's and Matthew's exhortation to "welcome the stranger," this new movement follows the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and Conferencia del Episcopado Mexicano's 2003 joint pastoral letter's call to embrace these communities as "strangers no longer."[7] Churches engaged in sanctuary work thus acknowledge as a primary responsibility the need to develop a spirit of hospitality and communion with immigrant and migrant communities, regardless of their documentation status, in order to counteract immigration policies and enforcement tactics that undermine the human dignity of undocumented persons and their right to pursue a life with their loved ones in the United States.

❖ ❖ ❖

[7] United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and Conferencia del Episcopado Mexicano, *Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope* (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2003).

The development of the New Sanctuary Movement brings this study of immigration, community formation, and religion into what Tomás Summers Sandoval calls the "dynamic present" of U.S. Latino immigration.[8] Latinos and the communities they continue to develop today are at the center of dynamic social, cultural, and economic transformations across the country. This is apparent in no region more prominently than the Midwest, where the Latino population has boomed in the last three decades. In Wisconsin, Latinos now constitute the state's largest minority group at more than 6 percent of its total population. The majority of the state's Latinos reside in the Milwaukee area, where their numbers have grown swiftly in recent decades – the city's counted Latino population soared from 26,111 in 1980 to 39,409 in 1990, 71,646 in 2000, and 103,007 in 2010 – essentially quadrupling in forty years.[9] For many of these Latinos, the church has served, and continues to serve, as a vital institution within which to organize community, and when necessary, movements for social change. It is a space where, as historian Roberto Treviño notes in his study of Catholic Mexican Americans in Texas, Latinos have "countered inequality…by claiming legitimacy," a legitimacy to envisage community, cultivate modalities of collective organization, and reimagine identities in an effort to define their sense of belonging in Milwaukee.[10]

This dissertation has examined the sacred spaces and communities that Milwaukee Latinos built throughout the twentieth century, interrogating how these sites and configurations became political, social, and educational resources for immigrants and the second- and third-generation communities that followed them. It has examined how the religious and spiritual

---

[8] Tomás Summers Sandoval, Jr., *Latinos at the Golden Gate: Creating Community and Identity in San Francisco* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2013), 8.
[9] Marc C. Levine, "Latino Milwaukee: A Statistical Portrait," (Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Center for Economic Development, 2016), https://www.greatermilwaukeefoundation.org/files/7914/6215/2972/Latino_Milwaukee_Study_2016.pdf.
[10] Roberto R. Treviño, *The Church in the Barrio: Mexican American Ethno-Catholicism in Houston* (Chapel Hill: Univeristy of North Carolina Press, 2006), 8.

were, and continue to be, central to the everyday lives of vast numbers of Latinos. Perhaps most important, it has argued that historians mustn't exclude or neglect the religiosity of the Latino communities they study. Within faith-based spaces and institutions, Milwaukee Latinos crafted locations of possible political, social, and economic engagement, reminding historians that, as scholars of Latin America Jeffrey Rubin, David Smilde, and Benjamin Junge have noted, religion, just like politics, "do not have a priori, natural domains." Instead, within religious spaces immigrants can carve out sites where religious meanings "provide particularly powerful moral, emotional, or symbolic dynamism."[11] Religion, understood through this lens, is not an abstract category but instead a fundamental aspect of who historical actors were and how they defined themselves.

Through an examination of what religious scholar Roberto Oris refers to as the "lived religion" of Latinos, this study has argued that faith beliefs can't be separated from other practices of everyday life, including the material circumstances that frame individual and communal existence.[12] A newly-fashioned religious site, even one scrabbled together in a parish basement or created out of a repurposed telephone company storefront as was the case for Milwaukee's Mexican Catholics, or in a hastily-constructed chapel in a migrant camp in the small central Wisconsin town of Endeavor, became a space where community members could develop what cultural geographer Dolores Hayden has referred as a "world of shared meanings," one that stretches beyond the private dwellings of individuals and into the public being of a broader community.[13] These spaces became sites within which Milwaukee Latinos could

---

[11] Jeffery W. Rubin, David Smilde, and Benjamin Junge, "Lived Religion and Lived Citizenship in Latin America's Zone of Crisis: Introduction," *Latin American Research Review* 49 (2014), 9-13.
[12] Robert Orsi, "Everyday Miracles: The Study of Lived Religion," in *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice*, ed. David D. Hall (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 6.
[13] Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscape as Public History* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), 35.

challenge institutions that played essential roles in their everyday lives – workplaces, schools, social service agencies, and even the churches they attended – forcing them to be increasingly more responsive to their needs and desires. This dissertation has thus demonstrated that by delving into the religious spaces within which Latinos made community, historians might find stories not just of conflict, contestation, and transgression, but of negotiation, compromise, and even collaboration.

Churches have demonstrated a commitment to their newest congregants in a way that goes beyond cultural accommodation or matters of formal religious belief. Throughout the twentieth century, Milwaukee's religious institutions grappled with if and how best to integrate newly-settling Latino populations into existing faith communities. In the 1920s, congregants at the Holy Trinity Catholic Church, for example, worked in collaboration with Mexican immigrants to develop a mission chapel rejoicing in devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe. Churches' attention to particular religio-cultural norms and practices in faith spaces has expanded over the last century, with the incorporation of celebrations like *las posadas* and *quinceñeras* and the infusion of Spanish-language masses perhaps the most obvious examples. Latino immigrants, who faced economic, social, and cultural discrimination in Milwaukee's schools, job sites, and social services, also found within the city's churches spaces to negotiate and claim religious and ethno-racial identities and create cross-ethnic movements to support Latino communities. Over the last five decades, religious bodies and individual congregations have shifted their attention to Latino parishioners beyond simply integrating these forms of familiar religious practice, increasingly becoming some of the most vocal advocates for the rights of migrants and undocumented immigrants. This attention to immigration activism and

solidarity with Latino communities represents an engaged form of fellowship that recognizes the well-being of Latino parishioners as constitutive of the larger community's health.

In order to better understand the complexity of these incorporation experiences within religious spaces, this study has argued for a multifaceted reading of the very concept of Latino identity, or Latinidad. The layered nature of a pan-ethnic Latino identity includes a variety of factors, including contested categories of documentation, national origin, and generational cohort. During the twentieth century, Milwaukee's Latinos demonstrated varying levels of support for a unifying category of ethno-racial identity. Sociologist Felix Padilla refers to this formation as "situational ethnic identity," a contingent identity where a multiethnic unit is created and deployed for social action when two or more Spanish-speaking ethnic groups are affected by societal and economic structural forces.[14] It is an identity that can be developed and deployed for a variety of reasons, at times for cultural affinity, but often to serve a particular social or political end and in response to circumstantial conditions of structural inequality. This study has shown that Milwaukeeans' embrace of a Latino identity was always historically contingent, dependent on linguistic, cultural, and ethno-racial similarities; institutional imperatives and opportunities to pursue support from city and religious organizations; and, the political opportunities for solidarity that communities might find under a shared banner of Latinidad. Churches served as crucial locations for these pan-ethnic identities to develop, functioning as spaces where Mexican-, Puerto Rican-, and Central American-descent people could cultivate movements for migrant farmworker rights, community self-determination, and sanctuary.

---

[14] Felix Padilla, *Latino Ethnic Consciousness: The Case of Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans in Chicago* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), 4-5.

