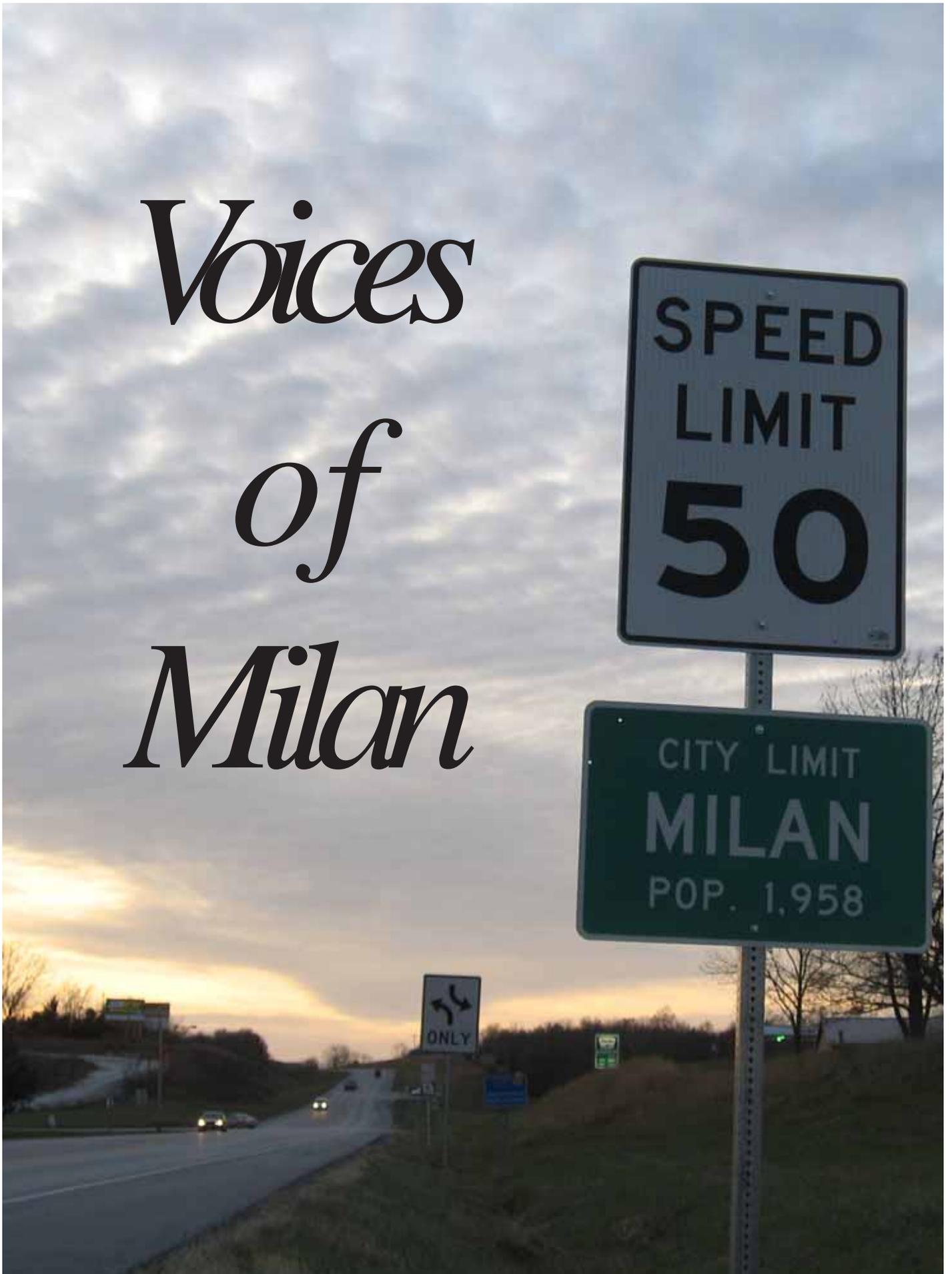


*Voices
of
Milan*



Voices of Milan

by

Race, Class, and Ethnicity in Latin America

JINS 338

Truman State University

Kirksville, Missouri

December 2007

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Introduction

Race, class, and gender permeate every part of life, and for this reason we decided it would be important to explore these topics outside of the classroom. In our Junior Interdisciplinary Seminar we decided to do an oral history project in Milan, Missouri. Milan is small town in northern Missouri whose Hispanic population has exploded over the last several years because of the changing economy. Since our class work focused on race, class, and gender in Latin America, Milan is the closest we could get to study these concepts in action. Because we live in a global world, these specific issues are not necessarily isolated within Latin America alone.

We interviewed numerous community members in Milan from varying socioeconomic, racial, and gendered backgrounds. We wanted to hear about these issues from the people in Milan instead of relying solely on the books we read to explain to us the complex relationships that exist there. It is easier to understand race, class, and gender when one is looking in from the outside. In this way, our oral history project allowed us to step outside of the world that we know in order to understand how these issues impact a community.

This book is our compilation of the interviews that we conducted in Milan. We looked for the core themes that ran throughout all of the interviews, and this is how we divided the book. While our overarching themes are race, class, and gender, these can all be broken down into smaller, still relevant themes. We have decided not to compile the voices we heard into a narrative so that the direct quotes may most clearly speak for themselves. We are trying to be as objective as possible, but there is no way to remove completely our biases during the process of creating a book. We interspersed some of our own reflections on these interviews in blue within the text. These interviews have taught us a lot about real-world issues that we had only considered in an academic sense, and we hope that you can take something from them as well.

