PROFESSOR'S WORK PUTS SPOTLIGHT ON LATINO/A HISTORY

World War II was an era of both opportunity and conflict for many Mexican American women on the home front, according to Elizabeth Escobedo, associate professor of Latina/o history. Escobedo explores the complexities of the war on the lives of these women in her recently published book, *From Coveralls to Zoot Suits: The Lives of Mexican American Women on the World War II Home Front*.

"This extraordinary historical moment allowed for women of Mexican descent to earn unprecedented wages, to make demands of the state as essential wartime workers, to escape the rigid confines of their barrio homes, and to interact more frequently with women and men of different backgrounds," said Escobedo. "However, wartime conditions and new attitudes of racial liberalism did not always swing doors of acceptance open wide."

"Mexican American women still faced workplace inequities, in addition to communal and familial resistance to their broadening public presence," she added. "Yet, in the end, home front life offered women of Mexican descent an abundance of new options to challenge traditional gender and racial norms."

Escobedo was working on her book project in 2011 when she met a television producer who had been commissioned by PBS to produce an episode focused on World War II for a six-hour documentary series on Latino Americans. She was formally interviewed for the series and assisted with content and research materials during the production process.

"Latino Americans is the first major documentary series for national television that chronicles the rich and diverse historical experiences of Latinos in the United States," said Escobedo. "The series traces the five-hundred-year-plus history of Latinos in North America, capturing the varied histories of communities including Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Cubans, and Central and South Americans, and their tremendous, long-standing contributions to the United States."

Escobedo has a Ph.D. from the University of Washington. She has been at DU since 2007, and specializes in 20th century Mexican American history. In 2007-2008, she received a Ford Foundation Postdoctoral Fellowship, which enabled her to take time off from teaching to work on her book.
Escobedo enjoys teaching a wide range of topics in U.S. history, including modern America, the Latina/o and Chicana/o experience, women and gender, and the history of race and ethnicity in America.

“One of my favorite things about teaching is that ‘aha!’ moment when students connect with history personally,” Escobedo said. “Too often I find that students come to the classroom having taken classes in high school that ignored categories of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. Many students come to believe that U.S. history does not include women, people of color, and members of the LGBT community—in many cases, their own history. Much of my course curricula seek to inform students of the history of race and gender in our nation, enabling them to not only be better-informed, but to be global citizens who see and understand how their stories are linked to those of others.”

“I try to teach students that history is not just about ‘great’ men and women but also about ordinary people living day-to-day,” she added. “It is my hope that students will not only learn to view their communities as a valuable resource, but also to use the knowledge gained in the classroom to better their world.”

More information on Escobedo’s book.

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