In twenty-first century Milwaukee, religion continues to disrupt and transcend borders. Faith practices, traditions, iconography, and perhaps most important, organizing within religious spaces is connecting people beyond their denominational distinctions, ethno-racial identities, and documentation status. Future studies of Latinidad, religion, community formation, and coalition building must also consider transnational methodologies to examine how immigrants maintain and develop cross-border connections through faith. Religious institutions can function as sites where transnational models of social organization and local responses come together to produce new iterations of religious belief and practice. Historians have for some time recognized that religion is a transnational phenomenon, as people belonging to faith communities are connected across national boundaries through shared belief systems and cosmologies. Religious institutions like the Catholic Church, whose global reach transcends national boundaries, can become central vehicles for the maintenance of what David Badillo has called the "transnational character" of immigrant communities.[15] Scholars must continue to study ecumenical and interfaith organizations that bind communities in shared religious and social missions, such as the sanctuary coalitions that developed to aid Central American refugees in Milwaukee and across the United States in the 1980s, to understand how Latinidad and faith can stretch locally-based religious organizations beyond city, state, and national boundaries into transnational networks that transcend political and denominational borders.

The recent protracted attention to Latino immigrants' sense of belonging in Milwaukee by religious institutions, demonstrated most visibly by the New Sanctuary Movement, has occurred within the context of nearly one hundred years of engagement between these communities. This study has shown that across the twentieth century, Wisconsin faith

[15] David Badillo, *Latinos and the New Immigrant Church* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), xi.

communities, representing different denominations, class backgrounds, and ethno-racial identities, worked to untangle the often-complicated intersections of hospitality, fellowship, and activism. Within churches and synagogues, faith-minded activists engaged in struggles over migrant and immigrant rights to provide alternative explanations of and solutions for social problems. Clergy and laity combined a concern for Latino communities and their battles to define belonging in midwestern communities by connecting immigrant justice to scripture, to papal and church encyclicals, and to larger calls for attentiveness to those who had been pushed to the margins of society. These activists believed that arguments infused with the language of religious morality could offer a larger resonance for broader religious communities that many other political arguments might lack. By combining a shared moral language with an attention to the connections between hospitality to Latinos and religious social teaching, Milwaukee clergy and laity established a justification for organizing through their religiosity, understanding their activism as fundamental to their identity as people of faith.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Major Archival Collections

Archives in possession of author
Milwaukee *La Guardia* Records

Archives of the Catholic Archdiocese of Milwaukee
Holy Trinity – Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church Records
City of Milwaukee Parishes Records
Frank Gross Papers

Archives of the Wisconsin Historical Society
Archival Resources on Hispanics in Wisconsin
Chicago Religious Task Force on Central America Records, 1982-1992
Cristobal Berry-Cabán Papers, Microfilm Collection
Milwaukee Mexican-American interviews, 1974-1977
Wisconsin Governor's Commission on Migratory Labor Records
Wisconsin Department of Industry, Labor and Human Relations, Committee and Task Force Records, 1943-1973, Records
Wisconsin Division of Economic Assistance: Economic Opportunity Section Administrative Subject Files, 1964-1978, Records
Wisconsin Governor (1947-1951: Oscar Rennenbohm) Records
Wisconsin Governor (1959-1963: Gaylord Nelson) Papers
Wisconsin Governor's Committee on Migratory Labor, 1959-1972, Records
United Migrant Opportunity Services, 1969-2005, Records

Archives of the Milwaukee County Historical Society
Church Pamphlet Collection
Latino/Hispanic American Collection
Local History Manuscript Collection
School Sisters of St. Francis, 1986-2000, Records

Archives of the Milwaukee Public Library
Carl A. and Frank P. Zeidler Papers
Office of the Mayor – Milwaukee Commission on Community Relations, 1941-88, Records

The Catholic University of America's American Catholic History Research Center
Catholic Charities USA. Records
National Catholic Welfare Conference Records
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Office of the General Secretary Records

Claremont University Consortium's Honnold/Mudd Library Special Collections
Darlene Nicgorski Papers on the Sanctuary Movement.

Julian Samora Library at the Institute for Latino Studies, University of Notre Dame Archives
Marc S. Rodriguez Papers

Marquette University Department of Special Collections and University Archives
Milwaukee Catholic Interracial Council Records.
Milwaukee Council on Urban and Rural Life Records
Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Milwaukee Council, 1917-1969, Records

University of Notre Dame Archives
Robert Emmet Lucey Papers

Periodicals and Newspapers

Capital Times (Madison)

Catholic Herald Citizen (Milwaukee)

El Mensajero Católico (Milwaukee)

El Mutualista (Milwaukee)

El Young Lord (Milwaukee)

Kaleidoscope

La Guardia

Madison-Milwaukee Bugle American

Milwaukee Jewish Chronicle

Milwaukee Journal

Milwaukee Sentinel

Racine Journal-Times

Soul City Times (Milwaukee)

The Compass (Milwaukee)

Waushara Argus

Wisconsin State Journal

Interviews (by author)

Ray Bacalzo. Milwaukee. June 12, 2015.

Tony Baez. Milwaukee. March 30, 2010.

Joseph and Margarita Cárdenas. Milwaukee. June 8, 2015.

Thomas Cannon. Milwaukee. February 16, 2016.

Ruth Chojnacki. Chicago. December 29, 2015.

Graciela and Luis de la Cruz. Milwaukee. January 10, 2017.

Reverend Joseph Ellwanger and Joyce Ellwanger. Milwaukee. January 5, 2016.

Father Glenn Gessner. Appleton, WI. November 21, 2016.

Josefina (Sandoval), Rebecca (Campos), and Frank Gonzales. Milwaukee. June 23, 2015.

Carolyn Jackson. Nashotah, WI. February 4, 2016.

Sister Barbara Kraemer. Chicago. January 22, 2016.

Guadalupe Macias. Milwaukee. June 18, 2015.

Darlene Nicgorski. Claremont, CA. July 10-11, 2016.

Rios Family. Milwaukee. August 19, 2015.

Jesus Salas. Milwaukee. April 1, 2010.

Jesus Salas. Milwaukee. June 24, 2015.

Jesus Salas. Milwaukee. October 27, 2016.

Elvira Sandoval Denk. Milwaukee. October 4, 2016.

Francisco Urbina. Milwaukee. March 31, 2010.

Archbishop Rembert Weakland. Milwaukee. February 15, 2016.

Secondary Sources

Acuña, Rodolfo F. *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos.* 8th ed., New York: Pearson, 2014.

Alamillo, José. *Making Lemonade out of Lemons: Mexican American Labor and Leisure in a California Town, 1880-1960.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006.

Alvarez Minoff, Elisa Matia. "Free to Move? The Law and Politics of Integration in Twentieth-Century America." PhD diss., Harvard University, 2013.

Arnau, Ariel. "The Evolution of Leadership within the Puerto Rican Community of Philadelphia, 1950s-1970s." *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 136, no. 1 (January 2012): 53-81.

Anderson, Margo and Victor Greene, edited. *Perspectives on Milwaukee's Past*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009.

Arredondo, Gabriela F. *Mexican Chicago: Race, Identity, and Nation, 1916-1939*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008.

August, Tom. *From Assimilation to Multiculturalism: Managing Ethnic Diversity in Milwaukee*. New York: AMS Press, 2012.

Avella, Steven M., edited. *Milwaukee Catholicism: Essays on Church and Community*. Milwaukee: Knights of Columbus, 1991.

--------. "Sebastian G. Messmer and the Americanization of Milwaukee Catholicism." *U.S. Catholic Historian* 12, no. 3 (Summer, 1994): 87-107.

--------. *In the Richness of the Earth: A History of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, 1843-1958*. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2002.

--------. *Confidence and Crisis: A History of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, 1959-1977*. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2014.

Badillo, David. "The Catholic Church and the Making of Mexican-American Parish Communities in the Midwest." In *Mexican Americans and the Catholic Church, 1900-1965,* edited by Jay P. Dolan and Gilberto M. Hinojosa, 223-308. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994.

--------. "Religion and Transnational Migration in Chicago: The Case of the Potosinos." *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 94, no. 4 (Winter 2001/2002): 420-440.

--------. *Latinos and the New Immigrant Church*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006.

Baker III, Robert Earl. "Push Back: Race, Jobs, and the Struggle for Power in the Late Twentieth Century" PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2013.

