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“Why Not Nuevo Mexicano Studies?”: Interrogating Latinidades in the Intermountain West, 1528–2020

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Abstract: While there has been an explosion of scholarly interest in the historical and contemporary social, economic, and political status of U.S. Latinx individuals and communities, the majority focuses on traditional Southwestern U.S., Northeastern U.S., and South Florida rural/urban enclaves. Recent “New Destinations” research, however, documents the turn of the 21st century Latinx experiences in non-traditional white/black, and rural/urban Latinx regional enclaves. This socio-historical essay adds to and challenges emerging literature with a nearly five-century old delineation of Latinidad in the Intermountain West, a region often overlooked in the construction of Latina/o identity. Selected interviews from the *Spanish-Speaking Peoples in Utah Oral History* and Wyoming’s *La Cultura Hispanic Heritage Oral History* projects shed light on Latinidad and the adoption of Latinx labels in the region during the latter third of the 20th century centering historical context, material conditions, sociodemographic characteristics, and institutional processes in this decision. Findings point to important implications for the future of Latinidad in light of the region’s Latinx renaissance at the turn of the 21st century. The region’s increased Latino proportional presence, ethnic group diversity, and socioeconomic variability poses challenges to the region’s long-established Hispano/Nuevo Mexicano Latinidad.

Keywords: Latinx; Latinidad; Intermountain West; oral history; racial/ethnic identity



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1. Introduction

Shortly after I assumed my duties as the University of Wyoming Chicano Studies Program Director in 2003, a high school counselor from Cheyenne, Wyoming telephoned me to wish me well. Part of the conversation, however, revolved around me considering a name change for the program to Nuevo Mexicano Studies. This was not as surprising for me after I gradually learned that much of the early Latinx migration into Wyoming was from the northern New Mexico region in search of economic opportunity (Martínez and Fonseca-Chávez 2021; Rios-Bustamante and Vialpando 2001). Not long after that phone call, representatives from the Wyoming State Museum and Wyoming State Archive approached me and requested my assistance in revising their *Hispanics in Wyoming* traveling exhibit. As a self-identifying Nebrascueño, or a Chicano born and raised in Nebraska, the project excited me. In addition, my hometown in the Nebraska Panhandle is part of Sugar Valley, USA that spans the Wyobraska region along the North Platte River valley. After reviewing the exhibit created from the Wyoming *La Cultura Hispanic Heritage Oral History* project, I agreed to collaborate on the exhibit on the condition that we broaden its scope from primarily a 20th century Mexican American history, to a multi-century look into the Latina/o presence in Wyoming and the surrounding region.

My reasoning came about because of ongoing debates about Latino labels and terminology, and my distaste for the label “Hispanic,” still preferred by many at the turn of the 21st century as demonstrated by a recent Pew Research Center Study (Noe-Bustamante et al. 2020). Today Latinx is a contested label for individuals that trace their ancestry to Latin American and/or Hispanic origins. It is gaining popularity over the gender inclusive Latina/o because of Latinx’s enhanced inclusiveness for queer and non-gender conforming Latinas/os.

Its increased use reveals the evolving disciplinary arguments among Latina/o Studies students and scholars (Vidal-Ortiz and Martinez 2018). At the same time, scholarly research (Blackwell et al. 2017) and popular media (Salazar 2019) are questioning the usefulness of both Latinidad as a concept, and Latinx as a label due to their erasure of indigenous, black, and transnational Latinx experiences. Critiques are valid and part of the ongoing and necessary interrogation of what Latina/o means to individuals during specific historical moments, particular geographic locations within the Latino Diaspora, and individual sociodemographic characteristics (Hernández 2020; Tlapoyawa 2020; Pelaez Lopez 2018; Milian 2017). I agree with Milian (2017, p. 124) who asserts that the interrogation of Latinidad, and/or Latinx is necessary to “... delve into the instability of the matter: to feel the pulse on the open X-ness of it all as well as the abstractions and *mélange* of connections that are happening with this new signifier.”

My undergraduate and graduate training, particularly by Chicano Studies Professors in history, literature, and sociology at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln taught me much about a Southwestern and Midwestern Chicana/Latino experience. Included as a part of that education was the historical presence of Hispanics on the Great Plains long before 19th century American colonization and settlement. I quickly realized after my first jointly appointed faculty position in 1996 with the Department of Sociology and the new U.S. Latino Studies Program at Iowa State University, that my Chicanocentric training and perspective was in need of correction as I prepped new Latino Studies courses. As this welcomed process occurred, I better connected my Chicanocentric Latinidad to Nuyorican Latinidad, Miami Cubanidad, Caribbean Afrolatinidad, and Central American indigeneity. These combined personal and professional experiences and reflections informed revisions to the traveling exhibit that debuted at the University of Wyoming in 2006 under the title of *Construyendo Latinidad (Constructing Latina/o Identity)* (Muñoz et al. 2006).

I employed the term Latinidad based on the understanding that Latina/o identity is not a monolithic concept or process. Rather, it is an ongoing, fluid social, economic, and political construction mediated through individual and institutional processes, as well as by historical and contemporary regional contexts (Gómez 2018; Vidal-Ortiz and Martinez 2018; Blackwell et al. 2017; Milian 2017; Nieto-Phillips 2008; Rios 2008; Torres-Saillant 2003; Davila 2001; Gonzales 1997, 1993; Hayes-Bautista and Chapa 1987; Treviño 1987; Hall 1986). This small snapshot of my personal history is an attempt to demonstrate this variability by describing how individuals can experience Latinidad, and then assert, deny, and/or re-define labels based on new knowledge and encounters. To illustrate further, I came to self-describe as a Nebrasqueño when I began attending National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies Association conferences in the mid-1980s. Nebrasqueño became my way of claiming and expressing my Chicano identity despite the fact that I was born and raised in Nebraska, which was unbelievable for many of the conference participants I interacted with, and who mostly had their origins and life experiences in the “traditional southwest.”

Using historical comparative analysis in general and oral histories in particular, this essay examines the construction of Latinidad in a region not readily recognized as a Latina/o historical enclave or destination area. Past and present research primarily focuses on long-established Mexican southwest, Puerto Rican northeast, and Cuban south Florida enclaves. Emergent “New Destinations” literature has documented turn of the 21st century Latinx experiences in the southern, Midwestern, and western United States; historically white and black, rural and urban communities (Rodríguez et al. 2008; Zúñiga and Hernández-Léon 2005). Existing accounts often position Latinidad in the Intermountain West as primarily Mexican and relatively new to the area (Sáenz and Morales 2015). I trace the development of Latinidad in the Intermountain West beginning with Spanish exploration and colonization during the long 16th century and up through the Civil Rights Movements of the 1960s and 1970s. This discussion lays the foundation for the interrogation of a Hispano/Nuevo Mexicano Latinidad in the Intermountain West.

