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Doing it with “*Ganas*”: Mexican and Mexican Americans Shaping the Wine

Industry

I am standing in the kitchen of Amelia Ceja, owner and President of Ceja Family Wine watching her stir a big bubbling pot of *caldo* or chicken soup. “I was the daughter of a farm worker,” she points out, as we talk about her father who migrated to California in the 1950’s to work in the fields and vineyards. “He moved full time to the Napa Valley in the late 50s early 60s and he fell madly in love with the beauty, but also he knew that when and if he would bring his family, it would only be to Napa Valley. Could be in Fresno, but I’m lucky it’s Napa.”¹ As I look out over her vineyards with Amelia, I think about the meaning and importance of what she says, the role of the migration of Mexican labor for the U.S. agricultural industry, of settlement and communities of Mexicans in the U.S., and of the influence these communities had in agriculture, food, cultural landscape while participating and working in the Napa and Sonoma, California wine industry.² The voices and experiences of these Mexican and Mexican American workers in Napa

¹ Amelia Moran Ceja, interviewed by Steve Velasquez, Napa, California, October 21, 2011.

² This project focused on Napa proper, St. Helena, and Calistoga. Sonoma and Napa viticulture regions are distinct, with distinct economic and development policies but the wine work is essentially the same. Some of the wineries in this project are based in Sonoma but for this purpose, I have combined them using the reference of Napa.

vineyards and wineries are frequently ignored and virtually unknown in scholarship on the Napa wine industry post Prohibition. These workers have contributed to the economic and social fabric of the nation and have been able to use wine work as a means to create a path to economic and social inclusion.

Napa family wineries like the Ceja's, and others like the Robledo Family Winery, Mario Bazan, and Maldonado, along with other farmworkers turned activist like Aurelio Hurtado and wine specialists like Salvador Preciado, make family and cultural tradition the center of their winery businesses. These migrant families from Mexico have deep roots in the California wine industry and, in fact, are instrumental in the creation of the California wine, planting and harvesting, cleaning and packing, and supporting the industry since the 1950's. Seasonal work opportunities and changes in agriculture drove migration of cheap labor from Mexico, and affected settlement patterns in Napa. Migrants from Mexico established communities in and around Napa and provided the labor necessary for the California wine industry. The specialized knowledge that they developed around wine labor in addition to their own political activism created opportunities for families and workers to enter and excel in the wine industry rising to high-end wine makers. Their sense of cultural identity, and traditions drawn from various regions in Mexico, helped build Napa wineries, moving these families from vineyard workers to winemakers and vineyard owners. No story captures the American dream more than some of these families, which makes their dismissal from the scholarly canon even more disturbing. [image1 ?]

This research on Mexican and Mexican American viticulture is part of an ongoing oral history and collecting project at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American

History that illustrates changes in consumption and production in American food history which will be featured in the exhibit Food: Transforming the American Table, 1950-2000.³ These changes in agriculture demonstrate how Mexican Americans are participating in, and more importantly, shaping a wine business around Mexican American identity.⁴ Broadly, the project looks at the role of memory, food politics, migration, and business. But at the heart of this project is the story of how migrants and their families use wine work to negotiate cultural belonging in the United States. To highlight the contributions of Mexican and Mexican American people in the industry this project asks: How has migration from Mexico shaped the labor of Mexican communities in Napa and Sonoma California? How are migrant laborers shaping and determining new directions in the agricultural and wine industry? How do they create a sense of community on vineyards? How does wine work help create a sense of place, identity, and inclusion? Put another way, how do these families place culture, food, and familial traditions at the center of their winery business?

The dismissal of Mexican history on the California vineyard is shared with other communities of color, like Native American and Asian grape laborers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Chinese, African American, Portuguese, and Eastern European labor often only gets mentioned in passing when looking at the histories of wine production in California. Published winery history and oral histories of twentieth century vintners rarely acknowledge the dependences on these laborers. A handful of historians,

³ For more about the exhibit go to: <http://americanhistory.si.edu/food>

⁴ This project received Federal support from the Latino Initiatives Pool, administered by the Smithsonian Latino Center.

geographers, and researchers have been adding these under represented voices to wine history.⁵ The migrant worker's history and legacy represents stories that reflect a little-known American experience. The Mexican labor story, the Latino story, is part of American history. [image 2 ?] Recovering and revisiting these little-studied histories illustrate the significant impact of Mexican migrants to the California wine and agriculture industry.⁶ Scholar Sandra Nichol's work on the growth of Mexican community in Napa Valley offers a model for how the grape workers accommodated a new life and made a physical and figurative space for themselves.⁷ One of the first and only popular publications to feature Mexican labor is Bob Thompson's 1973 publication *California Wine, Sunset Pictorial*.⁸ The cover features two men harvesting and in the interior sections are four more images. This publication doesn't mention the workers on the cover by name, all of whom are from the De Haro and Segura family, featured in

⁵ One of the only publications that features seventeen Latino winemakers is an undated publication for AltaMed, a clinic in Los Angeles and there fundraising event that started in 2006 featuring Latino winemakers. Abel Valenzuela and Eric Avila, *In their own words: Latino contributions to the wine making industry in the U.S.* (Place of publication not identified: Altamed, no date).

⁶Linda Frances Mollno, *Deep roots and immigrant dreams: a social history of viticulture in Southern California, 1769-1960*, (PhD. Diss., Claremont Graduate University, 2008) has written about immigrant and indigenous wine labor in Southern California.

⁷ Sandra Nichols, "Mexican Immigration and Transnational Networks in Napa, California," *Changing Face, Conference Report*, (October, 2000). See also Sandra L. Nichols, *Santos, Durazos y Vino: Migrantes Mexicanos y la Transformación de Los Haro, Zacatecas, y Napa, California* (México, D.F.: Porrúa, 2006)

⁸ Bob, Thompson, 1977. *California Wine: A sunset Pictorial*. (Menlo Park, Calif: Lane Publishing 1973)

Nicholas' work. Our goal is to highlight these stories for the public.