Balderama, Francisco E. and Raymond Rodríguez. *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006.

Bantjes, Adrian A. "Idolatry and Iconoclasm in Revolutionary Mexico: The De-Christianization Campaigns, 1929-1940." *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 13, no. 1 (Winter, 1997): 87-120.

Barrett, James R. and David R. Roediger. "The Irish and the "Americanization" of the "New Immigrants" in the Streets and in the Churches of the Urban United States, 1900-1930." *Journal of American Ethnic History* 24, No. 4 (Summer 2005): 3-33.

Barton, Josef. "Borderland Discontents: Mexican Migration in Regional Contexts, 1880, 1930." In *Repositioning North American Migration History: New Directions in Modern Continental Migration, Citizenship, and Community*, edited by Marc S. Rodriguez, 141-205. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester, 2004.

Blackwell, Maylai, *¡Chicana Power!: Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement.* Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011.

Blau, Ignatius. *The Ground is Holy: Church Sanctuary and Central American Refugees*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1985.

Blum, Carolyn Patty. "The Settlement of American Baptist Churches v. Thornburgh: Landmark Victory for Central American Asylum-Seekers." *International Journal of Refugee Law* 3, no. 2 (1991): 347-356.

Boff, Leonardo and Clodovis Boff. *Introducing Liberation Theology.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987.

Bon Tempo, Carl J. *Americans at the Gate: The United States and Refugees During the Cold War.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008.

Brands, Hal. *Latin America's Cold War.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012.

Braun, Mark Edward. *Social Change and the Empowerment of the Poor: Poverty Representation in Milwaukee's Community Action Programs, 1964-1972.* Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2001.

Brett, Edward T. "The Attempts of Grassroots Religious Groups to Change U.S. Policy Towards Central America: Their Methods, Successes, and Failures." *Journal of Church and State* 36, no. 4 (Autumn 1994): 773-794.

Buff, Rachel Ida. *Against the Deportation Terror: Organizing for Immigrant Rights in the Twentieth Century.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2017.

Bukowczyk, John J. "Mary the Messiah: Polish Immigrant Heresy and the Malleable Ideology of the Roman Catholic Church, 1880-1839." *Journal of American Ethnic History* 4, no. 2 (Spring 1985): 5-32.

Burks, Paul. "This is Sanctuary: A Reformation in Our Time." In *Churches in Struggle: Liberation Theologies and Social Change in North America*, edited by William K. Tabb, 291-300. New York: Monthly Press Review, 1986.

Burns, Jeffery. *Disturbing the Peace: A History of the Christian Family Movement, 1949-1974.* South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999.

Busto, Rudy V. *King Tiger: The Religious Vision of Reies López Tijerina.* Albuqurque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006.

Butler, Matthew. "Revolution and the Ritual Year: Religious Conflict and Innovation in Cristero Mexico." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 38, no. 3 (August 2006): 465-490

--------, edited. *Faith and Impiety in Revolutionary Mexico*. New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2007.

Cadava, Geraldo L. *Standing on Common Ground: The Making of the Sunbelt Borderland.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008.

Calavita, Kitty. *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the INS.* New Orleans: Quid Pro Books, 2010.

Callahan Jr., Richard J. *Work and Faith in the Kentucky Coal Fields: Subject to Dust.* Bloomington: University of Illinois Press, 2008.

Caminero-Santangelo, Marta. "Documenting the Undocumented: Life Narratives of Unauthorized Immigrants." *Biography* 35, no. 3 (Summer 2012): 449-471.

Cárdenas, Gilbert. "Los Desarraigados: Chicanos in the Midwestern Region of the United States." *Aztlán* 7, no. 2 (Summer 1976): 153-186.

Cary, Lorin Lee. "The Wisconsin Loyalty Legion, 1917-1918." *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 53, no. 1 (Autumn, 1969): 33-50.

Chappell, David. *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005.

Chavez, Ernesto. "*¡Mi Raza Primero!" (My People First): Nationalism, Identity, and Insurgency in the Chicano Movement in Los Angeles, 1966-1978.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.

Chen, Anthony S. *The Fifth Freedom: Jobs, Politics, and Civil Rights in the United States, 1941-1972.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.

Chinnici, Joseph P., O.F.M. "Ecumenism, Civil Rights, and the Second Vatican Council: The American Experience." *U.S. Catholic Historian* 30, no. 3 (Summer 2012): 21-49.

Chodin, Harvey M. and Grafton D. Trout, *Mexican Americans in Transition: Migration and Employment in Michigan Cities.* East Lansing, MI: Rural Manpower Center, Michigan State University, 1969.

Chomsky, Aviva. *A History of the Cuban Revolution.* Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015.

Cohen, Lizabeth. *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939*. New Edition; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Connell, Tula A. *Conservative Counterrevolution: Challenging Liberalism in 1950s Milwaukee.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016.

Conzen, Kathleen Neils. *Immigrant Milwaukee, 1836 – 1860: Accommodation and Community in a Frontier City*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976.

Coutin, Susan B. *The Culture of Protest: Religious Activism and the U.S. Sanctuary Movement*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1993.

--------. "From Refugees to Immigrants: The Legalization Strategies of Salvadoran Immigrants and Activists." *International Migration Review* 32, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 901-925.

Craighill, Peyton G. "The Ministry of The Episcopal Church in the United States of America to Immigrants and Refugees: A Historical Outline." *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 51, no. 2 (June 1982): 203-218.

Cross, Robert D. *The Emergence of Liberal Catholicism in America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967).

Cullen, Mike. *A Time to Dance: The Mike Cullen Story as told to Don Ranly.* Celina, Ohio: Messenger Press, 1972.

Cunningham, Hilary. *God and Caesar at the Rio Grande: Sanctuary and the Politics of Religion*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995.

--------. "The Ethnography of Transnational Social Activism: Understanding the Global as Local Practice." *American Ethnologist* 26, no. 3 (August 1999): 583-604.

Curran, Charles E. *Catholic Social Teaching, 1891-Present: A Historical, Theological, and Ethnical Analysis*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2002.

D'Agostino, Peter R. *Rome in America: Transnational Catholic Ideology from the Risorgimento to Fascism*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.

Dalton, Frederick John. *The Moral Vision of César Chávez.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003.

Davis, Carla P. "Beyond Miami: The Ethnic Enclave and Personal Income in Various Cuban Communities in the United States." *International Migration Review* 38, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 450-469.

Daniel, Pete. *The Shadow of Slavery: Peonage in the South, 1901-1969.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972.

Dougherty, Jack. *More Than One Struggle: The Evolution of Black School Reform in Milwaukee.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.

Davis, Mike. *Magic Urbanism: Latinos Reinvent the U.S. City*. New York: Verso Books, 2000.

De La Torre, Miguel. "Pray for Elián: Religion and Politics in Miami." In *Latino Religions and Civic Activism in the United States,* edited by Gastón Espinosa, Virgilio Elizondo, and Jesse Miranda, 249-262. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Delgadillo, Theresa. *Latina Lives in Milwaukee.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015.

Diaz-Stevens, Ana Maria. *Oxcart Catholicism on Fifth Avenue: The Impact of the Puerto Rican Migration upon the Archdiocese of New York.* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993.

Dochuk, Darren. *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism.* New York: W.W. Norton Company, 2012.

Dolan, Jay P. *The Immigrant Church: New York's Irish and German Catholics, 1815-1865.* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992.

Dolan, Jay P. and Jaime R. Vidal, edited. *Puerto Rican and Cuban Catholics in the U.S., 1900-1965.* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994.

Eisenbrandt, Matt. *Assassination of a Saint: The Plot to Murder Óscar Romero and the Quest to Bring His Killers to Justice*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017.

Elizondo, Virgilio. *Christianity and Culture: An Introduction to Pastoral Theology and Ministry for the Bicultural Community.* Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 1975.