Historical-comparative research focuses its topic as part of the course of history and positioned in a cultural milieu. Historical-comparative methods are appropriate for

exploring aspects of social life that yield a particular result (e.g., *Latinidad*). They also are suited for determining commonalities, conflicts, and social change between groups. Historical comparative research attempts to determine the usefulness of concepts and theories by laying bare connections between social processes in differing social backgrounds (Kreuger and Neuman 2006). Oral history interviews from two archived projects—*Spanish-Speaking Peoples in Utah Oral History* (1972–1975) and Wyoming’s *La Cultura Hispanic Heritage Oral History* (1981–1983)—help illuminate this historical social, economic, and political construction of *Latinidad* and the adoption and use of particular labels. How did Spaniards and various Mexican mestizos interact with indigenous populations in the Intermountain West? How did Intermountain West Hispanic and Mexican colonial legacies influence 19th and 20th century American colonization, settlement, and integration? What was the nature and scope of inter- and intra-ethnic collaboration and competition? Utah oral histories completed at the height of the Chicano Movement (c. 1970) include narratives from individuals in both urban and rural locales. On the other hand, Wyoming oral histories completed in the wake of the Chicano Movement (c. 1980) are from individuals in largely rural environments (Soldatenko 2009; Rios-Bustamante and Vialpando 2001; Mayer 1975).

My goal is to connect this historical analysis to the larger contemporary discussion of what constitutes being Latina/o, Hispanic, Mexican, and/or Chicana/o. I discuss implications in light of the contemporary 21st century renaissance of Intermountain West *Latinidad*. The increased proportional growth and diversity of the region’s Latinx community portends an amplifying role on the region’s social, economic, and political landscape.

1.1. Spanish Beginnings

European conquest, colonization, and cultural imperialism of the Americas during the long 16th century set the stage for the creation and maintenance of a Nuevo México Hispanic *Latinidad* in the Intermountain West (Torres-Saillant 2003; Hayes-Bautista and Chapa 1987; Hall 1986). The Intermountain West is a region defined by a combination of institutional, historical, topographical, and cultural criteria and includes all or parts of states between the Rockies, Sierras, and Cascades—Northern Arizona, Western Colorado, Idaho, Western Montana, Nevada, Northern New Mexico, Utah, and Southern and Western Wyoming (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2010b; Blake 2002).

To be sure, *Latinidad* from the beginning was more than simply a Hispanic influence. *Mestizaje*, or the blending of peoples from different racial, ethnic, and/or cultural backgrounds, was clearly characteristic of *Latinidad* with more numerous indigenous peoples, Mexican mestizos, *afromestizos*, and *genízaros* providing the bulk of the labor for Spanish colonial endeavors (Menchaca 2001). The Dominguez—Escalante expedition of 1776–1777 is the best documented trek into the heart of the Intermountain West. This expedition beginning from Santa Fe, New Mexico pushed north and west into Colorado and Utah in search of an overland trade route to California’s Monterrey mission. Harsh terrain and weather forced the return to Santa Fe through Central and Southern Utah, and Northern Arizona with assistance from indigenous guides of the Timpanogos tribe (Iber 2008; Miranda 2008; Muñoz 2008; Romero and Gonzales 2008).

The dawn of the 19th century saw the Intermountain West as a contested territory between indigenous tribes, Mexico, the United States, Spain, France, and England for control of a prosperous fur trade. The Spanish Cuban American Manuel Lisa is responsible for much of the industry’s early success (Kevane 2008; Muñoz 2008; Oglesby 1963). After Lewis and Clark’s return, the skilled keelboat captain set out from St. Louis with a plan he developed through information gleaned from the expedition, and with former Corp of Discovery veterans contracted as guides and trappers. Lisa transported goods up the Missouri river with the intent of pacifying tribes along the way, allowing for safe passage of furs back from the Missouri River Three Forks headwaters in Western Montana where he built Fort Raymond in 1807. Lisa directed trappers to bring in furs and notify the area tribes of their aims. Lisa also instructed trappers to look for signs of Spanish traders who

were trading in the region prior to the arrival of the Corps of Discovery, which earlier reported encountering Spanish-speaking Native Americans. This fur trade flourished for decades through multicultural mountain man rendezvous, several held within the northernmost internationally recognized border areas of Mexico including Nevada, Utah, and Southwestern Wyoming (Jones 2008; Kevane 2008; Muñoz 2008; Oglesby 1963).

1.2. Mexican Entrenchment

By the 1830s the fur trade was in steady decline and gave way to livestock raising as a viable economic activity for early settlers, which then gained increased importance with the great American westward migration. Spanish vaquero traditions established in Texas by the late 17th century, merged with Anglo traditions during their migration into the Southwest after Mexican independence in 1821. This hybrid cowboy culture moved northward with Texas cattle, to feed developing urban areas and westward migrants. A significant number of Mexican and Black vaqueros drove cattle north from Texas facilitating the development of a Texas Mexican Latinidad in the region. Even so, a New Mexican Hispanic Latinidad further became rooted in the Intermountain West through the sheepherding industry. Spaniards introduced sheep to New Mexican pastures by the mid-16th century and similarly, *borreguero* (shepherd) culture spread north, east, and westward, as sheep became a desirable product for mid-19th century migrants and settlers. *Borregueros* and their families were critical in the early development of Intermountain West Latino communities in the latter half of the 19th century (Cadava 2008; Iber 2008; Jones 2008; Kevane 2008; Miranda 2008; Muñoz 2008; Nesvig 2008; Romero and Gonzales 2008).

Texan, New Mexican, and Mexican migrations hastened after the beginning of the 20th century that witnessed increased infrastructure development, resource extraction, industrialization, and commercial agriculture throughout the U.S., and especially in the Trans-Mississippi West. In addition to this, social, economic, and political instability in Mexico facilitated movement north. These events produced the first large scale movement of Mexican nationals and Mexican Americans into areas outside of historical southwestern rural and urban enclaves (Driscoll 1999). Mexican miners, rail workers, and farmworkers joined cowboys, sheepherders, hunters, and muleteers in the early development of Intermountain West communities. For many Mexican Latinas/os, increased economic mobility counterbalanced unforgiving winters and cultural remoteness. Nevertheless, this did little to mitigate individual prejudice and institutional discrimination levied against them in their new environments (Cadava 2008; Iber 2008; Jones 2008; Kevane 2008; Miranda 2008; Muñoz 2008; Nesvig 2008; Romero and Gonzales 2008).

