

Somos Latinas: Voices of Wisconsin Latina Activists

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ment of Mexicans began only after company experiments to employ local labor failed. In fact, ethnic Mexicans entered the region in significant numbers prior to the 1880s. In the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, Mexican vaqueros from Texas worked the cattle drives from Texas to Kansas during the industrial boom of the era. Before that, starting in 1821 with the opening of the Santa Fe Trail, Mexican teamsters and traders delivered goods between Santa Fe and St. Louis. Still earlier, during the United States War of Independence in the 1770s and 1780s, ethnic Mexican soldiers representing the Spanish Crown occupied several locations in the region. Also in the late eighteenth century, residents of the Louisiana Territory under Spanish control, ethnic Mexicans, received land grants and established residences in the region. Enterprising and imaginative archaeological and anthropological research will elaborate and enhance our knowledge of these and earlier links between the ancestors of Latinas/os and the region currently referred to as the Midwest.

Regarding the issue of identity, some of the authors problematize the terms *Latino*, *Latina*, and *Latina/o* but inexplicably neglect the very important popular term *Latinx*, which for many reasons has gained widespread acceptance and usage in the twenty-first century.

Somos Latinas: Voices of Wisconsin Latina Activists, by Andrea-Teresa Arenas and Eloisa Gómez. Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2018. xx, 290 pp. Illustrations, appendixes, bibliography, index. \$24.95 paperback.

Reviewer Janet Weaver is assistant curator at the Iowa Women's Archives, University of Iowa Libraries. She is the author of "Barrio Women: Community and Coalition in the Heartland" in *Breaking the Wave: Women, Their Organizations, and Feminism, 1945-1985*, edited by Kathleen A. Laughlin and Jacqueline L. Castledine (2011).

Coauthored by Andrea-Teresa Arenas and Eloisa Gómez, *Somos Latinas* brings to light the powerful life stories of 25 Wisconsin Latina activists to underscore the significance of grassroots community activism in making change from the 1950s to the present. Through the lens of these narrators, readers gain insight into the value of a "woman-centered" community engagement and the discipline and persistence of these *madres*, whose activism often centered on building community and contributing to the good of the whole in the places where they lived. It is entirely fitting that the foreword to *Somos Latinas* is written by renowned Chicana civil rights activist Dolores Huerta, whose lifelong advocacy on behalf of farmworkers and women began with her first-hand experience in community organizing through the Community Service Organization (CSO) in California.

The book is arranged in two sections. The first and largest section comprises the edited interview transcripts of the 25 women featured in *Somos Latinas*. In the second section, the authors return to the narrators for a second round of interviews around three key themes: the importance of role models and support systems, the motivations propelling their activism, and the risks they took. This section does not include the interpretive analysis and historical framework that some readers might expect, but the authors hope that it will “open up new opportunities for research on Latina activism” (229).

Collectively, the voices of the women in *Somos Latinas* provide inspiration for a new generation of activists and a role model of what community activism is and why it matters. Core values of fairness, honesty, and commitment propelled these women to action across a broad range of human rights issues. As Teresita Neris explains, “A group can make positive changes with a goal in mind to make a better life through freedom, justice, and a sustainable society” (143). Whether their activism was under the radar or overt, their stories are all the more compelling because they represent the experiences of a broad cross-section of Latinas in the Midwest whose history is underrepresented in archival repositories and mainstream historical narratives.

The interviews are drawn from a larger collection of oral histories recorded for the *Somos Latinas* Digital History Project between 2012 and 2015 by undergraduate students in the Chican@ and Latin@ Studies Program (CLS) at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. The complete interviews and related materials are preserved in the *Somos Latinas* Project and Collected Papers at the Wisconsin Historical Society. An instructor in the CLS program, Andrea-Teresa Arenas taught community-based research courses to involve students in conducting research and interviews for the project. The students recorded a total of 46 interviews in different parts of Wisconsin with assistance from professional videographer Linda Garcia Merchant. The *Somos Latinas* Project serves as a model for the central importance of service learning in involving students in the process of research and interviewing through the Office of Service Learning and Community Based Research, directed by Arenas. It would be interesting to connect with these students in the future and see what impact their involvement in the project has had on their lives.

Somos Latinas sets an exemplary standard in highlighting the value of community-based learning in recovering and preserving for posterity the hidden voices of Wisconsin Latinas and their model of community-based activism.