

Asturian migrants in the United States: Stories between two borders

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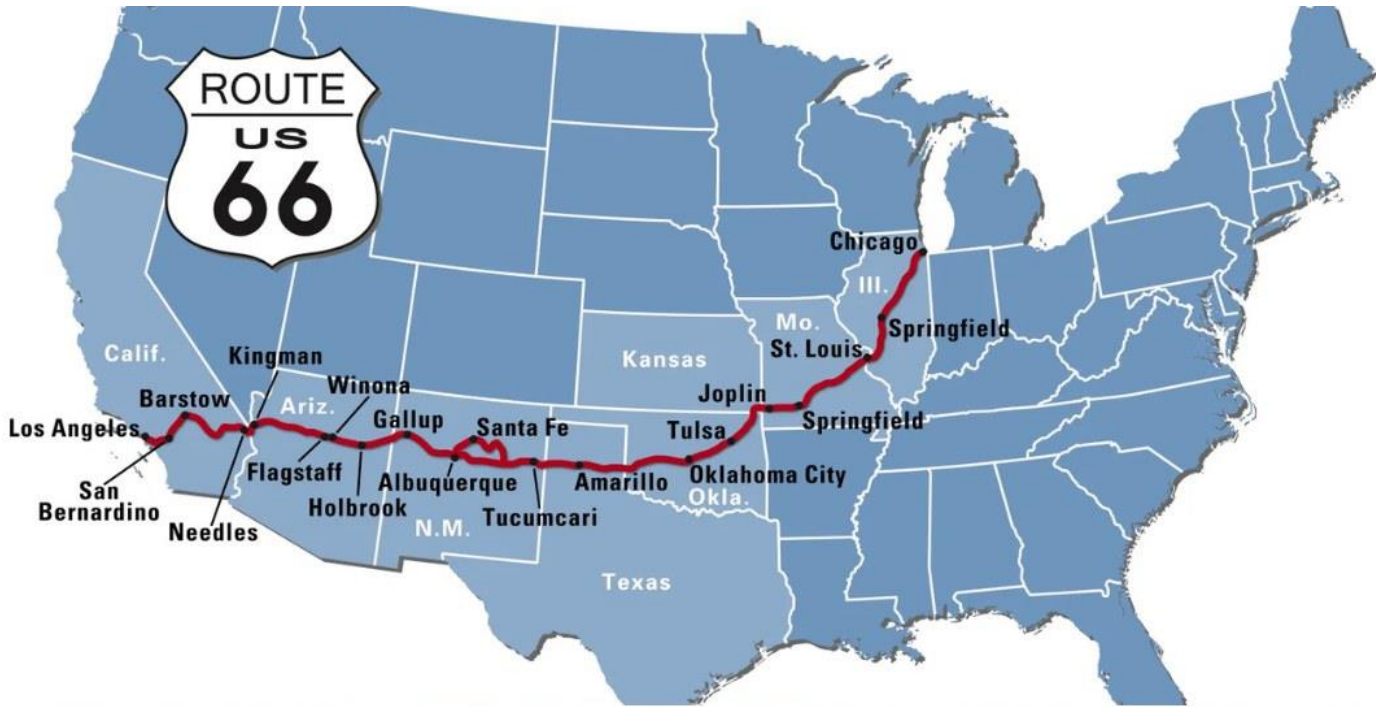


