

An Exchange between Latinxs and Houston

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Research Question

Recently, Houston, which has a 45% Latinx population, was recognized as the most diverse large city in the United States. This recognition ties directly to my research question: Why did Guatemalans, Mexicans, Hondurans, and Salvadorans decide to immigrate to Houston specifically? How have the four immigrant groups helped diversify Houston through the exchange of each other's culture?

Methodology

- Oral histories were conducted in English and Spanish with people from Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador.
- Interviewees answered a series of open-ended questions recorded on Zoom or by phone using Audacity and and transcribed using Sonix.ai.
- *Prophetic City: Houston on the Cusp of a Changing America* provided the main background to understand Houston’s history and people’s attitudes towards immigrants. The book tracks Houstonians’ attitudes towards immigration and other issues and is unique in that no other American city has been studied in this way over such a long period.

Conclusion

- Mexican, Guatemalans, Hondurans, and Salvadorans are embracing Houston’s culture of opportunity, with many living the “Houston dream” – the ability to build themselves up through hard work by taking advantage of employment and educational opportunities.
- They cherish their ethnic cultures, which have also shaped Houston through incorporation of the Spanish language, Latinx foods, festivals, and businesses.

Mexico
Olga Flores was born in San Luis Potosi, Mexico, immigrated to the United States at the age of 12. Her parents left Olga and her siblings in Mexico for jobs inside and outside her hometown and the United States.

- Her mother came back for the children whom she took across the Rio Grande to Houston.
- She has lived in Houston for over 10 years and has worked at Hermann Hospital as a medical technologist for almost 17 years.
- An independent woman, she loves living in Houston, where she is raising her daughter.

Yolanda Carrillo born in Dolores Hidalgo, Guanajuato, Mexico and raised by a single mother.

- Her desire for an education and her economic situation forced her at the age of 18 to immigrate to Houston, where she had family and the city offered opportunities.
- She sent money to her mother and family in Mexico.
- Working in restaurants, she has seen the emersion of Tex-Mex food in American restaurants.
- She appreciates seeing Talavera planters in downtown Houston, which reflect her Mexican culture, and recognizes a person can find anything from their home country in Houston.

El Salvador
Jennifer Castro was born in El Salvador and immigrated to Los Angeles, California.

- Her mother came to the United States first because their family had lost their house and their financial situation was not improving.
- Jennifer met her future husband, Ruben, a California native, and applied for a fiancé visa. She moved to Los Angeles, where she was reunited with her mother after eight years.
- Jennifer’s dream was to live in the United States and to own her house, which she has realized. When Ruben received a job opportunity in Houston, the couple moved there for the more affordable cost of living. Now, she has a family with two little girls, owns a home, and has her own small hair salon.

Honduras
Wendy Pineda was born on November 7, 1990, in Honduras.

- She immigrated as a teenager to Houston because, despite working consistently, she never saw an improvement in her life financially or personally.
- When she first came to Houston learning English and not being able to communicate was a challenge.
- She now owns a Honduran restaurant, Mi Pueblo Catracho, in Spring Branch.
- She dedicates herself to her family and to her restaurant, which was a long-life dream, to create a place where people could meet and enjoy Honduran food. However, people of all nationalities come to enjoy the food.
- Wendy says Houston has many opportunities to offer immigrants including jobs and good people.

Honduran was born in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, on May 24, 1996.

- His parents brought him to the United States when he was a young boy, seeking a better a life for the family.
- The skyline most impressed him when he first arrived in Houston.
- He described the process of learning English, getting used to American food, and adjusting to life in a new country.
- His life is better in Houston, which is affordable and has more opportunities than Honduras to better oneself.
- Honduran restaurants in Houston remind him of his homeland with their food, pictures, and decorations.
- He has loved living in Houston for over 18 years and works as a mechanic.

Guatemala
Roland Gramajo was born on May 17, 1971, in Retalhuleu, Guatemala.

- When Roland was 15 years old when his mother decided, they would immigrate to Houston, despite not having family or friends there.
- The transition from moving to Houston was difficult because as a child he had more freedom in Guatemala.
- Involved in the local Guatemalan and Houston community at large, he worked towards cleaning the Dering Ditch with Bayou Preservation Association, pressured former councilman Mike Laster to clean up Burnett Bayland Park, and worked to make voting accessible for Guatemalans in Houston to participate in Guatemalan presidential elections. Roland created the Miss Guatemala Houston contest and the Guatemalan parade.
- At Roland’s urging, former mayor Annise Parker named December 21, 2012, the Guatemalan American Holiday, and Mayor Sylvester Turner proclaimed May 17, 2018, as Roland Omar Gramajo Reyes Day.
- Roland loves his Guatemalan culture and Houston, which he calls the best place to live in the United States.

Martin Tzul, my father, was born in Paqui, Guatemala on August 10, 1971.

- He came to the United States because he did not feel safe in Guatemala, which was not at peace and grabbing young men, including his brother, to fight in the military against their will.
- He was sad to leave behind his family, his country, and his friends.
- He first lived in Los Angeles, California, and Miami, Florida but did not like their way of life. He came to Houston at the age of 24.
- He sees Houston’s diversity as a good thing because people learn from each other.
- He enjoys living in Houston and plans to stay there because he has a job, he has food on the table, he is the father if 3 girls who are studying which is something he is extremely proud of.

References

-Stephen Klineberg, *Prophetic City: Houston on the cusp of Changing America* (Avid Reader Press / Simon & Schuster: 2020)
-7 Oral Histories to be deposited in Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries
-William V. Flores and Rina Benmayor, *Latino Cultural Citizenship* (Beacon Press: 1997).
-Nestor P. Rodriguez, Undocumented Central Americans in Houston: Diverse Populations (The International Migration Review: 1987).



An Exchange Between Latinxs and Houston explores the role of Latinxs immigrants played in Houston and the continuation of such impact. The purpose of the research project was to understand why Latinxs from Guatemala, Mexico, El Salvador, and Honduras decide to come and establish themselves in Houston, Texas. Latinxs make up 45% of the population in Houston. Oral histories were conducted with at least one member of the Guatemalan, Mexican, Salvadoran, and Honduran community. They were asked a series of open ended questions in English and Spanish about their childhood, present family, and their decision to immigrate to Houston as well as why they have stayed living in Houston. They spoke about Houston and what they liked about living in Houston. Mexican, Guatemalans, Hondurans, and Salvadorans are embracing Houston's culture of opportunity. They are living the Houston dream, the ability to build yourself up through hard work. They are taking advantages of employment opportunities and educational opportunities. Their culture and tradition has shaped Houston including the incorporation of the Spanish language and Latinx food.