A Brief History of Wine and Mexican Migration in Northern California

Since the first established Spanish Missions in present day California in 1779, Native American, later Mexican, and other “foreign” labor was responsible for harvesting grapes and winemaking throughout California. European immigrants who came to California seeking new opportunities started many of the most prominent, successful, and largest vineyards and wineries.⁹ In nineteenth century California, winemaking relied heavily on foreign Chinese and Mexican labor on Italian vineyards to plant and harvest grapes. This enterprise weakened by the era of Prohibition (1920 -1933) when the ban on alcohols virtually closed down wine production.¹⁰ Vineyards survived by shifting to fruit orchards or specializing in sacramental wine and grapes to ship for home wine making.

The late nineteenth century ushered in a more continuous stream of Mexican citizens migrating to Northern California to plant, pick, and care for fields. The need for labor established both informal and formal recruitment networks between the United

⁹ Vincent P. Carosso, “Anaheim California: A Nineteenth Century Experiment in Commercial Viniculture,” *Bulletin of the Business Historical Society*, vol. 23, no. 2 (1949): 78-86. For more on the history of Napa wineries and the European founders see Charles Sullivan, *Napa Wine: A History From Mission Days to Present*, (San Francisco: Wine Appreciation Guild, 2008)

¹⁰ Julia Ornelas-Higdon, *A cultivating enterprise: wine, race, and conquest in California, 1769-1920*. (PhD. Diss., University of Southern California: 2014) looks at foreign labor and class and power dynamics up till prohibition.

States and Mexico.¹¹ The growth of the California agricultural industry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century aligned with social and political upheaval in Mexico. This “push” of people migrating north from Mexico created by the Mexican revolution, violence, stagnant rural economy, worked in tandem with the “pull” of inexpensive labor assisting California agriculture.¹²

Even though Napa is known for its vineyards, small orchards and ranches were more common than vineyards in mid twentieth century. Small rural farms required less manual labor than other parts of California.¹³ Wineries were beginning to become established institutions but required only temporary work in late summer and fall. Pruning and planting were usually done with small local crews. The migration to Northern California of African Americans and white Anglos from the American South and the Midwest helped make the Napa Valley a productive agricultural zone in the early and mid twentieth century, yet the agricultural industry required only temporary field hands

¹¹ For more about Mexican migration see Cary McWilliams *Factories in the Field: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor in California*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971) and Ernesto Galarza, *Merchants of Labor: The Mexican Bracero Story: An Account of the Managed Migration of Mexican Farm Workers in California, 1942-1960*, (Santa Barbara: McNally & Loftin West, 1964) and Manuel Gamio, *Mexican Immigration to the United States: A Study of Human Migration and Adjustment*, (New York: Dover Publications, 1971)

¹² Matt S. Meier, “North From Mexico,” in *North From Mexico: The Spanish Speaking People of the United States*, ed., Carey McWilliams (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990): 310. See also Gamio *Mexican Immigration* and Galarza, *Merchants of Labor* for discussion of the push pull factors.

¹³ Sullivan, *Napa Wine*, discusses Napa midcentury. “It would not be until 1944 that wine grapes were again a more valuable crop than prunes.” 208

for harvesting and processing. These African Americans and white domestic laborers found better jobs, and the Mexican laborers quickly filled in.¹⁴ The typical pattern for Mexican labor through most of the twentieth century was the cyclical migratory itinerant field hand moving north from Texas, to Imperial Valley, to Salinas Valley, to Napa, then to pick apples and cherries in the upper northwest and back down.

The 1940's, 50's and 60's brought new technologies and changes in agricultural practices that increased production and yields, as well as demand for cheap labor. Such changes spurred the reliance on Mexican labor once again to work the remaining orchards, ranches, and commercial fields.¹⁵ The bracero program, a guest worker program that was instituted during World War II as a crop saving measure, recruited Mexican laborers for temporary work contracts to fill the need for workers while many domestic workers were away at war and others had moved to other industries.¹⁶ The bracero era was a fundamental turning point for Mexican migrants in Napa with many

¹⁴ Galarza, *Merchants of Labor*

¹⁵ Don Mitchell, *They Saved the Crops: Labor, Landscape, and The Struggles Over Industrial Farming in Bracero Era California*, (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 2012): 16

¹⁶ For more on the bracero program see Galarza's *Merchants of Labor*, an account of the program published during the final year of the program. Scholars have since published book-length studies of the program, including Erasmo Gamboa, Barbara Driscoll, and Gilbert González. Three other scholars, Mae Ngai, Stephen Pitti and Matt Garcia have written about the program within larger books about Mexican immigration and labor, while Manuel Garcia y Griego's article "The Importation of Mexican Contract Laborers to the United States, 1942-1964" and Don Mitchell, *They Saved the Crops*, remain the most authoritative and focused study of the politics leading to and through the management of the bilateral agreement.

more men coming through the Valley for work on the burgeoning vineyards, but with little infrastructure and support system in place. [image 3 and 4 ?] In Napa, 78 braceros arrived in May of 1943 to work on various ranches in the Napa Valley. The *St. Helena Star* reported on this event and explained, “Most of them are from the state of Michoacán and apparently speak and understand very little English. Bremir [C.E. Bremir of the Farm Security Administration] acted as interpreter.”¹⁷ One month later in June of 1943, 154 braceros, the “second contingent” added to the previous whom arrived in Napa.¹⁸ By 1959, Napa ranchers joined together to renegotiate wages for the more than 300 braceros that traveled to Napa during the high picking season.¹⁹ Many of the founding Mexican families of the wine industry, like the Ceja’s, started their family story in the U.S. with relatives who came through California as a bracero, or temporary worker. Some owners took advantage of these changes in agriculture and labor and began growing new vineyards in California. Wineries that used to employ Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, and some African American workers, shifted to cheaper (and according to some agricultural growers in California, more reliable) Mexican labor after World War II.²⁰ This helped set the stage for wine boom in the future.