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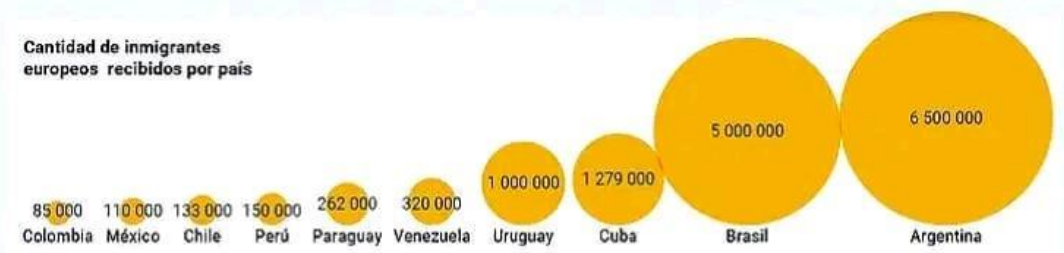
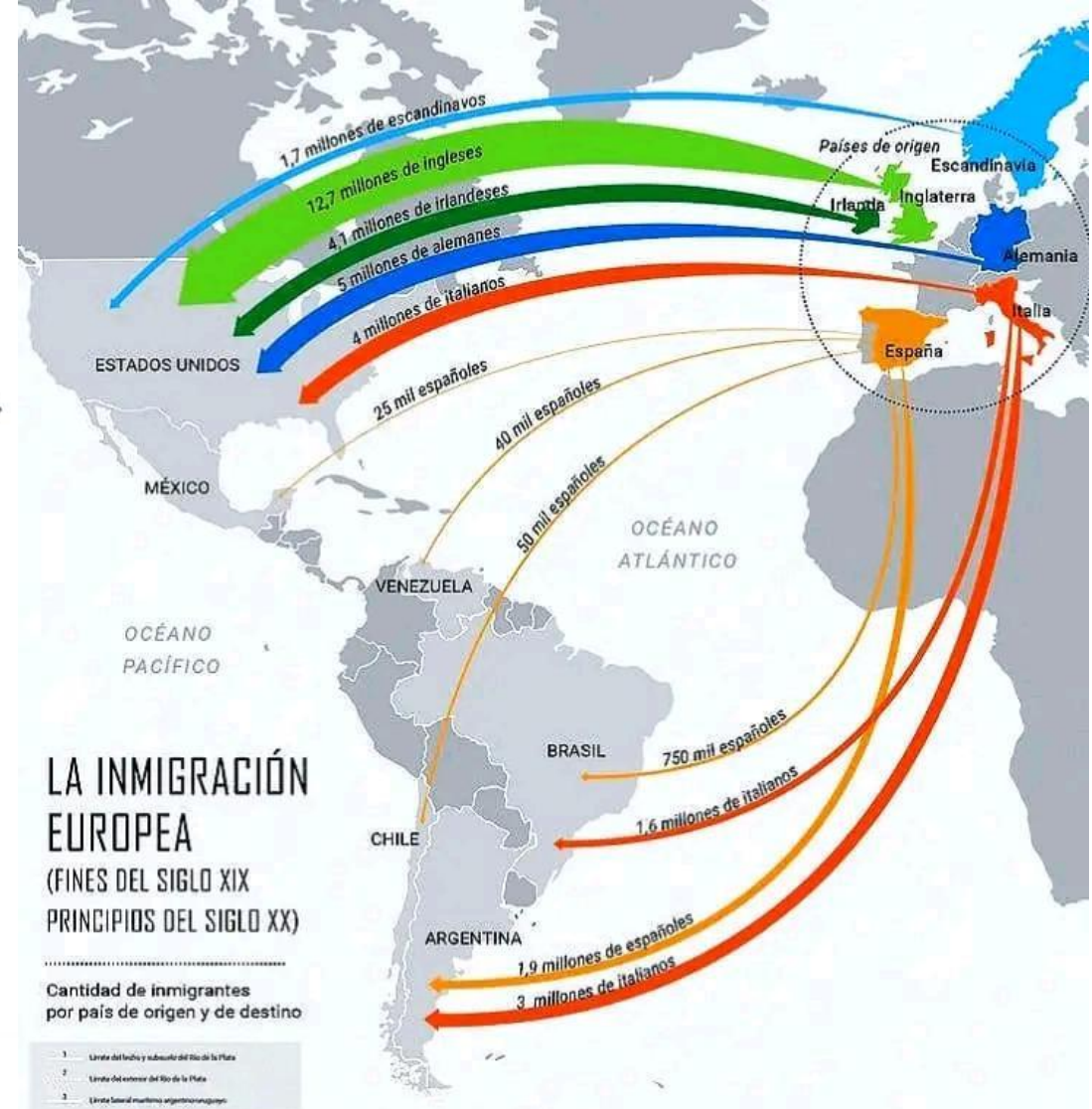
Is there any example of an Asturian migrant in your family?



