

Augustana College

Augustana Digital Commons

Race, Ethnicity, & Religion

Religion

Spring 2022

Where is Home?

Christina O'Connell

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/relgrace>



Part of the [Religion Commons](#)

Augustana Digital Commons Citation

O'Connell, Christina. "Where is Home?" (2022). *Race, Ethnicity, & Religion*.

<https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/relgrace/9>

This Student Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Religion at Augustana Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Race, Ethnicity, & Religion by an authorized administrator of Augustana Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@augustana.edu.

“I know it is wrong to not want them to move in, but it’s the way we feel.” “If one family moves in then pretty soon there will be others.” “I think that all races should have equal opportunity. But I think they should stay within their own groups.” “Negroes and Mexicans have as much right to love as we do, but they still depreciate property.”¹ These are all words that were written about by grandma and her two brothers when they moved to Moline, Illinois. They were born in the U.S. and had just been evicted from their apartment because the area was going to be industrialized. I’m going to tell part of my grandma’s story of her trying to find home. We will see how she was discriminated against because she moved into an area that was predominantly occupied by white people. I will make a connection between her lived experiences and Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands*. I will also explain how Moline can be looked at as a borderland area. Throughout this analysis we will see ignorance, hegemony, and diaspora. It is important to realize when those things are happening so we can learn from it and grow as a society.

My grandma, Clara Olvera Gonzales, was born in Roscoe Texas on August 12, 1927. Her and a couple of her siblings were born in the U.S. while the rest of her siblings were born in Mexico. Growing up she spent most of her time in Mexico. Her family couldn’t afford to put her through high school so she went away to live at an all girls Catholic school where she received her high school education. After high school she worked for a lawyer where she learned shorthand. When she was around 19 years old, her and her brothers moved to the U.S. and started creating roots in the Quad Cities so that they could bring the rest of their family over to the U.S. They lived in an apartment in Cook’s Point in Davenport for about a year before they, along with 22 other families were evicted from their homes so that the area could be industrialized. My

¹ “Reaction by Neighbors Differs.” *The Daily Dispatch*. March 18, 1952.

grandma and her brothers found a house they wanted to purchase in Moline and during the process of purchasing the home were met with backlash from the neighbors of the community. Around that time there were three main predominantly Mexican residential areas in the Quad Cities: Cook's Point in Davenport, La Yarda in Silvis, and Holy City in Bettendorf. Since my grandma and her brothers went into a predominantly white space, instead of moving to another predominantly Mexican space, they were met with backlash. Below are newspaper articles from March 18-21, 1952.

In Area South of Moline --- Call Up Contractor to Oppose Mexican Family

Two brothers and a sister, born in Texas but of Mexican heritage, now living in the Cook's Point area of Davenport, recently purchased a home in the outskirts of Moline and are indirectly encountering opposition in their attempt to move into the dwelling.

Involved are D. S. Olvera, 27, his brother, Ramon, 21, and their sister, Clara, 24. The home is located on the south side of Route 6 about one-half mile east of the Quad-City airport.

Although the Olveras were not contacted personally, the builder of the house, Richard Collignon, president of the Collignon Construction company, Davenport, who sold them the home, said today he had received seven telephone calls, five of them from unidentified callers.

No Violence Threatened

No threats of violence were made, Collignon said, but they questioned his judgment.

As a result, Collignon sent the Olveras a letter several days ago asking them to reconsider their purchase of the \$3,925 home they bought March 3. He offered to return their down payment of \$550 in addition to \$50 to compensate for work done on the house.

"However," Collignon said, "I did not threaten them with eviction. They've been asked to use their own judgment. They are certainly within their rights to refuse."

Meanwhile, the development lent emphasis to the activity of a citizen's advisory group in Davenport who have been making an effort to aid the 20 Mexican families in Cook's point.

The residents have received eviction notices effective May 1 from the property owner, A. F. Uehorff, Davenport industrialist, to make way for commercial development of the area.

The advisory group, spearheaded by Paul V. Ryan, Davenport realtor, has named two sub-committees to survey and weigh the financial status of each family living in the area.

"As far as Davenport is concerned, the eviction proceedings present a definite problem and obligation," Ryan said today.

He said he does not know how the Moline incident will effect the committee's project, but indicated similar incidents could well occur here.

Retain Attorney

Following receipt of Collignon's letter, the Olveras obtained the legal services of Atty. Charles B. Kaufmann, a Moline resident.