Shifts in U.S. immigration policy also contributed to the demographic and labor

¹⁷ “Mexican Arrive to Work on Valley Farms, Friday,” *St. Helena Star*, May 7, 1943, 1

¹⁸ “154 More Mexican Workers Okehed for Napa County,” *The Napa Journal*, June 18, 1943, 1

¹⁹ “Negations Get Under Way on Pact for Mexican Labor,” *The Napa Register*, May 26, 1959, 20

²⁰ Glaraza *Merchants of Labor*, 43 shows how growers sought foreign labor because the domestic workers labor organizing activities, the lack of Chinese labor caused by restrictive immigration polices, and the fact that Mexican labor had already been part of the California labor landscape.

make up of California. The Hart Celler Act restricted migration from Mexico and other Latin American countries and favored skilled professions and family unification.²¹ Undocumented apprehensions also caused workers to remain settled and looking for more stable work opportunities within the U.S.²²

The 1960's and 70's saw a shift from migrant and seasonal labor to more established Mexican communities working full time in the vineyards along with increased visibility of California wine. The increased training in the enology and viticulture departments at the University of California, Davis, in combination with the Paris Tasting of 1976²³ and advertising campaigns aimed at elevating the public perception of wine, changed consumption patterns around the country and the world, and helped advance the California wine industry.²⁴

²¹ See Aristide R. Zolberg, *A Nation by Design: Immigration Policy in the Fashioning of America*, (New York: Russel Sage Foundation, 2008) for more discussion about the impact of the Hart Celler Act.

²² For a discussion about border and migrant policing see Kelly Little Hernandez, *Migra! A History of the U.S. Border Patrol*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

²³ The Paris Tasting of 1976, also known as the Judgment of Paris, was a promotional event and competition put on by Steven Spurier an English wine merchant based in Paris. He gathered a panel of French judges to blind taste American and French wines. The American wines beat out the French wines. The only reporter at the event, George Taper, wrote a short report of the event for *Time* magazine. After the piece was published, wine merchants and consumers began requesting and demanding California wines, which in 1976, were hard to come by and spurred demand.

²⁴ For more about changing consumption patterns and advertng see David Michalski, "Real Taste". *Boom: A Journal of California*, no. 3, 1(2013): 63-69. James T. Lapsley, *Bottled Poetry: Napa Winemaking From Prohibition to the Modern Era*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996) and

As the California wine industry started to get established, Latino labor and political activism raised its visibility by connecting consumers and consumption with activism through store and product boycotts by the United Farm Workers. Activist also opened up other avenues for advancement with the Johnson administration's War on Poverty programs that expanded roles, responsibilities, and opportunities for Mexican and Mexican American workers in the industry. These early generations of families started in the fields, then became vineyard managers, owners and producers. Vanessa Robledo, former President of Robledo Family Winery, and daughter of founders, Reynaldo and Maria, points out how important Mexican labor was in establishing the Napa wine industry. She says of her grandfather and his family in Napa and Sonoma, "...they have a tremendous legacy and my grandfather, every time we would drive down [highway] 29 in Napa. He'd point out all of the old vines that he had his hands on."²⁵ They now own more than 400 acres in Napa and Sonoma.

How Wine Shapes Everyday Life

In Napa, the planting, cultivating, and harvesting shapes the everyday life of the community. The changes in planting techniques and improved wages were tied to the continuing growth of year-round employment. These changes contributed to changing

Charles Sullivan, *Napa Wine* also give detail accounts of marketing and communication efforts to change perceptions of wine in the U.S. For more about the Judgment at Paris see George M. Taber, *Judgement of Paris California vs. France and the historic 1976 Paris tasting that revolutionized wine*, (Scribner: New York, 2005).

²⁵ Vanessa Robledo, interviewed by Steve Velasquez, Napa, California, May 16, 2012

settlement patterns, opening up new opportunities for the experienced worker (though wineries still dependent on the seasonal worker.)²⁶ With a more rooted population, children of field workers took advantage of more educational services and opportunities.²⁷

The results were dramatic. The Latino population in Napa rose from an estimated 8,600 Latinos in 1980 to over 22, 322 in 1998.²⁸ Job opportunities created more upward mobility for Mexican migrants and their families during this period.²⁹ Scholar Rani Salas McLean shows that “agricultural practices used to produce premium wine and the high value of terroir tourism interact to shape and physical and social landscape of the valley” through changes in vine management practices and employment needs.³⁰ These changes lead to creation of more vineyard management companies started by Mexican

²⁶ Rani Salas Mclean, “Wine, Meaning, and Place: Terroir-Tourism, Concealed Workers, and Contested Space in the Napa Valley” (PhD diss. University of California, Santa Barbara, 2013)

²⁷ Sue Elleen Hayes, “If We Plant It, Will They Come? If We Hire Them, Will they Stay? Seasonal Labor in the Napa and Sonoma County Wine Industry”, *Changing Face*, vol. 6, no. 4 (October 2000).

Accessed 3/15/2012. Hayes looks at changes between Napa and Sonoma viticulture, and the labor practices, wages, and comparative pay scales of service jobs, as well as available housing for migrant seasonal workers. “With relatively open job opportunities, the children of farm workers see no need to follow their parents into the fields. In all likelihood, seasonal farm jobs and less desirable year round jobs in the vineyards will be filled by new undocumented immigrants.” 15

²⁸ Sandra Nichols, “Mexican Immigration and Transnational Networks in Napa, California,” *Changing Face*, vol. 6, no. 4 (October, 2000). P. 2 Accessed 3/15/2012

²⁹ Nichols, “Mexican Immigration,” 5

³⁰ Salas Mclean, “Wine, Meaning, and Place,” 195

families, opening up avenues for upward mobility and putting them at the center of vineyard support industry.

These families are quick to acknowledge those who helped them along the way such as Reynaldo Robledo who came in 1968 following his father and uncles who came as braceros and laborers. Reynaldo worked alongside his father developing vineyards in the 1970's. Reynaldo acknowledges the expertise and knowledge he gained while budding and grafting grapes for Dry Creek and Paul LeBern, who was a "very good boss...he liked my family...always asking, what do you need."³¹

Family stories of migration served to connect Napa winemakers to larger narratives of migration and wine making. While growers and winemakers such as Amelia Ceja, Robledo Family, and Gustavo Brambila highlight the shared story and connection to the bracero program, they acknowledge the knowledge they gained from others. "The community was small when we came here..." said Gustavo Brambilla of the community of Mexican workers when Bartolucci employed his father in the early 1960's.³² Gustavo learned his craft by working with renowned wine maker Mike Grgich, himself an immigrant from Croatia, and is known as a mentor to many winemaker around the world.