The Mother Road to Migration



The Other Migration



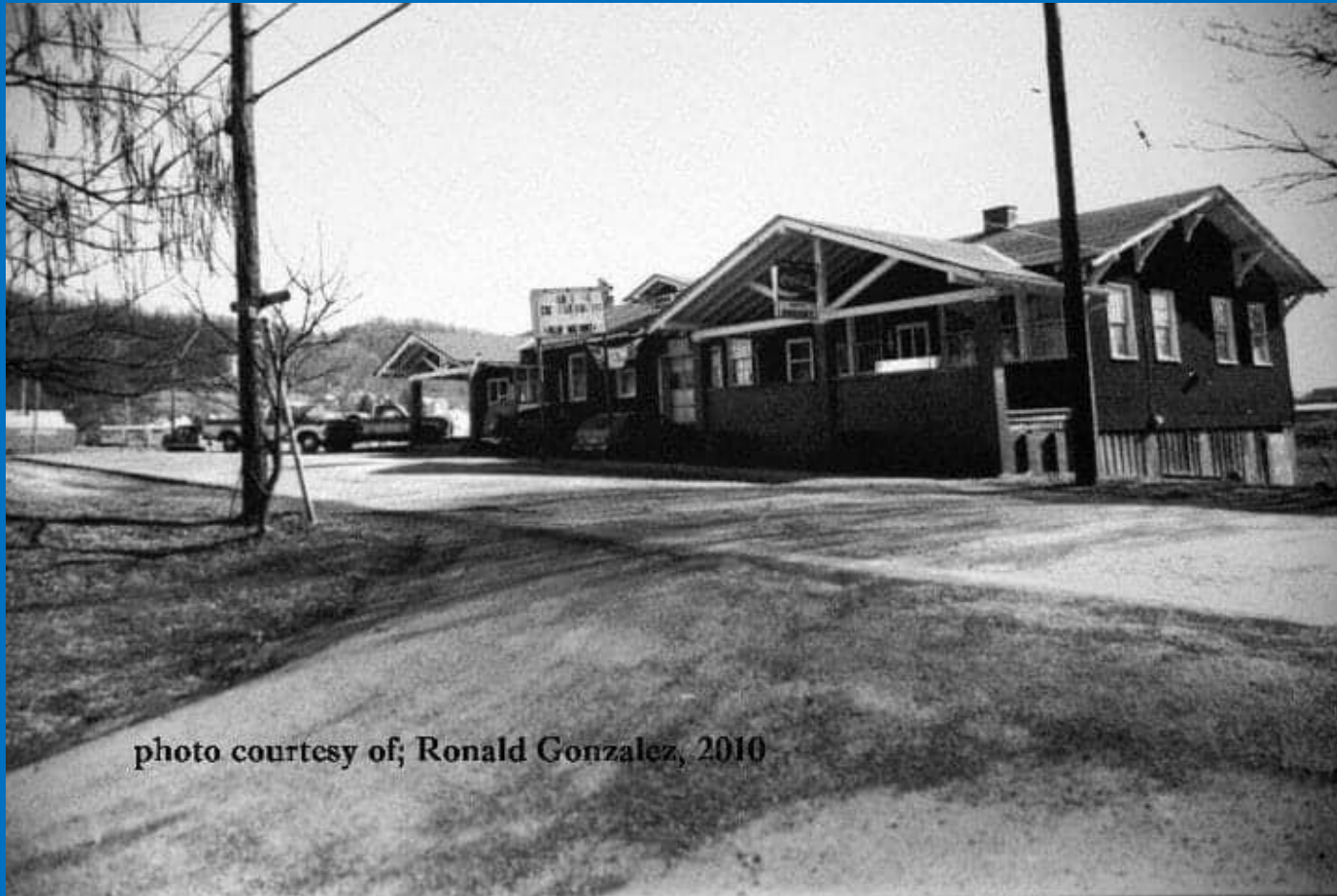


photo courtesy of; Ronald Gonzalez, 2010



Asturian immigration

- Some interesting questions:
 - Who were the Asturian migrants in USA?
 - Where did they go?
 - Have they preserved any custom or tradition from the older Asturian generation?
 - Who are the Asturian Americans now?

The context

Why
migrating?

Clark Colahan on Spanish Americans:

“At the end of the **nineteenth century**, **Florida** attracted the second largest group of Spaniards in the country through its ties to the Cuban cigar industry. Most of the owners of factories were originally from **Asturias**, and in the second half of the century they immigrated in substantial numbers, first to Cuba, then later to **Key West**, and eventually **Tampa**, taking thousands of workers with them. Several thousands of their descendants still live in the vicinity.”

<https://www.everyculture.com/multi/Pa-Sp/Spanish-Americans.html>

The context

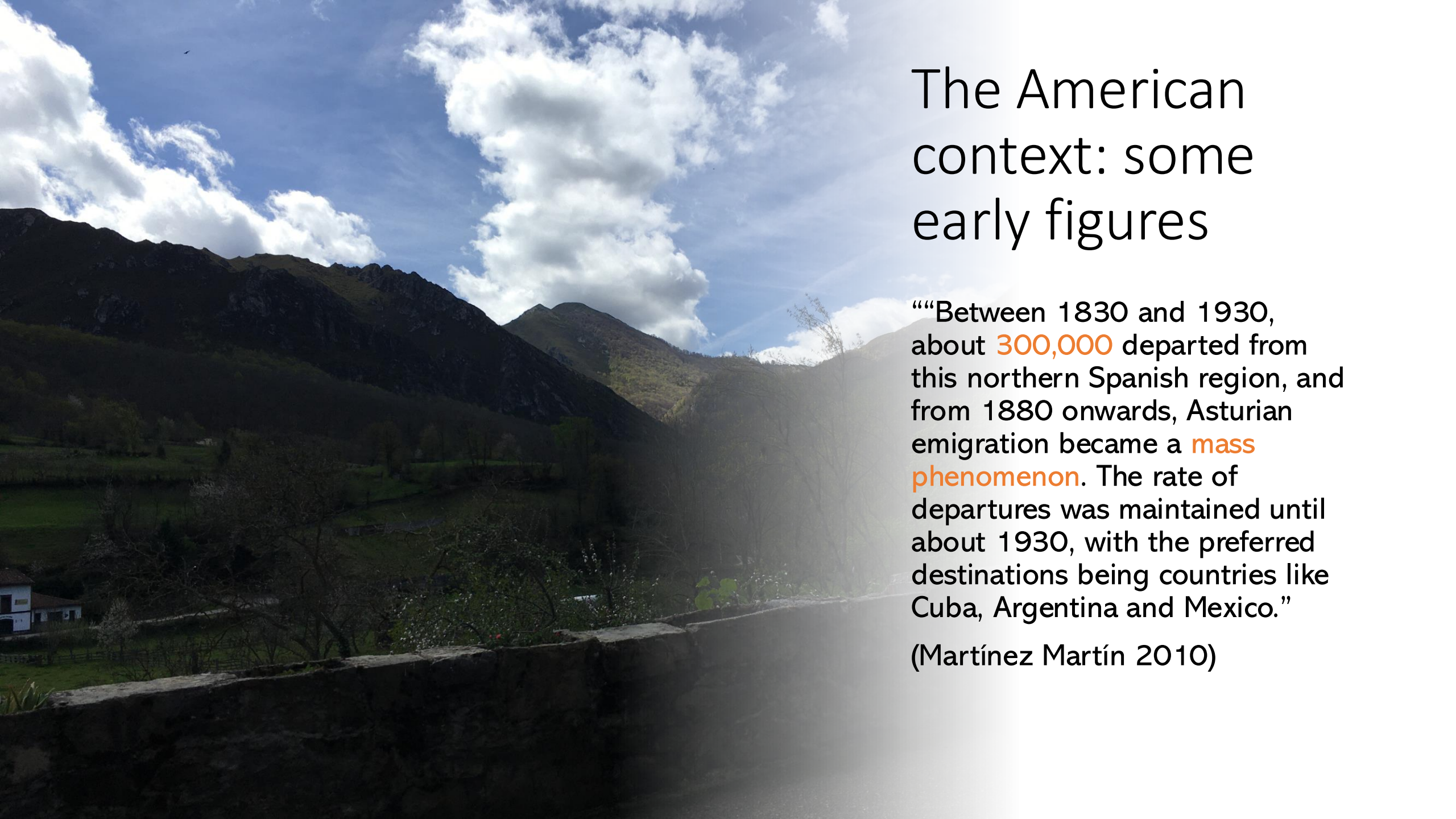
SUMMARY

Clark Colahan on Spanish Americans:

“The steel and metalworking centers of the **Midwest** also attracted northern Spaniards. In the censuses of 1920, 1930, and 1940, due to sizable contingents of **Asturian** coal miners, West Virginia was among the top seven states in number of Spanish immigrants. Rubber production and other kinds of heavy industry accounted for large groups of Spaniards in **Ohio, Illinois, Michigan, and Pennsylvania**. With the decline of this sector of the American economy in the second half of the twentieth century such centers of industry have largely lost their drawing power, accelerating the dispersal and assimilation of these Spanish communities.”

<https://www.everyculture.com/multi/Pa-Sp/Spanish-Americans.html>

The impact of immigration



The American context: some early figures

“Between 1830 and 1930, about 300,000 departed from this northern Spanish region, and from 1880 onwards, Asturian emigration became a mass phenomenon. The rate of departures was maintained until about 1930, with the preferred destinations being countries like Cuba, Argentina and Mexico.”

(Martínez Martín 2010)

How many Asturian Americans

“The overwhelming majority of the Spaniards who came to the United States did so in the quarter-century from 1900 through 1924”

Taking into consideration the number of Spaniards that returned home:

“The net immigration of Spaniards to the United States, then, from 1900 through 1924 (but using the 1908-1940 figures for the returnees) would approximate **102,000.**”

(Gómez 1962: 70-71, based on the *Annual Report of the Secretary of Labor, 1923-1924*)

The context: some figures

Recent census of population shows that:

“As of 2019, there are 103,655 Asturian living in the Americas.”

The most recent **Census Bureau Report** (December 06, 2022) indicates that :

“The number of people in the United States who spoke a language other than English **at home nearly tripled.**”

“The Hispanic population is the largest minority group in the United States. So it is not surprising Spanish was the most common non-English language spoken in U.S. homes (62%) in 2019 – 12 times greater than the next four most common languages.”

Why to USA?

El vocero, 25/8/1984

“Existieron otros alicientes nada desdeñables a la hora de las grandes decisiones. Así, el conocimiento de la lengua que, en nuestro caso particular, explicaría el **poco atractivo despertado por los Estados Unidos** y la indudable inclinación hacia los pueblos hispanoparlantes.”

Martínez Fernández 1984

EL VOCERO, San Juan — Sábado 25 de Agosto de 1984

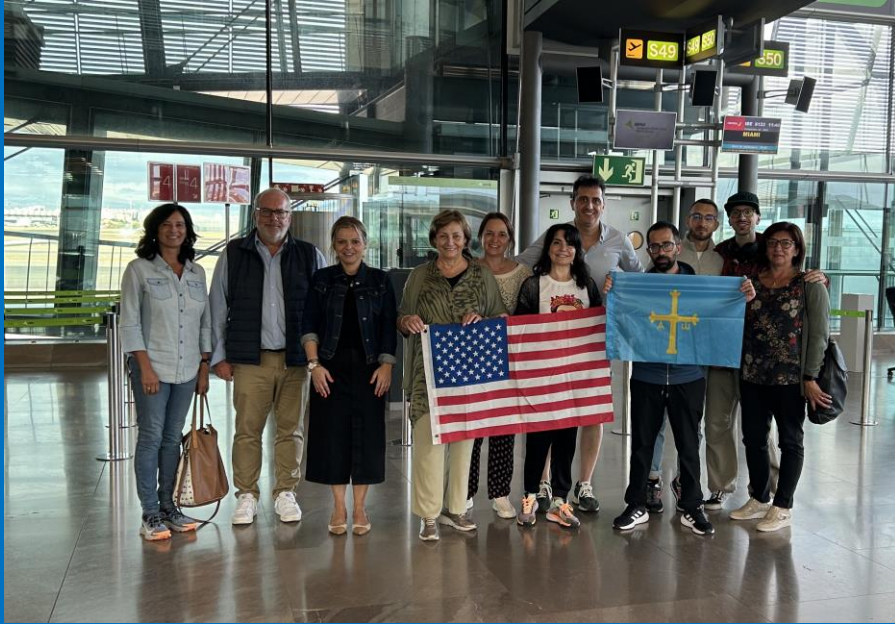
Asturianos en A Relato

Por Jesús Martínez Fernández

Los mayores números se dirigieron a Argentina (R.A.), Cuba (C), Puerto Rico (P.R.), Uruguay (U), México (M.), Venezuela (V), Santo Domingo (S.D.) y Nueva York (N.Y.) en la proporcionalidad que concretamos seguidamente:

País	%
R.A.....	34.6
C.....	30.7
P.R.....	22.4
U.....	5.7
M.	3.8
V.....	1.2
S.D.....	0.9
N.Y.....	0.7

En el siglo XIX finalmen-



Early relations

Relación con los Estados Unidos:
Delegación.

