

*Browning Bluff City:
Hispanic Business, Culture, and Memory in Memphis*

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“Yo no soy mexicano. Yo no soy gringo. Yo no soy chicano. No soy gringo en USA y mexicano en Mexico. Soy chicano en todas partes. No tengo que asimilarme a nada. Tengo mi propia historia.”

Carlos Fuentes on Hispanic Identity

*“I am not Mexican. I am not gringo. I am not Chicano. I am not gringo in the USA and not Meixcan in Mexico. I am Chicano everywhere. I have no need of assimilating to anything. I have my own **history**.”*

Carlos Fuentes

Introduction:

When looking into the changing demographics of a city and the contribution of those actors of that change, it is important to look at data, statistics, and visual aids to interpret and analyze the change. “Change” might come in population, cultural (and everything associated with culture), economics, education, and ideology.¹ In order to effectively understand the grander picture of change is necessary to incorporate narratives and memories of the people who have been active factors of change, for it gives insight and depth to the perception offered by data. In the case of Memphis, this project deals with the on going change reaction afforded by the growing demographic of “Hispanics” in terms of economics and culture.

¹ David J. Theroux, “Open Letter on Immigration” (Oakland, CA: Independent Institute, June 19, 2006), www.independent.org/newsroom/article.asp?id=1727

Why focus on economics and culture? Economics is highly important because it is the main motivation for people, especially Hispanic, foreign born immigrants, looking for the next best way to supply for their families—whether they may be living in the same city, or in another country.² Culture because no matter how minimal the effect of a growing group of people may be, the social dynamics and norms in a place like Memphis, will and are changing at different rates at different times.

My personal motivation on doing this project is reflected by who I am as a person and my experiences and intersectionality of race, gender, age, sexuality and nationality living in a changing environment, such as Memphis. Being an immigrant myself and being the son of a Hispanic businessman who takes part in a Latino-based small business, the wellbeing of the Hispanic community has been something dear to my heart. Furthermore, having been introduced to the common traits of Hispanic businesses, that is—family owned and family operated—I have gained interests in seeing how some of these other small businesses are operated.

Having worked as the Latino Outreach Intern for Worker’s Interfaith Network and for CHOICES: Memphis Center for Reproductive Health, in addition to having Hispanic family members in Memphis, I have seen first-hand the effects and impact that Hispanics have on businesses, revitalizing neighborhoods, and the infusion of cultures in the city of Memphis. Looking back at previous research projects, it is evident that there have been minimal specific studies conducted on the ever-growing Latino population in

² Joseph, G. M., and Timothy J. Henderson. *The Mexico Reader: History, Culture, Politics*. Durham: Duke UP, 2002. Print.

Memphis. For this reason, I was motivated for the possibility to not only scratch the surface in what later may become of higher academic interest, but also finally bring the spotlight to questions that have been brewed over my years as a young Hispanic growing up in Memphis.

So what exactly are these topics? The research focuses on topics that included Hispanic population growth, economic impact, and cultural change in a changing and dynamic city such as Memphis—a city that is on its way to more potential and is constantly changing everyday, but also the possibility that this research may open up other questions to be answered in the future.

Introduction to Social-Scientific Data:

The stories and narratives of a few small business owners living in the Southern region of the United States will demonstrate how the impact of the continuing population growth of Hispanics has dramatically changed the demographics, the economics, perhaps most noticeably, and the culture of cities such as Memphis. Through all the challenges, obstacles, and barriers presented by a new land with new cultures, this growing demographic is swiftly and surely leaving a trace. When trying to identify the true impact of the community in the grander scale, we must first answer the question of what exactly is to be “Hispanic.”

Being Hispanic?

Being Hispanic, the U.S. Census Bureau defines Hispanics or Latinos as those persons who identify themselves as having family origin in Mexico, Guatemala, Puerto Rico, or Cuba, as well as other Latin American and South American countries. The Census Bureau identifies Hispanic as an ethnic category, and as different from race categories. However, this definition is just according to data collectors and the like.³

When people from Latin America or the descendants of immigrants from those countries are asked the question of what it means to be Hispanic, many respond with similar, yet unsatisfying definitions of the term “Hispanic.” However, when I read to the interviewees the following definition of the term Hispanic [Latino] drafted by Dr. Clara E. Rodríguez Professor at Fordham University, all agree that it embodies most aspects of what it means not only to be a Hispanic in the United State, but also an immigrant. In the quote she states,

“Being Latino also means that you lay claim to one (or more) of the rich and unique histories that each of these groups brings to the United States. Likewise, each of these groups has had a unique narrative in the United States, involving different times of arrival, areas of settlement, and types of migration and reception experiences. Like so many other groups coming to the United States, some groups came mainly as political refugees, or, political exiles without the benefit of refugee status. Others came as free or contracted laborers, and still others simply as immigrants looking to improve the opportunities in their lives. Unlike most other groups, Latinos have come from this hemisphere. Therefore, they have been consistently impacted by U.S. hemispheric policy and they have had more “va y ven” (coming and going) between their countries and the United States.”⁴

³ "Hispanic Origin." *US Census*. United States Government, n.d. Web. 05 July 2013.

