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## Latino Louisiana

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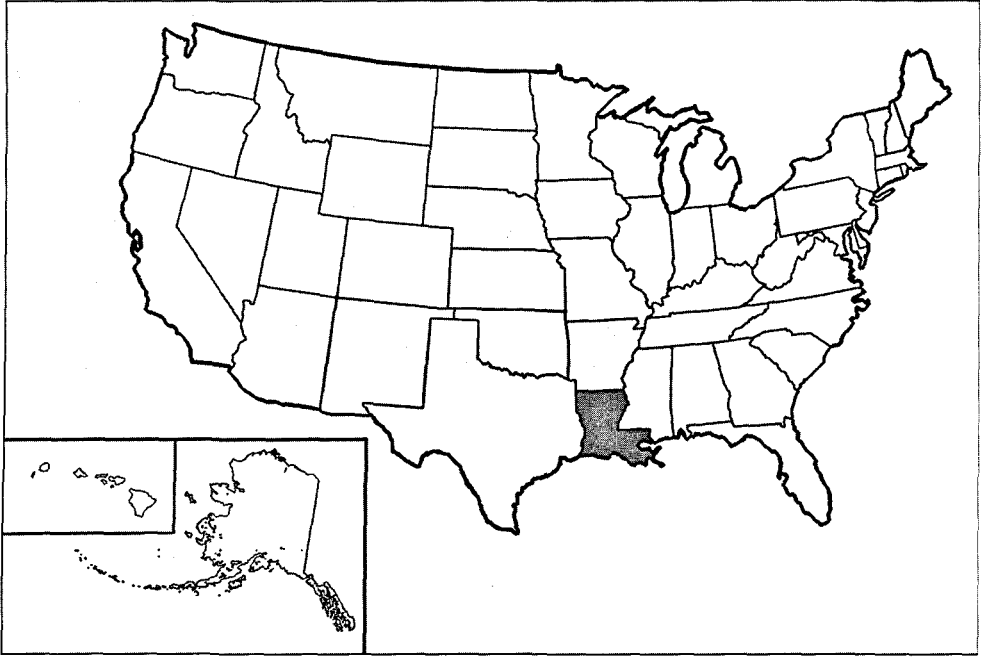
# 19

## LOUISIANA

*Lázaro Lima*

### CHRONOLOGY

- 1814** After the British invade Louisiana, residents of the state from the Canary Islands, called *Isleños*, organize and establish three regiments. The *Isleños* had very few weapons, and some served unarmed as the state provided no firearms. By the time the British were defeated, the *Isleños* had sustained the brunt of life and property loss resulting from the British invasion of Louisiana.
- 1838** The first Mardi Gras parade takes place in New Orleans on Shrove Tuesday with the help and participation of native-born Latin Americans and *Isleños*.
- 1840s** The Spanish-language press in New Orleans supersedes the state's French-language press in reach and distribution.
- 1846–1848** Louisiana-born Eusebio Juan Gómez, editor of the eminent Spanish-language press newspaper *La Patria*, is nominated as General Winfield Scott's field interpreter during the Mexican-American War.
- 1850** The capital moves from New Orleans to Baton Rouge, where a new statehouse had been built with the help of Latin American and Caribbean immigrants.
- 1856** The Last Island Hurricane devastates Louisiana and destroys Last Island (also known as Derniere Island), interrupting commerce from Cuba to New Orleans for months.
- 1861** Cuban-born Loreta Janeta Velázquez enlists in the Confederate Army masquerading as a man, but she is ultimately discovered and discharged while in New Orleans.



- 1861–1865** Various Louisiana regiments comprise Latinos fighting for the Confederacy, including the Chalmette Regiment Infantry of Louisiana and the “European Brigade.” New Orleans is captured by Union forces in 1862.
- 1901** Latin American and Caribbean migrants are hired in Jennings after the first oil well establishes the importance of the state’s oil industry.
- 1940s** United Fruit Company is headquartered in New Orleans. Hondurans begin to arrive because of the company’s ties with their home country.
- 1942–1964** Bracero program brings Mexicans to the state.
- 1950s** Hondurans settle in New Orleans’s Barrio Lempira, which will become the largest Honduran American community in the United States.
- 1953–1954** Ernesto Galarza of the National Farm Labor Union assists many sugarcane and strawberry pickers.
- 1959** Honduran Victor Herrera establishes the Asociación Hondureña de Nueva Orleans to help Honduran American migrants and other Latinos.
- 1962** The United States Catholic Conference in Miami resolves to open a Catholic Cuban Center in New Orleans to provide health care and resettlement assistance to Cuban exiles overwhelming resources in Miami.
- 1962–1963** Cuban exiles are encouraged to move to New Orleans to alleviate their settling exclusively in Miami.
- 1987** Cuban prisoners, known as Marielitos, take approximately 130 hostages in Oakdale.