1.3. Chicanas/os, Comunidad y Justicia

Because of its need for workers, the Intermountain West was generally hospitable to all immigrants during territorial and early statehood eras. Turn of the 20th century nativism, jingoism, and economic recessions negatively transformed sentiments towards non-white, non-WASP immigrants. For Mexicans, their Spanish, Indigenous, and African mestizo racial and cultural history often put them at odds with Anglo identity and society, manifest in an ongoing resistance to unjust subjugation and colonization since the mid-19th century U.S.–Mexican War. Research demonstrates that Intermountain West Latinas/os suffered overt and covert social, economic, and political discrimination, as did Latinos nationally throughout the 20th century (Cadava 2008; Iber 2008; Jones 2008; Kevane 2008; Miranda 2008; Muñoz 2008; Nesvig 2008; Romero and Gonzales 2008).

Individual and organized resistance mirrored that found in traditionally recognized Latino enclaves. Formal legislation prohibiting miscegenation and *de jure* segregation did little to stop the historic process of *mestizaje*. Mutual aid societies helped ameliorate the effects of poor housing, sub-standard education, debt peonage, dual labor market/wage systems, religious persecution, and public facilities exclusion. Increased acculturation and integration during the 1940s and 1950s worked to solidify a Mexican American identity through participation in assimilationist organizations dedicated to equality and inclusion

for all citizens. The limited success of assimilationist politics gave rise to cultural nationalism and the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Scholarly research often examines the impact that Chicana/o nationalism had to decelerate acculturation and the resulting positive effect on social, economic, and political inclusion. Important during this era was the debate on a Hispanic versus a Chicana/o identity (Soldatenko 2009).

1.4. *Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish Origin*

Some would maintain that the origin of debates on Latinx identity dates back to the long 16th century when Spaniards and other European colonial powers began the dual processes of empire building and cultural imperialism on the North and South American continents. In addition, 19th century Mexican and other Latin American independence movements from colonial rule increased regional autonomy and sovereignty that brought about varied national and cultural identities, both between and within budding nation states. Current arguments for the preferred use of one term over the other revolve around various social, economic, and political factors—e.g., race, class, gender, sexuality, nationality, citizenship, generation, ideology (Noe-Bustamante et al. 2020; Gómez 2018; Vidal-Ortiz and Martinez 2018; Blackwell et al. 2017; Milian 2017; Nieto-Phillips 2008; Rios 2008; Torres-Saillant 2003; Davila 2001; Oboler 1995; Vigil 1994; Gonzales 1997, 1993; Hayes-Bautista and Chapa 1987; Treviño 1987; Hall 1986).

Institutional processes also have had an impact on defining one's Latinidad and the criteria for self-identification, can be accepted or rejected. With the exception of the 1930s counting of the Mexican population prior to 1970, the Census Bureau used Spanish surname, place of birth, Spanish mother tongue, and/or white racial categories to count the Latinx population. The 1970 census introduced the compromise "Hispanic" category after much political struggle and debate on appropriate terminology between census officials and growing Latinx communities. Continued debate and political pressure changed the category to Spanish/Hispanic origin for the 1980 and 1990 census. The 2000 census transformed the category to Spanish/Hispanic/Latino. For the 2010 and 2020 census enumerations, officials re-ordered the category with respondents able to choose their "Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish" ethnic origin—Mexican, Mexican Am., Chicano; Puerto Rican; Cuban; or another Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin (NALEO Educational Fund 2019; Ennis et al. 2011; Cohn 2010; Nieto-Phillips 2008; Davila 2001; Grieco and Cassidy 2001; Gonzales 1993; Hayes-Bautista and Chapa 1987).

Put simply, both "Latino" and "Hispanic" are umbrella terms used to categorize those individuals who can and do trace their ancestry from Latin America and Spain. To be sure and according to the most recent U.S. census, Hispanics or Latinos are defined as an ethnic group—Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, etc.—that can and does include individuals that identify within each of the major U.S. census racial categorizations—White, Black, Native American, etc. (NALEO Educational Fund 2019; Ennis et al. 2011; Grieco and Cassidy 2001).

While there is no steadfast rule on which term is more appropriate, a recent Pew Research Center survey about one's knowledge and view of the term Latinx provides insight. About 23% of Hispanic adults from a sample of approximately 2000 reported they were aware of the term Latinx, with only about 3% actually using the term. Younger and college educated Latinas/os are more likely to be aware of the term, as well as U.S. born and primarily English speaking and bilingual Latinas/os. Latinx individuals who identify as Democrats also are more likely to be aware of the term. In addition, the report indicates that the online search activity for the term Latinx is substantially lower than Latina, Latino, and Hispanic respectively. Actual use of the term Latinx is highest among Latinas 18–29 years old. Overall, the majority of the sample preferred Hispanic (61%) to Latino (29%) to describe the Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin population. This trend held even among those aware of the term Latinx with 50% favoring Hispanic and 31% favoring Latino (Noe-Bustamante et al. 2020).

2. Materials and Methods

Utah and Wyoming Oral History

The Civil Rights Movements of the mid-20th century brought about improved scholarly work that centered historically marginalized communities in research endeavors (Soldatenko 2009). The Spanish-Speaking Peoples in Utah Oral History Project (SSPU 1970–1975) and Wyoming’s La Cultura Hispanic Heritage Oral History Project (LCHH 1981–1983) are two examples of this development. I employ selected oral histories from these databases to compare the construction and maintenance of Latinidad in these states. Wyoming and Utah lie at the heart of the Intermountain West, and not traditionally recognized for a rich, vibrant Latinx history and culture. These oral histories include but are not limited to topics such as origins and factors for migration, intra- and inter-ethnic relations, cultural norms and traditions, interactions with religious institutions, labor markets and organizing, individual and institutional discrimination, the Depression years, and identity preferences.

The SSPU (1970–1975) oral history database consists of 166 interviews collected by the University of Utah’s American West Center from participants that lived in Utah, Idaho, Wyoming, and the San Luis Valley of south central Colorado and north central New Mexico. The project builds from work started through the 1970 Utah Ethnic Communities oral history project, and provided the basis for curriculum development on the Spanish-speaking people of Utah (Mayer 1975). Geographic diversity and gender balance determined the selection of nine interviews for exploratory analysis. This produced three out of state, three non-Salt Lake County, and three Salt Lake County interviews. Four of the interviews are male, while five are female with ages ranging from 37–63 years old. One of the interviews is a co-interview with two females for a total of six female respondents.

The LCHH (1981–1983) oral history database consists of 83 interviews collected by an incorporated committee of approximately two dozen statewide representatives working for the preservation of La Cultura in Wyoming. This committee first convened in March of 1982 with assistance from the Wyoming Council for the Humanities. The committee collected sets of three-generation oral histories from participants located in five separate contiguous county areas derived from a percent formula of total Hispanic county populations (Rios-Bustamante and Vialpando 2001). Selected generational interviews are from three counties strongly represented by historical employment opportunities in Wyoming—sheep herding, mining, railroad, and sugar beets. Six males and three females are included in the interviews with an age range of 16–88 years old. The age of one elderly male was absent.