Ellwanger, Joseph. *Strength for the Struggle: Insights from the Civil Rights Movement and Urban Ministry*. Milwaukee: Maven Mark Books, 2014.

Enck-Wanzer, Darrel. "Decolonizing Imaginaries: Rethinking "the People" in the Young Lords' Church Offensive." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 98, no. 1 (February 2012): 1-23.

Espinosa, David. "'Restoring Christian Social Order': The Mexican Catholic Youth Association (1913-1932)." *The Americas* 59, no. 4 (April 2003): 451-474.

Erenburg, Mark. "Obreros Unidos in Wisconsin." *Monthly Labor Review* 91, no. 6 (June 1968): 17-23.

Escobar, Samuel. "The Legacy of Orlando Costas." *International Bulletin of Missionary Outreach* 25, no. 2 (April 2001): 50-56.

Espín, Orlando O. *The Faith of the People: Theological Reflections on Popular Catholicism*. New York: Orbis Books, 1997.

Espín, Orlando O. and Miguel H. Diaz. *From the Hear of Our People: Latino/a Explorations in Catholic Systematic Theology*. New York: Orbis Books, 1999.

Farone, Joan. "The Evolution of the Secretariat of Hispanic Affairs of NCCB/USCCB and its Contributions to Catechesis for Hispanic/Latinos in the United States." PhD diss., Catholic University of America, 2009.

Feen, Richard H. "Church Sanctuary: Historical Roots and Contemporary Practice." *In Defense of the Alien* 7 (1984): 132-139.

Fernández, Delia. "Rethinking the urban and rural divide in Latino labor, recreation, and activism in West Michigan, 1940s-1970s." *Labor History* 57, vol. 4 (Oct. 2016): 482-503.

Fernández, Eduardo C. *La Cosecha: Harvesting Contemporary United States Hispanic Theology.* Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2000.

Fernández, Lilia. *Brown in the Windy City: Mexicans and Puerto Ricans in Postwar Chicago*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012.

Fife, John. "Civil Initiative." In *Trails of Hope and Terror: Testimonies on Immigration,* edited by Miguel A. de la Torre, 170-175. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009.

Filindra, Alexandra. "The Emergence of the 'Temporary Mexican': American Agriculture, the US Congress, and the 1920 Hearings on the Temporary Admission of Illiterate Mexican Laborers." *Latin American Research Review* 49, no. 3 (2014): 85-102.

Flores, Edmundo. "Mexican Migratory Labor in Wisconsin: A Study of Some Aspects of the War Food Administration Program for the Use of Mexican Agricultural Workers during 1945, in the State of Wisconsin." Master's thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1947.

--------. "Los braceros mexicanos en Wisconsin," *El Trimestre Económico* 17, no. 1 (1950): 23-80.

Fones-Wolf, Elizabeth. "Industrial Recreation, the Second World War, and the Revival of Welfare Capitalism, 1934-1960." *Business History Review* 60, no. 2 (Summer 1986): 232-257.

Fones-Wolf, Elizabeth and Ken Fones-Wolf. *Struggle for the Soul of the Postwar South: White Evangelical Protestants and Operation Dixie*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015.

Forment, Carlos A. "Political Practice and the Rise of an Ethnic Enclave: The Cuban American Case, 1959-1979." *Theory and Society* 18, no. 1 (January 1989): 47-81.

Fox Piven, Frances and Richard A. Cloward. *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail.* New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

Freier, Luisa Feline. "How Our Lady of Guadalupe Became Lutheran: Latin American Migration and Religious Change." *Migraciones Internacionales* 5, no. 2 (July-December 2009): 153-190.

Gabaccia, Donna. *Foreign Relations: American Immigration in Global Perspective*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012.

Gamboa, Erasmo. *Braceros in the Pacific Northwest, 1942-1947.* Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990.

García, Juan. *Mexicans in the Midwest, 1900-1932*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996.

García, María Cristina. *Havana USA: Cuban Exiles and Cuban Americans in South Florida.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.

--------. *Seeking Refuge: Central American Migration to Mexico, the United States, and Canada*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.

García, Mario T. edited. *The Gospel of César Chávez: My Faith in Action.* Lanham, MD: Sheed & Ward, 2007.

--------. "PADRES: Latino Community Priests and Social Action." In *Latino Religions and Civic Activism in the United States,* edited by Gastón Espinosa, Virgilio Elizondo, and Jesse Miranda, 77-96. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

--------. *Cátolicos: Resistance and Affirmation in Chicano Catholic History*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010.

Garcia, Matthew. *From the Jaws of Victory: The Triumph and Tragedy of Cesar Chavez and the Farm Worker Movement.* Berkeley: University of North Carolina Press, 2012.

García Ugarte, Marta Eugenia. "Los católicos y el presidente Calles." *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* 57, no. 3 (July-September 1995): 131-155.

Garneau, James F. "The First Inter-American Episcopal Conference, November 2-4, 1959: Canada and the USA Called to the Rescue of Latin America." *Catholic Historical Review* 87, no. 4 (October 2001): 662-687.

Gellman, Erik S. and Jarod Roll, *The Gospel of the Working-Class: Labor's Southern Prophets in New Deal America*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011.

Goizueta, Roberto. *Caminemos Con Jesus: Toward a Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995.

--------. "Our Lady of Guadalupe: The Heart of Mexican Identity." In *Religion and the Creation of Race and Ethnicity: An Introduction*, edited by Craig R. Prentiss, 140-151. New York: New York University Press, 2003.

Golden, Renny and Michael McConnell. *Sanctuary: The New Underground Railroad.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986.

--------. "Sanctuary in Chicago." In *Yearning to Breathe: Liberation Theologies in the United States*, edited by Mar Peter Raoul, Linda Rennie Forcey, and Robert Frederick Hunter, Jr., 156-158. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990.

Gonzales, Michael. "Ruffians and Revolutionaries: The Development of the Young Lords Organization in Chicago." Master's thesis, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2015.

González, Gilbert G. *Culture of Empire: American Writers, Mexico, and Mexican Immigrants, 1880-1930*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004.

Gosse, Van. "'The North American Front': Central American Solidarity in the Reagan Era." In *Reshaping the US Left: Popular Struggles in the 1980s,* edited by Mike Davis and Michael Sprinker, 11-50. New York: Verso, 1988.

Graham, Jr., Otis L. and Elizabeth Koad. "Americanizing the Immigrant, Past and Future: History and Implications of a Social Movement." *The Public Historian* 15, no. 4 (Autumn, 1993): 24-49.

Grebler, Leo, Joan Moore, and Ralph Gúzman. *The Mexican American People: The Nation's Second Largest Minority.* New York, Free Press, 1970).

Greene, Victor. *For God and Country: The Rise of Polish and Lithuanian Ethnic Consciousness in America, 1860-1910.* Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 1975.

Greer, Colleen. "Ideology as Response: Cultural and Political Process in the Sanctuary Movement." *Social Thought & Research* 20, no. 1 (1997): 109-128.

Grewal, Zareena. *Islam Is a Foreign Country: American Muslims and the Global Crisis of Authority*. New York: New York University Press, 2013.

Grow, Michael. *U.S. Presidents and Latin American Interventions: Pursuing Regime Change in the Cold War.* Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2008.

Guajardo, Jr., Antonio G. "Incorporation of Latino Police Officers into the Milwaukee Police Department: How a Group of Latino Police Officers Shed the "Blue Shield" for a Latino Identity." PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2015.

Guérin-Gonzales, Camille. *Mexican Workers and the American Dream: Immigration, Repatriation, and California Farm Labor, 1900-1939.* New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1994.

Guerra, Lillian. *Visions of Power in Cuba: Revolution, Redemption, and Resistance, 1959-1971.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014.

Gurda, John. *The Latin Community on Milwaukee's Near South Side*. Milwaukee: The Milwaukee Urban Observatory, 1976.