- 1996** The Canary Islanders Heritage Society of Louisiana is created to preserve the history and culture of Spanish settlement in the state.
- 2005** The New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice Coalition is established to address the working conditions of migrants and African Americans. In 2006 the coalition mobilizes 200 law school students to gather the stories of over 1,000 workers, and it authors one of the most comprehensive assessments of race and labor in the wake of Katrina.

## HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

When Louisiana became the 18th state of the Union in 1812, the territory was already seeped in the linguistic, historical, and cultural antecedents that had made New Orleans, its most important city at the time, one of the first multilingual, multiracial, and multiethnic cosmopolitan centers in the United States. The origins of Spanish-speaking Latino Louisiana can be traced to the arrival of Alonso Álvarez de Pineda (c. 1492–1520) in 1519. Álvarez de Pineda sailed from Cuba to explore the uncharted territories between the Florida peninsula—modern-day Arkansas and Louisiana—and the southern Gulf of Mexico region. The purpose of his trip was to find a route to the Pacific Ocean and, in this sense, the trip can be said to have initiated the importance of Louisiana, and of New Orleans in particular, to the development of one of the first major commercial zones in the Americas. Though the Spanish were the first Europeans to explore Louisiana, the area was largely under the political control of the French until 1762, when it was briefly ceded to Spain. France, however, regained control of the region in 1800, with the Third Treaty of San Ildefonso, but less than 3 years later it sold the territory to the United States with the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. By the time it was incorporated into the Union, Louisiana had thriving communities of Spanish speakers composed of migrants from Latin American, Spain, and the Canary Islands.

The Canary Islanders—or *Isleños*, as they came to be known—migrated to Louisiana by way of Cuba between 1778 and 1783 to prosper economically and to protect the territory from English and French invasion. Scholars have referred to *Isleños* by the three distinct Spanish dialects that the latter developed in their cultural-geographic enclaves throughout the state of Louisiana. They are the *Isleños* proper, who have preserved the Spanish language with the lexical and syntactic patterns of the late colonial Spanish period, the *Bruli*, and the *Adaeseños*. The *Isleños* settled in St. Barnard Parish, near New Orleans; the *Bruli* settled throughout Iberville Parish, south of Baton Rouge; and the *Adaeseños* in Natchitoches and Sabine parishes, southwest of Shreveport.<sup>1</sup> Many of Louisiana's cities grew out of former settlements such as these and from Spanish posts throughout the state, including the cities of New Orleans, Donaldsonville, Alexandria, Marksville, Franklin, and Vidalia. Not surprisingly, New Orleans was the most

significant city in the state given its strategic position on the Mississippi river. As early as 1820 New Orleans had already become a destination for visitors from around the globe, but especially from Latin America.

The importance of New Orleans to the state as the gateway to the Americas, not to mention the major inland shipping route through the Mississippi, also made the city one of the principal centers of Spanish-language print culture, with major newspapers circulating via ships through the Gulf of Mexico and by steamboats up and down the Mississippi River. By the 1840s the Spanish-language press in New Orleans was thriving, and it had superseded the French-language press not only in Hispanic expatriate communities but in Latin American and U.S. Latino communities as well. Many newspapers—such as *El Independiente*, *Diario del Gobierno*, *La verdad*, *La Patria*, and its predecessor *El Hablador*—were distributed throughout the United States via steamboats, trains, and the telegraph, so that by mid-nineteenth century New Orleans had at least 23 different Spanish-language newspapers and journals; New York, in comparison, had only thirteen.<sup>2</sup> Not surprisingly, the war with Mexico (1846–1848) was covered with singular interest in the Spanish-language press because many Latinos and Latin American expatriates, émigrés, and travelers saw the U.S. conquest of Mexico as but a precursor to U.S. expansion into the newly emerging Latin American republics.