In line with historical and contemporary discussions on Latinidad and Latinx labels above, I use three categories to analyze selected oral histories—Spanish Americans, Mexican(a/o), and Chicana/o. The Utah oral histories yield much more detailed information than Wyoming oral histories. This appears to be an outcome of interviewing protocols, the different sampling methods employed, and oral and written bilingual competencies. Utah oral history narrators were almost all older adults, with Wyoming oral history narrators having many younger individuals that at times did not appear to have sufficient knowledge of topics raised for discussion. The quality of Spanish to English translation for Utah interviews was better than Wyoming interviews.

3. Results

3.1. *Utah Latinidad*

3.1.1. Spanish Americans

Lula Jacquez, 54 years old and born in the Southern Colorado, San Luis Valley preferred a Spanish American identity since her “grandparents came from Spain and not Mexico.” She also comments that her husband’s side of the family has French and Cuban ancestral roots. This real and perceived Spanish ancestral marker of privilege allowed the distancing of “Spanish Americans” from Mexicans and Indians, and their negative treatment. Lula recalls her grandfather practicing child slavery when she was a young girl influencing her early interactions. “I did not want to intermingle with the Indians because . . . they were bought like slaves They bought them for a sack of wheat.” Lula’s lifelong

career as a Pre-K—12 educator working with children in the rural San Luis valley, however, seemed to impact her feelings about the term Chicano. “I think . . . these activities have done some good, because they did not open the doors for our people, until they started this movement. I don’t like the militant part, but I think they have a right to speak out and be heard.” In this passage, Lula acknowledges American racism and discrimination that a privileged Spanish identity failed to shelter. On the other hand, Lula wished for a more correct history curriculum in schools, but one that centered on local Spanish achievements. “I feel that our History books should be written right. Starting with the coming of the Spaniard and ah . . . not starting with the Mayflower and other history events. I feel that our Spanish . . . came into Mexico and they were here before the English came to America, and I feel that that’s how they should get started” (Jacquez 1973).

Beatrice Garcia Luckinbill and Rosalie Garcia Robertson were born 10 years apart in 1910 and 1920 in Abiquiú, New Mexico. They arrived to Moab, Utah in 1921 with their Mother who decided to join her brother after the separation from her spouse. The family’s deep roots and higher-class status in northern New Mexico shows through discussion of the family’s officially registered brand, livestock ownership, and private Catholic school experiences. This privileged status carried over for the sisters when they moved in with Uncle Ben a Moab sheep ranch foreman for a long-time family friend and associate. In an era when women were most likely to be homemakers, both sisters enjoyed professional careers. Older Rosalie graduated a straight “A” student at the age of 16 and went on to the University of Utah in 1929 with the assistance of a scholarship award for her essay on “Why I Should Vote.” She received additional assistance from the Grand County University of Utah alumni group for room and board. Rosalie earned her English and Spanish degrees in 1933 and a BYU teaching certificate in 1954. Despite her degree, Rosalie talked about the difficulty in finding a teaching job in 1933 when there was a lot of discrimination towards Mexicans. This was the era of Mexican Repatriation during the Great Depression.

Younger and rebellious Beatrice became a Licensed Practical Nurse during WWII after her divorce. She started her nurses training locally under a Registered Nurse in Moab and later moved to Salt Lake attending the vocational school and receiving her LPN credentials in 1954. Both women commented on how they felt it was tough for “Spanish Americans,” their preferred term over the “derogatory” Mexican and Chicano. Beatrice recalls her “first encounter with racism was as a little girl, and they must have been calling me Mexican, and I asked Mother about it, and she said, ‘You’re not a Mexican, you’re Spanish American.’” Again, claiming Spanish American ancestry did not shield one from discriminatory attitudes and behavior as Beatrice remarked, “. . . like I told you there’s always been that pressure that because your skin’s brown, you’ve got to be a little bit better. And down through the years, I can’t tell you when or where, I made up my mind that anything the gringos could do, I could do better.” Despite this acknowledgement, both sisters felt that there was more religious discrimination than race based discrimination, with the Catholic faith being the minority in Utah (Luckinbill and Robertson 1973).

3.1.2. Mexican(a/o)

Gene Hernandez, 54 years old and born in San Antonio, Texas started his Army military service in 1943. He was wounded twice and lost a leg the second time, which brought him to the Brigham City, Utah military hospital in 1945. While rehabilitating he met his first wife from Ogden, Utah. After working in the Centerville, Utah military depot, divorcing, and remarrying he moved to Pocatello, Idaho upon purchasing a bar. He remained in the bar business serving primarily “. . . Mexicanos y Indios, casi todos (Mexicans and Indians, almost everyone) . . .” in Pocatello, Blackfoot, and Burley, Idaho. Texas migrant farmworker families moved into southeastern Idaho as laborers for sugar beet and potato production. By the 1970s, many of the early migrants had settled out and worked in a variety of blue collar and service occupations, both men and women. This expanded economic opportunity for Mexicans led Gene to claim that he would not live anywhere else. He reminisced of community building efforts with others in raising funds for disabled persons,

some 20 years before the American Disabilities Act. While never specifically claiming an identity, Gene uses the term Mexicanos in describing the experiences of his compatriots from Texas. Unfortunately, he differentiates between “mojados” (undocumented Mexican workers) who were in competition for jobs with U.S. born Mexicanos. His biggest concern was the depression of wages as agriculturalists chose to pay lower wages to Mexican immigrants. Unfortunately, he laid blame on Mexican immigrants ([Hernandez 1973](#)).

“Enganchistas (Labor agents)” worked to recruit workers on a commission for different labor markets in and around Salt Lake, Utah, and neighboring states as José Medel recalls. He was born in 1907 and migrated from Guanajuato, Mexico in 1923 by way of El Paso. From there he caught a train to Albuquerque and worked enough for bus fare to Los Angeles. He picked fruit and nursed trees in the San Fernando Valley, as well as in Oregon and Idaho before becoming a railroad section hand in Wasco, OR and then Woods Crossing, Utah in 1927. José’s interview describes Salt Lake City public and neighborhood segregation, ethnic institutions, and inter-ethnic labor conflict between Mexicanos and a variety of Asian and European groups. José used derogatory and stereotypical language when describing race relations. For example, he used the term “colored people” for African Americans, and commented how they and the “Indians” were always drinking and could not keep their jobs. He also believed that some of the Japanese workers were trying to send money to help for the war on the other side. There was also a great deal of inter-ethnic conflict among white ethnic groups such as French, Italians, and Greeks. His remarks gave the impression that everybody just belonged in their own separate groups. His descriptions echo the historical events of the early 20th century as several of his compatriots were Mexican Revolution veterans from both sides of the conflict. He worked alongside different ethnic groups in different decades that coincided with immigration policies during and after both World Wars. As reported by others, José recalls the intra-ethnic conflict between foreign and U.S. born Mexicanos ([Medel 1970](#)).