Female professional, 47: “Well, we were getting ready to buy a house when land prices tripled.... Then they notified everyone that PSF was moving in, so that affected us and it wasn’t until they got the plant built, there wasn’t much change, and then all of a sudden we started seeing an influxion of Latinos, and they gradually kept growing.”

Female professional, 30: “I think it’s had a good effect, it’s a positive effect. I think that, at the time they came in, Milan’s economy was slow, hurting. We lost ConAgra, it was another plant down here which hired several people, and kept several people employed at one time. And when they left, our economy is still trying to bounce back from that. And, so I think it’s a very positive effect. I think they’ve helped people here to get jobs, incomes, at least stable recently. So I think it’s positive.”



Male worker, 24: “When I started out at PSF I started out on the kill floor shackling and then they moved me to hog driver then back to shackling at the same time doing two jobs ’cause they didn’t have enough people. Then after my six months of being there I moved over to the cut floor where I started out flipping bellies and then from there I started talking to the right supervisors and I got to where I was doing more than one job. Right now ’cause we don’t have enough people on baby back ribs, I help peel, cut, do the break in the riblets bagging them, boxing them, and whatever else they want me to do.”

Interviewer: “What is shackling?”

Male worker, 24: “Ok, it’s a chain that is sent through a pipe and one end’s tied down and when you pull it tight it hooks onto the hogs leg. Now then back in December, I got my finger accidentally caught in with one of the 300-pound hogs while he was going down.”

[Looking at his finger]

Interviewer: “Wow, It looks swollen.”

Male worker, 24: “Nah, this is permanent, this is tendon. It ripped that tendon from here to here, I got an MRI done, and the doctor don’t want to do anything about it. Well, it would cost PSF too much money. Now this happened back in December almost a year ago.”

Interviewer: “How long were you off of work with that?”

Male worker, 24: “I went back to work the same day.”

Female immigrant, 32: “Aquí también en Milán yo he escuchado de compañeras, amigas más, de que a veces los dicen que a los supervisores si quieren ir al baño y no los dejan y pues se ve que los americanos se ven los hombres como las mujeres se van al baño a tomar agua o andan charleando con las amigas o los americanos y los mexicanos casi no, trabajando duro. Se ve el racismo más que nada.”

Male professional immigrant, 46: “Well, I think it’s good because everybody, everybody around this town we live off it. I don’t work at PSF, but you know I live off the customers working there. If it wasn’t for PSF, this store probably wouldn’t be here. So actually the whole town, we live off the plant.”

Female professional, 47: “My biggest problem with PSF is that, well, I guess it’s Farmland now. Well I guess it’s that they have so many illegals working there. And that there are people within the community that could use the job, but can’t get a job because they have illegals working. That’s my biggest pet peeve.”

Female professional immigrant, 56: “That plant is the only source of employment for the community, not only for the Hispanics. But the Hispanics, like I said, the ones that come here, they just come to work there. And the banks are hiring, and they would like to have bilingual people, you know, in other places but most of them don’t want to because nobody pays or keeps the benefits that the plant gives.”



Female professional, 61: “And it’s even worse for the Hispanics because the only work available here is the pork processing plant and there’s a certain amount of lack of respect.”

Female professional, 23: “If we could still have all the Hispanic people and not have PSF, I would prefer that. I have friends who live out there, and the smell is awful. Their screens turn black; it’s put a lot of pollution out too. Several deaths have occurred there too. It would just be better for the community.”

“I’m not sure exactly what I had thought it would look like, but I definitely assumed it would contain more evidence of Hispanic culture. Perhaps I thought it would look slightly more like a small town in Mexico rather than a small town in the Midwest.” -Laine

Male professional immigrant, 46: “Well, we have all kinds of people. There are nice people, they like Latinos and some people they really don’t like, so there’s you know. Some people they get along okay, some people they don’t.”

“She also said that there are two different communities in Milan, the Spanish speaking community, and the non-Spanish speaking community, and they do not mix. The Hispanics eat at ‘their restaurants’ and not at ‘our restaurants.’” -Karena

Female professional, 74: “The whites and Latinos? Oh, I don’t know. Not very good I don’t think. I don’t think that especially at restaurants, you don’t see them in our restaurants much, they probably go to the two Mexican restaurants. They probably don’t like our fried food too much. You don’t see them eating in the restaurants. I know that one of my renters told me that he cannot go to the bar. He would like to go to the bar with his brother and have a beer, but they don’t feel welcome, they just, like the bars is probably a bad place to be, when the Spanish and Americans don’t get along well when they have been drinking.”



Male immigrant worker, 28: “Son violentos con nosotros. Es tanto los güeros, los americanos, como los latinos, y estas mismas razas. Tratamos de dar el mejor servicio a todas las personas de igual para está tratando culpa con todos Ustedes.”

Male immigrant worker, 28: “Tienen mejores carros que los latinos, mejores casas, están en su país, los americanos. Y nosotros estamos en otro país. La diferente tipo de comidas, los americanos comen diferente que los latinos. El idioma es diferente. Costumbres: diferentes. El color: diferente, see: mira. Muy güero, yo negro. La forma de vestir. Creo que son una de las cosas que caractericen la diferencia de dos países, de México o de latinos de los Estados Unidos.”