During the Mexican-American War Latinos participated on both sides of the conflict. For example, the army nominated Eusebio Juan Gómez, editor of the eminent *La Patria* newspaper, as General Winfield Scott's field interpreter. Gómez was quickly commissioned as lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army, until the Louisiana-born Gómez's position was rescinded because of allegations that he had leaked secret plans to the Mexicans. Manifest Destiny politics in the United States created the need to further justify the war with Mexico in an attempt to achieve geographic and political hegemony and to secure trade routes from the Atlantic to the Pacific seaboards. Native-born Louisiana Latinos such as Gómez were often assumed to be sympathetic to Mexico's plight and less American for their cultural, religious, and linguistic ties to Mexico—even if they were born in the United States.

Speakers of Spanish of various nationalities and political sympathies in Louisiana, as well as native-born Latinos, were often indistinguishable from each other in the English-speaking press and assumed to be Mexican, or at least sympathetic to Mexico during the war. Justifying the violence related to westward conquest—itself most often understood as “westward settlement”—required the denigration of conquered populations as “uncivilized mongrels.” Given the racial diversity of Latinos and the need to justify the war against Mexico, many Latinos began to be classed along with blacks as the former's political and cultural influence diminished; still other Latino groups sought to assimilate by identifying pos-

itively with their European ancestry as Spaniards.<sup>4</sup> However, determining race through ocular evidence was not always possible for such an ethnically diverse group as Latinos. Unlike the various *Isleño* communities who since their arrival in the late eighteenth century had always considered themselves European, most Latinos could not pass as European or as Anglo-Americans even if they wanted to do so. It was during this generative period that the importance of France to the region was exalted, and the notion of a French Louisiana grew in measure with the paradoxical representation of Latinos as foreign to the state. Indeed, even *Isleños* whose physical and cultural presence predated the arrival and settlement of Anglo-Americans began to emphasize their heritage as “pure” Spaniards in contradistinction to mixed-race Latinos in the region, who were increasingly classed as colored, foreign, or both.

Yet, many Louisiana Latinos saw themselves as part of the very fiber of the state and country. The Civil War (1861–1865) is a case in point. At the onset of the war in 1861 Louisiana seceded from the Union and joined the Confederacy. Estimates of Latino participation in the Civil War range as high as 9,500 nationally. In Louisiana, Latinos fought for the Confederacy in the Chalmette Regiment Infantry of Louisiana, as well as in the Zouaves First Florida Calvary of Louisiana.<sup>5</sup> Louisiana’s “European Brigade” alone had upwards of 800 “Spanish” soldiers, though it is not clear how many were actually Spanish nationals, given the pressure to assimilate and the collapsing of national distinctions for most speakers of Spanish in the public sphere. Other units such as Louisiana’s William E. Stake Brigade included Cubans, Mexicans, Central Americans, as well as other Latin American nationals who suffered discrimination. For example, while in Maryland, the “foreign”-looking members of the Stake Brigade were signaled out and accused of looting and violence.<sup>6</sup>

Louisiana ultimately fell to Union forces early during the conflict when in 1862 Union admiral David G. Farragut, himself of Spanish ancestry, led the USS *Hartford* past the Chalmette batteries and took the port city of New Orleans by securing control of the Mississippi River, thereby effectively capturing the state for the Union. Economic recovery was slow in Louisiana after the Civil War, as slavery and the dependence on the plantation system were replaced with farm tenancy and sharecropping. The importance of the Mississippi River as a steamer commercial route was also diminished because of the emergence of railroad construction and related industries. Reconstruction in Louisiana, as in much of the South, was overseen by military governors who attempted to ensure, with limited success, that slaves would be freed and given suffrage, but literacy and poll tax laws aimed at former slaves disenfranchised them from the promise of political participation and cultural enfranchisement. Literacy laws, however, disenfranchised not only freed blacks but also Latinos. Recent arrivals to the region as well as established native-born Latinos who had found Louisiana’s multilingual and