"The Olveras have a right to live on that property," he said. "Under the law there can be no racial discrimination under restrictive covenant. There's no ifs, and's or but's about it. It is unconstitutional to exercise a restrictive covenant."

Didn't Recognize Voices

Collignon said today that those who objected in their telephone calls to him did not appear to be immediate neighbors in that area.

"If they had been I would have recognized their voices," he said. He explained that the company had constructed 22 four-room dwellings in the area known as Country court No. 3.

All but five houses have been sold. He said he would have recognized their voices from having contracted the sale of the homes with them.

He objected to the Olvers being called Mexicans. "They are Americans just like you and me. They were born in Texas and they are not common Mexican 'wetbacks.' There are a lot of people of Russian extraction in the Quad-Cities but no one would object to their living next door."

"I investigated the credit and financial status of the Olvers before I sold them the house, Collignon continued, but I could find nothing against them. Collignon's letter dated March 12 said in part:

'Painful Thing'

"This is the most painful thing I've ever had to do, partly because of the shame that comes from the realization that there is such a thing as prejudice in the country and mostly because my own beliefs do not allow room for such an attitude . . ."

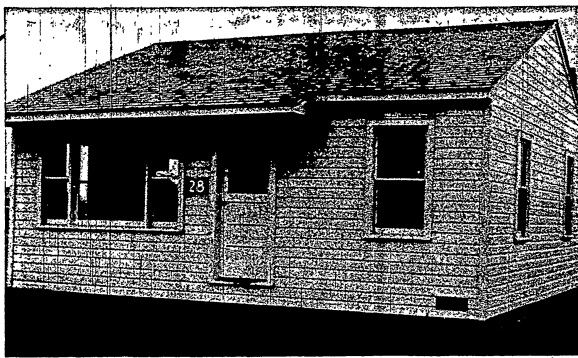
"I ask you to be bigger men than those who are causing the trouble. You are within your rights to refuse but I am forced to ask you to accept. Please call me when you have decided."

Collignon said the Olvers had not contacted him as yet.

The Olvers who have lived in Davenport since 1947 said they were shocked when they received Collignon's letter, but bore him no malice. The elder brother, however said he thought they were entitled to a decent home and the right to live as American citizens.

Meanwhile the citizens survey committee, headed by Charles Toney of Davenport will investigate the financial status of each family in Cooks Point this weekend.

"The results of this survey will, we hope, show what can be done and what might be done," Paul Ryan said. "We're certainly looking for an answer."



THIS IS THE HOUSE in Country Court No. 3, located east of Quad-City airport, which some neighbors do not want two brothers and a sister of Mexican descent to move into. The protesters claim property values in the vicinity would be decreased, but some other residents declare they have no objections to the three moving in. The interior of the 4-room house is not completed. That work would be done by the purchasers. (Dispatch Photo)

Reaction by Neighbors Differs

There are mixed feelings among the residents of Country Court No. 3, a housing development south of Moline, as to whether two brothers and a sister of Mexican descent would be welcomed into the area.

The three, consisting of D. S. Olvera, 27, his brother, Ramon, 21, and their sister, Clara, 24, have purchased a new house in the addition, located on the south side of Route 6 about a half mile east of Quad-City airport.

But protests from some of the other homeowners in the area have resulted in Dick Collignon, president of the Davenport construction firm which built the houses, asking the Olveras to take back their down payment to prevent any trouble which might result in their moving into the little community.

Some of the residents are highly put out about the prospect of the Olveras moving in.

But others say it doesn't matter to them if they settle there.

All those who are against the Olveras moving in use the argument that it would result in a devaluation of their property.

"I know it is wrong to not want them to move in, but it's the way we feel," one woman said.

"If one family moves in then pretty soon there will be others," Rose declared. "I think that all races should have equal opportunity. But I think they should stay within their own groups."

The Olveras are Texas-born and are American citizens.

Another man said that Negroes and Mexicans have as much right to live as we do, but they still depreciate property."

Asked if that feeling was pretty much prevalent among residents of Country Court No. 3, the man replied:

"Isn't it that way all over the country?"

To which the wife answered: "Some of these boneheads out here don't want anyone to move in."

It was argued by those who do not want the Olveras to move in that they were promised when they purchased homes in the area that no houses would be sold to Negroes or Mexicans.

However, Collignon this morning strongly denied that any such promises were made.

"Nothing of the sort was even implied," he said. "In fact now is the first time that any mention of such a matter has even arisen."

Such an agreement couldn't be enforced in a court of law even if it were made, however, according to a decision by the United States supreme court.