“When we asked about the differences between Latinos and gringos in Milan, he specified his answers to me, telling me that for the most part, gringos make more money, have nicer things and so forth. I believe he singled me out because by looking at Amy’s physical appearance he assumed she was Hispanic, and experienced the same prejudices that he experiences. However, later in the conversation when we were discussing our families, he seemed shocked to find out that Amy was adopted and lived with a white family. Although she is of Hispanic descent, she grew up in a white family.” -Karena

“He was a very upbeat person (even despite the fact that he had just gotten off a 13-hour shift) and seemed happy with life. He was very involved with one of the Hispanic churches and didn’t really have any issue with race. Daniel did mention that most of the upper-level positions in the factory are held by whites, but he interacts with both groups regularly and feels acceptance. He didn’t seem to care what color a person’s skin is or what they do for a living; he just gets along with everyone.” -Jessica

Female immigrant, 32: “Aquí también en Milán yo he escuchado de compañeras, amigas mías, de que a veces los dicen que a los supervisores si quieren ir al baño y no los dejan y pues se ve que los americanos se ven los hombres como las mujeres se van al baño a tomar agua o andan charleando con las amigas o los americanos y los mexicanos casi no, trabajando duro. Se ve el racismo más que nada.”

Female professional, 47: “Well no, they pay them just like everybody else, but I guess in some ways, they may get a subsidy for being a minority...you know. And they can provide the appropriate paperwork to work there. One time I was told that 80% of their workforce, of their Latino workforce was illegals. And I’m sure that’s probably grown.”

“Given her Hispanic name and the fact that she is fluent in Spanish as well, I assumed that she was born in Latin America, and had been in the United States for long enough to gain fluency in English. During the interview, however, I learned that she was actually born in the United States and, although she was originally from Texas, she attended high school in Milan. My inaccurate assumption shed light on the fact that many Americans tend to assume that Hispanic individuals who speak Spanish must have immigrated to the United States. Contrary to this assumption, however, a large number of Hispanic people in the U.S. were born here and are citizens just as much as any other American.” -Laine

Female professional, 47: “Latinos have a good habit of taking care of their own, and you know, that’s more economical for them and they feel a family obligation.”

Female professional, 60: “I think the Mexican men interact with the white women- maybe way too much. You know, I don’t have any trouble with that at all, but I think some people here do because, you know ‘Suzie’s daughter married a Hispanic.’ But it seems to be working out well.”

Female immigrant, 32: “Yo si quiero regresar a México. Yo a mí me gusta mi país jaja. Yo me siento orgullosa de ser mexicana y por mí quisiera regresar lo más pronto a México pero a veces no se puede. Mis hijos están, quisiera que terminaran la primaria yirme a México. Yo sé que en México también que vamos a morirnos de hambre pero, pero es de, vamos a echarles ganas.”

Female professional, 23: “I feel more at home there [in the Dominican Republic where her husband is from] than I do here [her hometown] with some of the white people.”

Mateo: “O pero si, les decía algunas especialmente las norteamericanas que les gustan a los hispanos y también un hombre norteamericano que le gustan a las hispanas, hay algunos que tienen sus esposas, en PSF y algunas con los esposos.”

“She cites her experiences living outside of Milan as giving her a better perspective on ethnicity and race (as well as gender) issues in Milan. She commented during the interview about how she saw racism from both the white and Latino communities in Milan, which I found to be interesting. During her interview, she spoke positively of the integration of Latinos into the Milan community, but not the other way around (she even made a comment about not seeing herself participating in Cinco De Mayo). Her interview gave me a perspective that I did not get from the panel on our first night in Milan, that of prominent community businesswoman.” -Daniel

Female professional, 26: “Well they, they’re starting to interact. They’re doing a lot of things together now. Like, they church together. And they have all these Mexican holidays together. I think we’re doing okay.”



- 6 - **Female professional immigrant, 56:** “Yeah, you don’t get to know the people, if you don’t speak their language it is like you don’t discover the places or people.”

Female professional, 66: “Oh... I don’t know well I first come here it was really I mean about 10 years ago when the Hispanics started coming here it was a challenge to get them to understand anything because most of them did not speak English, and they would bring a 7 or 8-year-old child trying to interpret and they don’t understand legal language. And it was REALLY a problem, but now a lot of them speak English more and, it’s not much a problem but it was REALLY a challenge at first because they don’t understand and I didn’t understand them. It was a big challenge when they started buying houses because we just couldn’t get them to understand anything.”

Female professional, 74: “It’s a challenge to them to try to talk to me, and I guess it is a challenge for me to try to see what they are trying to say. But we use the children. The families that have children bring their children to try to talk to me and the kids do all of the talking for their parents. The kids have a lot of responsibility talking for their moms.”

Female professional, 47:
“One time we had a patient who was a pregnant young girl out of the clinic, and we have an interpreting phone where you can, yeah, and we could not get the translator or interpreter on the other end to understand her. And we were like, what’s going on? And she had an Aztec dialect. She was from way back in the rural rural areas of the Americas. And even though she spoke Spanish, it was still with an Aztec dialect. And it was hard to understand her. But the girl I had to translate within the clinic and they could pick it-pick each others’ words apart so they could make sense.”

“She also said that ‘they’ (the Latinos) need to learn ‘our’ (American’s) language because of the opinion that they are not native and should have to learn how to ‘fit in’ better to our community. I asked her if she knew any Spanish, and she said that she didn’t because she had no need for it. As the owner of a few apartment complexes that rent out to only Spanish tenants, the need is apparent.” - Amy



Interviewer: “So was there a translator at the school before you?”