Saint Augustine de la Florida

James Fernandez & Luis Argeo

**JORNADA FESTIVA
XUNTANZA
TRASATLÁNTICA
25 DE SEPTIEMBRE DE 2021**

MUSÉU DEL PUEBLU D'ASTURIÉS, GIJÓN/XIXÓN

**#XUNTANZATRASATLÁNTICA
DE 16 A 20 H.**



PROGRAMA

ESPACIO PAPELEO	ESPACIO PARPAYUELA	ESPACIO FOLIXA
16:00 Digitalización de materiales con Luis Argeo y James D. Fernández, comisarios de la exposición	"RECUERDOS ARCHIVADOS" Charla con Alfonso García (Cis, Asturiano de Zinc), Sanja Goya (Museu del Pueblu d'Asturies) y Tatja Gil (Asociación Navegantes)	
16:50	"RECUERDOS HEREDADOS" Charla con Yolanda Cerro y Chemo Menéndez	
18:00		"CARTA DE UN EMIGRANTE" Obra de teatro amateur a cargo de la Asociación Cultural Fumafeda. Santiago
18:30	"Piquiniqui" en el proyeo y conexiones en directo con el Centro Español y el Centro Asturiano de Tampa (Florida), La Nacional de Nueva York y La Sociedad Española de San Luis (Misuri)	
20:00	Fin de la jornada	

**Música y actividades para los más pequeños durante toda la jornada.
No olvides traer tu cesta de picnic con la merienda!**

Puedes consultar más detalles de este programa en la web: www.emigrantesinvisibles.com.
Acceso libre con aforo limitado de acuerdo con la normativa COVID

Organiza:  **EMIGRANTES INVISIBLES** ESPAÑOLES EN EE.UU.  **Xixón**  **Cultura y Educación**

En colaboración con:  **Xixón**  **Cultura y Educación**

RESCATA Y CELEBRA CON NOSOTROS LA MEMORIA DE LOS ASTURIANOS EMIGRADOS A EE.UU.



Where to find Asturian heritage

Florida



“Florida has long been a center for Spaniards, particularly in Tampa and vicinity. This movement has been influenced by the proximity of Cuba and the cigar industry. The tabaqueros of Spain-almost all of whom were **Asturians** originally-migrated to Cuba in considerable numbers during the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Eventually some of the cigar-makers established themselves in **Key West**; in 1886, following labor difficulties, a number of establishments moved to Tampa with thousands of employees. The concentration of Spaniards in this vicinity has remained strong since that time with a population from 3,000 to 5,000. Ybor City, a district east of Tampa's business section, has been the center of the Spanish community, featuring such organizations as **Centro Asturiano** and Centro Español.”

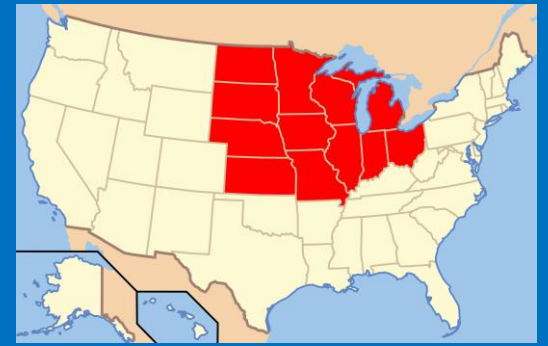
(Gómez 1962: 76)





Where to find them

Industrial Midwest



“In the heart of the industrial empire of the United States—in the **Midwest** along with **Pennsylvania** and **West Virginia**—a few thousands of Spaniards have settled in the employment patterns presented by heavy industry. In 1950 there were 5,157 Spaniards resident in the industrial states of Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia. The most compact group consisted of a concentration of **Asturian** coal miners who settled in West Virginia decades ago in such numbers as to rank that state as sixth or seventh “Spanish state” in the censuses of 1920, 1930, and 1940. In addition to these, there were also metalworkers in other West Virginia locations, such as Clarksburg. In the steel cities of Ohio and Pennsylvania can be found Galicians and Vizcayans; in the rubber factories of Ohio are others of the same regions.”

(Gómez 1962: 77)

Peculiarities of Asturian migration

Special character of the migration from Asturias:

“there are particular well-known cases of **concentrations** of population originating from very **specific areas**, which went to the United States at **particular dates**. This was the case, for example, with migration from **Asturians** (mainly Avilés and Castrillón) to West Virginia at the beginning of the 20th century (Menéndez, 2003). The fact that the population came from such a clearly delimited area was fairly typical of Asturian migration, providing a good example of ‘**chain migration**’: people already established in the American continent acted as a hook for their relatives and acquaintances to follow them (Anes, 1993).

(Saurí & Hanks 2012: 77)

Where to find them



De
romería
en West
Virginia

Where to find them

DONORA



In the website “Traces of Spain in the US”:

“The port of Philadelphia, and the coal fields and heavy industry throughout the state of Pennsylvania attracted a significant number of Spanish immigrants during the early decades of the twentieth century. Donora is a good case in point.

Donora is a borough of Pennsylvania, about twenty miles south of Pittsburgh. It was incorporated in 1901, and it gets its name from a combination of William Donner, the founder of the American Steel and Wire Corporation (one of the town’s major companies), and Nora Mellon, the wife of banker and investor Andrew Mellon. In the first decades of the twentieth century, Donora quickly developed into a major industrial site, where many immigrant workers –including a considerable number of Spaniards– would find jobs in the borough’s coal pits, steel mills, and zinc foundries.

Finding the data

In the website “Traces of Spain in the US”:

“Luis Argeo’s documentary film [AsturianUS](#) deals with the history of Spanish immigrants both in West Virginia and in Donora, Pennsylvania. The presence of coal, steel and zinc in the area of Asturias around Avilés helps explain the presence –and **circulation**– of **Asturian** immigrant workers among several industrial sites in the US where those industries were strong; in addition to West Virginia and Pennsylvania, we will find significant numbers of “asturianUS” employed in the zinc works of, for example, [Cherryvale, Kansas](#), [St. Louis, Missouri](#), and East St. Louis, Illinois.”