Wine labor -- the process of planting, tending, harvesting, fermenting, and storing-- is a highly stratified specialized set of skills. Each stage requires careful monitoring, knowledge, and attention. Careful training happens at each stage, requiring

³¹ Reynaldo Robledo, interviewed by Paula Johnson and Rayna Green, Sonoma, California, April 8, 2005

³² Gustavo Brambila, interview by Steve Velasquez, Napa, California, April 12, 2016

long hours of training and investment per worker. Planting and budding, the process of grafting wine varieties onto a rootstock, and irrigation, are essential jobs that require basic knowledge of farming techniques. Budding is arguably the most important. Without proper training and skill, the graft may not take and the vines future grape production could be in jeopardy. [image 5, 6, and 7] Tending the vines, pruning, and trusseling, requires specialized knowledge that includes keen observation of each and every vine and branch.

In Napa, most of the harvesting is done by hand. This requires a large number of temporary workers, which puts a strain on housing, health care, and policing, often causing friction within the wider Napa community. This lack of infrastructure addressed by community institutions and the growers themselves. Since the 1970's activists in the Mexican community helped address these concerns for workers by organized health clinics and creation of more farm worker housing, and advocating for more affordable housing, and more stable work increasing Mexican settlement in the Napa region.

Tensions between the Anglo population and the Mexican migrants relating to insufficient housing added to tensions within the migrant community.³³ However, Nichols shows us, the community did find creative ways to address some of the problems that developed. Through internal community resources and hometown associations and

³³ Salas Mclean indicates Latino community is not very integrated. Napa's racialized politics and power structure keeps Latinos from integrating, 206. See also Nichols, Durazos, p. 228-231

networks, the community was able to address problems of housing, education, and tensions with integrating into the community.³⁴

For instance, housing for vineyard workers has been an issue for a number of years, and one that activists tried to correct. In the 1980's, Father John Brinkle and the North Bay Development Corporation (Later the California Human Development Corporation) with leaders such as Aurelio Hurtado, Lou Flores, and Hope Lugo advocated for farmer worker housing and affordable housing.³⁵ But the wineries are dependant on these migrant workers and according to the *New York Times*, the effort to create subsidized and affordable housing for the migrant workers "was born of compassion and practicality. Without migrant labor, most of it from Mexico, the wine producers in Napa would be hard pressed to fill a carafe, much less the valley's nine million cases."³⁶ These activists helped raise the visibility of the workers that do the harvesting and planting that make wine possible. Long time winery owners started to acknowledge publicly the role of Mexican migrants by aiding in the development of farm worker housing and fund raising activities.

³⁴ Nichols, "Mexican Immigration," 7

³⁵ California Human Development Corporation website. Accessed July 17, 2017.

<https://californiahumandevelopment.org/founding-fathers/>. For more about Father Brinkle see Jose Duarte, "Father John Brinkle to Retire," *St. Helena Star*, Feb. 7, 2013.

http://napavalleyregister.com/star/news/local/st-helena-s-father-john-brinkle-to-retire/article_82fc302e-70cd-11e2-8e56-0019bb2963f4.html accessed July 18, 2017.

³⁶ Scott James, "Aware of its Dependence, Napa Takes Care of Migrant Workers," *New York Times*, May 26, 2011 accessed 3/15/2012.

Vineyards and wineries often contract out work to vineyard management companies to oversee planting, pruning, grafting, harvesting and manage the vineyards for clients. Starting a management company offers a means for Mexican workers to rise in ranks and prestige within the wine industry, becoming an expert in the field.³⁷ Many skilled budders have been recognized by wine makers and others in the industry, and often get called on to work on vineyards around the world.

The highly specialized nature of viticulture work and the expertise needed has led to more Mexican workers creating a niche for themselves as experts in the field of grafting or vineyard management. The winery operations has taken notice and beginning in the 1970's started moving from seasonal and temporary labor to year round employment to aid in the development of growing acreage of vineyards, increasing winery production, and more year round vineyard operations such as planning and grafting.³⁸ Independent, Mexican-owned vineyard management companies began popping up to take care of the fields, creating supporting businesses devoted to the industry. Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the wine industry were starting to move away from anonymous temporary workers to leaders and experts in several aspects of the wine industry. Mexican families started laying down more family roots, finding year round work, and creating a greater sense of community. [image 8]

³⁷ For more about vineyard management and field labor see Salas Mclean, "Wine, Meaning, and Place," 98- 122

³⁸ Hayes, "If We Plant It," 8. Hayes documents the increases in wages, which are tied to increases in vineyard production and winery production. These increases account for the rise in more full time and year round labor.

One of these experts is Salvador Preciado who came to California in 1963 at the age of 20 from Jalisco. He came to earn money to build a house for his parents, and then settled in St. Helena in 1965 with an offer to work with Frank Emmolo, owner of Emmolo Nursery in Rutherford. Emmolo himself was an Italian immigrant that came to the U.S. in the 1920's. Salvador's story exemplifies the specialized and skilled labor of wine work but more importantly, how migrants used this knowledge to gain a foothold in the industry. He seized on the opportunity to access information and training and became an entrepreneur with a vision. His role as entrepreneur created a social and labor network, a system of passing on specialized knowledge that highlights the importance of Mexican and Mexican Americans in shaping the global wine world. After he secured employment at the nursery, he learned the basic care and maintenance of grape vines with Frank Emmolo. Salvador set out on his own in the 1970's, but still working with Frank in down times. Salvador went to night school to learn English as well as welding (with funds from the War on Poverty and the North Bay Development Corporation) but returned to grafting because he enjoyed the freedom of working the field and better wages of grafting. He explains, "When I left school, it was better for me to keep on grafting and working in the field because I had, like more freedom, and I felt that I earned more. Because as a welder, they paid, in that time \$1.50 the hour but as grafter they paid us \$3 an hour. That's when I started, we made twice as much and that's when I went all in. I went out on my own little by little".³⁹ He trained his brother, cousins, nephews, and

³⁹ Salvador Preciado, interview by Steve Velasquez, St. Helena, California, April 13, 2016. Translation by author. "Cuando sali de la escuela major quise seguir injertando y trabajando en el campo porque tenia como mas libertad y sentia que ganaba mas. Porque en el soldador, si pagaban en ese teimpo

brothers-in-law in to graft. He took the opportunity to learn from UC Davis professional who would visit the fields, requesting books on the subject of plant propagation, to learn other methods of grafting on his own. Salvador comments on his desire to learn even more, “Well, when I was there [with Emmolo], I learned a whole lot of ways to graft, right. That served me well, and more than that, sometimes they came to give classes, and well, I thought I knew it, but at any rate, to reaffirm what I knew, or to really be sure, yeah I learned and liked to learn about it all”⁴⁰ The phylloxera outbreak of the late 1980’s and early 1990’s forced many wineries’ to replant and graft entire vineyards.⁴¹ His business grew to twenty and thirty employees, and he has trained their children as well. This multigenerational business has moved into Europe and other parts of the U.S., using his expert skills to train others in grafting around the world.