Female professional, 26:
“There was. Well there’s actually three of us now, and there’s one for the high school, one for the middle school and me.”

“Despite the large Hispanic population in the community, including many individuals who do not speak English, there were very few translators available. It was interesting to hear that in many cases the children were forced to become translators for their parents. I also thought that perhaps the town would hire bilingual professionals that can communicate with the Hispanic population. After actually seeing the town, however, I realize that there probably is not money to attract such individuals.” -Laine

“Instead of helping themselves, the community of Milan asks for translators to do the work for them. But until they understand the language of what is now the majority population of the community, they will continue to struggle.” -Jeff

Female professional, 74: “I own 8 rental houses and like we were talking about the Spanish population, I don’t speak any Spanish and they don’t speak any English, and sometimes it is a challenge for them to explain to me what is wrong. One time a family had a little baby and they didn’t think the house was as warm as they wanted it to be, so he took a picture of the thermostat, and brought it up to me to show me that he didn’t think that the thermostat wasn’t working because he wanted that baby to be warm. . . . It seems the dads learned to talk a little better, the ones that go to work everyday. They face more challenges and make themselves learn. But some of the women stay at home with their children and talk Spanish to their kids. I wish they wouldn’t do that. Because they would make it easier for their kids when they go to school if they talked English, but they probably don’t want their kids to lose their Spanish language.”

Female professional, 74: “No, I don’t know any Spanish at all. My kids took some Spanish in school but I just really wasn’t interested. And I don’t really feel like I could use Spanish. I feel like they came to our town and our country and they need English worse than I need Spanish. But maybe I am just old and grouchy.”



Male professional immigrant, 46: “‘American Dream.’ I would say it’s a lot of things like to start, speak the language, to speak English and have a good job you know and have a nice place to live and there’s some other good things to me like my kids are American students.”

“I find it striking that while Hispanics are working towards learning English, not many native English speakers are making a stronger attempt to learn Spanish to accommodate the Hispanic population’s needs.” -Christine

Female professional, 23: “The biggest thing people complain about is that they use their ability to not speak English to get out of a speeding ticket. They get pulled over and they pretend they don’t speak any English. That’s probably the biggest complaint I ever hear.”

Female professional immigrant, 56: “So we came and whether we like it or dislike it, we feel like we have to learn the language because otherwise it’s like going to a place and not and, you know, being in the dark .”

David: “Bueno, es, si uno puede hablar un poco de ingles, puede uno comunicar con ellos, pero si no, no se puede.”

“The interviewee said that the most amount of interaction he had with the whites was with the customers that came into the restaurant. This is not surprising because there is a definite language barrier. As my partner stated, our interview was in Spanish and he did seem very impressed and pleased that we held the conversation in Spanish.” -Amy

Male worker, 24: “The more and more you work there the more bilingual you get or the more Spanglish you get, if you really care. Because we have some people that just don’t care about the Hispanics or some that don’t care about the Americans. As a matter of fact, I’ve actually heard from both sides that they would rather it be a straight Hispanic or straight American plant, get rid of one or the other. There’s others that actually work together, there’s only a few that’s like that.”

“Some of the best things that one can do is acknowledge that one doesn’t understand. I think that is something that this book should show is that people in power often don’t acknowledge his/her privilege.” -Kim

Female professional, 47: “For the size of community it is, health care is adequate. Probably...more than adequate.”

Interviewer: “Do you receive any type of health insurance, or what is health care like for you?”

Male professional immigrant, 46: “Well, right now I don’t have anything. If I go to the doctors, I pay out of my pocket.”

Interviewer: “Does that hinder you from going to the doctor a lot than what you would have before?”

Male professional immigrant, 46: “No, no, no.”

“I thought it was interesting that one of the interviewees pointed out how Latinos tend to take care of each other instead of always running to the doctor. I think this is a big difference between Americans and Hispanics. Family care and love is sometimes better than anything a doctor can give you, and this concept is not a big part of the American mindset.” -Jessica

Female professional, 47:

“Well, the first thing when you said problems, I thought the teenage pregnancies. There’s a lot of that.”



“She mentioned that there has been a dramatic increase in teenage pregnancies, mental illness, and drug abuse. In terms of preventative care, there have been some counseling and education services offered from the local clinic, but it seems that there has been a recent cutback on the amount of health care workers. Even the OB-GYN from Kirksville that visits only does so once a week. Another interesting statement that she made was that the local clinic is regarded as the ‘Latino clinic,’ and most of the locals will drive to other places to get treatments instead of staying in Milan.” -Christine

Interviewer: “What kind of health care services do you have here available to you?”

Male immigrant worker, 23: “Plastic service, dental care, Medicare, hospital.”

Interviewer: “Do you have health insurance through the company?”

Male immigrant worker, 23: “Yes, dental.”

Female professional, 47: “Well, when I worked at the clinic, I had a full time translator every hour we were there, so we breached that barrier . . . We did our best, you know, we always had our translators, interpreters.”



Female immigrant, 32: “Pues, aquí me gusta porque un pueblito no está tan mal todo, pero también necesitamos como apoyos, necesitamos, batallamos mucho porque no hay ride como para ir al doctor, es de, en veces en vamos a las clínicas y no hablan, es de, español solo ingles y a veces también se portan racisamente con los hispanos porque no porque realmente no sabemos en veces uno dice no sé pero en veces entendemos poquito y uno cuenta cuando los están es de burlando de uno porque uno entiende poquito más que a veces uno no quiere hablar por pena o algo así.”