⁴ Rodríguez, Clara E. "What It Means to Be Latino." *PBS*. PBS, 4 June 2004. Web. 12 July 2013. <<http://www.pbs.org/americanfamily/latino3.html>>.

However, to understand the changing dynamics at the local scale, it is critical to look at the overall change at the national scale. The growth of Hispanic demographics throughout the history of the United States has unquestionably impacted the economics and the cultures of different regions and cities at different times. According to Rogelio Saenz, head of the department of sociology at Texas A&M University,

“Over the last 100 years, few racial or ethnic groups have had as great an impact on the demography of the United States as Latinos. In 1900, there were only slightly more than 500,000 Latinos. Today, the national Latino population numbers more than 35 million and represents one of the most dynamic and diverse racial/ethnic groups in the United States.”⁵

This growth was reported back in 2004. Since then, in the course of nearly a decade, the complete population of Hispanics in the US has increased to an estimated 52 million across the country.⁶ Surprisingly, the fastest concentration of growth has been happening in the South that includes the states of Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Virginia, Arkansas, and the Carolinas.⁷ For the purpose of this research project, emphasizes on the “browning” effects of the South from this population growth will focus on Tennessee, specifically Memphis and its surrounding area.

Population Growth and Trends in the United States and the Mid-South

The labor force in the US has been greatly impacted by immigrant workers well before the last comprehensive piece of legislation affecting immigration reform was successfully passed in 1986 under the Reagan Administration. However, upon signing

⁵ Saenz, Rogelio. "Latinos and the Changing Face of America." - *Population Reference Bureau*. PBR, Aug. 2004. Web. 16 July 2013.

⁶ "Hispanic Origin." *US Census*. United States Government, n.d. Web. 05 July 2013.

⁷ United States Census Bureau <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/47000.html>

the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 into law, also known as the Simpson-Mazzoli Act, the Hispanic labor force exploded nationwide. The largest concentration in Texas, California, Florida, New York, and Illinois, creating a high concentration of Latinos working in construction, restaurants, grocery stores, and landscaping. Under this act, “certain seasonal agricultural illegal immigrants were legalized along side those illegal immigrants who entered the United States before January 1, 1982 and had resided there continuously with the penalty of a fine, back taxes due, and admission of guilt.”⁸

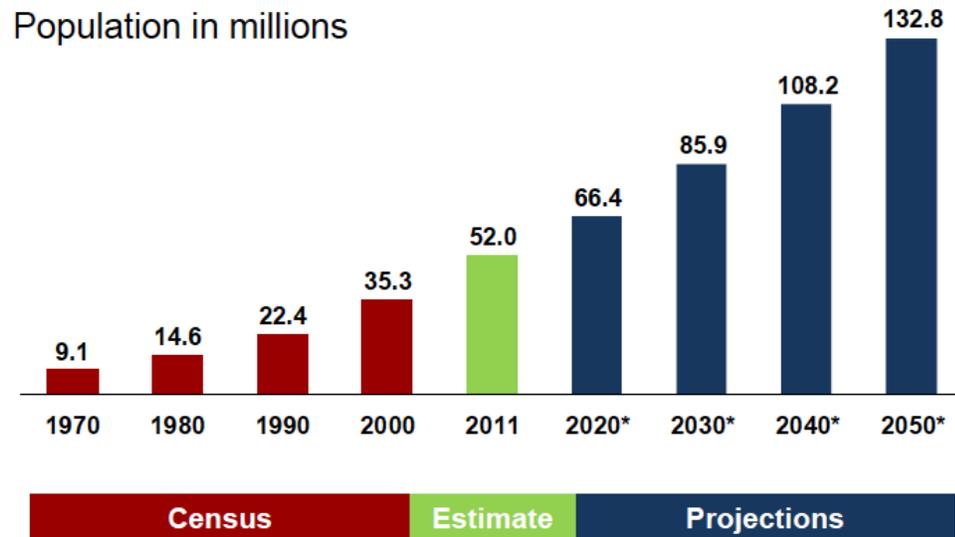
This law, the legalization of millions of undocumented immigrants, and a booming economy can be accredited to the explosion of Hispanic growth from the 1990’s until the present day. The Hispanic population in the United States has increased exponentially overall in the past two decades. According to the US Census Bureau, the overall population has increased from 35.3 million to an impressive 52.0 million.

Hispanic US Population growth from 1970 to 2050⁹

⁸ Coutin Susan Bibler. 2007. Nation of Emigrants. Cornell University Press, Itaca, NY. Pg 179

⁹ United States Census Bureau <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/47000.html>

Hispanics: 1970 to 2050



However, more recently the region that has experienced the most growth has been the Mid-South area that includes: Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, Arkansas, Mississippi, Virginia, Kentucky, and the Carolinas. Furthermore, six Southern states—Arkansas, Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee—registered very fast rates of Hispanic population growth between the censuses of 1990 and 2000 and continue to outpace the national average in the most recent census estimates. In order to examine the diversity of demographic and economic experiences at the local level, a report by the Pew Research Center examined 36 counties in the South that have experienced especially rapid Hispanic growth. Some of these counties contain metropolitan areas such as Atlanta, Ga., Birmingham, Ala., and Charlotte, N.C., that registered huge increases in their Hispanic populations. For example, Mecklenburg County, N.C., which includes Charlotte, was up 500 percent. But other counties are

predominately rural or contain smaller cities. Their total population in 2000 ranged from fewer than 37,000 (Murray County, a carpet manufacturing community in northwest Georgia) to almost 900,000 (Shelby County, Tenn., home to Memphis).¹⁰