--------. *The Making of Milwaukee*. Milwaukee: Milwaukee County Historical Society, 1999.

--------. *Cream City Chronicles: Stories of Milwaukee's Past*. Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2006.

Gutiérrez, David. "The New Turn in Chicano/Mexican History: Integrating Religious Belief and Practice." In *Catholics in the American Century: Recasting Narratives of U.S. History*, edited by R Scott Appleby and Kathleen Sprows Cummings, 109-134. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2012.

Gutierrez, Gustavo. *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation.* 15th anniversary ed., Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988.

Gutierrez, José Angel. *The Making of a Chicano Militant: Lessons from Cristal.* Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998.

Gutman, Herbert G. "Protestantism and the American Labor Movement: The Christian Spirit in the Gilded Age." *American Historical Review* 72, no. 1 (October 1966): 74-101.

Hahamovitch, Cindy. *The Fruits of Their Labor: Atlantic Coast Farmworkers and the Making of Migrant Poverty, 1870-1945*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997.

--------. *No Man's Land: Jamaican Guestworkers in America and the Global History of Disposable Labor*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011.

Harvey, Paul. *Freedom's Coming: Religious Culture and the Shaping of the South from the Civil War through the Civil Rights Era.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007.

Hayden, Dolores. *The Power of Place: Urban Landscape as Public History*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995.

Hinojosa, Felipe. *Latino Mennonites: Civil Rights, Faith, and Evangelical Culture*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014.

--------. "Sacred Spaces: Race, Resistance, and the Politics of Chicana/o and Latina/o Religious History." In *A Promising Problem: The New Chicana/o History,* edited by Carlos Kevin Blanton, 111-134. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016.

Hoffman, Abraham. *Unwanted Mexican Americans in the Great Depression: Repatriation Pressures, 1929-1939.* Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1974.

Holbrook, Joseph. "The Catholic Church in Cuba, 1959-62: The Clash of Ideologies." *International Journal of Cuban Studies* 2, no. 3/4 (Autumn/Winter 2010): 264-275.

Hondagneu-Sotelo, Pierrette. "Religion and a Standpoint Theory of Immigrant Social Justice." In *Religion and Social Justice for Immigrants*, edited by Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, 3-15. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007.

Hondagneu-Sotelo, Pierrette, Genelle Gaudinez, Hector Lara, and Billie C. Ortiz. ""There's a Spirit that Transcends the Border": Faith, Ritual, and Postnational Protest at the U.S.-Mexico Border." *Sociological Perspectives* 47, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 133-159

Horn, James J. "U.S. Diplomacy and 'The Spector of Bolshevism' in Mexico (1924-1927)." *The Americas* 32, no. 1 (July 1975): 31-45.

Hoy, Suellen. *Good Hearts: Catholic Sisters in Chicago's Past.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006.

Huber, John. "Migratory Agricultural Workers in Wisconsin," Master's thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1967.

Innis-Jiménez, Michael. *Steel Barrio: The Great Mexican Migration to South Chicago, 1915-1940*. New York: New York Press, 2013.

Izzo, Amanda. *Liberal Christianity and Women's Global Activism: The YWCA of the USA and the Maryknoll Sisters.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2018.

Jablonsky, Thomas J., edited. *Milwaukee Stories*. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2005.

Johnson, Karen Joy. "The Universal Church in the Segregated City: Doing Catholic Interracialism in Chicago, 1916-1963." PhD diss., University of Illinois-Chicago, 2013.

Jones, Patrick D. *The Selma of the North: Civil Rights Insurgency in Milwaukee*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010.

Joseph, Gilbert M. "What We Now Know and Should Know: Bringing Latin America More Meaningfully into Cold War Studies." In *In From the Cold: Latin America's New Encounter with the Cold War,* edited by Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniela Spenser, 3-46. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

Kanter, Deborah. "Making Mexican Parishes: Ethnic Succession in Chicago Churches, 1947-1977." *U.S. Catholic Historian* 30, no. 2 (2012): 35-58.

--------. "Truly In-between People: Situating Latinos in Twentieth-Century Urban History." *Journal of Urban History* 41, no. 6 (2015): 1143-1151.

Kantowicz, Edward R. *Corporation Sole: Cardinal Mudelein and Chicago Catholicism*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983.

Katznelson, Ira. *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time.* New York: Liverlight Publishing, 2013.

Kauffman, Christopher J. "The Knights of Columbus: Lay Activism from the Origins through the Great Depression." *U.S. Catholic Historian* 9, no. 3 (Summer 1990): 261-274.

--------. *Faith and Fraternalism: The History of the Knights of Columbus*. New York: Simon and Schuster Publishing, 1992.

Kelliher, Jr., Thomas G. "Hispanic Catholics and the Archdiocese of Chicago, 1923-1970." PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 1996.

Kellogg, Louise P. "The Alien Suffrage Provision in the Constitution of Wisconsin." *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 1, no. 4 (June 1918): 422-425.

Kelly, Timothy. *The Transformation of American Catholicism: The Pittsburgh Laity and the Second Vatican Council.* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009.

K'Meyer, Tracy E. ""I Just Felt Called…": Oral History and the Meaning of Faith in American Religious History." *Journal of American History* 86, no. 2 (September 1999): 724-733.

Knight, Alan. "The Mentality and Modus Operandi of Revolutionary Anticlericalism." In *Faith and Impiety in Revolutionary Mexico*, edited by Matthew Butler, 21-56. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

Kniss, Fred and Paul D. Numrich. *Sacred Assemblies and Civic Engagement: How Religion Matters for America's Newest Immigrants*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2007.

Korman, Gerd. *Industrialization, Immigrants, and Americanizers: The View From Milwaukee, 1866-1921*. Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1967.

Kornbluh, Felicia. *The Battle for Welfare Rights: Politics and Poverty in Modern America.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007.

Korstad, Robert R. *Civil Rights Unionism: Tobacco Workers and the Struggle for Democracy in the Mid-Twentieth Century.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003.

Kruse, Kevin M. *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America.* Philadelphia: Basic Books, 2015.

Kuzniewski, Anthony J. *Faith and Fatherland: The Polish Church War in Wisconsin, 1896-1918*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981.

Leffel, Gregory P. *Faith Seeking Action: Mission, Social Movements, and the Church in Motion.* Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2007.

Lernoux, Penny. *Cry of the People: The Struggle for Human Rights in Latin America – The Catholic Church in Conflict with U.S. Policy.* New York: Penguin Books, 1991.

Lieblich, Julia. *Sisters: Lives of Devotion and Defiance.* New York: Ballantine Books, 1992.

Loescher, Gil. "Humanitarianism and Politics in Central America." *Political Science Quarterly* 103, no. 2 (Summer 1988): 295-320.

Loescher, Gil and John A. Scanlan. *Calculated Kindness: Refugees and America's Half-Open Door, 1945-Present*. New York: The Free Press, 1986.

Lorentzen, Robin. *Women in the Sanctuary Movement.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991.

Loza, Mireya. *Defiant Braceros: How Migrant Workers Fought for Racial, Sexual, and Political Freedom.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016.

MacLean, Nancy. *Freedom is Not Enough: The Opening of the American Workplace.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008.

Mantler, Gordon K. *Power to the People: Black-Brown Coalition and the Fight for Economic Justice, 1960-1974.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013.

Mapes, Kathleen. *Sweet Tyranny: Migrant Labor, Industrial Agriculture, and Imperial Politics.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009.

Mariscal, George. *Brown-Eyed Children of the Sun: Lessons from the Chicano Movement, 1965-1975.* Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005.

Marsh, Charles. *God's Long Summer: Stories of Faith and Civil Right.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008.

Martin, Philip L. "Harvest Mechanization and Agricultural Trade Unionism: Obreros Unidos in Wisconsin." *Labor Law Journal* 28, no. 3 (March 1977): 166-173.

Martínez, Anne. *Catholic Borderlands: Mapping Catholicism onto American Empire, 1905-1935*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2014.