ethnic diversity ideal for the maintenance of heritage traditions soon experienced how legalized discrimination prevented them from maintaining or achieving political relevance in the region. The landmark Supreme Court decision *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), which legally permitted segregation under the doctrine of “separate but equal” originated as a case in Louisiana, where the plaintiff was not allowed to sit in a “white” rail car because he was, in the parlance of the era, an “octoroon”; that is, a person who is one-eighth black. Ironically, common racial systems in Latin America—such as the *casta* divisions that created hierarchies based on race and ethnicity in Mexico and Peru—found their way into Louisiana law. To this day Louisiana is the only state that maintains earlier legal structures based on Spanish and Napoleonic code law as opposed to English common law, which forms the basis of the rest of the United States’ legal system. Discrimination in Louisiana, as in much of the South, was systemic at the turn of the twentieth century.

Like blacks, Latinos fell victim to lynching mobs in Louisiana, though this fact has been largely elided in the history of lynching in the United States. The solidification of a rigid black and white binary in the post-Reconstruction imagination often meant that Latinos would be counted as white in the popular press in descriptions of lynching, often for reasons that had more to do with diminishing the onus of the South’s lynching of blacks (as opposed to blacks *and* whites who were meted “justice”) by collapsing other racial and ethnic distinctions. Such was the case on October 7, 1909, when a certain Mike Rodrigauetz [sic] of Vernon Parish was lynched for an alleged robbery at the hands of “persons unknown.” Indeed, the transliteration from Rodríguez to “Rodrigauetz” is instructive of how English-language hegemony began to supplant multilingual Louisiana. In the process, Latinos became increasingly erased from the historical record, not only literally as in the case of lynchings, but symbolically, as the once multiracial, multiethnic, and plurilinguistic Louisiana began to be divided along black and white lines of racial affiliation under one language.<sup>7</sup>

Systemic discrimination was also part of the state’s drive to delimit the cultural disenfranchisement of Latinos and blacks. In 1900 Louisiana stopped public schooling after fifth grade for blacks and native-born Latinos who were considered colored. It would not be until 1917 that Louisiana established a public high school for blacks or “students of color,” after the state’s Compulsory Education Act became effective in 1916. Not surprisingly, at the turn of the century thousands of blacks left Louisiana during the Great Migration to seek work and improve their lot in northern industrial cities. The migration of blacks to the North also partly explains the first wave of Latino migration to Louisiana at the turn of the century, as the region experienced a boom brought on by the discovery of natural gas and petroleum in the region.

The Mexican Revolution (1910–1920) also increased the number of Mexican nationals who fled their country to the United States for political and economic



Creole girls, Plaquemines Parish, Louisiana, c. 1935. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, Reproduction Number LC-USF33-006159-M1.

reasons. Though most settled first in states across the border with Mexico, many traveled throughout the South in search of economic opportunity. It is estimated that this migration brought over 1 million Mexicans to the United States shortly after the revolution. These Mexicans eventually found work in U.S. farms, docks, railroads, as well as in the more traditional agricultural sectors of the economy. By 1911 the press of the period had noted how the increasing number of Mexican laborers to Louisiana allowed the Spanish language to be heard “almost as frequently as English on the docks where Mexican and Central Americans were often employed.”<sup>8</sup> Indeed, by 1911 the United States Immigration Commission, also known as the Dillingham Commission, limited the immigration of southern and eastern Europeans and Asians who were deemed as “undesirable” as Mexicans; but because Mexicans were seen as temporary immigrants who would work for far less than other immigrants, it became expedient to make exceptions for them. The Dillingham Commission unwittingly set the stage for the arrival of Mexican migration through subsequent accords, as it noted that “Mexican immigrants are providing a fairly acceptable supply of labor in a limited territory in which it is difficult to secure others . . . [w]hile Mexicans are not easily assimilated, this is not of very great importance as long as most of them return to their native land in a short time.”<sup>9</sup> Not surprisingly, Mexican migration to Louisiana and the Southwest grew considerably because it was believed that their stay would be temporary.