For Mexicans and Mexican Americans, finding work in the cellar or as a winemaker has been more challenging. Accesses to education, which would create

\$1.50 la hora y en el injerto nos pagaban \$3 dolares. Fue cuando empece, entonces le ganabamos el doble y asi fue dando. Ya me fui independizano poco a poco”

⁴⁰ Salvador Preciado, April 13, 2016. Translation by author. “Pues, yo ahi, aprendi muschillos estilos de injerto, verdad. Eso me sirvio mucho y aparte pues algunos veces vinieron a dar clase verdad..y pues aunque yo creo que me sabia verdad, pero todos modos para afirmar mas, para asegurar ya digo tambien fue lo que si, me gustaba aprender todo.”

⁴¹ Frank J. Prial, “WINE TALK: After phylloxera, The First Taste of a Better Grape,” *New York Times*, May 5, 1999. <http://www.nytimes.com/1999/05/05/dining/wine-talk-after-phylloxera-the-first-taste-of-a-better-grape.html>. Accessed July 14, 2017. Phylloxera is an infestation of insects that attack the roots of grape vines. Sullivan p. 368-374 also goes into a detailed discussion of the phylloxera issues.

opportunity and competitive placements are some of the obstacles to aspiring winemakers. The children and second generation of Mexican migrants often see farm work as difficult and leave the community for work in other sectors.⁴² However, there have been a few families and individuals who have recognized the need and opportunity of wine work and used their knowledge of the vineyard as a stepping stone to create other opportunities for themselves and those in the community.

Aurelio Hurtado is one of these early migrants to Napa that helped shape the community we see today. Aurelio migrated from Mexico to California in 1959 to work with his older brothers. Aurelio explains the start of his journey from Los Angeles where he was living with his brothers, Angel and Luis to St. Helena to see his other brother Elias and his cousin Feliciano,

“So I got work, job over there, in LA. It was about probably two or three months. I didn't, like Los Angeles, but I didn't like the smog. It was terrible, and it really affected me a lot, the smog in downtown. So I was miserable there. So, one day when I came back, my brother and I came back from work, my brother Luis said, “take a shower because we want to go and visit Elias in the Santa Helena.” I said, “How? you don't have cars and so how we're going to go.” We need to come back in time for work, we need to go back to work on Monday.”⁴³

Later, Aurelio recalls the long car journey and reason he decided to stay in the Napa area, “And we just travelled all night, and we got to San Francisco very early in the morning... So I remember early in the morning, very early, I get to the Bay Bridge...Christ, so beautiful... and then we start to go in the valley I said, Christ. Fresh

⁴² Hayes, “If We Plant It,” 15

⁴³ Aurelio Hurtado, interview by Steve Velasquez, St. Helena, California, August 19, 2016.

air. And I said, Jesus! This is where I belong. I don't want to go back to Los Angeles. The smog and everything, no, no no.” Aurelio stayed with his older brother and cousin, who were working in the vineyard at Charles Krug. After two weeks, Aurelio also got a job with them, working alongside Spanish and Portuguese laborers where he was able to learn some English. Aurelio worked in the winery for almost thirteen years, working alongside the cellar master for Mondavi, one of the first Mexicans along with his brother and others in the family, to have jobs in the winery post-prohibition.

Aurelio had the opportunity to move up in the job, but he didn't want the responsibility of being a supervisor, in part because of his limitation English. His drive and motivation was tied to his training as an accountant in Mexico. He transferred that knowledge and drive to more community empowerment. He became involved with Don Lucio Perez who, in the 1930's, formed the *Comite Mexicano de Beneficiencia*, an organization that helped with funeral costs and arrangements for Mexican citizens in California. Aurelio's father used to organize for the local political party in Jerez, Mexico, so he was familiar with being politically active in the community. After a few years involved in the Comite and Don Lucio, he saw a need to help the community even more. He recalls,

“So, I used to tell Don Lucio, 'Don Lucio, we should get involved in something else, we should get involved in politics,' and then the Don Lucio would say, 'No, no, no *companerio* ... let somebody else take care of the politics.' I said, "But they." He said, "Why? Don't you like it?" I like what I'm doing, but in order for me to get something, back I had to die. You've got to be kidding. You know, I laugh...So, when we had some opportunity to do something else that's why we get involved with politics. That's why we started organizing the farm workers. Get something when you're still alive.”⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Hurtado interview

From that point on, Aurelio has been involved with community organizing and politics as a founding member of the Mexican American community in the Napa region. He started *Centro de Informacion y Servicios*, then the *Organizacion Latinoamericana de Liberacion Economica* of Napa County. In 1967, with War on Poverty funds he created, along with Lou Flores and several others, the North Bay Human Development Corporation, later named the California Human Development Corporation, to help advance educational job opportunities for farm workers, and finally he helped set up Community Health Clinic *Ole*, a health clinic for farm workers.⁴⁵ This was the beginning of opportunities for farm workers to establish themselves for future personal and financial growth and a path to empower the members of the Mexican community.⁴⁶ [image 9]

Wine maker and winery owner is arguably one of the more visible roles in Napa. Currently, there are more than a dozen Mexican and Mexican American winemakers, and have become part of the wine history of Napa Valley. Rolando Herrera is one winemaker that shares history with a winery connected to the Judgment of Paris event. Roland Herrera's father came in the late 1970's to work other industries in the growing town of Napa. Rolando and his brother, Ricardo, got their first winery job at Stags Leap Wine Cellars, breaking rocks to build a garden wall, quickly rising the ranks. They often

⁴⁵ For more see, "North Bay Legend, Aurelio Hurtado Retiring after Lifetime of working with the Poor," *La Voz*, Northern California Foremost Bilingual Newspaper, http://www.lavoz.us.com/07_2013_AurelioHurtado.html accessed July 19, 2017.