Other residents who were interviewed said they wouldn't care if the Olveras moved in.

In fact, two persons who live near the house the Olveras purchased said that most of the people who live in that immediate vicinity have no objection to their moving in.

One man said that he had met D. S. Olvera and that "he talked nice and seemed nice."

"I don't think they (the protesters) can say anything about the boy because they haven't even met him," the man declared.

Olvera Family To Move In, Says Lawyer

Atty. Charles Kaufman of Moline said today the Olvera family of Cook's Point, Davenport, probably will move into their newly purchased home on the outskirts of Moline.

Although the Olvera brothers were willing to occupy their home, they have hesitated during the past week because of hesitancy of their sister, Clara, 24. However, Kaufman said today the sister said she would agree to the proposed move.

"I plan to have another talk with the older brother tomorrow," Kaufman said, "but it looks like they will go ahead with their plans."

Olveras Will Move Soon to Moline Home

DAVENPORT — The Olveras of Cook's Point will soon be residents of the new housing area south of Moline, and east of Quad-City airport along Route 6.

Charles Kaufmann of Moline, their attorney, said today the family has definitely decided to occupy their newly-purchased dwelling.

The actual moving date, however, has not been set, pending a conference with their attorney this afternoon.

"We hope our moving in will not cause trouble," D. S. Olvera, 27, eldest member of the family, said today. "Our friends say the protests which have been received do not represent the true feeling of people in this area."

Assured Protection

Rock Island County Sheriff Morris Muhleman has assured the Olveras protection "against any difficulty" which may arise.

Olvera, his brother, Ramon, 21, and their sister, Clara, 24, who keeps house for her two working brothers, purchased the \$3,925 home last March 3 from the Collignon Construction company, Davenport.

As a result of several telephone calls from Moline residents protesting the sale, Richard Collignon, company president, sent the Olveras a letter offering to return their \$550 down payment. He made it plain, however, that he did not condone prejudice evidenced against the Olveras.

The brothers and sister were born in Texas but are of Mexican heritage, and have lived in Davenport since 1947. They are among the 23 families facing eviction May 1 in the Cook's Point area, which is being cleared for industrial development.

2 3 4 5

The reactions of the neighbors show ignorance, hegemony, and a resist of diaspora. Townes states “ In postmodern America, discourse on “the Other” often becomes an excuse to remain ignorant and arrogant about our illiteracy of other peoples—their thoughts, their religions, their politics, their values, their social structures, their moral landscapes—their isness/ontology—both mundane and radical.”⁶ Had my grandma and her brothers not move in, the implications could be that the neighbors remain ignorant. Eventually the neighbors got to know my grandma and her brothers and they got along quite well. Had hegemony won this fight, those neighbors would have missed out on that growth.

The reaction of the owner also shows hegemony and a resist of diaspora. He was giving in to what the neighbors wanted. There were no financial issues with the purchase, their only issue was the color of their skin. Where did he think they should go? One of the neighbors mentioned that “they should stay within their own groups.”⁷ As discussed earlier, this idea doesn’t help anyone. It keeps people in a state of ignorance.

One reason my grandma and her brothers were able to purchase the house is because restrictive covenants were illegal. “Racially restrictive covenants refer to contractual agreements that prohibit the purchase, lease or occupation of a piece of property by a particular group of

² “In Area South of Moline - - - Call Up Contractor to Oppose Mexican Family.” *The Daily Dispatch*. March 18, 1952.

³ “Reaction by Neighbors Differs.”

⁴ “Olvera Family To Move In, Says Lawyer.” *The Daily Dispatch*. March 20, 1952.

⁵ “Olvera Will Move Soon to Moline Home.” *The Daily Dispatch*. March 21, 1952

⁶ Emilie Maureen Townes, *Womanist ethics and the cultural production of evil* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 35.

⁷ “Reaction by Neighbors Differs.”

people.”⁸ The newspaper article states that it was not legal to exercise a restrictive covenant but it was only in 1948, 4 years prior, when

the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Shelley v. Kraemer* that these covenants were legally unenforceable and violated the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment. Although racial restrictive covenants were no longer legally enforceable, they were not illegal to establish and privately enforce. Because of this, these covenants remained commonplace in much of the nation until 1968, when the Fair Housing Act made them explicitly illegal.⁹

It is unclear if the neighbors did actually sign restrictive covenants but apparently one neighbor thought they did. Had they been in another neighborhood that privately enforced them, my grandma and her siblings probably would not have had any chance at purchasing a house. It wasn't until 16 years later that they became explicitly illegal.