This partly explains why even though Congress passed the Immigration Act of 1917 to prevent the immigration of “undesirables” during the height of World War I,



itinerant agricultural workers from Mexico were exempted from the directive until 1923 in order to assist with the labor shortage occasioned by World War I. This concession to U.S. farmers brought over 200,000 migrants to states along the border with Mexico and throughout the South.<sup>10</sup> In Louisiana, Latino migrants worked in sugarcane fields and as strawberry and cotton pickers under oppressive conditions. Attempts to improve their lot were nearly nonexistent as unionizing became largely a clandestine operation that, if successful, ultimately required U.S. citizenship for membership. This was further hampered by the Louisiana Constitution of 1921 as it effectively sought to limit the enfranchisement of blacks and native-born Louisiana Latinos through voting roadblocks that required voters to complete voter registration cards without assistance, and to be able to both read and interpret any portion of the Constitution selected by the registrar of voters. Because Louisiana did not provide state schooling for "students of color" until 1917, the state's voter registration board effectively created a tiered democracy in the state.

The economic crisis brought on by the Great Depression ended these labor concessions and caused a backlash that resulted in the Mexican Repatriation, which deported over half a million Mexican Americans to Mexico, even though many were U.S. citizens. Yet, the experience provided a testing ground for the various guest worker accords that came to be known as the Bracero program, beginning during the height of World War II in 1942 and up until 1964.

Mexicans, however, did not provide the only source of migration-related labor in Louisiana. Hondurans also began to settle in New Orleans when the United Fruit Company, whose headquarters was in that port city, began shipping produce from their Honduran plantations for national distribution. The trade relationship that existed between Honduras and Louisiana ultimately made New Orleans the city with the largest Honduran American population in the United States.<sup>11</sup> Honduran immigration to Louisiana was also the result of political and economic disruptions exacerbated by U.S. capital and military interventions in Central America. When it was no longer possible to return to their country of origin, Honduran Americans settled in Louisiana, which led to one of the first permanent settlements of Honduran Americans in the state. During the early 1950s Hondurans settled in Barrio Lempira, near the lower Garden District of uptown New Orleans, and worked in agribusiness and related industries alongside other Latinos from various nationalities. By the end of that decade the Asociación Hondureña de Nueva Orleans "marked the official introduction of a Honduran identity to New Orleans."<sup>12</sup> The racialization of Hondurans prior to the civil rights movement in Louisiana was similar to that of many Latino groups. The white majority conferred a higher status to Creoles and Latinos who were lighter complected than darker-skinned blacks, as the "reality of racial ambiguity, a result of years of miscegenation, led the elite whites to make clear distinctions in order

to guard their own white identity from the imminent black ‘infiltration.’”<sup>13</sup> The term *Creole* itself (from the Spanish term *criollo*) became a euphemism for a person of Spanish or, in some instances, of Latin American lineage, and it signified affiliation with Spain, thus avoiding slippage into the more charged term of the era, *Negro*. Yet, unlike native-born Creoles and Latinos, more recent Latino arrivals had to contend with the added disadvantage of limited English-speaking skills, which made it difficult not only to get work but to demand humane working conditions.

The 1950s also marked concerted efforts by the white majority to limit the possibilities for Latinos to secure living wages. Latino populations in Louisiana were prevented from demanding work protections through Louisiana’s right-to-work laws. The laws compromised the emerging strength of unions in the state by making it optional, rather than mandatory, to join labor unions. The laws effectively prevented many entry-level workers from establishing union ties, and they were eventually used as strike-braking measures. Ernesto Galarza of the National Farm Labor Union worked in Louisiana from 1953 to 1954 to assist sugarcane and strawberry pickers through organized protests against agricultural exploitation of Latino workers. Galarza’s efforts resulted in the revision of many right-to-work laws through calls for the right to fair wages and safer working conditions.<sup>14</sup> Galarza’s experiences in Louisiana and his native California led him to believe, however, that unionization would not provide the necessary safeguards and labor protections, because he saw the Bracero program as ultimately abusive of both braceros and native-born Latinos, who could not earn sustainable wages while the program was in place.<sup>15</sup> His living through the 1954 Operation Wetback, a program established to deport Mexican and Mexican Americans to Mexico, also made Galarza distrustful of unions’ ability to protect workers. He was present in many congressional hearings on the Bracero program and eventually worked to end it. Just before the program was officially terminated in 1964—after its extension was denied by Congress—a Louisiana senator presciently noted, “I am certain that if the proposed extension is not granted, there may be a recurrence of conditions that existed . . . when Mexican labor came by the thousands.”<sup>16</sup> Indeed, in 1970 less than 20 percent of Mexicans in the United States were born in their country of origin, whereas today over half of the Mexican population in the United States were born in Mexico.<sup>17</sup> Of course the end of the Bracero program did not end the pattern of itinerant and seasonal work to the state; only the designation of legal or undocumented workers changed.