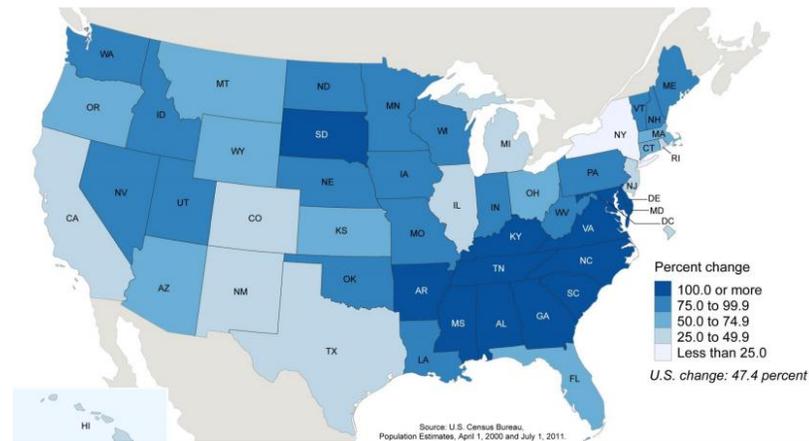
Thirty-six of these counties, all with an increase in their Hispanic population of 200 percent or more, had enough statistical information available to be studied in detail for this report. And in every case, the Hispanic population was relatively small before it surged. Fewer than 7,000 Hispanics were counted in Mecklenburg in 1990, but by 2000 there were nearly 45,000. Gordon County, Ga. had just 200 Latinos in 1990 and saw its Hispanic population soar to more than 3,200 by the 2000 census.¹¹

Percent of change in Hispanic Population by State, 2000-2011¹²

¹⁰ Rakesh, Kochhar. "The New Latino South: The Context and Consequences of Rapid Population Growth." *Pew Hispanic Center RSS*. Pew Hispanic Center, 26 July 2005. Web. 09 July 2013. <<http://www.pewhispanic.org/2005/07/26/the-new-latino-south/>>.

¹¹ Rakesh, Kochhar. "The New Latino South: The Context and Consequences of Rapid Population Growth." *Pew Hispanic Center RSS*. Pew Hispanic Center, 26 July 2005. Web. 09 July 2013. <<http://www.pewhispanic.org/2005/07/26/the-new-latino-south/>>.

¹² United States Census Bureau <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/47000.html>



Tennessee in specific has experienced a growth in the Hispanic population that has more than doubled since the 2000 census. The actual data indicates that the total population has grown an impressive 128% over the past decade.¹³ Of the approximate 322,800 Hispanics living in Tennessee, the large majority is distributed in the four largest cities in the state that include of Nashville, Clarksville, Memphis, and Chattanooga.

Cities with significant concentration of Hispanic immigrants in Tennessee¹⁴



After all these set of data and statistics, the question arises. Just how diverse is Tennessee exactly in terms of countries that the population represents and how has that

¹³ United States Census Bureau <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/47000.html>

¹⁴ Mendoza, Marcela, David H. Ciscel, and Barbara E. Smith. *Latino Immigrants in Memphis, Tennessee: Their Local Economic Impact*. University of Memphis. N.p., 12 Jan. 2001. Web. 10 Feb. 2013.

growth been concentrated? Many Hispanic persons are immigrants. According to the 2009 American Community Survey, there were 265,568 foreign-born persons in Tennessee in 2009, of which 124,585 (49 percent) were from Latin America. Of these 124,585 immigrants, 84,624 were from Mexico.

The remainder of the foreign-born population is quite diverse: 12 percent of immigrants are from Europe, 8 percent are from East Asia, 8 percent are from Africa, and 7 percent are from South Asia. This diversity makes Tennessee relatively unique among the states experiencing strong Hispanic growth; the fraction of immigrants from Mexico, while large, is much lower than the national average, yet still subject for an impact in those places that boast these people and their communities.^{15 16}