Sixty-nine year old Jesusita Aparicio born in Michoacán, Mexico also commented on intra-ethnic disunity between “Hispanics,” “Mexicans,” and “Chicanos,” but through the lens of her long-time Centro Civico Mexicano volunteer work with the Ballet Folklorico. Jesusita came to the U.S. at the age of 16 long after her father arrived 13 years beforehand. Jesusita came with her Mother who finally agreed to join her husband and did not want to leave Jesusita and her new, Tarascan Indian, trumpet-playing husband behind. After arriving in San Antonio and moving to Kansas, they settled in Utah in 1921 where she divorced and remarried a Colorado-born Mexican in 1931. Interestingly, Jesusita describes some of the tension between Mexicans and those identifying as “Spanish”, mostly from New Mexico and Colorado. Jesusita painfully ruminates about the “No Mexicans Allowed” signs; the many fights that her brother and his friends would endure with whites; and the “I’m sorry, but . . . ” explanations when people would be turned down for jobs. She understood Chicano to mean Mexican American, and more importantly, that they were fighting for Civil Rights of the Mexican community. Jesusita perceived Blacks as having increased status over Mexicans due to their better access to resources despite their limited presence in the city and in Utah. Baptized a Catholic in México, she was not practicing when she came to Utah. Jesusita converted into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS), faith in 1930 and was one of an early handful of converts that formed the LDS “Mexican Branch.” Different from other narrators’ experiences, she remarked on her collaborative and successful friendships and event organizing through the Centro Civico Mexicano even though she was a religious minority with respect to the predominantly Latino Catholic population in Salt Lake City ([Aparicio 1972](#)).

At six weeks old, Edith Melendez came with her laid off railroad father and the rest of the family from Sergintin [sic], Colorado to Bingham Canyon, Utah in 1925 to search for work. Edith developed her bilingual skills early on helping her family with the boarding house business they started after her father fell ill from working in the mines. After graduation, Edith attended the University of Utah for a year before marrying one of their Puerto Rican boarders recruited to work in Utah through the Bracero Program. Edith

describes many of the different Latino organizations that emerged in the 1940s to help with different issues such as the social club La Sociedad Miguel Aleman, the American GI Forum, and the Catholic Youth Organization. Her bilingual skills proved beneficial at the time employment in government agencies began to open up for people of color due to the Civil Rights movements. Edith joined the movement in earnest participating with and holding leadership positions in varied organizations such as the NAACP and Spanish Speaking Organization for Community, Integrity, and Opportunity (SOCIO). Her insight into race relations provides one of conflict between primarily Europeans and Mormons against non-Europeans and Catholics. Edith too provides memories of conflict between “Spanish New Mexicans” and “Mexican surumatos” (slang for southerners or Mexican immigrants), and between Mexicans and Puerto Ricans. Edith preferred the label Mexican over Chicano, because “other people” feel Chicano is derogatory due to their uncivil Black Panther like militancy (Melendez 1973).

3.1.3. Chicana/o

Clorinda Córdova, 37 years old at the time of this interview, was born in Pagosa Junction, Colorado. She was seven years old when she moved with her parents to a tent city at the Horse Canyon mine near Columbia, Utah in 1942. She remembers the intense racial/ethnic segregation and discrimination for Mexicans who were primarily Catholic trying to fit into the Mormon world, “You asked if we had a Mormon influence here and it’s all Mormon influence and it’s all, it’s the same thing as when I was going to school, it is just you know if your LDS you’ve got it made it doesn’t matter how smart or how dumb you are. And if you’re not you’ve just got to fight every inch of the way, either that or go over to their side which I don’t think that it is a very good reason to go over” Her negative experience was a factor for quitting school in the tenth grade. Clorinda struggled with the gendered and racialized work force since as early as she can remember. Women worked at the mines, but not in the underground jobs that paid more money. There were no Mexicanas/Chicanas working in the mine administrative offices, or as postal workers. She and her husband’s politicization came about through SOCIO and the “Brown Movement” after attending an outreach meeting in rural Dragerton. SOCIO was at the forefront of organizing efforts in Salt Lake City. Their goals of equality and inclusion resonated with them, providing the motivation to become local chapter officers and state representatives. Clorinda then applied for and completed a government-funded teacher’s aide training program. She felt confident that she was making an impact on the young Mexican children attending the school where she worked. While she never declared being Chicana, she spoke highly of the movement and all that it was doing to help “brown people” (Cordova 1972).

Duvan Lujan was born in 1919 at Valencia, New Mexico. He worked with his family following the crops for years in Colorado, Wyoming, and Arizona. He often mixed it up with the German Russians, and spoke of the public signs indicating “No Mexicans or Dogs Allowed.” As a young man, he searched for steady employment before enlisting into the Air Force to learn formally the machinist trade. After military service, he moved to Montana to work in his brother’s nightclub. He then made it to Seattle, WA to work in the Boeing Industries and joined their union. He moved back to New Mexico for employment and used his union organizing skills to work with the American GI Forum on a number of civil rights complaint cases. Duvan was critical of New Mexicans that identified as Spanish and distanced themselves from their Mexican roots. He recalls the term Chicano as an informal way of describing working class Mexicans since his days working in the fields. “I know it identifies the Mexican community, a group of Chicanos this and the group of Chicanos that, we used to say todos los Chicanos en contra de los Rusos (all the Chicanos against the Russians) . . . to us any body that was a migrant out there more or less were Chicanos I have heard all kinds of ideas as to where it might had started, I never gave it too much of a thought” In any case, he was critical of “Chicanos” that promoted opportunistic activism rather than community empowerment. The American GI Forum’s devotion to assimilationist politics undergirded his skepticism of Chicanos and their militant ethos.

Ironically, his critiques of Chicano activists often included descriptions of Chicanismo—a political ideology dedicated to eradicating social, economic, and political oppression. In the end, Duvan preferred a Chicano identity because he “wasn’t hyphenated” (Lujan 1973).

Bill Gonzalez born in 1935 is a native of Monticello, Utah with his family having New Mexican roots. Bill lived a sheltered, seemingly idyllic life in rural Monticello, but with travel over the years, he saw the need for change. He attended college after high school in San Jose, CA and Minnesota for several years until he volunteered for the draft so that he could have some control in when and where he served. After two years of military service in Chicago, he returned to San Jose to finish his degree. He taught English in one of the roughest San Jose barrios for a year before returning to Monticello to teach. However and after receiving requested teaching credentials, Bill believed his Catholic faith was the determining factor for not receiving the position earlier assured for him. Shortly thereafter, Bill went to study in Spain upon invitation, and with the financial assistance of his GI Bill, earning a Master’s in Philosophy and Theology. Throughout the interview, conducted in both Spanish and English, he uses the term Chicanos. However, he does differentiate between Mexicanos and New Mexicans several times, even seeing the conflict between the groups as far away as California. He also remembers his mother not wanting him to hang around pachucos when they were in California working in the fields when he was in the fourth grade. His family is one of the earliest and most respected in Monticello, helping to raise funds to build the Catholic Church. His many travels and experiences raised his awareness and helped change his view about Chicanos and SOCIO, “We have to change things” (Gonzalez 1973).