“Did you know that applying egg whites to a burn can heal the wound around two weeks faster than a burn cream prescribed by an American doctor? This is just one of the many handy remedies that Latin American curanderos recommend for various ailments; many of which would cause doctors trained in Western Medicine to cry out in disbelief. This example, as told by Kelsey on the bus ride home, illustrates the vast misunderstandings between the two cultures that still may cause ethnic tensions in places such as Milan.” -Kent

- 10 - **Female professional, 47:** “I’ve been in a home one time, where I went to rescue some kids, and there was a Latino home. And there was seventeen people living in one house, and there was wall-to-wall mattresses, but that was basically their choice to live that way because they were of age to work, and they could do that and send it back to wherever they were from. So, you know, I wouldn’t want to live that way, but you know, a lot of people from different countries do live that way, but still you know, it could be better conditions.”

Female professional, 60: “And this little yellow house right here [across the street], I furnished it like three times for Hispanics with stuff that my friends discard, because they come in here on a bus with a black plastic bag, and a gob of kids, and that’s it. And then here we are to take care of them? I have. I feel part of that is my Christian duty, the other thing is that I have more stuff than they do.”

“People really seem to work together to help out those without a home.” -Cynthia

Female professional, 66: “Oh yeah, it’s not because they passed an ordinance saying they can’t do that anymore, yeah some of their relatives can live with them but you’re not going to fit...but we don’t have...see when they first started up here it was mostly single people that came and they didn’t buy houses and we had people sleeping in their cars and on the streets because until they got that first pay check there was no place they could go because I’ve seen them sleep in the car. But we don’t have that anymore you know after they all came a couple of years the families started to come and once the families started coming we didn’t have the problems anymore.”



Female immigrant, 32: “La razón porque me vine de mí país es por, por porque la verdad allá no tenía ni donde tener un techo, hacer una casa, yo quería en algún día tener una casa, algo más quería yo, por un futuro mejor.”

“I was shocked to hear about some of the housing and living conditions that the Hispanics are willing to put up with just to live and work in the United States.”

-Jessica

“I couldn’t believe that once condemned houses are now being rented out once again.”
-Dylan



Female immigrant, 32: “But I find them [Latinos] very good renters because they are clean, and they love their kids and take good care of their kids, which is more than you can say for some of our girls. I’ve had some, I don’t do it anymore, I have had some girls in my houses who get their rent paid but don’t take care of their kids or my house, so I don’t rent to them anymore. All my houses are rented to Spanish people. And they think that I am a good landlord because when something is broken I get it fixed. And I have no problem renting my houses because if they are moving or going away, they tell their friends and their friends want to live there, and they take that place.”

Interviewer: “Para contador?”

Immigrant: “Yeah, uh, contador, like accounting?”

Interviewer: “Oh, okay, okay. Did you finish that studying in Guatemala, or did you decide to stop and come here?”

Immigrant: “No... casi, pero no.”

Interviewer: “Um, are you comfortable talking about what stopped, why you stopped studying in Guatemala? Was it just...?”

Immigrant: “Ah, Porque quería trabajar.”

Interviewer: “How many years did you go to school?”

Male professional immigrant, 34: “Thirteen years, no, fourteen.”

Interviewer: “That includes post-graduation of high school?”

Male professional immigrant, 34: “No, that means, that includes my elementary, you know, all my school through high school, and then I went to the University, I graduate for a teacher, I was a teacher in Guatemala and I took some engineering classes too, so, but I didn’t finish, I didn’t graduate as engineer I just started.”



Interviewer: “How many years did you go to school, prior to here?”

Female professional, 26: “I did like a year and a half of college, plus high school, so, like, thirteen years and a half.”

Interviewer: “What did you study when you were in college?”

Female professional, 26: “I got my basics, like, year and a half...”

Interviewer: “Just general classes?”

Female professional, 26: “Right, yes. I didn’t do any major or anything like that.”

Interviewer: “The kids are involved in sports at school, you know they can mix, it gets the parents involved in a school activity?”

Female professional, 30: “I mean its most obvious when you go to football games, and more of the Hispanic kids are being involved in the sports. Which, before, even as far as three or four years ago, there was not a Hispanic child on the football team or in any of the sports. They are starting to be more involved, and if they bring their families, and are integrating pretty well.”

“The high school’s football team has a kicker who is the best the school has ever had. He is setting records and breaking even regional and state records for field goal attempts. He is Hispanic. And many of the white community are interested in him and are rooting for him. This is what the Hispanic community in Milan needs, a role model who is not white or American.” -Joel

Female professional, 23: “That they’re investing their money and time so much, and their kids getting involved in school, getting involved in the activities, and sports, and families getting involved in the school activities.... It’s a small town. I guess the school’s not very good. So, probably by the time my kids are old enough to go to school we’ll go somewhere else. That’s probably our biggest challenge.”

“The school issue was also really interesting for me. Of course my immediate reaction is that there is no way that paying for better schools would not benefit the community as a whole. But I think it is also important to take location into account. Kelsey brought up the argument that a good portion of the voters and property tax payers in Milan are older farmers who really don’t have a lot of money or children in the schools anyway. Not that they would not reap benefits from a better educated community, but it’s understandable that the tax increase is such a blurry line.” -Ellen

Female professional, 23: “It had to be hard for them because they put a lot of stipulations on speaking Spanish, the kids couldn’t do it. But now they can’t do that. Can’t really tell anyone they can’t speak Spanish, so the kids do speak Spanish. That’s probably the biggest thing, was that they were trying to control those kids. And those kids didn’t know much English and that makes it really difficult for them.”