(Fernández)

Finding the data

According to Argeo:

“towns like **Spelter**, **Anmoore**, and **Moundsville** in West Virginia, and **Donora** in Pennsylvania” (<https://tracesofspainintheus.org/west-va/spelter>) are well-known reception areas of Asturians leaving their home land.



Finding the people

What did they
leave to us?

WRITTEN

ORAL

AUDIOVISUAL



Asturian language crossed the Atlantic

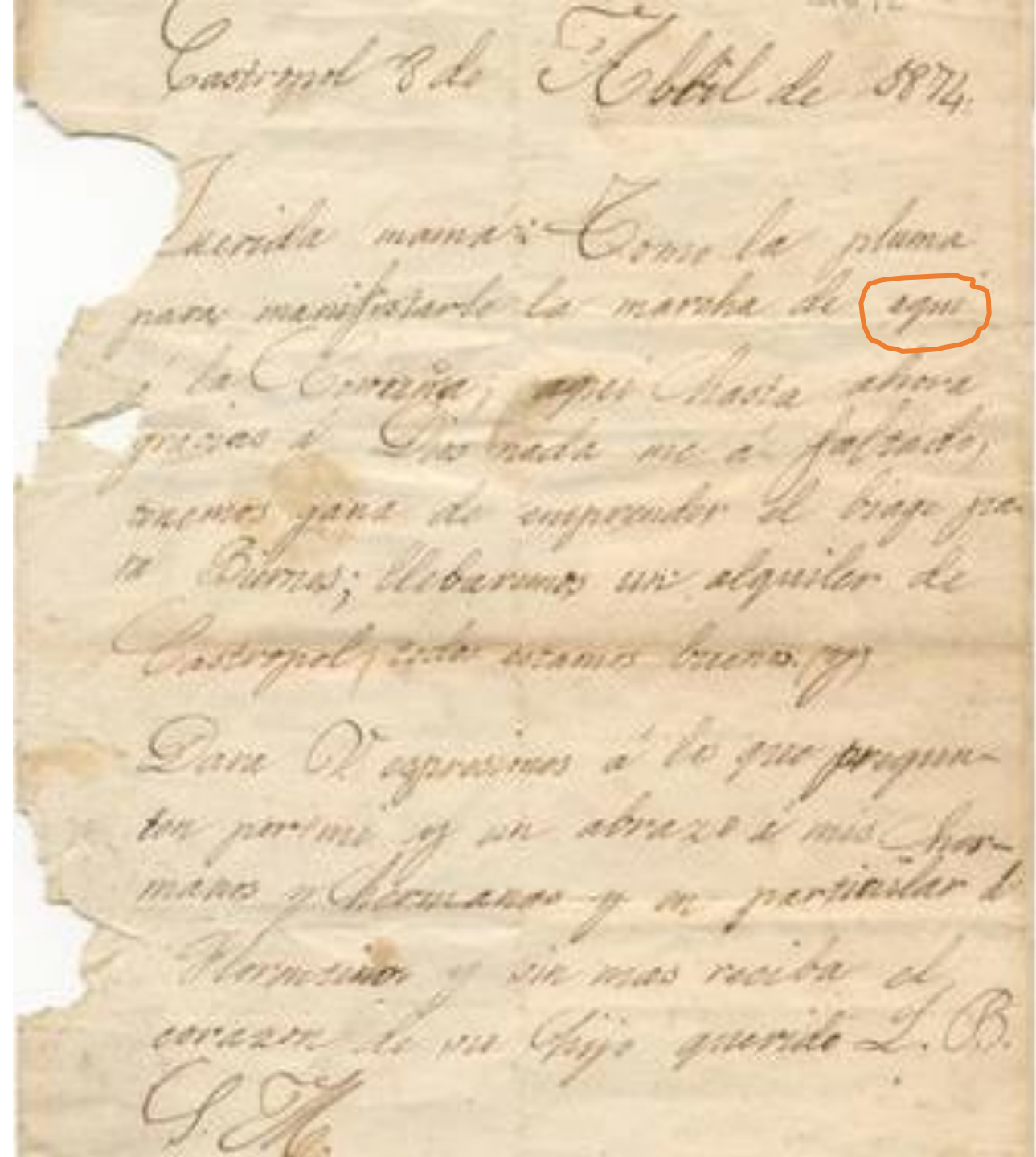
Letters were mostly written in Spanish, even though the immigrants were likely to speak Asturian. For many of them leaving Spain was **the first time** they felt the need to resort to pen and paper.

They show a situation of linguistic diglossia, where one language or language variety is employed in formal environments, while another coexists but is used in informal, relaxed and familiar communicative situations (Martínez Martín 2019)

Examples

First letter sent by José Moldes in 1874 (Martínez Martín 2010):

- some intruding Asturian expression which reveals the orality of written letters sent by Asturian migrants: “equí”



Castropol 3 de Abril de 1874.

Reciba mamá con la pluma
para manifestarle la marcha de equí
y la Comarca, equí hasta ahora
gracias a Dios nada me a faltado,
sueño para de emprender el viaje por
la Burela; llebaré un alquiler de
Castropol todo como bueno.

Dame D'agracias a lo que pregun-
tan por mí y un abrazo a mis her-
manos y hermanas y en particular a
Florimundo y sin mas reciba el
caroza de su hijo querido L. B.
J. M.