⁴⁶ No exhaustive study about the history and impact of California Development Corporation, or the health clinic, *Clinica Ole* exists.

acknowledge the support of owner, Warren Winiarski in giving them the support, training, and opportunity to rise up in the ranks from landscaper, to working harvest, to cleaning equipment in cellar, to cellar master. When working as cellar master, Rolando noticed that at other wineries, many cellar masters did not rise through the ranks. “I didn’t want that to happen to me,” he says.⁴⁷ There were not many Latino or Mexican cellar workers at the time,

“...so back then, the Hispanic, Latin laborers in the cellars...it was very minimal, there wasn’t a lot. I remember at Stags Leap, I was the first Hispanic cellar worker...and in the wine industry, I remember, back then, there was probably the most at Robert Mondavi. And I remember people whose, when we hear “oh, yeah, he works at a winery, like wow! it was like working in a winery back then, doing cellar work, was like, a great job.”⁴⁸

When Rolando left Stags Leap, he wanted to find a place to test his skills as winemaker “...my goal was, I wanted to go, open a winery that was very disorganized, had very little equipment, and ...the most difficult challenges that I could possibly run into, because I wanted to test my skill, I wanted to test my mind, I wanted to see, ‘Do I really want to do this? Do I really have what it takes? At Stags Leap we had all the bells and whistles...I want to go to a place and turn it into another Stags Leap.’”⁴⁹ Herrera and his business represent the American dream: working hard and seeking opportunities will provide a reward. His drive and passion were noticed and he moved quickly from fieldwork to cellar starting his own label *Mi Sueño*, which translates to my dream. “I was

⁴⁷ Rolando Herrera, interview with Paula Johnson and Reyna Green, Napa, California, April 27, 2005.

⁴⁸ Herrera interview, 2005

⁴⁹ Herrera interview, 2005

taught no matter what work you do you should be thankful and do it with pride, do it with *ganas!*”⁵⁰

Cultural Tourism, Cultural Identity, and Consumption.

Many of the Mexican family wineries are proud of their heritage and use it to guide consumers, and in the process, are changing consumption and ideas about wine. The Robledo Family Winery draws from their Mexican rancho culture of Michoacán, to decorate their tasting room with lush hand carved chairs and tables and vintage photos of family members in Mexico and California as young field workers. Like many businesses, it is a family affair where several brothers run the tasting room, distribution, and winemaking. Even the extended family is involved in cultivating vineyards. [image 10]

Mario Bazan, a migrant who came in 1973 from Oaxaca, worked at Joseph Phelps, then a vineyard management company. At Mondavi he was a vineyard foreman and supervisor, learning about wine growing and wine making along the way. In 1997 he got a job at Stags Leap Wine Cellars, but quickly set off on his own to start his own vineyard management company. By 2005 he started making his own wine because he says, “I thought it would also be easy to make wine, put on a label and sell it.”⁵¹ Like other Mexican winemakers, he uses his name on the label and draws from his Mexican tradition. His label incorporates Oaxacan weaving design elements of migratory birds and flowers. Symbolically this is a powerful message, like migratory birds leave one place

⁵⁰ Rolando Herrera, interviewed by Steve Velasquez, Jan. 25, 2017

⁵¹ Mario Bazan, interview by Steve Velasquez, Oct. 22, 2011

and go to another, migrants from leave Mexico to come to the US and make a mark and transform the landscape.

Like other migrants in Napa wine history, Mexican families are using heritage to claim a space in the Napa wine industry. In her article on Italian immigrants in the wine industry, Jennifer Helzer looks at the “role of ethnicity in contemporary place making.”⁵² Helzer claims that Italian immigrants used ethnic ties and ethnic traditions to create sites of cultural consumption that help define, redefine, and sharpen regional identity and promote a sense of place. Similarly, in a study of a Mexican market in San Joaquin Valley, Vazquez Medina and Medina explore the role of this market in shaping the participatory sensory experience, creating an imaginary (image) of a Mexican-ness for consumers.⁵³ Much like the market acts like a third space, a transnational space, a space that can be and act as familiar, and safe to perform and be traditional, I see the space of wine rooms and family wineries as a symbolic space creating and establishing a comfort in cultural nostalgia and self-awareness and identity. For these families, the business of wine is a space they can link themselves to a Mexican and California identity and claim and cultural and economic capital, carving out a space in American society and claiming

⁵² Jennifer J. Helzer, "Old Traditions, New Lifestyles: The Emergence of a Cal-Ital Landscape," *Yearbook of the Association of Pacific Coast Geographers*, 63 (2001): 49-62.

⁵³ José A. Vázquez-Medina, and F. Xavier Medina, "Migration, nostalgia and the building of a food imaginary: Mexican migrants at "La Pulga" Market in San Joaquin Valley, California," *ESSACHESS – Journal for Communication Studies*, vol. 8, no. 2 (2015)

<http://www.essachess.com/index.php/jcs/article/view/302>. Accessed Nov. 15, 2015.

part of a national identity in their own way.

The Robledo Family is one such family that has foregrounded cultural identity and is a good example of how they are making consumers think differently about wine consumption. Vanessa Robledo explains about their approach to business and marketing that draws from their cultural capital,

“... I was really excited because Robledo Family Winery was going to carry our name and it was something that I could not fail in and I knew that. So, I was determined to make the family business successful and one of the things that I knew that had to happen is to include our culture and our food and to be able to share that with people. So, in everything that we did we had my mom cooking and then the furniture that we have in the tasting room we brought it from my dad’s pueblo in México. It was all hand-carved, and since then they’ve expanded they bought even more furniture. But at that time it was just one table, the bar and the back bar and the benches, I mean the little chairs in the front. So my vision, and I know that what my dad always talked about, is we wanted people when they stepped in Robledo to step into a little pueblo in México. It was like going to a different—traveling into a different time. So that was really the purpose of everything that we did then.”⁵⁴

They sell direct to consumer and created a wine club with levels, based on the family and using family terms in Spanish such as the *Primo* or *Tío* level, creating a sense that they are still part of the family. Vanessa goes on to explain,