Martínez, Richard Edward. *PADRES: The National Chicano Priest Movement.* Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010.

Matters, Michael Dean. "The Sanctuary Movement, 1980-1988: An Organizational Analysis of Structures and Cultures." PhD diss., University of Illinois at Chicago, 1994.

Matthiasson, Carolyn J. "Coping in a New Environment: Mexican Americans in Milwaukee, Wisconsin." *Urban Anthropology* 3, no. 2 (Fall, 1974): 262-277.

Matovina, Timothy. "The National Parish and Americanization." *U.S. Catholic Historian* 17, no. 1 (Winter, 1999): 45-58.

--------. *Guadalupe and Her Faithful: Latin Catholics in San Antonio, from Colonial Origins to the Present*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005.

--------. *Latino Catholicism: Transformation in America's Largest Church*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011.

Matovina, Timothy and Gary Riebe-Estrella, edited. *Horizons of the Sacred: Mexican Traditions in U.S. Catholicism.* Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2002.

McCarthy, Malachy Richard. "Which Christ Came to Chicago: Catholic and Protestant Programs to Evangelize, Socialize, and Americanize the Mexican Immigrant, 1900-1940." PhD diss., Loyola University of Chicago, 2002.

McCartin, Joseph A. "The Force of Faith: An Introduction to the Labor and Religion Special Issue." *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 6, no. 1 (2009): 1-4.

McEvoy, Gráinne. ""Operation Migratory Labor": Braceros, Migrants, and the American Catholic Bishops' Committee for the Spanish Speaking." *U.S. Catholic Historian* 34, no. 3 (Summer 2016): 75-98.

McGreevy, John T. "Racial Justice and the People of God: The Second Vatican Council, the Civil Rights Movement, and American Catholics." *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 4, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 221-254.

--------. *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth-Century Urban North*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996.

McNamara, Patrick H. "Social action priests in the Mexican American community." *Sociology of Religion* 29 (1968): 177-185.

Meconis, Charles A. *With Clumsy Grace: The American Catholic Left, 1961-1975.* New York: Seabury Press, 1979.

Medina, Lara. *Las Hermanas: Chicana/Latina Religious Political Activism in the U.S. Catholic Church.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005.

Medina, Nestor. *Mestizaje: Remapping Race, Culture, and Faith in Latina/o Catholicism*. New York: Orbis Books, 2009.

Meyer, Stephen. "*Stalin Over Wisconsin": The Making and Unmaking of Militant Unionism, 1900-1950*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992.

Moralez, Eduardo. "From Tejano to Latino in Indiana: The Evolving Class and Ethnic Identity of Mexican Migrants to the Great Lakes, 1900-2000." PhD diss., Southern Methodist University, 2010.

Miller, Randolph and Thomas Marzik, edited. *Immigrants and Religion in Urban America*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1977.

Miner, Barbara J. *Lessons from the Heartland: A Turbulent Half-Century of Public Education in an Iconic American City.* New York: The New Press, 2013.

Mize, Ronald L. "The Invisible Workers: Articulations of Race and Class in the Life Histories of Braceros." PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2000.

Molina, Natalia. *How Race is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014.

Mollin, Mary. "Communities of Resistance: Women and the Catholic Left of the Late 1960s." *The Oral History Review* 31, no. 2 (Summer-Autumn 2004): 29-51.

Montejano, David. *Quixote's Soldiers: A Local History of the Chicano Movement, 1966-1981.* Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010.

Morales Domínguez, Esteban. *Race in Cuba: Essays on the Revolution and Racial Inequality.* New York: Monthly Review Press, 2013.

Moreton, Bethany. *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010.

Morrison, Karen Y. *Cuba's Racial Crucible: The Sexual Economy of Social Identities, 1750-2000.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015.

Murray, Jennifer Lynn. "The Chicago Religious Task Force on Central America: Moral Defiance in the Face of U.S. Policy, 1980-1992." Master's thesis, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, 2012.

Myrdal, Gunnar. *An American Dilemma.* New York: Harper and Row, 1944.

Nadasen, Premilla. *Welfare Warriors: The Welfare Rights Movement in the United States.* New York: Routledge, 2005.

--------. *Rethinking the Welfare Rights Movement.* New York: Routledge, 2011.

Nepron, Ezra Berkley. *Justice, Justice Shall You Pursue: A History of New Jewish Agenda.* Philadelphia: Thread Makes Blanket Press, 2012.

Nepstad, Sharon Erickson. *Convictions of the Soul: Religion, Culture, and Agency in the Central America Solidarity Movement*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Ngai, Mae. *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004.

O'Brien, David. "What Happened to the Catholic Left?" In *What's Left?: Liberal American Catholics,* edited by Mary Joe Weaver, 255-282. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999.

Odem, Mary E. "Our Lady of Guadalupe in the New South: Latino Immigrants and the Politics of Integration in the Catholic Church." *Journal of American Ethnic History* 24, no. 1 (Fall 2004): 26-57.

Okihiro, Gary Y. "Oral History and the Writing of Ethnic History." In *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, edited by David King Dunaway and Willa K. Baum, 27-46. Walnut Creek, C.A.: AltaMira Press, 1996.

Opie, Frederick Douglass. *Upsetting the Apple Cart: Black-Latino Coalitions in New York City from Protest to Public Office.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2014.

Orleck, Annelise. *Storming Caesar's Palace: How Black Mothers Fought Their Own War on Poverty.* Boston: Beacon Press, 2005.

Oropeza, Lorena. *¡Raza Si! ¡Guerra No!: Chicano Protests and Patriotism during the Viet Nam War Era.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.

--------. "The Heart of Chicano History: Reies López Tijerina as a Memory Entrepreneur." *The Sixties: A Journal of History, Politics and Culture* 1, no. 1 (June 2008): 49-67.

Orsi, Robert. *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985.

--------. *Thank You, St. Jude: Women's Devotion to the Patron Saint of Hopeless Causes*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.

--------, edited. *Gods of the City: Religion and the American Urban Landscape*. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1999.

--------. "Everyday Miracles: The Study of Lived Religion." In *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice*, edited by David D. Hall, 3-21. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.

Padilla, Felix M. *Latino Ethnic Consciousness: The Case of Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans in Chicago.* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985.

Paik, A. Naomi. "Abolitionist futures and the US sanctuary movement." *Race & Class* 59, no. 2 (2017): 3-25.

Parot, Joseph J. *Polish Catholics in Chicago, 1850-1920: A Religious History*. DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois Press, 1981.

Peck, Gunther. *Reinventing Free Labor: Padrones and Immigrant Workers in the North American West, 1880-1930.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Pedraza-Bailey, Silvia. "Cuba's Exiles: Portrait of a Refugee Migration." *The International Migration Review* 19, no. 1 (Spring 1985): 4-34.

Peña, Elaine. "Beyond Mexico: Guadalupan Sacred Space Production and Mobilization in a Chicago Suburb." *American Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (September 2008): 721-747.

Pérez-Stable, Marifeli. *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course, and Legacy.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Perla, Jr., Héctor. "Si Nicaragua Venció, El Salvador Vencerá: Central American Agency in the Creation of the U.S.: Central American Peace and Solidarity Movement." *Latin American Research Review* 43, no. 2 (2008): 136-158.

Piar, Carlos R. "César Chávez and La Causa: Toward a Hispanic Christian Social Ethic." *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* 16 (1996): 103-121.

Pienkos, Donald. "Politics, Religion, and Change in Polish Milwaukee, 1900-1930." *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 61, no. 3 (Spring, 1978): 178-209.

Pirie, Sophie H. "The Origins of a Political Trial: The Sanctuary Movement and Political Justice." *Yale Journal of Law & the Humanities* 2, no. 2 (1990): 381-416.