My grandmother moved from one borderland to another. Her life started on the U.S. side of the U.S.-Mexico border, but was forever determined by the Mexico side. Because of her race/ethnicity she was not accepted in Moline, where her citizenship and access to land were tenuous. She was evicted at no fault of her own and once displaced was resisted when attempting to settle in Moline. To be a chicana woman in America is to live in a borderland. There is no way to know everything she experienced, but reading the stories of others and knowing that could have very well been my grandma or other relatives that that was happening to made me empathetic towards those situations. Let's back up and first discuss this idea of borderlands. *Borderlands* explains:

La frontera (the border) is also the geographical area that is most susceptible to la mezcla (hybridity), neither fully of Mexico nor full of the United States. Anzaldúa argues that living in the borderlands creates a third space between cultures and social systems. The word "borderlands" denotes that space in which antithetical elements mix neither to

⁸ Bill Burding, “Racially restrictive covenants still appear in public records,” HousingWire, HW Media, October 29, 2021, <https://www.housingwire.com/articles/racially-restrictive-covenants-still-appear-in-public-records/>

⁹ Racially restrictive covenants

obliterate each other nor to be subsumed by a larger whole, but rather to combine in unique and unexpected ways.¹⁰

Moline could be seen as a borderland area, and I wonder if my grandma saw it that way.

Living in Cook's Point, her and her brothers were in a Mexican community. And there were other Mexican communities in the area, but there were also areas that were predominantly white communities where they were seen as outsiders, like when they moved to Moline. Throughout the years, more and more Mexicans moved to Moline. Mexican restaurants, including El Pavito, a restaurant my grandma's family owned, and Mexican stores popped up and there was, and still is a mix of Mexican and American cultures in the city. *Borderlands* states:

For Anzaldúa, the borderlands are important not only for the hybridity that occurs there, but also for the perspective they afford to their inhabitants. Living between two countries, two social systems, two languages, two cultures, results in understanding experientially the contingent nature of social arrangements. Thus, Anzaldúa asserts, living in the borderlands produces knowledge by being within a system while also retaining the knowledge of an outsider who comes from outside the system.¹¹

Still being outsiders, my family had to conform and try to fit in. One way they had to conform was by speaking english. When my mom was growing up, her teachers told my grandparents to stop speaking spanish to my mom and her siblings because they didn't want them speaking spanish in school. Anzaldúa touches on this idea as well:

At the time that Anzaldúa was attending schools in South Texas it was not uncommon for children to be physically punished for speaking Spanish in and outside of the classroom. Mexican culture was explicitly considered inferior to U.S. culture and the ethos was one of compulsory, complete and absolute assimilation to U.S. culture, language, and norms. The terrible irony was that in some areas of the Valley at least 85% of the residents were of Mexican descent whose families had, like Anzaldúa's, resided in the area before Texas was part of the United States.¹²

¹⁰ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* (Aunt Lute Books, 1987), 6.

¹¹ Anzaldúa, 7.

¹² Anzaldúa, 5.

This is completely heartbreaking for so many reasons. My grandparents would not speak Spanish to me because the school had told them to stop speaking Spanish when my mom was a child. Now after doing more research I wonder if they had heard of children being physically punished and did not want that to happen to us. It made me think about how the language just stopped right there, it wasn't passed down to us. Something that is part of my culture that I haven't been able to experience with my family. It made me wonder what else was lost because my family had to try to fit in to survive.