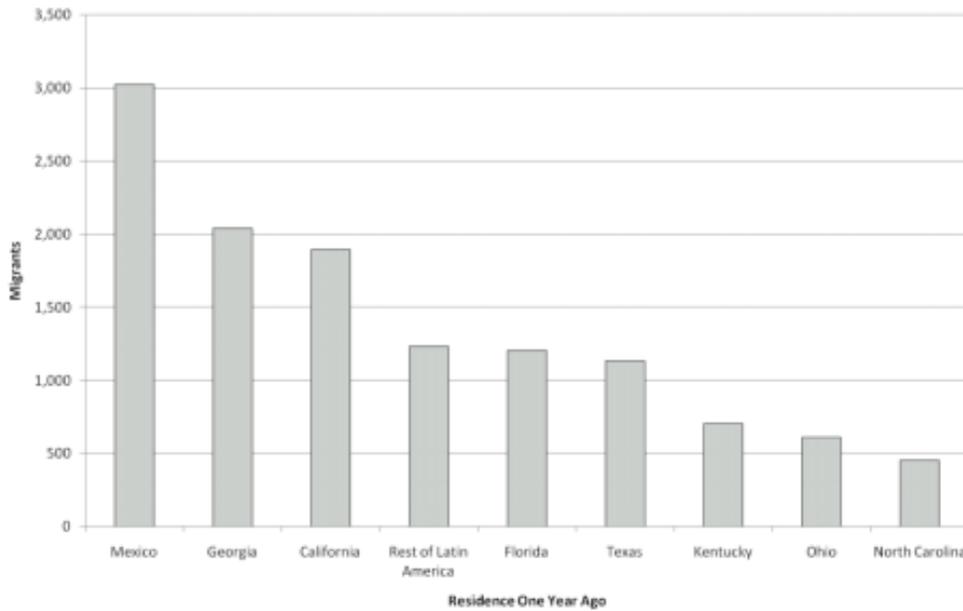
Additionally, not only did Tennessee grew in population growth in number of immigrants directly from Mexico, Central America, or other Latin American countries. Many of the people responsible for the growth in Tennessee actually came from other states across the nation.¹⁷

¹⁵ OECD 2011. "International Migration Outlook 2011". <http://www.oecd.org/migration/imo>

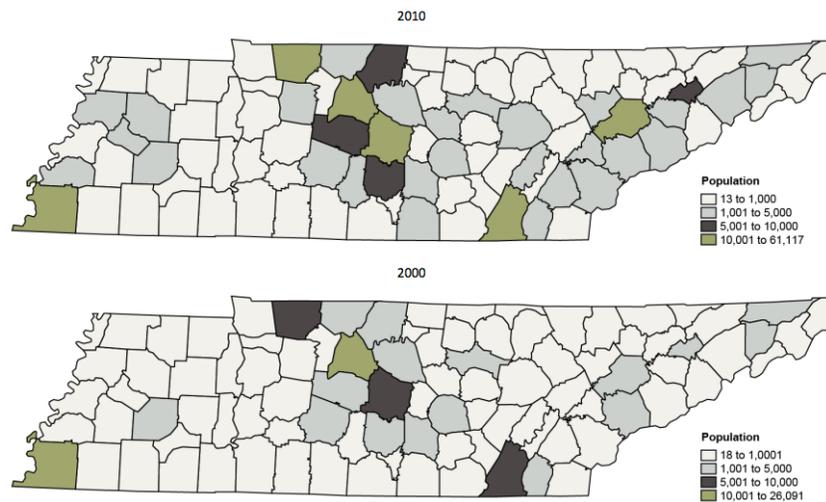
¹⁶ Nagle, Nicholas N., Randy Gustafson, and Charlynn Burd. "A Profile of Hispanic Population in the State of Tennessee." *University of Tennessee*. University of Tennessee, Aug. 2012. Web. 14 July 2013. <<http://cber.bus.utk.edu/census/hisp/bfox288.pdf>>.

¹⁷ CBER tabulation of 2005-2009 American Community Survey, 5 percent Public Use Microdata Sample.

Origins of Hispanics Migrating to Tennessee from 2005-2009¹⁸



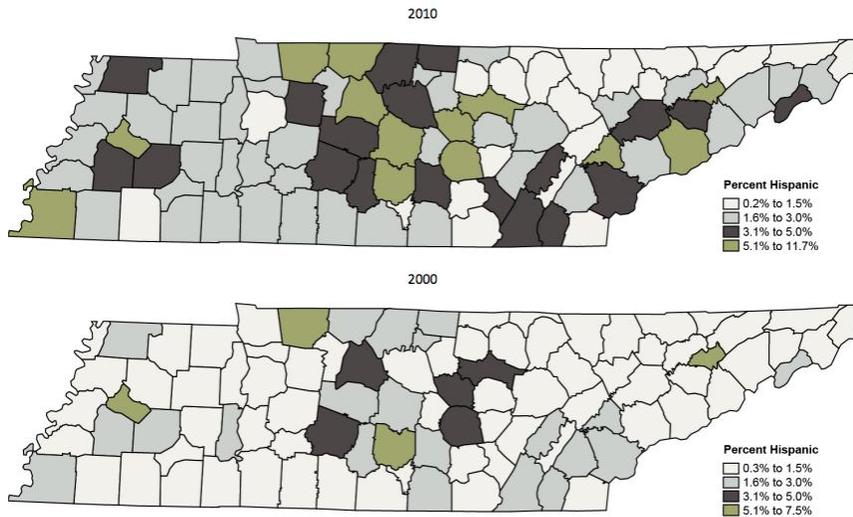
Number of Hispanic Persons by County¹⁹



¹⁸ CBER tabulation of 2005-2009 American Community Survey, 5 percent Public Use Microdata Sample.

¹⁹ Nagle, Nicholas N., Randy Gustafson, and Charlynn Burd. "A Profile of Hispanic Population in the State of Tennessee." *University of Tennessee*. University of Tennessee, Aug. 2012. Web. 14 July 2013. <<http://cber.bus.utk.edu/census/hisp/bfox288.pdf>>.