The civil rights movement in Louisiana was largely dominated along the black/white divide. Latino rights struggles were most often associated with labor issues, whereas civil rights proper was something that Louisiana blacks were seeking. Unlike the states of California, New Mexico, and Texas, during the height of the civil rights movement Louisiana’s established Latino communities—

composed chiefly, though not exclusively, of *Isleños*, Hondurans, and Mexican Americans—comprised U.S. citizens, either native born or naturalized, and the more recent arrivals at the time were working difficult jobs that left little opportunity to organize protests. Differences among and within various Latino groups in the state regarding questions of civil rights were also conditioned by class standing.

Because they had been residing in Louisiana for generations, Cuban Americans in Louisiana had ties to their U.S. identity that often superseded their relationship to more recent arrivals. Cuban Americans had long established ties to Louisiana prior to the Cuban Revolution of 1959. Cuba was the Port of New Orleans's leading customer prior to the revolution, and established Cuban American business interests were in place, as Cuban sugar producers sent their children to study agriculture and business at Louisiana State University. There was also an influx of post-1959 Cubans who settled predominately in New Orleans after the United States government "started to deny financial help to Cubans in Miami if they would not move to other cities"—New Orleans being one of the principal cities designated for Cuban resettlement.<sup>18</sup> However, already before the Cuban Revolution of 1959, Honduras had also become one of the largest trading partners of the Americas with Louisiana. From the mid-twentieth century to the present, Louisiana has had the highest number of Honduran Americans in the United States, with most settling near New Orleans. Native-born Honduran Americans, like Cuban Americans before them, also had a different relation to the civil rights movement and social inclusion, as their tight-knit communities provided much of the protections that were not available to more recent Latino arrivals.

Cubans reemerged as migrants to Louisiana in the 1980s though under quite different conditions from previous Cuban settlement in the state. The largest single number of arrivals to Louisiana in the 1980s was the nearly 2,400 Cuban refugees who were sent to the Oakdale Federal Detention Center in 1986. After the Port of Mariel boat exodus of 1980, during which over 125,000 Cubans sought political asylum in the United States, various detention centers were set up in the United States to house Cuban detainees who had criminal records or were considered mentally incompetent. The Marielitos, as they have come to be known, remained at Oakdale until in 1987, when, after being told that they would be returned to Cuba under a renegotiated immigration accord with Fidel Castro's government, they took approximately 130 hostages. The hostage crisis forced the United States to negotiate with the Cuban refugees and, with the help of various intermediaries, the latter agreed to release all hostages in return for an indefinite moratorium on their repatriation to Cuba and a review of their individual cases. (It was not until 2005 that the Supreme Court ruled that open-ended detention of Marielitos was illegal.) As these Cubans were processed and released, many stayed in the Bayou State, thereby changing the class dynamics of prior Cuban migration to Louisiana.

Census estimates for Latinos in Louisiana during the 1990s were upwards of 93,000, though the actual numbers were probably much higher, because of the undocumented Latinos in the state. By the 2000 census the total number of Latinos in the state had increased to over 107,700, reflecting an almost 16 percent population increase from the 1990 census. The highest concentration of Latinos from any single national group was composed of Honduran Americans, who accounted for 24 percent of the total Latino population in the state, with the Greater New Orleans metropolitan area serving as their principal enclave. This changed drastically after Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast region in 2005.