Pitti, Gina Marie. "To "Hear About God in Spanish": Ethnicity, Church, and Community Activism in the San Francisco Archdiocese's Mexican American Colonias, 1942-1965." PhD diss., Stanford University, 2003.

Plaut, W. Gunther. "Jewish Ethics and International Migrations." *The International Migration Review* 30, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 18-26.

Pope, Jackie. "Women in the Welfare Rights Struggle." In *A New Introduction to Poverty: The Role of Race, Power, and Politics,* edited by Louis Kushnick and James Jennings, 287-306. New York: NYU Press, 1999.

Portes, Alejandro. "Dilemmas of a Golden Exile: Integration of Cuban Refugee Families in Milwaukee." *American Sociological Review* 34, no. 4 (1969): 505-518.

Power, Margaret and Julie A. Charlip. "Introduction: On Solidarity." *Latin American Perspectives* 36, no. 6 (November 2009): 3-9.

Poyo, Gerald E. ""Integration without Assimilation": Cuban Catholics in Miami, 1960-1980." *U.S. Catholic Historian* 20, no. 4 (Fall, 2002): 91-109.

--------. *Cuban Catholics in the United States, 1960-1980.* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007.

Praszalowicz, Dorota. "The Cultural Changes of Polish-American Parochial Schools in Milwaukee, 1866-1988." *Journal of American Ethnic History* 13, no. 4 (Summer, 1994): 23-45.

Presbyterian Historical Society. "Working the Promised Land: Mission Service to Agricultural Workers," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 88, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2010): 68-74.

--------. "Migrant Ministry," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 93, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2015): 70-76.

Preston, William. *Aliens and Dissenters: Federal Suppression of Radicals, 1903-1933.* Reprinted ed., Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994.

Prouty, Marco G. *César Chávez, the Catholic Bishops, and the Farmworkers' Struggle for Social Justice.* Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2006.

Pulido, Alberto López. "A Sociological Analysis of Latino Religions: The Formation of the Theoretical Binary and Beyond." In *Religion and Social Order: American Sociology of Religion, Histories*, edited by Anthony Blasi, 223-252. Boston: Brill, 2007.

Purcell, Eileen M. *The Public Sanctuary Movement: An Historical Basis of Hope.* San Francisco: Sanctuary Oral History Project, 2007.

Rabe, Stephen G. *The Killing Zone: The United States Wages Cold War in Latin America.* 2nd ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Ramirez, Leonard G. *Chicanas of 18th Street: Narratives of a Movement from Latino Chicago.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011.

Redinger, Matthew. "'To Arouse and Inform': The Knights of Columbus and United States-Mexican Relations, 1924-1937." *Catholic Historical Review* 88, no. 3 (Jul., 2002): 489-518.

--------. *American Catholics and the Mexican Revolution, 1924-1936*. Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2005.

Reese, William J. "'Partisans of the Proletariat': The Socialist Working Class and the Milwaukee Schools, 1890-1920." *History of Education Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (Spring, 1981): 3-50.

Rippley, La Vern J. *The Immigrant Experience in Wisconsin*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1985.

Rivera, Eugenio. "La Colonia de Lorain, Ohio." In *The Puerto Rican Diaspora: Historical Perspectives,* edited by Carmen Teresa Whalen and Víctor Vázquez-Hernández, 151-173. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005.

Rodriguez, Joseph, Sarah Filzen, Susan Hunter, Dana Nix, and Marc Rodriguez. *Nuestro Milwaukee: The Making of the United Community Center*. Milwaukee: Wisconsin Humanities Council, 2000.

Rodriguez, Marc S. "A Movement of "Young Mexican Americans Seeking Change,": Critical Citizenship, Migration, and the Chicano Movement in Texas and Wisconsin, 1960-1975." *Western Historical Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (Autumn 2003): 274-299.

--------. *The Tejano Diaspora: Mexican Americans and Ethnic Politics in Texas and Wisconsin*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011.

--------. "Defining the Space of Participation in a Northern City: Tejanos and the War on Poverty in Wisconsin." In *The War on Poverty: A New Grassroots History, 1964-1980,* edited by Annelise Orleck and Lisa Gayle Hazirjian, 110-132. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2011.

--------. *Rethinking the Chicano Movement.* New York: Routledge, 2015.

Roll, Jarod. *Spirit of Rebellion: Labor and Religion in the New Cotton South*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010.

Rosales, F. Arturo. *Chicano! The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement.* Houston: Arte Público Press, 1996.

Ross, Rosetta. *Witnessing and Testifying: Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights.* Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2003.

Ruiz, Jean-Pierre. *Readings from the Edges: The Bible and People on the Move*. New York: Orbis Books, 2011.

Ruiz, Vicki. *Cannery Lives, Cannery Women: Mexican Women, Unionization, and the California Food Processing Industry, 1930-1950.* Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987.

--------. "Situating Stories: The Surprising Consequences of Oral History." *The Oral History Review* 25, no. 1/2 (Summer-Autumn 1998): 71-80.

Rúa, Mérida M. *A Grounded Identidad: Making New Lives in Chicago's Puerto Rican Neighborhoods.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Rubin, Jeffery W. David Smilde, and Benjamin Junge. "Lived Religion and Lived Citizenship in Latin America's Zone of Crisis: Introduction." *Latin American Research Review* 49 (2014): 9-13.

Ryan, Kevin Michael. "Catholic Liberal Interracialism in the Archdiocese of Chicago in the 1960s and 1970s." PhD diss., University of Buffalo, 2016.

Sagerena, Robert Lint. "Migration and Mexican American Religious Life, 1948-2000." In *Immigration and Religion in America: Comparative and Historical Perspective*, edited by Richard Alba, Albert J. Raboteau, and Josh DeWind, 56-70. New York: New York University Press, 2008.

Sánchez, George J. *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945*. Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Sandoval, Moises. *On The Move: A History of the Hispanic Church in the United States.* Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1990.

Santillan, Richard. "Latino Politics in the Midwestern United States: 1915-1986." In *Latinos and the Political System,* edited by F. Chris Garcia, 99-118. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988.

--------. "Mexican Baseball Teams in the Midwest, 1916-1965: The Politics of Cultural Survival and Civil Rights." *Perspectives in Mexican American Studies* 7 (2000): 131-151.

Satter, Beryl. ""Our Greatest Moments of Glory Have Been Fighting the Institutions We Love the Most": The Rise and Fall of Chicago's Interreligious Council on Urban Affairs, 1958-1969." *U.S. Catholic Historian* 22, no. 2 (Spring 2004): 33-44.

Sterne, Evelyn Savidge. *Ballots and Bibles: Ethnic Politics and the Catholic Church in Providence.* Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2004.

Sawyer, Mark Q. *Racial Politics in Post-Revolutionary Cuba.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Schoultz, Lars. *Beneath the United States: A History of U.S. Policy Toward Latin America.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998.

Schwartz, David R. *Moral Minority: The Evangelical Left in an Age of Conservatism.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012.

--------. "Global Reflex: International Evangelicals, Human Rights, and the New Shape of American Social Engagement." In *The New Evangelical Social Engagement,* edited by Brian Steensland and Philip Goff, 221-241.Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Secrist, Karen S. "Construyendo nuestro pedacito de patria: Space and Dis(place)ment in Puerto Rican Chicago." PhD dissertation, Duke University, 2009.

Shaull, Richard. "A Theology of Sanctuary from a Calvinist Perspective." In *Sanctuary: A Resource Guide for Understanding and Participating in the Central American Refugee Struggle,* edited by Gary MacEoin, 62-74. New York: Harper Collins, 1985.

Shaw, Stephen J. "The Cities and the Plains, a home for God's People: A History of the Catholic Parish in the Midwest." In *The American Catholic Parish: A History From 1850 To The Present*, edited by Jay P. Dolan, 277-380. New York: Paulist Press, 1987.

Sheridan, Clare. "Contested Citizenship: National Identity and the Mexican Immigration Debates of the 1920s." *Journal of American Ethnic History* 21, no. 3 (Spring, 2002): 3-35.