Percent Hispanic by County²⁰



Top 10 Counties by Population²¹

County	Number of Hispanic Persons	Fraction of State Hispanic Total
Davidson	61,117	21.1
Shelby	52,092	18.0
Rutherford	17,500	6.0
Knox	15,012	5.2
Hamilton	14,993	5.2
Montgomery	13,752	4.7
Williamson	8,166	2.8
Hamblen	6,711	2.3
Sumner	6,308	2.2
Bedford	5,083	1.8

When looking into Memphis as a hub for one of the largest cities with Hispanics in Tennessee, there's a much faster growing diversity than the rest of the state, mainly

²⁰ Nagle, Nicholas N., Randy Gustafson, and Charlynn Burd. "A Profile of Hispanic Population in the State of Tennessee." *University of Tennessee*. University of Tennessee, Aug. 2012. Web. 14 July 2013. <<http://cber.bus.utk.edu/census/hisp/bfox288.pdf>>.

²¹ Source: 2010 Decennial Census

Memphis boasts in impressive 53,000 Hispanics, or 16% of total Hispanics in Tennessee.²⁵ This vast growth of people has led to “Little Mexico” neighborhoods along the Jackson Avenue Corridor, Graham Street, Summer Avenue, and Covington Pike Rd. Within these neighborhoods, it is challenging to ignore the vast diversity in services offered by Hispanic businesses. These businesses are catered and owned by Hispanics for Hispanics, which extend far beyond the typical food industry. These businesses founded in these neighborhoods now offer many services—hair/nail salons, insurance offices, supermarkets, bakeries, travel agencies, newspapers, construction services, wireless, radio stations and bars/clubs—just to name a few.

This new growth of these new Hispanic services businesses sheds light on the fact that many (while not all) Hispanics are now establishing more permanent homes in the Sunbelt states, moving away from the traditional job of agriculture. As history would tell us, most Hispanics who immigrated to the Mid-South region of the United States in 70’s-90’s, would work in the fields harvesting agricultural goods in order to send money back to Mexico or other Latin American countries. However, there has been a new wave in the South that parallels that of other major Hispanic states such as California, Florida, and Texas in that one member of a family brings his entire family to the United States.

Memphis has been no stranger to this new trend. The migration of entire families into the region is partially responsible for the growth of Hispanic owned and operated businesses. Hispanic Memphians have been able to become homeowners not only in the

²⁵ Charlier, Tom. "Census Finds Hispanic Population Grows to 52,000 in Memphis Metro Area." *Memphis Commercial Appeal*. N.p., 22 Dec. 2010. Web. 12 Feb. 2013.

corridors and locations previously stated, but increasingly more in the many different suburbs. These of course Germantown, Lakeland, Bartlett, and Cordova. These permanent move allow the entire family to establish businesses that are closer to their homes, their children's schools, and closer to what eventually becomes their epicenters of their lifestyles and entertainment.²⁶

Hispanic Memphis Memory:

As with any other set of gathered statistics and data used for proving an argument, point, or fact—numbers and data has its limitations. They often leave out the humanizing aspect of the subjects and people that have been involved in the process of gathering such data. Their stories, their experiences, their lives, and most importantly their voices are completely and absolutely clouded by the sets of cold numbers, graphs, charts, and statistics.²⁷

Here are a few of the narratives that people, like myself, came or were brought to this country for the idea of a better life than that of their native lands, and the effect that these people are bringing into their new “home.” I carried out intimate, one-on-one interviews with five different people all from five different businesses. All five in their own right, have become influential leaders in the Greater Hispanic community in Memphis—mostly based on the fact that they have lived in Memphis far longer than most, therefore are considered some of the firsts in Memphis or because of their businesses' success and potential.

²⁶ Rene Sanchez." Personal interview. 25 June 2013.

²⁷ Joseph, G. M., and Timothy J. Henderson. *The Mexico Reader: History, Culture, Politics*. Durham: Duke UP, 2002. Print.

They explore answer questions such as: “why specifically these neighborhoods?” ‘What do these neighborhoods have that have attracted to many Hispanics?’ ‘Where do these people who settled here in the past decade come from?’ ‘From Mexico?’ ‘From Central America?’ ‘Or from other US cities?’ Of course, the narratives are just that, narratives. Many a times you have to separate truth and data from oral histories and memories, which is why both are complimentary to each other.

Every weekday, Joel Uriostegui and his sister, Maria Uriostegui, wake up at 6:30 AM to open the doors, turn on the baking ovens, chop the cilantro and onions for the fresh tortas and tacos, and do a fast sweep of the floor of Caminos de Michoacán, one of the newest and most popular authentic Mexican restaurants/bakeries with Hispanics and the rest of the greater Memphis community. Uriostegui, an aspiring young businessman, is the manager, bookkeeper, cook, and occasional dishwasher at this small, family owned restaurant. Like many other small, Hispanic owned businesses, the owner wears many different job descriptions to ensure the projected success during the early years of the business.²⁸

This establishment currently employs eight other people, six of them family. Uriostegui, a native of Michoacán, Mexico is one of the many small Hispanic business owners in Memphis, new and growing phenomena in Bluff City. He came to the United States in early 2003 at the green age of 15 to Chicago, and then moving to Memphis in 2006. While in Memphis, he and his sister along with his four cousins decided to open a restaurant that served not only Mexican food, but also traditional cuisine flavor from his

²⁸ "Joel Uriostegui." Personal interview. 18 June 2013.

native state of Michoacán. This idea led to the grand opening of Caminos de Michoacán in 2009.