3.2. Wyoming Latinidad

3.2.1. Spanish Americans

Alfred Arellano born in Costilla, New Mexico in 1896 met his wife shortly after returning from military service in Germany during WWI. He moved his family in 1946 to Rawlins located in Carbon County. Alfred’s grandparents were from Spain and probably the leading factor he prefers a Spanish American identity as it is “in his blood” and something he is proud of acknowledging. He spoke highly of his military service and lifelong Democratic Party affiliations, as well as his work herding sheep, railroading, and carpentry in New Mexico and Wyoming. This work put him into interactions with white ethnics and other “Mexicans” and “New Mexicans.” He reports having good interactions with whites but not so much with other Latinos because of his supervisory roles in different occupations and because of tensions between “Mexicans” and “New Mexicans.” His observations of foreign-born Mexicans in particular are often condescending describing them as “not as educated” and “fighters.” At times, when he references himself as Mexican it is usually in the context of experiencing discrimination, “One time we had come from Costilla over here to visit . . . I had three kids from the army. We entered a restaurant in Colorado, in Ft. Collins, where there were a lot of soldiers. The waitress there told us she couldn’t serve us, probably because we were Mexican. They didn’t explain . . . ” (Arellano 1981).

Maria DeHerrera, Alfredo’s daughter also commented on the tensions between Mexicans and Mexican Americans and felt, “They should get along, because there are good and bad in each group.” Even though Maria reports good relations with most people, she like others interviewed, experience and report on incidents of discriminatory behavior manifest in segregated housing and “jealously” towards her highly achieving children. She does not specify a Latino ethnic label, but she regularly uses Spanish and Spanish American in her comments. This is probably due to her father’s pride in his Spanish ancestry as discussed above, and her fond childhood memories of northern New Mexico and northern New Mexican cultural traditions rooted in Spanish Catholicism. Maria’s narrative is full of praise for all of her children, especially her lawyer and police chief sons (DeHerrera 1981).

Abe DeHerrera did identify a preference for Spanish American giving rise to the generational permanency of particular privileging labels even in the face of enduring

and painful discriminatory behavior. After a sheltered childhood at his first home in the unincorporated railroad village of Cherokee, Abe reports on the many interethnic conflicts he and his siblings encountered once they moved to Rawlins for their post-elementary education. A heartbreaking moment was Abe's ban from high school commencement activities due to his marriage with his white pregnant girlfriend. School policy prohibited married students from participating in graduation activities. He did note that this was not the case for white married students. Abe began a career in law enforcement at the age of 23 because it was stable employment. He rose to the rank of police chief and strove to make the department one that performed its duties without bias. His integrity put him in confrontation with many of the Rawlins elite expecting favors, and with his officers who accused him of unfair disciplinary actions received for "wrongdoing and mistreatment of the public." At the time of his interview, Abe was involved in an employment discrimination lawsuit with city officials for unjustly being relieved of his administrative post (DeHerrera 1983).

3.2.2. Mexican(a/o)

Secundino Rodriguez born in 1895 first came to the U.S. from Leon, Guanajuato as a contracted laborer in 1916 at the age of 21. He arrived to Lovell, Wyoming in Big Horn County to work in the sugar beet fields in 1924 just shy of 30 years old. From his comments about his childhood, it is clear that he was escaping extreme poverty. It was the saddest time of his life recalling not having a place to play or toys to play with. The happiest time of his life was living in the U.S. because he had work, albeit as a farm laborer working the sugar beets and irrigating alfalfa. He did not report having any ill feelings towards any particular group, and this may be due to the rural isolation of the Big Horn basin. Notably, he had no ill feelings towards Mexican immigrants despite being in the U.S. the entirety of his adult life. Nevertheless, he did not have any particular preference for a Latino identity nor had any comments about the term Chicano (Rodriguez 1983).

Secundino's son Jesse Rodriguez did prefer Mexican and did not like the term Chicano. This differs from most of the other selected oral history participants who do not express negative attitudes towards the term Chicano. Also different is Jesse's disregard for the term even though he was born in Lovell in 1932 and therefore a U.S. citizen, a criterion often employed to define a Chicana/o identity. Jesse completed the 6th grade and worked in primarily agriculturally related occupations after his service in the U.S. Navy, something he was very proud of accomplishing (Rodriguez 1982). It could be that Jesse's disregard for Chicano was because of rural isolation, lower educational attainment, and patriotic loyalty. While not specified, Jesse's military service most likely occurred during the Korean Conflict and/or the early part of the Vietnam War from approximately the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s. This was at a time when many young adults were questioning the role of the U.S. military in foreign matters, including Chicanas/os.

Juanita Martinez, raised by her grandparents when her mother died at a young age, is the granddaughter and niece to Secundino and Jesse respectively. While she did complete high school, she never worked much and preferred to be a stay at home mother. The few jobs she had were part-time in a cannery and as a teacher's aide offering interpreting skills. She prefers a Mexican ethnic identity to Chicano, because "that's who I am." She provides additional insight into why she prefers Mexican through her description of the tight-knit Mexican community in Lovell that would have traditional celebrations for September 16th and Cinco de Mayo. She also mentions speaking Spanish at school despite its prohibition, an act that would reinforce a preferred Mexican identity. Juanita also comments on her recollections of Mexican/New Mexican tensions that occurred more in the past. She knows of this because her Mom is Mexican and her Dad is New Mexican (Martinez 1982).

3.2.3. Chicano

Lucas Pacheco from Cheyenne, Wyoming located in southeastern Laramie County moved to the area sometime after his initial 1930 arrival to Rawlins from Taos, New Mexico

to work as a shepherd. He worked seasonally as a farmworker and railroad laborer before settling in Cheyenne, characteristic for many in the search for stable employment (Pacheco 1981c). Lucas' daughter Evangeline provides testament by informing the interviewer that . . . "the first time they came to Cheyenne was in 1946, but they didn't settle until 1952 as her Daddy worked in Colorado before they moved to Cheyenne" (Pacheco 1981b). Evangeline's son Dennis provides additional confirmation when mentioning that his grandfather came to Cheyenne sometime in the late 1940s and early 1950s (Pacheco 1981a). While Lucas preferred a Hispanic identity for himself because "we're really Spanish, not Mexicans from Mexico," he did not oppose a Chicano identity because of its American and not Mexican roots. Evangeline similarly stated, "Well I like to be called a Chicano better than Mexican-American because I feel, although a lot of people do call us Mexicans, I'd rather be called a Chicano because I feel that I was born here in the United States" . . . (Pacheco 1981b). In his interview, Dennis uses the terms Hispano and Hispanic often, but then when asked specifically, he prefers American. He also agrees that Chicano is ok too, because of his American birth. He further qualifies his racial/ethnic identity when speaking of his absent Afghani biological father (Pacheco 1981a).