Hurricane Katrina has brought about profound ethnic and demographic shifts in Louisiana. Less than a year before the hurricane made landfall, the African American population in the Greater New Orleans metropolitan area alone had decreased from 37 to 22 percent.<sup>19</sup> The 2004 U.S. census update reported a Mexican American population of just below 2,000, whereas by 2006 estimates ranged from between 10,000 and 20,000 Mexican Americans in the region.<sup>20</sup> The astounding demographic shift in a state with a pre-Katrina Latino population of 3 percent was exacerbated by the suspension of the Davis-Bacon Act that had required contractors to pay prevailing local wages. The suspension of the Davis-Bacon Act allowed contractors to hire ready Latino laborers and exploit them in the process. As with previous informal and more formal Bracero accords with Mexico, Latinos of Mexican descent in the United States often perform the most dangerous work. In post-Katrina Louisiana alone, 80 percent of the debris and mold removal of hurricane-ravaged areas was undertaken by migrant Latino laborers, many of whom are undocumented. The unprecedented number of Mexican American laborers alone in the Greater New Orleans metropolitan area led city Mayor Ray Nagin to rhetorically ask, "How do I ensure that New Orleans is not overrun by Mexican workers?" in an utter collapse of all possible Latino American nationalities under the national signifier *Mexican*.<sup>21</sup> Nagin's inflammatory political rhetoric both fabricated scapegoats and elided the fact that the state itself had created the conditions for the arrival of contemporary forms of servitude that have profoundly benefitted the rebuilding efforts in Louisiana. In effect, the paradoxical verbal bashing of the very migrants who are rebuilding the region has created the conditions for the further dehumanization of Louisiana Latino laborers.

In August 2006 Latin American and Caribbean laborers on legal H-2B visas who were contracted to work in New Orleans hotels but denied their contractual right to work staged a protest in mock handcuffs in front of the hotels that had lured them from as far as Bolivia and as close as the Dominican Republic. With the assistance of the New Orleans Workers Center, the hotel workers sued their employers and won. They have since formed the country's first H-2B visa workers alliance. As one Dominican hotel worker put it, "Only by studying workers' experiences can government create adequate reform."<sup>22</sup> Supporting the struggles of

Latinos for social justice from the early nineteenth century to the present, the Latin American hotel laborers joined a long historical battle for the economic and human enfranchisement of Latinos in Louisiana.

## NOTABLE LATINOS

**Farragut, David G. (1801–1870).** Union admiral of Spanish ancestry who led the USS *Hartford* past the Chalmette batteries and took the port city of New Orleans by securing control of the Mississippi River and effectively capturing the state for the Union.

**Velázquez, Loreta Janeta (c. 1842–c. 1898).** Cuban-born woman and Confederate Army soldier who was decommissioned in New Orleans after it was established she was masquerading as a man.

**Lázaro, Ladislas (1872–1927).** The first Latino to serve in the United States House of Representatives, from 1908 until 1912. He attended Holy Cross College in New Orleans and later graduated from Louisville Medical College in Kentucky before practicing in Louisiana.

**Pérez Sr., Leander Henry (1891–1969).** Democratic “political boss” of Plaquemines and St. Bernard parishes in the first half of the twentieth century. Officially, Pérez served as district judge, as district attorney, and as president of the Plaquemines Parish Commission Council.

**Gómez, Eusebio Juan (c. 1895–c. 1860).** The editor of the eminent New Orleans newspaper *La Patria*. He served as a field interpreter for General Winfield Scott during the Mexican-American War (1846–1848).

**Fernández, Joachim Octave (1896–1978).** Democratic representative from Louisiana to the United States House of Representatives.

**Pérez, Irvan (1923–2008).** Famous *Isleño* singer of poetic compositions known as *décimas*. Pérez was featured in the PBS series *River of Song: A Musical Journey* (1999).

**Herrera, Victor (c. 1926–c. 1985).** Latino community health advocate and founder of the Asociación Hondureña de Nueva Orleans, in 1959.

## CULTURAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The Latino presence in Louisiana predates and is coterminous with the economic and social development of the state. As one of the principal centers of journalistic and literary expression in the Spanish language during the nineteenth century, New Orleans alone has boasted a range of important newspapers and journals—including *El Independiente*, *Diario del Gobierno*, *La verdad*, *La Patria*, and its predecessor *El Hablador*. By the mid-nineteenth century New Orleans had over 23 different Spanish-language newspapers and journals in which the top figures of Latin American politics and culture of the period disseminated what has come to be known as Latino literatures and cultures of the United States. Given

New Orleans's unique location at the mouth of the Gulf of Mexico, the diffusion of Hispanic culture throughout the United States was literally carried up and down the Mississippi River and across the country.