Caminos de Michoacán is designed after a typical Mexican *Taqueria* conjoined by a *Panaderia*, or a Mexican bakery, a common commodity found in Michoacán, Mexico. The restaurant/bakery combo opened at its current location on Macon Road on June of 2009, right after the Great Recession took its major toll on economies throughout the region.²⁹ Businessmen such as Uriostegui wanted to take advantage of the lack of competition since the recession forced many other Hispanics to close down their restaurants around the same area where Caminos de Michoacán is currently located. Unlike many other businesses that are eligible for small business start-up loans because of the legal documentation of those applying for loan approvals, Uriostegui was not able to apply for loan. Instead, he and his sister had to save for approximately six years to gather the necessary \$20,000 to buy the minimum resources.

Uriostegui states,

“It was not easy those first two years, I mean, it still is not easy floating in this economy because you do have to survive. I thank God that the community likes us. The only reason why I was able to open this restaurant was because of a settlement I received when a drunk driver hit me. If I had not received that, the six years worth of saving would not have had sufficed to open these doors. My family and I probably would have had to return to Mexico.”³⁰

Across town in Germantown, Tennessee, one of the most homogenous suburb of Memphis, René Sánchez, founder of Sanchez Masonry, a small construction business

²⁹ Hinojosa-Ojeda, Raul. “Raising the Floor for American Workers: The Economic Benefits of Comprehensive Immigration Reform” Center for American Progress/American Immigration Council. (January 2010).

³⁰ Joel Uriostegui." Personal interview. 18 June 2013.

firm operating in Memphis and the surrounding Tri-State area of Mississippi and Arkansas since 1997, makes the first of many phone calls around 7:00 AM. He gathers his diverse team of 35 employees and divides them among groups according to location and mason specialties that include residential, commercial, etc. His business' projects have included homes, schools, gas stations, malls, and movie theaters—essentially all the backbones associated with the expansion of a city. In this case, his business has grown alongside Memphis and the surrounding suburbs and counties by developing and building up new establishments.

Sanchez, a native of a rural town in the Mexican state of Aguascalientes, moved to the United States at the age of 14 (now 42), first to Houston, Texas, then to Cleveland, Ohio, and eventually to Memphis in September of 1996. During this part of the 90s, there was little to no significant trace of a Hispanic face or economic activity in Memphis. In fact, he states,

“When I first moved to Memphis, I came with a group of 12 other guys from Houston looking for employment opportunities. Houston is great for meeting people with similar background, but the jobs are scarce because of the competition and the cut-throat environment when you try to start your own business. Memphis was bittersweet. There was no social life for people like us at that time. We worked, worked, worked and lived. This was great. I saved and kept out of trouble at that time—something difficult to do at a place like Houston where your best friends live.”³¹

As a commercial contractor, Sanchez has seen the city of Memphis expand over these past ten years not only in terms of buildings and construction sites, but also in terms of population growth, especially that of the Hispanic community. According to him,

³¹ Rene Sanchez." Personal interview. 25 June 2013.

before the Great Recession of 2008, Memphis was following similar patterns of cities such as Atlanta, Houston, Dallas, and Los Angeles, where Hispanic communities first flourished and grew at an exponential rate.³² Now, the growth is nearly back on track as it was, with many new Hispanic businesses reopening; however, many are modernizing; with demand. Construction businesses operated in the 90's by Hispanics had a much more relaxed atmosphere in terms of uniform and other safety matters. However, more and more businesses, especially in the construction and in the manual labor sectors have been abiding by set laws, mostly to keep in touch with current laws and policies.

In addition to traditional sectors of construction, restaurants, gardening, and factories, there has been an increasing diversity and variety of new Hispanic business. Such new establishments operated by Hispanics and catered to Hispanics include hair/nail salons, more insurance retailers, and more information technology services including wireless and Internet providing services.³³

South of Germantown, TN rests La Azteca, the oldest, continuing operating grocery store in Memphis that exclusively sells Hispanic items.³⁴ Mauricio Flores, 58, is from the Mexican state of Jalisco. Before moving to Memphis at the age of 42, he had lived in Los Angeles since he was 25. He moved from there to Memphis because he had heard how his brother moved to North Carolina in 1985 and had been able to successfully open a restaurant in Raleigh. Flores wanted to be closer to his only family in the United States, so it was by chance that a friend was moving to el "Sur," or the South. Flores

³² Rene Sanchez." Personal interview. 25 June 2013.

³³ Rene Sanchez." Personal interview. 25 June 2013.

³⁴ Mauricio Flores." Personal interview. 07 July 2013.

came here with his family and noticed upon the first few months the wasteland that was Memphis in terms of Hispanic culture.³⁵

Flores did not open the store until 1991 when there were more visible Hispanics in Memphis who wanted to cook for themselves instead of going out to eat. At the time, other American stores in Memphis did not carry much of the Hispanic foods that the few thousand Hispanic laborers were accustomed to. To alleviate this problem, he opened a very small, but popular store, his store.