Examples

Letter of Sixto Fernández from La Havana:

“Y per últimu, pa terminá estes frases que son de triste ricordación pa les muyerines piquiñines, desas que ya piensen en mozu, y hasta algunes piensen en casase con el rapacín de sus primeres rilaciones, y, como te dixé, me diz el últimu con que hablé: —Empecipióse ella qui s’abía interao per una amiga qui iba marchame. Ella púsose muy triste y yo sentí pol cuerpu unes cosquillines que sintimos los enamoraos y que me ficieron cambiar de color: ella notólo y entós yo, pa disimulalo y non viera que yo era más débil quella (aunque agora, en tiempu de «suframesmo», no sé qué cosa qui dicin que les muyeres quieren conseguir votu como los hombres, pe lo cual andamos de cabeza con lo que hablen los pedióricos), dixíey que taba de purgante porque m’iba a marchar mañana. Na’bia terminao, cuando me fixo en ella y veo que tien los güeyos toos virolaos como pa dai un síncope. Pues bien, ¿sabes tú por qué púsose así? Porqui dicía que aquí, en L’Habana, había muchas neñes muy guapes y rescamplaes que incendian corazones a los más enemigos del dios Cupido. Al oiy Cupido, asustéme, porque sabía tanto la mi moza y empecé a sospechar que pa dentro de pocu van saber más que nosotros y el «sufraguismo» femenino va ser un hechu.”

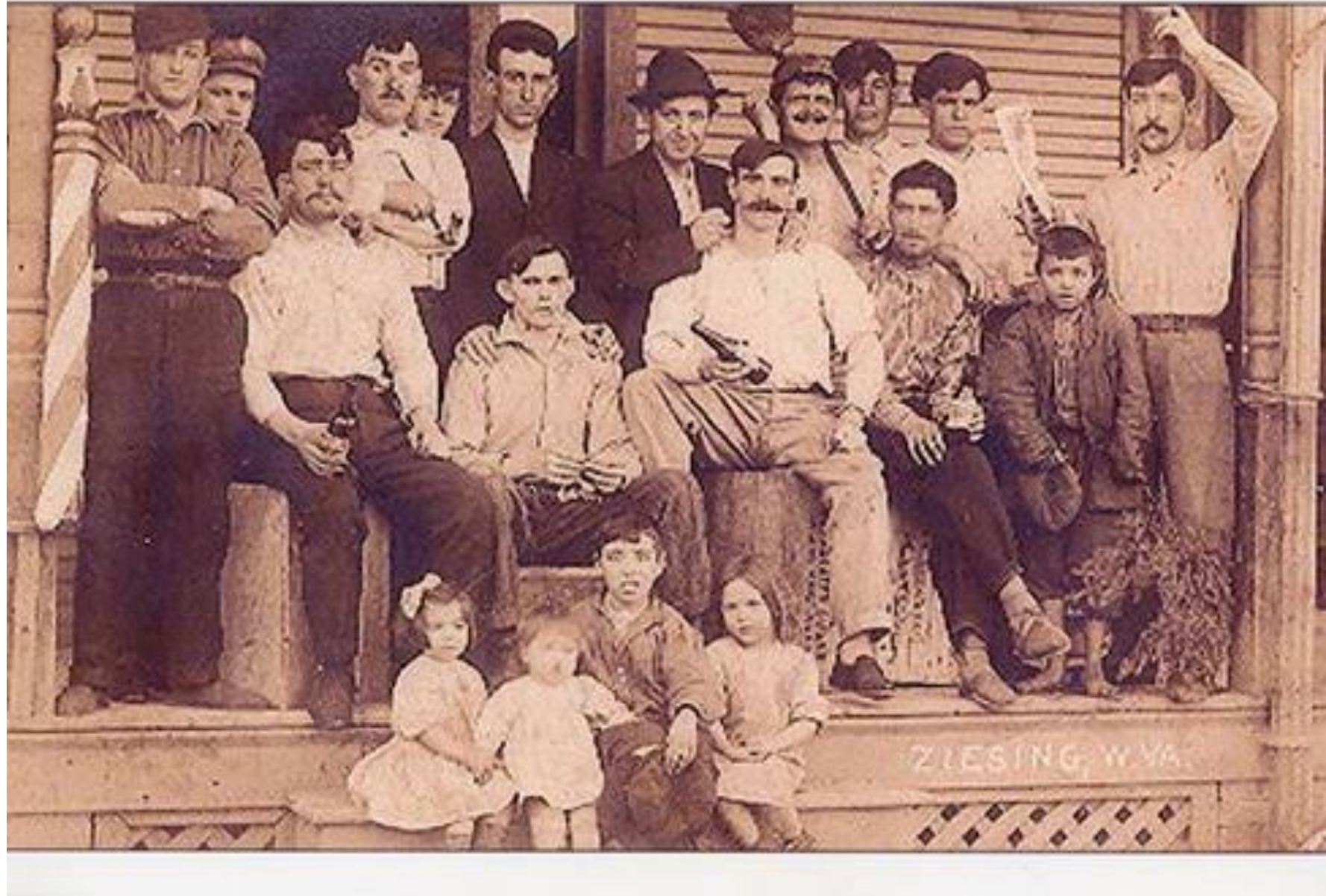
(Fernández and López Alfonso 2012: 33)

Examples

Audiovisual material such as Luis Argeo's filmed videos:

[Trailer](#)

- Asturian prosodic features: accent.
- Expressions of orality: “pa aquí”, “piciaron”, “iben venir pa”, “por causa de esto tuvieron”, “El madre de mio ma”, “El probe hombre”, “pa aquí”, “tovía”, “¿non sabes?”