This empathy for a Chicana/o identity among the Pachecos may relate to the proximity of Cheyenne to Denver, Colorado where the first Chicano Youth Liberation Conference occurred in 1969, and the University of Wyoming where students advocated for a Chicano Studies Program during the 1970s and 1980s. While the Pachecos do not consciously claim a Chicana/o identity, they are not opposed to it and claim it over Mexican because their definition of Chicanas/os is someone that is born in the U.S. This desire for Americanness is evident among all three, and Chicano becomes a way to distance themselves from Mexicans. In addition to this, all three Pachecos, while claiming not to have experienced discrimination, each describe negative experiences with Anglos in neighborhood, school, and work settings, and often because they are "Mexicans." During his discussion of troubles with Anglos in school, Dennis contextualizes his comments with the timeless microaggression that Anglos perceive him as "smart for a Mexican" (Pacheco 1981a). He then goes on to say that he is half Afghani and that may explain his intellectual abilities.

4. Discussion

While the sample is small and the analysis exploratory, not one individual used the term Latino, nor Latina, during their interviews. This should come as no surprise as the interviews occurred before the 1990s when the term Latina/o emerged and became used more regularly challenging Hispanic as the preferred umbrella term among the Latinx community (Cohn 2010; Davila 2001; Hayes-Bautista and Chapa 1987). It is clear from narratives that defining and claiming a Latina/o identity is fluid and variable and impacted by several factors.

Real or perceived Spanish ancestry, New Mexican origins, higher-class status, marital assimilation, and rural isolation influenced a preference for a Spanish American identity. Even so, this Spanish American identity did not shelter "brown people" from racism and discrimination. Texas and Mexican migrants into the region preferred a Mexican(a/o) identity label that appeared to be reinforced through inter-ethnic segregation among, and employment competition with various European and Asian ethnics during the first part of the 20th century in both urban and rural environments. Oral histories also suggested that Latinx intra-ethnic conflict based on regional and/or national origins, citizenship status, and recency of immigration affected the adoption and use of preferred identities. As demonstrated elsewhere, New Mexicans preferred a Hispanic identity to distance themselves not only from Mexicans and Mexican immigrants, but also Indigenous peoples and African Americans (Gómez 2018; Nieto-Phillips 2008; Gonzales 1993, 1997).

Oral histories also demonstrated ethnic diffidence, or the hesitancy to claim a certain identity. These individuals often relied on categorical awareness of who they were not to solve this ambiguity (Gonzales 1997). Chicana/o, not directly adopted by selected narrators, received tacit acceptance due to the breaking down of barriers many perceived

the Chicano movement was responsible for achieving by the early 1970s and beyond. Those most favorable towards the term were U.S. born individuals that had varied life experiences outside of the intermountain west, and involved in formal community organizing activities. Hesitancy to adopt fully a Chicana/o label appeared to be because of its connection to “Black militancy,” despite little to no mention of interactions with African Americans whose historical presence in the Intermountain West is/was minimal especially in rural areas. While there is an indigenous presence in the area due to several large reservations, discussions of indigeneity were sparse and mostly in a negative manner.

These findings have implications for Intermountain West Latinidad at the turn of the 21st century within the context of the region’s exponential growth and Latinx diversity. The region’s overall population increased by 166.4% from 1970 to 2010, while the Latino population increased by 486.6% during the same 40-year period. Mexican immigration accounted for much of the growth in the region and for individual states (Ennis et al. 2011; Gibson and Jung 2002). Data show that the Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin population constituted 16.4% of the total U.S. population. The 2010 Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin population in the Intermountain West region was proportionately higher at 23.7%. New Mexico had the highest Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin proportional population at 46.4%, with Wyoming having the lowest at 9.0% (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2010a).

Estimates do indicate that the region’s Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish Origin population is highly Mexican, Mexican Am., Chicano. Nationally in 2010, 64.9% of the Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin population identified as Mexican. In the Intermountain West the proportion is higher at 79.4%. Arizona had the region’s highest Mexican origin proportional population at 90.4% with New Mexico having the lowest at 60.8%. Puerto Rican regional (1.9%) and state proportional percentages are substantially lower than the U.S. total of 9.2%. Montana (3.4%) and Nevada (3.3%) are the only states with a Puerto Rican population of at least 3%. Montana (4.8%) and Nevada (3.5%) also have the largest Cuban proportional populations above and near the U.S. total of 3.7%, with proportions for all other states and the region overall (1.0%) substantially lower. The region’s Other Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin population proportion (17.7%) was lower than the national proportion of 22.2%. However, New Mexico (38.1%), Montana (25.0%), and Wyoming (23.7%) had higher proportions of Other Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin individuals (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2010a).

The 2010 racial composition of the Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin population provides interesting nuance. Sixty-four percent of the total U.S. Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin population identifies as White alone. With the exception of Wyoming (58.1%), all other states and the region (69.9%) as a whole have a higher Hispanic White population proportion with Arizona registering the highest Hispanic White population proportion (72.9%). Not surprising considering the historically low presence of African Americans in the region, Hispanic Blacks in the region (0.7%) are below the national proportion of 1.9%. Not one state had a Hispanic Black population of 1.0%. Conversely and with the exception of Nevada (0.4%), the region (1.5%) and all other regional states have a higher proportion of Hispanics that identify as Native American or Alaska Native Alone than the national proportion of 0.9%. Montana (5.5%) and Wyoming (3.8%) are notable with relatively large Hispanic Native American or Alaska Native Alone populations. Nevada (0.5%) is the only state in the region (0.2%) that has a larger Hispanic Asian Alone proportional population than the national proportion (0.3%). Nevada (0.2%) also has a Hispanic Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander Alone proportional population larger than national proportion (0.1%). However, Utah has the region’s (0.1%) largest Hispanic Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander proportional population at 0.5%, which corresponds to Utah having the largest Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander proportional population among the 48 contiguous states (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2010c).

While the region and its states have lower Hispanic Some Other Race Alone proportional populations than the national proportion (28.2%), all states except Idaho (19.0%) and Montana (13.5%) have at least 21% that identify as Some Other Race. What’s more several

states have higher proportions than national proportions of Hispanic Two or More Races (4.5%); Hispanic Two Races Including Some Other Race (2.4%); and Hispanic Two or More Races, Excluding Some Other Race, and Three or More Races (2.2%). Wyoming has the highest proportional percentages for these categories respectively (13.9%; 4.6%; 9.2%; [U.S. Bureau of the Census 2010c](#)).