“And then we had all of our events where all cultural. We’d bring in entertainment from México, we always had our harvest which is something that incorporated here. Our harvest party which we had to ask dancers to come in and do the dance for the gods to have a healthy harvest and things like that. So, all of that was really the vision and I think that we grew really fast in a very positive way, ... If you were to come to our events since we started, extremely diverse. That was one of the things a lot of people in the wine industry had not seen because in a lot of what we opened the tasting room in 2003. So we, at that time we were able to make history because it was the first tasting room in the country opened by Mexican vineyard worker, which is my father and my mother. And so,

⁵⁴ Vanessa Robledo interview

we received a proclamation from the city of Sonoma and we had a huge celebration and it was great.”⁵⁵

This acknowledgement of both cultural heritage and business savvy has been practiced with the Italian vintners in California.⁵⁶ These families understand the wine business and use cultural heritage to their advantage. We can see how the role of migration from Mexico for work is shaping the industry today. In a *Time* magazine article, wine maker Salvador Renteria explains, “By growing grapes, there’s not a lot of exposure...by making wine, you tell a story.”⁵⁷ It is symbolic, creating business and tasting room that creates a sense of place and identity, a “story.” They emphasize a history that is personal and familiar and add value to wine labor and those that do it.

For Robledo, creating the fiesta atmosphere is meant to transport you to a Mexico full of sights, sounds, tastes, and smells. Sutton (in Vazquez) writes that this kind of space “can shift the levels of identity when experienced in new contexts, becoming a symbol not just of home or local place, but countries or regions.”⁵⁸ Helzer further argues that “regional identity persists in a popular culture form, specifically through the promotion and consumption of ethnic heritage sites... that people actively construct local

⁵⁵ Vanessa Robledo interview

⁵⁶ Helzer, “Old Traditions”

⁵⁷ Lisa Takeuchi Cullen, “Excerpted from Legacy of Dreams: Second Generation immigrants are taking over their parents’ business, adding modern flair- and American flavor,” *Time, online edition*, (July 2004) <http://www.renterfamilywines.com/assets/client/File/TimeJuly2004Article.pdf>. Accessed July 7, 2011.

⁵⁸ In Vazquez Medina, “Migration and Nostalgia,” 137

and regional identity by manipulating ethnic heritage to establish connections with the past or to adopt a particular lifestyle.”⁵⁹ These themes and creation of an Italian landscape theme “are places of memory and identity tailored to and consumed by insiders and outsiders alike, used to manipulate and connect the consumer on some level.”⁶⁰ This practice of connecting to a historical and cultural past, in this case one of Mexican culture elevates what they do to a space created and honoring fieldwork, vine knowledge, and culture. The emphasis on the roots of Mexican migration for wine work has an element of activism, raising an awareness of their former positions as former workers, and immigrants, to new levels of visibility and importance.

Success in the wine world is often hard to come by. With over 500 wineries in Napa and Sonoma, the product, the story, the image needs to be set apart from others. Using the cultural heritage is one way to do it, using marketing to change perceptions and make a splash is another way. Vanessa Robledo recounts,

“We did have some people in the beginning that said, “You’re not going to use your name, are you?” And we said, “Yes, we are.” Because if you use your name they are going to know that you’re Hispanic or Mexican and we said, well that’s

⁵⁹ Helzer, “Old Traditions,” 51. Helzer is looking at the Italian heritage, what she calls Cal-Ital landscape which is drawn from traditions, artifacts, and images of the past and idealized forms of migration and settlement. In the 1980’s individual wineries were trying to find a “niche and self promotion became an important marketing strategy (53). These wineries recast and promoted the immigrant ethnic and family heritage. The narrative, she claims, eliminates the details of how Italians became associated with winemaking and more on pioneering theme. The family theme, where the image of family is also an aspect of the business, often leaves out the part that family doesn’t work in the field.

⁶⁰ Helzer, “Old Traditions,” 60

the point. So I remember comments like that when I first started which I honestly, I never had any doubt that our family was going to be successful. I always knew that everything the opportunities and the doors that opened up for us, those were the right path that we were supposed to be taking.”⁶¹

Vanessa goes on to explain a more about how she approached selling wine to restaurants and customers, making sure it connects with a food and wine pairing that one would normally not connect, Mexican food and wine,

“So, I mean I never had doubts, I never doubts for anything that we did, certainly sales weren’t easy in the beginning because I would go into Mexican restaurants and they’d say we don’t sale any wine here, we sale tequila. So that was challenging, things have changed now, they sale wine now. But I think that’s part of learning what pairs better with what dish and all those things. But it was an interesting journey in the beginning because sometimes I felt like, oh my gosh am I going to fail at this? But then I would get people who would order wine or re-order wine and all those things started to happen.”⁶²

The business model, marketing, and targeting a consumer base of Latinos has made these families fairly successful. They are targeting, through food and drink, a Latino demographic that has not been reached before. Amelia Ceja, in a 2005 interview explains the unique opportunity and niche, “There are 35 million Hispanics in the country. It’s like a country within a country...three and half million have a household income over \$100,000. Do I want to invite them to the table? Oh, you betcha.”⁶³ Ms. Violeta Barroso, of Mar Y Sol Vineyard, echoes the need to create a market focusing on food and wine pairings, “I would bring bottle of wine home and my parents were, you

⁶¹ Vanessa Robledo interview

⁶² Vanessa Robledo interview

⁶³ Andrea Kissack, “Children of Mexican Vineyard Laborers Now Vintners,” NPR transcript, August 25, 2005. Accessed 3/15/2012 <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4815504>

know, very complimentary, but not enthusiastic. So that gave us the idea that there was a need for a tailored style of wine for the types of food that we ate.”⁶⁴ In a *Saveur Magazine* article the tag line reads, “In California’s wine country, The Robledos come together each weekend for their mother’s fine Mexican Cooking, and to honor and strengthen a dream.”⁶⁵ This is an eleven page spread with large portraits and images of dishes and family members’ holding food or poring wine. Five recipes and two salsa are included, as are tasting notes and a side bar about the growth of Mexican Americans in the wine industry, “most of these new wineries are family run, are built on decades worth of savings and experience and utilize the skills of the college educated younger generation.”⁶⁶ The article is about the multigenerational family gatherings, the history of the Robeldo patriarchs, and in the middle, Maria and her food, “...her cooking reflects decades of adaption to a US pantry” states the article.⁶⁷

Similarly, Amelia Ceja uses her cooking skills to pair traditional Mexican food with their wines. She uses this knowledge and tradition to promote food and wines while taking full advantage of the internet and web, where she hosts cooking videos with her family pairing her wines with food. In a 2001 poster for Amelia Ceja ad the Macy’s Cellar Kitchen cooking demonstration and class indicates “you will learn firsthand about the Mexican culture and the art of Wine pairing”, most likely the first time a Mexican

⁶⁴ Ibid, 2

⁶⁵ Margo True, “Wine for the Family,” *Saveur Magazine*, no. 96 (October 2006): 50-61.

