

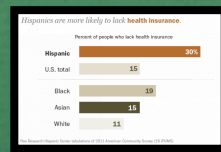
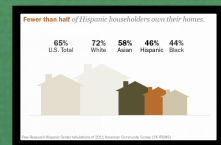


COURTESY: RECOVEROUR TRAVEL

The Alternative Lexington: Fashioning Home, Place, and Belonging among Lexington's Latino Immigrant Community

Faced with difficulties in joining Lexington's broader identities, I reason that the city's Latino immigrant population has largely crafted an alternative community – or an "imagined" Lexington – relying on the bonding power of elements of identity moveable between countries and nationalities. After attempting a statistical approach to this population as an investigative base, I employ three case studies to extrapolate a sense of the dynamics of such community construction. I find that external pressures – such as the fear motivated by one's undocumented status, racially based aggression and hostility, low wages, and lack of an alternative language infrastructure – create an environment from which particular transnational community building methods emerge in an attempt to negotiate a sense of home, place, and belonging via the utilization of certain transnational tools. These tools include family, work, language, and concrete cultural production. I then conclude that a conversation about how to better incorporate this community into Lexington's outer appearances and inner relationships would be beneficial to all residents, including Washington and Lee.

The Statistics:

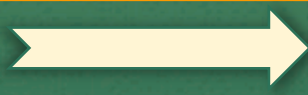


- Nationally: Out of foreign-born pop. of 37,606,000: 11,580,000 from Mexico; 8,839,000 from remaining Latin America
- Virginia: 16th largest absolute Latino pop. in U.S. = 630,000, 8% of total pop.
- Roanoke: 5.6% of pop. claims Latino origin = 5,416
- Harrisonburg: 45% of pop. under 25 speaks Spanish
- Lexington: 3.8% of pop. claims Latino origin = 266; Latino pop. of Rockbridge County more than doubled between 1990-2000 and again between 2000-2010; still growing

*All of these estimations complicated by presence of undocumented migrants, and likely too low

The Situation (As Demonstrated Via Three Case Studies):

The Forcing: External Pressures



The Response: An Imagined, Alternative Lexington



1. Undocumented status → fear
Mayra's friend deported after process initiated with a simple traffic violation
2. Racially-based aggression/hostility
Braylan, a Honduran, verbally assaulted in Wal-Mart as a "(expletive) Mexican"
3. Low wages
In the past year, Mario has worked at 6 different restaurants looking for decent pay
4. Lack of alternative language infrastructure
All interviewees were hesitant about approaching local social services



- Fabrication of home, place, and belonging through internal transnational community building
1. Family
Tool of appropriation of transnational space, center of cultural retention, and alternative support system
 2. Work
Center of social interaction that allows for 1) appropriation of transnational space and 2) subversion of external hierarchy; the silence imposed over the local Latino immigrant community is challenged here
 3. Language
Serves as a mobile vessel for embodied cultural identity and unifies speakers, while also segregating them from others
 4. Concrete cultural production
Physically incarnates the place left behind; includes posters, art, photos, videos, religious icons, food, song, dance, etc.

Possible solutions? Can you think of any?

I can! Talk to me about them!