Spanish Immigrants in the United States
María García, grabaciones de 1939:

La cigarrera



Sidney Robertson Cowell en Monterrey,
California el 18 y 19 de enero, 1939

Nombres

Saurí Colomer y Hanks 2012

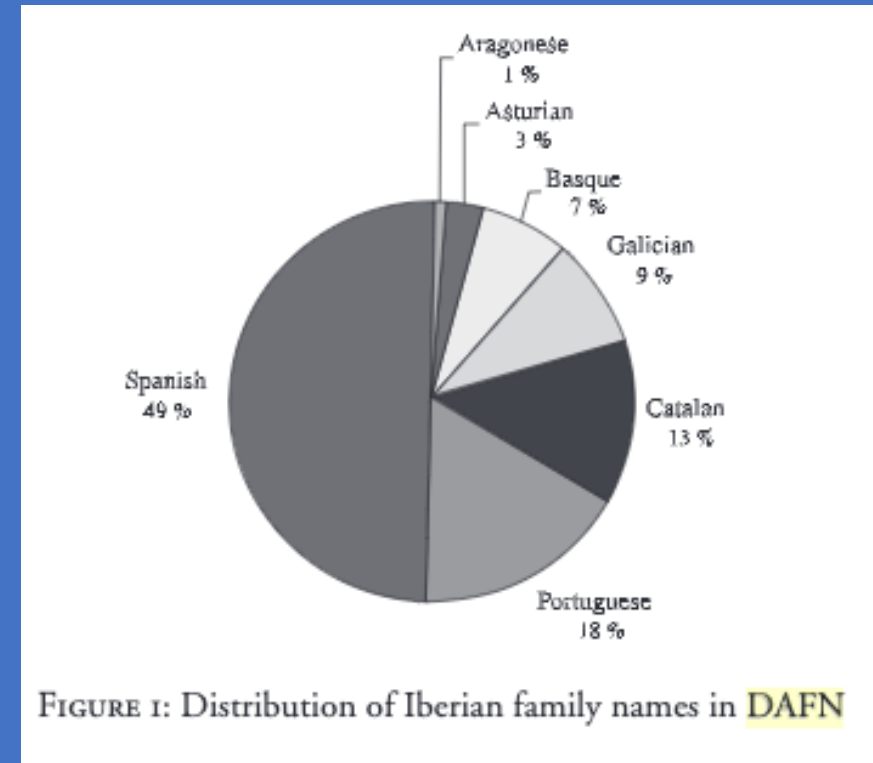
Saint Augustine de la Florida

- 1565: sailors.

Names such as Arango, Argüelles, Hevia, Miranda, Quirós, Solís and Valdés.

- 1572: 50 families arrived from Asturias

Dictionary of American Family Names (DAFN):
3% or 149 names of Asturian origin.



Challenges for the future

Although they retain traditions (making chorizo) and names, some migrants' descendants regret the **Asturian legacy** may disappear:

West Virginia Gazette (2005), Ron González, one of the descendants and residents in Spelter:

“The families cared for each other, the neighbors cared for each other.” “I look at it today and, ... ” he paused, shaking his head. “Sad, sad. Whatever legacy the original immigrants left is **slowly evaporating.**”
Following his father Alvarez. Fernandez. Garcia.
Gutierrez. Menendez. Vasquez.”

Challenges for the present and future

About the language:

“The Asturian immigrants themselves, of course, spoke Spanish. Their children were often bilingual, but the next generation — Ron Gonzalez’s generation — were English speakers ... unless they were talking to their grandparents. Gonzalez used to like to sit and listen to his mother and grandmother talk to each other in Spanish. At one time, he had a good command of the language, but **years of disuse** have washed away much of that ability.”

In a personal communication one of the descendants of Asturian migrants wrote to me:

“they tell me that my Spanish in the **old old Spanish** what I know is what I learned from my mother and grandma. The only thing don’t ask me to spell any of the words or phrases, I have no idea how to **spell them.**”

Cultural recognition

There is a problem of cultural, social and political recognition:

“The 2010 US Census failed to include an Asturian category, leaving Asturian-Americans with the only choice of checking the Hispanic category, unlike Basques or Scotch-Irish Americans, who, even though they do not come from independent countries, are recognized by the US Census with their own categories.”

Another member clarified the feelings of the Asturian community at the US Census' lack of sensibility with their heritage:

“The woman [census clerk] who ambushed me when I was entering my home put me through the drill. When she came to nationality I replied "**Asturiano**, Spanish." She asked "Mexican?," I said no, "Basque?," I replied no. She looked perplexed , and then angry that I wouldn't just be Mexican. I told her that my family lived thousands of miles from Mexico, and she just blinked at me. I saw her check Hispanic as she turned to leave.”

Hybridity In-betweenness

Anita Menéndez was one of the few Asturian-Americans who remained in Spelter. She learned to speak Spanish with her grandmother and continued speaking it fluently and with old Asturian turns:

“I’ll tell you something”, Anita says. “I’ve already traveled to Asturias three times, and the farms and the meadows remind me so much of these here [in West Virginia]. There in Spain, I am the American, and here I have always been the Spanish woman”.

Los asturianos de Tampa celebran sus orígenes con la exposición "Emigrantes invisibles": "Los españoles pusieron las bases del crecimiento de esta ciudad"

La exposición, que acaba de inaugurarse en el Tampa Bay History Center, es fruto de una profunda investigación del documentalista y periodista asturiano Luis Argeo y de James Fernández, catedrático de la Universidad de Nueva York, de orígenes asturianos





Thanks!



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