5. Conclusions

It is unclear if the Intermountain West Latinx population will continue to experience the growth witnessed from 1970–2010. For example, researchers have demonstrated the devastating impact that the COVID-19 pandemic is having on Latinx age-specific mortality with Latinas/os having higher COVID-19 specific death rates than Whites do ([Sáenz and Garcia 2021](#)). In addition, immigration policy has turned for the worse with increasingly punitive and restrictive measures proposed and implemented in response to growing anti-immigrant rhetoric directed primarily at Latinx communities and Mexicans in particular. This along with an improving Mexican economy, a depressed U.S. economy, enhanced Mexican educational opportunities, and a decreasing Mexican fertility rate has slowed Mexican migration to the U.S. since 2000, and in comparison to migration from Latin America overall. This decrease in Mexican migration is true for all states in the Intermountain West with the exception of Montana ([Sáenz 2019](#)). Thus, it is logical to anticipate increased Latinx ethnic diversity of the Intermountain West Latinx population in the years to come.

What this diversity entails, besides ethnic origin and racial diversity, is yet to manifest. Research is documenting how current immigration policies are affecting transnational movements and community building, acculturation, inter- and intra-ethnic relations, political activism, and institutional participation in both rural and urban settings ([Sáenz and Morales 2015](#); [Rodríguez et al. 2008](#); [Zúñiga and Hernández-Léon 2005](#)). In addition to Mexican migration to the U.S. on a downward trend, the composition of this Mexican migrant population is changing with higher educational levels, increased English language proficiency, increased occupational levels, and higher proportions of U.S. naturalized citizens ([Sáenz 2019](#)). These sociodemographic characteristics are reminiscent of the Cuban Golden Exiles of the 1960s and many recent South American migrants that tend to have conservative social, economic, and political values ([González 2020](#); [Sáenz and Morales 2015](#)).

For Latinidad to be a useful concept, particularly concerning its coalitional building capacity, we must heed the words of [Pelaez Lopez \(2018\)](#) who argues “the “X” in Latinx is a wound as opposed to a trend that speaks to a collective history. The “X” is attempting to speak to the violences of colonization, slavery, against women and femmes, and the fact that many of us experience such an intense displacement and silence that we have no language in which to articulate who we are. Therefore, if you are using “Latinx,” I encourage you to ask yourself at the end of every day: “what have I done to show up for Black, Indigenous, women and femmes of the Latin American diaspora today?” And second, “why?” Here, you’ll be crafting your own vision of a Latinx liberation that doesn’t leave the most marginalized behind. However, this is no easy task and it will require both a desire and an everyday commitment.”

For researchers, comparative historical research is a valuable tool to articulate better who we are as Latinx individuals and how we can improve society for all and not only a privileged minority. Oral histories in the current historical moment can provide insight into variables affecting Latinidad and left unclear in this exploratory analysis. Military service emerged, but it was not clear if patriotic duty lessened, strengthened, or changed a person’s preference for Latina/o labels with regard to males, let alone women who play an increasingly significant role in the military today ([Pérez 2015](#)). Comments from narrators indicated more research is needed to combat anti-blackness, anti-indigenesness, and anti-immigrant beliefs within Latinx communities ([Pelaez Lopez 2018](#)). An increasingly important research area at the turn of the 21st century are discussions revolving around sexuality, glaringly absent from the findings ([González-López and Vidal-Ortiz 2018](#)). Re-

ligion and especially the impact of the Church of Jesus of Christ of Latter Day Saints on Latinidad surfaced in Utah oral histories. Latinas/os are the fastest growing segment of the LDS church (Reyes 2016), which historically has had troubled relationships with people of color, women, and the LGBTQIA+ community.

Networks between interdisciplinary academics, public scholars, and non-profit organizations can lead the way in endeavors to advance further comparative historical research. These collaborations can include additional analyses of other national, state, and/or local Latinx oral history databases if available. Obviously, the creation of new oral history archives is necessary. Student oral history course projects can help build new databases through collaborations with state and/or local historical organizations. From these projects curated museum exhibits and digital displays can emerge for public consumption. Fortunately, this work is underway with University of Utah students, the Genealogical Society for Hispanic America (GSHA)-Utah Chapter, and the University of Utah's Marriott Library and Digital Matters Lab.

More specifically, students enrolled in my Ethnic Studies U.S. Latino Diaspora seminar develop a deep understanding of the historical and contemporary evolution of Latinidad through bi-weekly readings and reflections of current Latinx scholarship, both online and in-person. This lays the foundation for completing an oral history project after receiving training and practice over the course of the semester. Students interview a GSHA member volunteer, most of who came of age during and after the Chicano Movement. As stipulated in release forms, the overarching goal is to create the "Construyendo Latinidad in the Intermountain West" oral history database to archive at the University of Utah's Marriott Library. As the current President of the GSHA-Utah Chapter, I am in conversations with other chapter officers who wish to collaborate on the project.

This [Student Reflection \(2021\)](#) excerpt personifies the value of this work for the continued interrogation of Latinidades:

In comparison to the previous oral histories I read in this course, I feel that the articles, book readings, and discussions prepared me to encompass the plentitude of identities surrounding Latinidad. I appreciate how you, Dr. Muñoz, regarding our research of oral histories with the two different databases, continuously asked the question of how our oral histories are explained through an understanding of Latinidad, Latinx, and/or Chicax identity. Instead of just providing a summary of what I read, I was able to intertwine this subject with time periods and the era of knowledge surrounding identity. Furthermore, the books assigned targeted identity as a fluid notion surrounding colonialism and capitalism. Thus, I was able to undergo my oral history with a strong knowledge of our super racist roots and recognize the anti-racist efforts that have been developed through programs, such as the Chicano Scholarship Fund that [my Narrator] participated in. I also encompassed the awareness I gained about religion and its assimilation efforts through the reading of *Recovering History Constructing Race* by Martha Menchaca. With my oral history with [Narrator], she discussed how she used to live "in fear" near the Intermountain Indian School. Therefore, the fact that I was able to understand this common theme of xenophobic attitudes in response to the perceived impression of normality because of this one book does summarize how being prepared by the true discourse of history allows for a more realistic interpretation of the oral histories read.

As often proclaimed, "¡La lucha sigue (The struggle continues)!"

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Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are openly available in the American West Center's *Spanish-Speaking Peoples in Utah Oral Histories, 1972–1975* archive at <http://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/ark:/80444/xv23580> (accessed on 11 March 2019), and the Wyoming State Archives *La Cultura Hispanic Heritage Oral History Project* archive at http://spcrphotocollection.wyo.gov/luna/servlet/view/search/what/La%2BCultura?q=la+cultura&sort=oh_%2Cproject%2Cinterviewed%2Cnarrator (accessed on 26 November 2018).

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