Interviewer: “Do you find that they pick up English more quickly?”

Female professional, 26: “Yeah, because they don’t have anything in their minds, you know, they just have what you tell them. The bigger kids have a lot of, you know, stuff already there, so, I think it’s easier for younger kids to learn to speak English.”



“It was interesting to find out that the English only speakers were in the minority with only 8 of 19 students.” -Cynthia

Female immigrant, 32: “Ver televisión, con tres hijos es un poco difícil pero un ratito.”

Female professional, 60: “What do I do for fun? We do a lot of entertaining, in a small town there aren't places to go. We have a wonderful group of friends that I would call cosmopolitan for a real rural area. We all travel a lot and so forth, but we get together, well, for sure one night a week we have a dinner club that changes homes and it's six couples and we, um, actually, home entertainment is what's happening in Milan for people, like us. You know, none of us go to bars or anything in a small town, because we're all, you know, our friends are lawyers and doctors and so forth, so it's home entertaining, as you can see.”

Male immigrant worker, 28: “Me vine a contar con una chica para tener una familia. Estamos viviendo ahorita como parejas. No estamos casados pero somos viviendo como parejas...Hace diez, como quince años que la conozco. De la que estábamos jóvenes. Quince, dieciséis años que hemos novios. Y es ahorita que estamos juntos. Tenemos una bebita.”



Male immigrant worker, 28: “Trabajo de mesero, cocino, y también lavaplatos o lavo lo que es sucio. Todo el trabajo.”

Female professional, 23: “In Milan? I guess rent a movie, go out to eat, there's not very many food options, but you can get a good meal around here. There's lots of Mexican restaurants and Subway.”

Interviewer: “Is it pretty popular here in Milan to play soccer?”

Male immigrant worker, 23: “Yes, over the year we have the competition but we only have like five six teams. The last two years my team won.”

Interviewer: “Do a lot of Latinos get involved with things like Tee-ball and the kids' activities?”

Immigrant: “No, no, very few, no they don't participate a lot if it's not in their... You know for the soccer games ... they do play but ... no ... not for Tee-ball or football nor basketball ... very little. I think there are two boys who played football.”

Female professional, 26: “My husband, though, he plays soccer. They have a little league here in Milan. And my son, he plays soccer and baseball.”

Female professional, 74: “I never felt deprived. If it wasn’t here I didn’t worry about it. We always had kids in sports, and places to go and things to do.”

Female professional, 60: “She has 3 acres in town where she grows gardens that people can walk through and look at.”

Female professional, 26: “Yeah he [her son] plays soccer, well actually, he plays in Chillicothe, it’s called the Green Hills Soccer Club.”



Female professional, 26: “My boys they were at Chucky Cheese. We went there to Columbia and we went to the mall and we came home late.”

Female professional, 74: “I’ve had a really good life. And it’s a small town and I guess I never really felt deprived. Things I can’t get here, I can go somewhere else and get it. I can go to Kansas City to go shopping and go to shows and things and other places.”

Interviewer: “What is your religion?”

Female professional, 60: “Catholic.”

Interviewer: “Do you see a lot of Hispanics?”

Female professional, 60: “Oh, sure, they’re all Catholic.”

Professional: “Yes, I am not really religious but I am Baptist and I go to Baptist church.”

Interviewer: “How many Baptist churches are there?”

Professional: “There is just one a couple of blocks from my house and I have always gone there.”

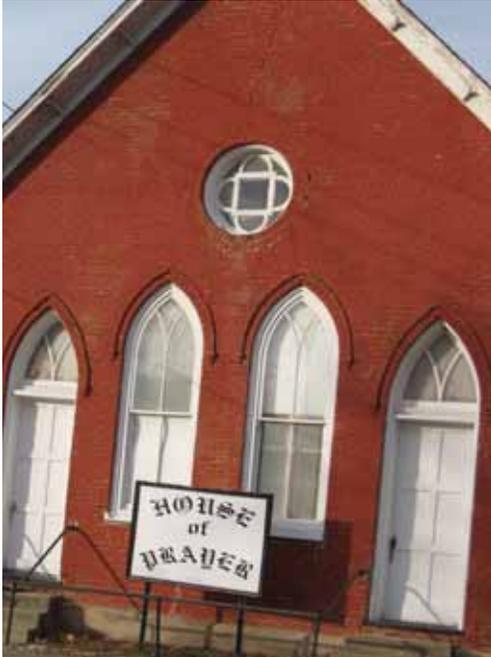
Professional: “We have a Lutheran, Methodist, Christian, and um, oh, Bread of Life, that is just a branch that broke off from another church I think, and Assembly of God. Those are all of them I think.”

Female professional, 60: “Well everything has changed with the Hispanic population. And the only thing really that bothers me that has changed was: We had a 4:30 Mass at our church, in English of course. Ok, well, the pillars of the community, the pillars of my church, who are much older, they went to that Mass because they didn’t like to get up early and in the snow and all that jazz and everything. And they gave that [Mass] to the Hispanics and made it a 5:30 Mass and no one likes that. But the Catholic Church doesn’t seem to change it.”