Latinos in Louisiana have also infused the state's music with the ethnic and linguistic particularisms that have made the state a harbinger of the nation's musical heritage. Though Louisiana's importance to U.S. popular music is undisputed, it is an often ignored fact that Cuban commercial exchanges with New Orleans also facilitated the arrival of musical forms that informed and complemented one another. Scholars have noted how the emergence of the Cuban *danzón* and *son* is roughly coterminous with the emergence of ragtime and jazz. In literature the poetic composition known as *décima* emerged from *Isleño* communities, and it still survives as a popular form of entertainment and versification. Composed chiefly of 10 octosyllabic lines, the *décima* could also be said to share affinities with what came to be known as *corrido*, or border ballad, in Texas. Like the better known *corrido* tradition of southern Texas, the structure of the *décima* makes rote memorization easy, and its rhyme scheme allows for verbal play, double entendres, and the community-specific continuity of cultural memory. To this day *décimas* are sung at dances, community celebrations, and holidays, as well as during more intimate family events.

Latino arts have also flourished in Louisiana as Latino artists have found a visually and culturally diverse environment with an active plastic arts scene from the 1960s onward. Latino performance art has also emerged as an innovative and provocative form of cultural commentary and ethnic memory. For example, New Orleans-based José Torres Tama's performance piece "The Cone of Uncertainty: New Orleans After Katrina" critiques government ineptitude in the wake of Hurricane Katrina through spoken-word poetry as well as ritual movement and dance, through the voices of a myriad of characters that he channels in order to bear witness to the abandonment of displaced Latinos whose suffering and resilience have remained largely ignored by the mainstream English-speaking press. Local Latino stations such as Radio Tropical Caliente (KGLA), however, have kept Latino communities informed through Spanish-language programming. More recently, in 2007 Telemundo affiliate KGLA-DT has begun to offer sports coverage, talk-show entertainment, and more traditional cultural offerings such as *telenovelas* (soap operas), along with local programming and advertising, in addition to Telemundo's national coverage.

The region's cultural ties to Latino communities in the state and the Americas have been solidified through various educational and cultural industries. Important institutions—such as Tulane University and Louisiana State University—with historically close ties to the Caribbean and the Americas have established some of the country's premier research centers devoted to the study of Latino, Latin American, and Caribbean cultures. State institutions such as the New

Orleans Jazz and Heritage Foundation have also acknowledged the importance of Latino culture to the region and the country through extremely popular festivals such as the Fiesta Latina, where jazz and Latin rhythms are seen as culturally constitutive of the ethno-linguistic diversity of the region. More populist cultural events are showcased in other festivals—for example, the Carnival Latino—in which the region's heritage, as well as its present and future, are seen as imminently tied to Latino communities. Given the demographic explosion of Latino populations in the state, cities such as New Orleans are reclaiming their historical importance as the Gateway to the Americas.

## NOTES

1. Armistead, 1992, 2.

2. For a discussion of Hispanophone print culture and New Orleans as its center in the nineteenth century, see Silva Guesz, 2002, 108–120.

3. For a discussion of Hispanophone print culture and New Orleans as its center in the nineteenth century, see Silva Guesz, 2002, 115.

4. Lima, 2007, 22–55.

5. For estimates of Latinos in the military during the Civil War and related history, see Thompson, 1976.

6. See Smith, 2005, 74.

7. Congressional Record—Senate, list of Louisiana victims of lynching, <http://www.iconn.org/documents/s%20res39CongressionalRecord6-13-2005SenateComments.pdf> (accessed December 12, 2007). Ken Gonzales Day's *Lynching in the West, 1850–1935* (2006) provides one of the few comprehensive attempts at documenting the historical erasure of Latinos from the history of lynching in the United States.

8. García, 1981, 62.

9. Tichenor, 2002, 168.

10. Monto, 1994, 55–57.

11. Fussell, 2006, 1.

12. Euraque, 2004, 10, 32–33.

13. Euraque, 2004, 32.

14. Chabran, 1985, 138.

15. Chabran, 1985, 139.

16. Cited in David M. Reimers, *Still the Golden Door: The Third World Comes to America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 59.

17. Gómez, 2007, 2.

18. Berchak, 2007, 51–52.

19. Berchak, 2007, 69.

20. Quinones, 2006, A10.

21. Fox Gotham, 2007, 201.

22. Fiedman-Rudovsky, 2007.

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