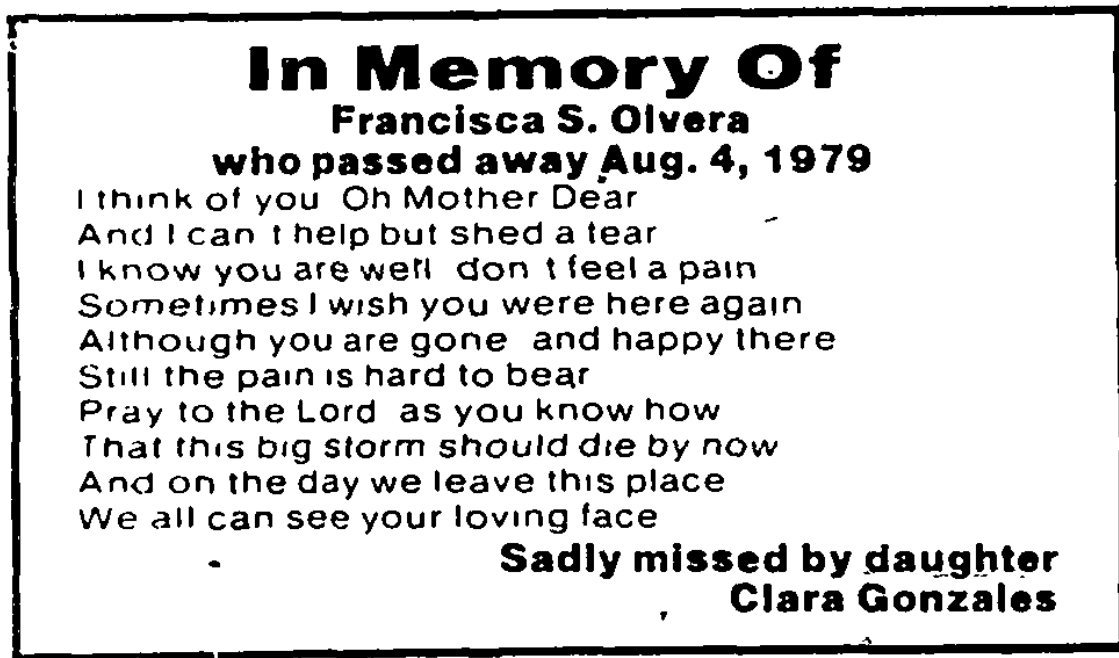
Going back to life experiences from *Borderlands*, below is a story that really stood out to me:

In the fields, la migra. My aunt saying, "No corran, don't run. They'll think you're from the other side. In the confusion, Pedro ran, terrified of being caught. He couldn't speak English, couldn't tell them he was fifth generation American. Without papers—he did not carry his birth certificate to work in the fields. La migra took him away while we watched. They took him. He tried to smile when he looked back at us to raise his fist. But I saw the shame pushing his head down, I saw the terrible weight of shame hunch his shoulders. They deported him to Guadalajara by plane. The furthest he'd ever been to Mexico was Reynosa, a small border town opposite Hidalgo, Texas, not far from McAllen. Pedro walked all the way to the Valley. They took him—and he was without a penny. He arrived on foot from Guadalajara.¹³

Reading this excerpt from Anzaldúa made me think about my grandma. It made me wonder if she had to carry her birth certificate with her any time she left her house. It made me think about how scary it must have been to know that even though you are a U.S. citizen, you could be sent to Mexico for not having your birth certificate with you just because of the color of your skin. It made me think about how brave she was to be away from most of her immediate family, in a place where she stood out as an outsider. She lived away from her family in high school so she could get an education, and then not long after that moved to the U.S. with her brothers. That is a lot of growing up to do at a young age. She loved her family so much, I can imagine being away

¹³ Anzaldúa, 26.

from them for so long must have been really difficult. I found a piece she wrote in the newspaper a year after her mother died.



14

Some of my earliest memories are with my grandma. I always saw her as this amazing, kind woman who loved me so much. I didn't know everything she had done so that I could even be there with her in those moments. We need to have empathy and make an effort to understand each other, to understand where we have come from, so we can grow as people and as a society. My grandma and her brothers came to the U.S. to find home and provide more opportunities for generations to come. In the process they paved the way for so many, including me. I am proud of where I come from, and I am thankful for all they did.

¹⁴ Clara Gonzales, "In Memory Of." *The Daily Dispatch*. August 4, 1980.

Bibliography

Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands*. Aunt Lute Books. 1987.

Burding, Bill. "Racially restrictive covenants still appear in public records." HousingWire. HW Media, October 29, 2021.

<https://www.housingwire.com/articles/racially-restrictive-covenants-still-appear-in-public-records/>

Gonzales, Clara. "In Memory Of." *The Daily Dispatch*. August 4, 1980, 16.

"In Area South of Moline - - - Call Up Contractor to Oppose Mexican Family." *The Daily Dispatch*. March 18, 1952, 1, 3.

"Olvera Family To Move In, Says Lawyer." *The Daily Dispatch*. March 20, 1952, 2.

"Olvera Will Move Soon to Moline Home." *The Daily Dispatch*. March 21, 1952, 40.

"Reaction by Neighbors Differs." *The Daily Dispatch*. March 18, 1952, 1, 3.

Townes, Emilie Maureen. *Womanist ethics and the cultural production of evil*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 2006.