Female professional, 61: “Well, I would say part of it is having three congregations to deal with: Hispanic, and Anglo here in Milan and we have a congregation in Unionville because we all work together. Here, since your project is mostly about the Latino congregation. I’d say that transiency and the work is very difficult and demanding, and uses a lot of people’s energy.”

Female professional, 60: “So I don’t feel that we should be changing our church services because, who was here first?”



Female professional, 74: “The Catholic Church has a Spanish group. Some of the Spanish go to the regular service, and some go to the Spanish one, too. And we have a Spanish Baptist church too on the highway, and the Christian has a Spanish church, and the Presbyterian church has a Spanish group that meets Sunday afternoon, instead of the morning, but I noticed they have a sign out in the yard that has the Presbyterian sign for the church and the Spanish have their Spanish church out their too. And they pay their rent money to that church. And the church needed more money. And so it worked out for them.”

Male immigrant worker, 28: “Pues, hay de todo, no sé cuantas religiones hay en todo el mundo: cristianos, católicos. Ni yo sé, pero yo soy católico porque mi mamá. Que estaba pequeñito, nos íbamos que hacer católicos. Cuando nosotros quisiéramos negar o cambiar la religión, era otro problema. Pero yo nunca, nunca, nunca he cambiado cuatro mismo porque me gustaba esta religión y esta, esta ahorita yo soy ciento por ciento católico.”

Female professional, 23: “My husband and I started our own ministry: God for the World. We had the dream to do a lot of work down there [Dominican Republic], and primarily what we do right now is like soup kitchens, start churches, stuff like that, help the poor, people who eat like a banana a day.”

Female professional, 26: “I don’t know, well we, have a church on Tuesday and Thursdays. And then on the weekends we usually just go out of town and just spend time with the family.”

Male immigrant worker, 23: “No because in this town there are different countries USA, Mexico, from all over anyway. I know like Taiwan too.”

Female professional, 23: “I myself don’t mind because I love Latin people. My life is about helping them. I don’t know. Some people don’t mess with them. Some people don’t like change. You know small town people. Didn’t really do very good with it when all of them came, but it doesn’t bother me.”

Female professional, 30: “There are still problems. There are problems on both sides. You have your groups of the whites who just cannot move past that. And I think a lot of the problem is that they have lived in a small community their whole life, like I did. I had the opportunity to get out and see other things, to see other cultures. A lot of people have never left this community, and have lived here their whole life. And so, they have a hard time opening their minds to things that are different, change. On the other side, for the most part I think, the Hispanics are, you know, willing to integrate, and want to, but then, they also have the same hard feelings on the other side, too. But then I see it most with clients who will come in and talk about things, and I know there are certain tendencies that they have to say certain things about certain people because of their race, just the same as I see on the other end. So, I think its kinda on both sides.”



Interviewer: “How do the whites and the latinos interact in Milan?”

Female professional, 74: “The whites and latinos? Oh, I don’t know. Not very good I don’t think. I don’t think that especially at restaurants, you don’t see them in our restaurants much, they probably go to the two Mexican restaurants. They probably don’t like our fried food too much. You don’t see them eating in the restaurants. I know that one of my renters told me that he cannot go to the bar. He would like to go to the bar with his brother and have a beer but they don’t feel welcome, they just, like the bars is probably a bad place to be, when the Spanish and Americans don’t get along well when they have been drinking.”

Interviewer: “Another one of the things during the panel discussion, I noticed that there’s a big language barrier between the two groups. And they were talking about how they needed translators for the WIC program, schools, for legal stuff.”

Female professional, 60: “Yeah, you see one of my girlfriends is a banker and the children 10 years old come in and speak for the people to get a loan. I thought, well excuse me, but they are in *our* country. And when I’m in their country, I try to speak as much Spanish as I can. I don’t expect them to change their mass to English because I happen to be vacationing in Acapulco, hello. You know? And they are not going to be here forever. They are going to be here to make enough money and send it home and la-de-da. And I have had so many neat families that have lived in this area. Then about the time you get attached to their children, they’re gone. So I don’t feel that we should be changing our church services because, who was here first?”

Female professional, 61:
“I don’t know if I would call it discrimination but they tell people; they tell people that if they don’t speak English that they are talked to in certain way or they are not given enough time to explain themselves.”



Female immigrant, 32: “Yo una ocasión trabajé en una compañía en Kansas City, Kansas a veces uno les dice a los supervisores – ‘¿me da permiso para ir al baño?’ y ellos dicen es de te dicen a uno que: ‘No me importa.’ Es de que: ‘No me importa, permítame un momento, voy a poner a alguien.’ Se van para allí [para que pueda ir] y nunca ponen a nadie no dieron permiso a uno, hispanos y si va una americana le dicen que quiere ir al baño en menos de cinco minutos va y la deja allí. A uno lo ven como hispano y no sabe nada de inglés ‘no tengo tiempo para que vayas al baño.’”

Female professional, 60: “A form of sort of reverse discrimination. Sunday Mass was taken away from English speakers and turned into a Spanish Mass.”

Female professional immigrant, 56: “I think it is even harder for the people who come just to work, get the money and go back, even though they never go back because sometimes they have their children are being born here.”

Female immigrant, 32: “Pues, la cultura más que me importa es que como la día que celebramos en México de la Virgen de Guadalupe, tradiciones de día de los muertos, día de la bandera, jaja.”

Female professional, 47: “I think the older you get, the less, happy you are about change, so that’s probably the biggest factor. They would prefer to see Milan the way it was when they were growing up, just as far as the influx of the Latinos, I think there is a lot of mistrust because of the reputation that goes along with being, some of the bad things, not the good things, but does that seem to answer, I mean in general you could say that 90% of them would rather not be here, talk to the very few, unless they get to know them.”