La Azteca not only served as the first Hispanic grocery store, but according to Flores, it was also one of the first places that allowed many Hispanics in Memphis find a common, safe place. Flore remembers,

“Yes, people used to come to my store not only to shop, but also to check on how *El Compadre* (a common name for a friend of a friend) was doing or to find out any major news. At times, a group of young workers came to invite strangers to a barbeque happening down the street. Many friendships were made the first years at my store. It felt good to know that not only my store reminded folks of their native lands, but also was able to help them create new home by building roots here.”³⁶

Immediate Impact of Hispanics and Hispanic Business in Memphis

As previously states, this Hispanic population is growing faster in the South than in any other region of the United States. In addition to Texas and Florida, which are “traditional” immigrant destinations, other Southern states have become popular destinations for Hispanic immigrants. Georgia and North Carolina are the most notable new destinations for Hispanic immigrants by total number, but Tennessee has certainly

³⁵“Mauricio Flores.” Personal interview. 07 July 2013.

³⁶“Mauricio Flores.” Personal interview. 07 July 2013.

experienced an increase in Hispanic immigration as well. Between 2000 and 2010, the growth rate of Tennessee's Hispanic population was the third fastest in the nation, and many places across Tennessee now have a sizeable Hispanic population where they were barely noticeable ten or twenty years ago.

Before the Great Recession, one trend driving immigration was the robust economic growth of the "New South" relative to other regions in the United States. Atlanta, Charlotte and Nashville experienced dramatic economic restructuring, with significant growth not only in high skill/high-wage industries but also in low-skill/low-wage industries, such as those in the construction and service sectors. These Southern cities experienced rapid economic and population growth during the 1990s and into the early 2000s.

A common concern is about the economic and fiscal impact of immigrants. In terms of economic impacts, most economists agree that immigration is good for both the average worker and for economic growth, but that immigration hurts the least educated workers. In terms of fiscal impacts, immigrants do pay taxes—probably more so in Tennessee than elsewhere—but they also consume public services, of which the largest, by far, is public education for their children. However, they also agree that the positives far outweigh the negatives.

In terms of income, Hispanics in Memphis tend to earn wages according to their occupation, their experience, and if possible, their knowledge of English for interpretation—not differently from their White counterparts. On average, according to a study done by the University of Memphis, Latino workers in 2000 earned less than

\$20,000 per year. In addition, Latino workers earned \$570.8 million dollars in wages and salaries in the Memphis area in 2000. Most of the Hispanic workers are employed as semi-skilled workers in the construction firms, warehouses and retail trade establishments of the Memphis economy. Often speaking only Spanish, these workers use temporary employment agencies or small firms with Spanish-speaking supervisors to gain employment.³⁷

Of the \$570.8 million that they earned in 2000, Hispanic workers paid at least \$85.6 million in payroll/income taxes, including undocumented workers since they are technically “on the books” but will never see a cent back from those specific taxes. During this same year, an estimated \$125.6 million were sent back to their families in Mexico or other parts of Latin America. In addition, Latinos generated, through their consumer expenditures, approximately \$12.3 million in local and state sales taxes. Perhaps most surprising, Latinos spent \$359.6 million in the local economy.³⁸

However, a more recent study done by the University of Tennessee-Knoxville, workers, those serving as construction workers, day laborers, and lawn/maintenance personnel, earn \$24,000 to \$26,000 per year, up 20% from the previous decade. The growth of wages is in part to the exploding demand of labor that Tennessee has

³⁷ Mendoza, Marcela, David H. Ciscel, and Barbara E. Smith. *Latino Immigrants in Memphis, Tennessee: Their Local Economic Impact*. University of Memphis. N.p., 12 Jan. 2001. Web. 10 Feb. 2013.

³⁸ Mendoza, Marcela, David H. Ciscel, and Barbara E. Smith. *Latino Immigrants in Memphis, Tennessee: Their Local Economic Impact*. University of Memphis. N.p., 12 Jan. 2001. Web. 10 Feb. 2013.

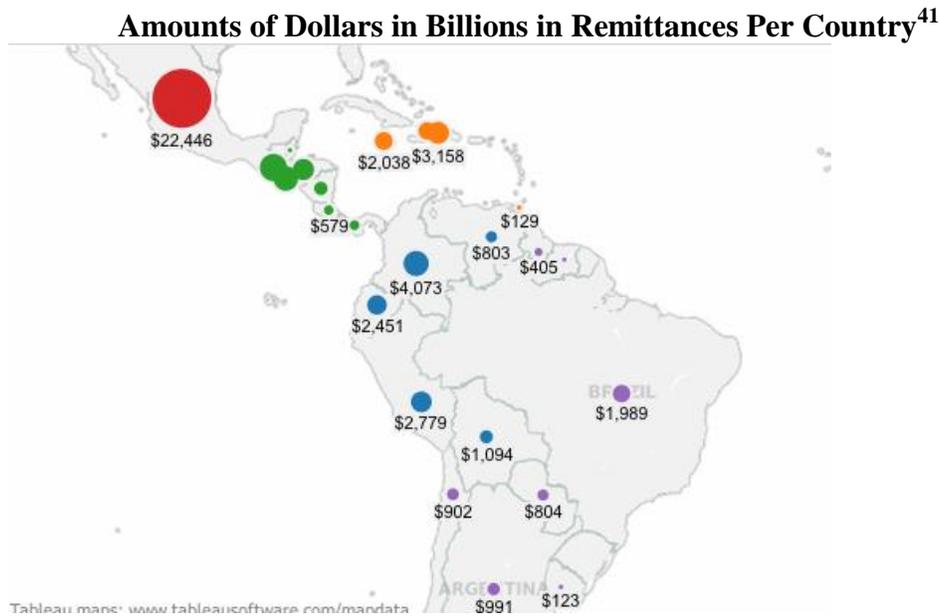
experienced from 2000 to 2008. As cities develop and demand for more establishments to satisfy their growing population, more labor is desired to be above the pace.