⁶⁶ Margo True, “Wine for the Family,” 56

⁶⁷ Ibid, 56

wine maker was pairing wine with Mexican food in a public space like Macy's.⁶⁸ Their inclusion in culinary magazines and mainstream department stores point to the importance, acceptance, and continuous changes of Mexican wine and American consumer tastes. [image 11 and 12]

Conclusion

The Robledo, Ceja, Bazan, and Maldonado families used their knowledge and skill to buy land, plant grapes, and make wine. Others like Salvador Preciado and Aurelio Hurtado used years of knowledge about grapes and community to help make the Mexican and Mexican American community stronger. These Mexican American families are not just wine workers, but they are active agents, shaping an industry where they used to be invisible. These families, and many like them, take their own cultural traditions and networks and explicitly make them part of wine industry. Their business strategy, connecting to the wine working roots with food and labor has given them access to consumers and notoriety in the wine world. Although not everyone has the same experience, these families have marked the journey from field workers to winery owners and wine makers. They have created a sense of place and memory and created an under looked niche and voice within the Napa and Sonoma community.

Hugo Maldonado, who literally and figuratively carved out a space for himself by digging out a cellar cave on his own, reflects on what his position means to the next generation of producers: "The Mexican producers have an obligation to serve as an example. They see us, the generations of Maldonados, the Robledos, Mi Sueño, Latinos

⁶⁸ Poster, 2004. National Museum of American History

can do it (*si se puede*) no matter if your name is Lopez, Herrera, Maldonado. We are not obligated to just work in the field or McDonalds anymore.”⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Hugo Maldonado, interview by Steve Velasquez, Calistoga, California, Jan. 24, 2017.

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Image list [I list these in the order I think they make the most sense. I am ok with cutting some out if needed]

Image 1: [SLWC, harvest crew]

Harvest crew at Stags Leap Wine Cellars. In 1997 curators from the National Museum of American History began documenting and collecting the modern California wine industry. Stag's Leap Wine Cellars Documentation Project, 1960-2002, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

Image 2: [SLWC, Mario and Paula]

Mario Bazan, vineyard foreman at Stags Leap Wine Cellars speaks with curator, Paula Johnson. Mario Bazan is now producing his own wine. Ca. 1997. Stag's Leap Wine Cellars Documentation Project, 1960-2002, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

Image 3: [Nadel, stoop labor, .52.16]

The Mexican Farm Worker Program, also known as the Bracero Program, brought over two million men to work on temporary work contracts to work in agricultural fields between 1942 and 1964. Leonard Nadel Photographs and Scrapbooks, Archives Center, National Museum of American History.

Image 4: [Nadel, bracero, .56.07]

The Bracero Program formalized a system of temporary migration and cheap labor for the agricultural industry. The bracero program also changed the social landscape by creating vibrant Mexican and Mexican American communities across the country.

Leonard Nadel Photographs and Scrapbooks, Archives Center, National Museum of American History.

Image 5: [SLWC, grafting, Jesus Valdez]

Budding and grafting is a highly specialized process requiring years of mastery. Jesus Valdez grafts onto root stock at Stags Leap Wine Cellars, ca. 1997. Stag's Leap Wine Cellars Documentation Project, 1960-2002, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

Image 6: [end post, 1998.3058.45 / AHB2006q07117]

A tradition at Stags Leap Wine Cellars is to place a plaque with the name of the person who grafted the row of vines. This end post indicates that Rodolfo Orosco was responsible for the grafts. Ca, 1997. Division of Work and Industry, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

Image 7: [end post in situ AHB2006q07123]

The end post with the name of Rodolfo Orosco in situ. Stags Leap Wine Cellars. Ca. 1997. Stag's Leap Wine Cellars Documentation Project, 1960-2002, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

Image 8: [SLWC, Gloria Ceballos in cellar, AC0816-0000028]

Gloria Ceballos topping off barrels at Stags Leap Wine Cellars. Latina women have increasingly become more visible in the upper echelons of the wine industry. 1997. Stag's Leap Wine Cellars Documentation Project, 1960-2002, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

Image 9: [boycott Grapes, AHB2017q021264 85.693.880]

The struggle to balance fair wages and workers rights while maintaining cheap labor and sustaining farms has been a major issue in the history of agriculture and Mexican American civil rights. The United Farm Workers used boycotts, strikes, and stoppages as a way to receive national attention for workers rights and working conditions. Ca. 1970. Division of Political History, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

Image 10: [barstool, 2012.0026.01 / JN2012-0770]

The Robledo Family Winery draws from their Mexican rancho culture to decorate their tasting room in Sonoma, California. This bar stool made in Michoacán, Mexico has hand carved horseshoe and wine grapes, a nod to his life in Mexico and his livelihood in

California. Ca. 2000. Division of Home and Community Life, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

Image 11: [poster, 2012.0045.01 / ET2013-16656]

This poster from 2004 is advertising a cooking demonstration with Amelia Ceja. The poster indicates that Amelia Ceja has been a wine grower for three generations, reinforcing to consumers that Mexican Americans have been instrumental in the wine industry. 2004. Division of Work and Industry, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

Image 12: [tortilla press, 2016.0132.01 / ET2017-00017]

This handmade tortilla press was given to Amelia Ceja as a wedding present by her “tía Tona.” Like many wineries, there is a strong focus on food and wine pairings. For many of the Mexican American vintners, pairing their wine with their regional Mexican cuisine is important. Ca. 1980. Division of Home and Community Life, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.