Interviewer: “On that line of questioning actually leads us right into the next question. How do the white and latino populations interact here in Milan, as far as you can see.”

Professional: “Well I think they get along right, at first it was sort of you know, our town never had had any blacks in town and we never had anybody of a different culture in our town so it probably was a culture shock at first, but everybody is used to it now and I don’t...I don’t see any problems in this town.”

Interviewer: “Yeah.”

Professional: “At first there was a few but, you know there was always a few like we don’t want ‘em and all that, but people... like I say the kids when they start growing up with them in school and everything and they interact with they just don’t have that anymore.”

Female professional, 30: “Now, in the last few years, a lot of the Hispanic population that are here are making homes, and making this their home. And, so, there has been a lot of change in that way. From leaving home and then coming back, it was a big shock, a big change to me, because you just didn’t see a lot of other ethnicities in this area. We’ve also had more African-Americans recently. So, we’re becoming more diverse.”



Female professional, 30: “I think it’s getting better, I do. More recently, in the past couple of years, I mean it’s most obvious when you go to football games, and more of the Hispanic kids are being involved in the sports. Which, before, even as far as three or four years ago, there was not a Hispanic child on the football team or in any of the sports. They are starting to be more involved, and if they bring their families, and are integrating pretty well.”

Interviewer: “Yeah, yeah, it’s been a while. How do you think that the white and Latino population interact in Milan. Do you notice any?”

Female professional, 26: “Well they, they’re starting to interact. They’re doing a lot of things together now. Like, they church together. And they have all these Mexican holidays together. I think we’re doing okay.”

Female professional immigrant, 56: “A lot of people come here... we have people from, while the majority is from Mexico, and then we have from El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala and a lot of different countries, and that is very interesting because I like the lot of different cultural differences”

Female professional, 23: “It is a different culture. They don’t see women very highly. And that’s probably the most difficult for me, dealing with that because I’m a very dominant female, and I don’t like being looked down upon. That was the biggest thing of their culture. Otherwise, I love the people. I feel more at home there than I do here with some of the white people.”

Female professional, 60: “Yeah one of those fake weddings [quinceañera]. Probably that vow lasts until the dance is over. Well you know one of our older parishioners who have gone here generation after generation, are like offended. They are like ‘what’s this?’ So, you know, and I travel a lot in México because we just love it. And I don’t expect them to change anything. You see, I’m a visitor in their country and I don’t see that that is happening.”



Female professional, 74: “The family I have that lives upstairs, they have a little girl that was in the sixth grade last year, she knows how to wire money to Mexico. And I don’t know how. The mother asked me if I would give her a ride uptown to the Mexican store, so I gave her a ride uptown and went in with her because I was nosy and I have never been in a Mexican store. She wired money to her grandmother. They have a house in Mexico and they want to go back there. And once they have all these kids, they have three girls, they have to get them raised and live in Milan. Right now they think when they get enough money they will build onto their house and move back to Mexico and the grandma and some of their relatives live in their house. She wired a hundred some dollars to her grandmother. She just pressed a couple numbers. I don’t know how to do that. They have a machine in the store to wire money like that.”

Male worker, 24: “Now then here’s another thing, when they come up here some of those that come up here send money down to the families to support them, after they’ve been here a while, they lose sight of their real goals. They lose sight of why they came to America. Like my ex-girlfriend, she lost sight of why she came to America now and she was going to church things all the time and now she doesn’t have anything to do with the church.”

Interviewer: “Tell me about your important cultural traditions.”

Female professional, 60: “Oh, so it’s more for the Latino population. Oh yeah. No, you know, the same things that are important to you. Christmas, tooth fairy, you know.”

Conclusion

These interviews provided a lot of insight to the relations between different races, classes and genders in Milan. Many of the interviewees came from very diverse backgrounds and shared different perspectives on life in the community. We also found that even people from very similar backgrounds often had different opinions on certain topics. Hearing personal stories and attitudes allowed our class to gain a deeper understanding of the ways that race, class and gender affect every aspect of life.

Even though Milan is just a small town in the Midwest, it provided a lot of insight that can be related to all communities. Because the Hispanic immigration started so recently, we were able to hear first hand how people deal with change in their community. As outsiders, we did not really know what to expect during the interviews. What we found was a community that has come a long way in diversifying and has been through many changes in the past decade.

Race, class and gender were the main issues that our class wanted to address, but as we started compiling the book, we were able to see the many ways that these issues affected every aspect of life in Milan. While the focus of this class was Latin America, there are issues with these topics everywhere. Milan provided a good example of how a community as a whole can be united or divided because of race, class and gender.

Race, Class, and Ethnicity in Latin America

JINS 338

Truman State University

Kirksville, Missouri

December 2007



Back row (LR): Laine Nickl, Joshua Hoyt, Ellen Weber, Julia Reimann, Kelsey Aurand de Razo, Dylan Zini, Joel Brune, Kent Buxton, Jeff Sanders, Ashley Hawkins
Middle row (LR): Karena Smith, Kim Mitchell, Nicole Ray, Mandi Perez, Lindsey Ballard, Jessica Schmittgens, Daniel Curtis
Front row (LR): Marie Weichold, Christine Lin, Anna Pechenina, Cynthia Maupin, Amy Bockelman, Marc Becker