Despite the fact that these employees and small business owners earn a lot less than their White counterparts, many have an unusual characteristic when it comes to their budgeting—they tend to have very high savings rates. The question is what exactly do they do with these savings? It is a well known fact that foreign born individuals emigrating into the United States have families, responsibilities, and other ties stringing them back to their countries of origin whether it may be Mexico, India, China, or even a Western European nation. This fact explains the percentage an employee's wage being saved and sent back to his or her country of origin. This reality leaves the question: exactly how much money in the form of remittances is sent back to the countries of origin of immigrants, in specific, Hispanics?³⁹

According to the World Bank, Hispanics tend to send back \$2,001 per capita of their income back to their countries of origin. This money is used not only to help family members residing abroad, but also as in investment in building a home, buy cars, savings, or even providing education to children of immigrants that otherwise would be near impossible to obtain. Given the average annual wages of Hispanic workers tend to range from \$22,000 to \$24,000, the percentage sent back is roughly only 10%, contrary to many other beliefs. This means that the rest of their wages, 90%, stays in the local

³⁹ <http://www.iadb.org/en/news/news-releases/2013-04-29/2012-latin-america-remittance-flows,10432.html>

economy, contributing to sales, property, and social security taxes, even though most the times they will not receive a dollar in return, due to their documentation status.⁴⁰



Future for Hispanic Businesses and Conclusions:

As the business owners age and their children grow and eventually graduate high school, and if possible college, another question arises. What will become of the business that many times embodies the family’s legacy to Memphis, The New South, and the United States? When I asked this question, I received the same answer from all five interviewees: “I am not sure.” This uncertainty is a dreadful reality that the family will have to face later on in their lives. However, by looking at other cities such as Houston and Atlanta, a valid answer to the question would be that the business’ legacy will still be

⁴⁰ Acosta, Pablo, Pablo Fajnzylber, and Humberto Lopez. "Remittances and Development in Latin America." *The World Bank*. The World Bank, 22 Apr. 2006. Web. 24 July 2013.

<http://www.ssrc.org/workspace/images/crm/new_publication_3/%7B76ac51c8-4055-de11-afac-001cc477ec70%7D.pdf>.

⁴¹ <http://www.marketplace.org/topics/world/remittances-latin-america-rise>

there, but perhaps under a different name and different owners. The trends in Atlanta and Houston in relation to this question have been one of the two: sell the business, or let it die. For the most part, businesses are sold to other much younger and aspiring Hispanic businessmen and are often times make the business more successful because of new visions and ideas.

Many times the children of these small business owners do not return to run the family business. Instead, the children are pressure by their parents to become to professionals in hope of leaving memories of hardships associated with these business and their initial failures and struggles. For many of the parents, this is the ideal American Dream—making enough money to supply their family with the basic necessitates, invest back in the Mother Land, and have their children graduate college and become professionals in America. Because of this ambition and goal, business owners and founders do not take into concern this bigger question.

The trends in Atlanta and Houston in relation to this question have been one of the two: sell the business, or let it die because of the lack of interest. For the most part, businesses are sold to other much younger and aspiring Hispanic businessmen, often times making the business more successful than before because of new visions and ideas offered by a younger generation. The other outcome of this question lies with letting the business die, due the neglect of interest from other family members or other Hispanics in the city.^{42 43}

⁴² State of Texas. 2006. “Undocumented Immigrants in Texas: An Financial Analysis of the Impact to the State Budget and Economy.” Office of the Comptroller. (December, 2006).

Throughout the process of my research, I have been able to scratch the surface of questions that have been answered over and over again, with little to no answers because of the novelty that is Hispanics in Memphis. I was able to look at the connection between the narratives and memories, the local economic impact, the culture behind small businesses, but perhaps most importantly, I was able to put voices into the data and numbers that make up the limited studies of Hispanics in Memphis, in Tennessee, and in the United States as a whole.

The Hispanic community has been visible for a long time, even before the settle of the Unites States in places such as California, Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. However, the dynamics that make up the “New South” are changed completely by the fact that in this region, Hispanics are leaving traces and in some places slowly changing the dynamics while in others are an exponential rate.

⁴³ Passel, Jeffrey S. and D’Vera Cohn. 2011. “Unauthorized Immigrant Population, National and State Trends, 2010.” Pew Hispanic Center, Washington, D.C. (February 1, 2011).