Shoemaker, Karl. *Sanctuary and Crime in the Middle Ages, 400-1500.* New York: Fordham University Press, 2011.

Sifuentez, Mario. *Of Forests and Fields: Mexican Labor in the Pacific Northwest.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2016.

Simon, Roger D. "The City-Building Process: Housing and Services in New Milwaukee Neighborhoods, 1880-1910." *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 86, no. 6 (1996): 1-163.

Slawson, Douglas J. "The National Catholic Welfare Conference and the Church-State Conflict in Mexico, 1925, 1929." *The Americas* 47, no. 1 (Jul., 1990): 55-93.

Slesinger, Doris P. and Eileen Muirragui, "Migrant Agricultural Labor in Wisconsin: A Short History." Madison: University of Wisconsin Madison, Institute for Research and Poverty Discussion Papers, 1979.

Smith, Christian. *The Emergence of Liberation Theology: Radical Religion and Social Movement Theory.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

--------. *Resisting Reagan: The U.S. Central America Peace Movement*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

Smith, Kevin D. ""In God We Trust": Religion, the Cold War, and Civil Rights in Milwaukee." PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1999.

--------. "Breaking Faith: Religion, Americanism, and Civil Rights in Postwar Milwaukee." *Religion and American Culture* 20, no. 1 (Winter 2010): 57-92.

Snyder, Ronald H. "Chief for Life: Harold Breier and His ERA." PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2002.

Song-Ha Lee, Sonia. *Building a Latino Civil Rights Movement: Puerto Ricans, African Americans, and the Pursuit of Racial Justice in New York City.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014.

Staudenmeier, Michael. ""Mostly of Spanish Extraction": Second-Class Citizenship and Racial Formation in Puerto Rican Chicago, 1946-1965." *Journal of American History* 104, no. 3 (December 2017): 681-706.

Still, Bayrd. *Milwaukee: The History of A City*. Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1948.

Stromquist, Shelton edited. *Labor's Cold War: Local Politics in a Global Context.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008.

Summers Sandoval Jr., Tomás F. *Latinos at the Golden Gate: Creating Community and Identity in San Francisco*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013.

Surdam, Maia A. "Migrant Camps and Family Farms: The Politics of Housing, Community, and Citizenship in Wisconsin Agriculture, 1933-1972." Master's thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2006.

Taylor, Paul S. "Migratory Farm Labor in the United States." *Monthly Labor Review* 44, no. 3 (March 1937): 537-549.

Tentler, Leslie Woodcock. "On the Margins: The State of American Catholic History." *American Quarterly* 45, no. 1 (March 1993): 104-127.

Thomas, Lorrin. *Puerto Rican Citizen: History and Political Identity in Twentieth-Century New York City.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.

Tippner, Jeffrey E. "The Third World Evangelical Missiology of Orlando E. Costas." PhD diss., University of St. Andrews, 2012.

Todd, Molly. ""We Were Part of the Revolutionary Movement There": Wisconsin Peace Progressives and Solidarity with El Salvador in the Reagan Era." *Journal of Civil and Human Rights* 3, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2017): 1-56.

Tomsho, Robert. *The American Sanctuary Movement.* Austin: Texas Monthly, 1987.

Toro-Morn, Maura I. "Boricuas in Chicago: Gender and Class in the Migration and Settlement of Puerto Ricans." In *The Puerto Rican Diaspora: Historical Perspectives,* edited by Carmen Teresa-Whalen and Víctor Vázquez-Hernández, 128-150. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005.

Treviño, Roberto R. *The Church in the Barrio: Mexican American Ethno-Catholicism in Houston*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006.

Trotter, Joe William. *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915-145*. Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 2006.

Tweed, Thomas A. *Our Lady of the Exile: Diasporic Religion at a Cuban Catholic Shrine in Miami.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

--------. *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008.

Valdés, Dennis Nodín. "Betabeleros: The Formation of an Agricultural Proletariat in the Midwest, 1897-1930." *Labor History* 30, no. 4 (September 1989): 536-562.

--------. *Al Norte: Agricultural Workers in the Great Lakes Region, 1917-1970.* Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991.

--------. *Barrios Norteños: St. Paul and Midwestern Mexican Communities in the Twentieth Century*. Austin: University of Texas, 2000.

Valdez, Avelardo. "Selective Determinants in Maintaining Social Movement Organizations: Three Case Studies from the Chicano the Chicano Community." In *Latinos and the Political System,* edited by F. Chris Garcia, 236-254. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988.

Valerio-Jiménez, Omar, Santiago Vaquera-Vásquez, and Claire F. Fox, edited. *The Latino Midwest Reader*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016.

Vargas, Zaragosa. *Proletarians of the North: A History of Mexican Industrial Workers in Detroit and the Midwest, 1917-1933*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.

Vecoli, Rudolph J. "Prelates and Peasants: Italian Immigrants and the Catholic Church." *Journal of Social History* 2, no. 3 (Spring 1969): 251-253.

Vega, Sujey. *Latino Heartland: Of Borders and Belonging in the Midwest.* New York: New York University Press, 2015.

Vidal, Jaime R. "The American Church and the Puerto Rican People." *U.S. Catholic Historian* 9, no. 1/2 (Winter-Spring 1990): 119-135.

Vietoris, John M. ""A Golden Opportunity for Reaping a Harvest of Souls": A History of the Ministry to African American Catholics in Milwaukee, 1908-1963." PhD diss., Marquette University, 2009.

Villareal Garza, Amy. "Places of Sanctuary: Religious Revivalism and the Politics of Immigration in New Mexico." PhD diss,, University of California-Santa Cruz, 2014.

Waligora-Davis, Nicole A. *Sanctuary: African Americans and Empire.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Walsh, Albeus. "The Work of the Catholic Bishops' Committee for the Spanish Speaking in the United State." Master's thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1952.

Wanzer-Serrano, Darrel. *The New York Young Lords and the Struggle for Liberation.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015.

Warner, R. Stephen. *A Church of Our Own: Disestablishment and Diversity in American Religion.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005.

Watt, Alan J. *Farm Workers and the Churches: The Movement in California and Texas.* College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2010.

Wauters, Will "The Borderland Cultures Encounter the Church and a Church Gave Birth to a new Chicano Culture." *Anglican and Episcopal History* 82, no. 4 (December 2013): 393-408.

Weaver, Mary Jo. "Introduction: Who Are the Conservative Catholics?" In *Being Right: Conservative Catholics in America,* edited by Mary Jo Weaver and R. Scott Appleby, 1-16. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1995.

Weigel, George. "The Neoconservative Difference: A Proposal for the Renewal of Church and Society." In *Being Right: Conservative Catholics in America,* edited by Mary Jo Weaver and R. Scott Appleby, 138-162. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1995.

Westad, Odd Arne. *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Wahl, Victor T., Jr. "Migrant Farm Workers in Wisconsin." *Wisconsin Law Review* (March 1951): 344-358.

Whalen, Carmen Teresa. "Colonialism, Citizenship, and the Making of the Puerto Rican Diaspora: An Introduction." In *The Puerto Rican Diaspora: Historical Perspectives,* edited by Carmen Teresa Whalen and Víctor Vázquez-Hernández, 1-42. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005.

Wilkes, Paul. *The Education of an Archbishop: Travels with Rembert Weakland*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992.

Williams, Daniel K. *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Witt, Andrew. *The Black Panthers in the Midwest: The Community Programs and Services of the Black Panther Party in Milwaukee, 1966-1977.* New York: Routledge, 2007.

Wuthnow, Robert. *The Restructuring of American Religion.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988.

Young, Julia G. *Mexican Exodus: Emigrants, Exiles, and Refugees of the Cristero War.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Yukich, Grace. *One Family Under God: Immigration Politics and Progressive Religion in America.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.