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Sacramento en El Movimiento: Chicano Politics in the Civil Rights Era

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in
History

by
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2010

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2010

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PREFACE



Image 1: “Bridge,” Freeport Bridge, Freeport, CA. Marchers approaching state capitol. (Courtesy of Center for Sacramento History, Farm Labor Folder, SBPM5221, 4-10-1966.)

On Easter Sunday, April 10, 1966, tens of thousands of migrant farm workers and their supporters chanted “¡SÍ SE PUEDE, SÍ SE PUEDE!” (“Yes We Can, Yes We Can!”) in unison as they approached California’s capitol. Armed with flags of the image of La Virgen de Guadalupe and the black eagle (the United Farm Workers Union’s emblem) the marchers—whether they knew it or not at the time—were making history in the fight for Mexican labor rights in the United States. César Chávez and Dolores Huerta had organized a successful pilgrimage from Delano to Sacramento

to shed light on the poor working conditions of grape pickers. In her speech at the state capitol, Huerta addressed California Governor Edmund Brown and the California legislature on behalf of farm workers: “We are the citizens and residents of the state of California and we want to have rules set to protect us in this state.”¹ In making these demands, Huerta asserted farm workers deserved the human and civil rights granted to other California residents.



Image 2: UFW Co-founders, Dolores Huerta (right) and César Chávez (left). Huerta speaking at the UFW rally at state capitol following dramatic 300-mile farm worker march from Delano to Sacramento. (Courtesy of Center for Sacramento History, 83/149/2078, 4-10-1966.)

The marches orchestrated by the UFW are synonymous with the Chicano Movement. It was a well-known and -represented event, yet we know little else about what transpired in the Sacramento region before, during, and after the Delano farm

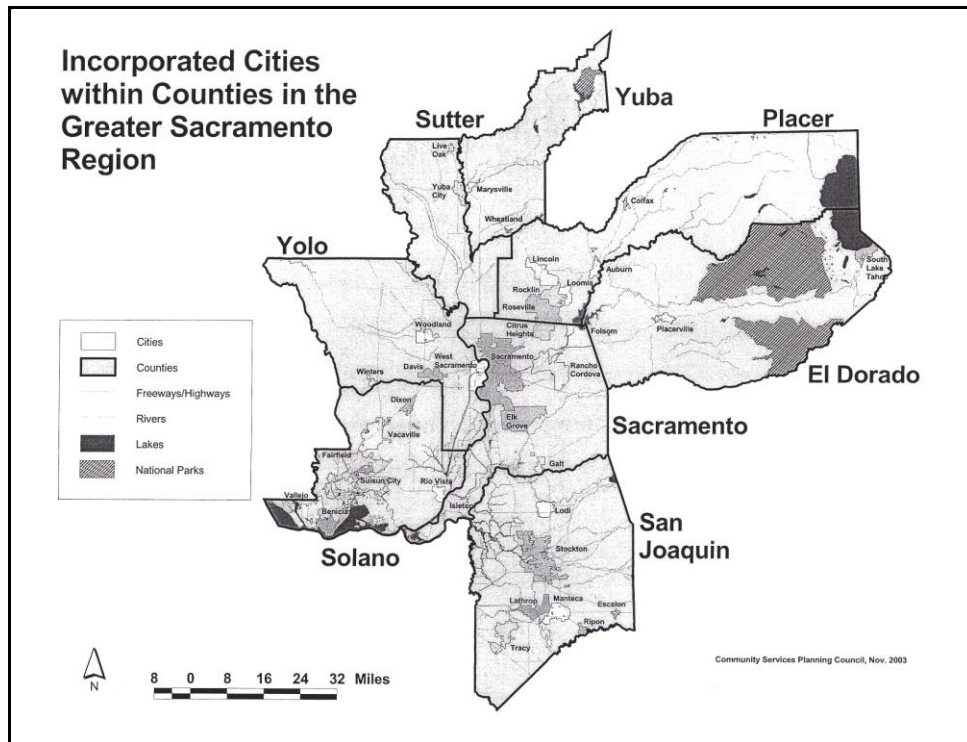
¹ “Marchers: Capitol Protest Ends Grape Strikers’ Walk,” *The Sacramento Bee*, 11 April 1966, p. A10. Also see: Susan Ferris and Ricardo Sandoval, *The Fight in the Fields: Cesar Chavez and the Farmworkers Movement* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1997): 122-123.

workers went home. What kinds of movements did Chávez and Huerta inspire and/or draw on? What was the context of the greater Sacramento valley in terms of political protest and activism?² Sacramento, as the state capitol, has functioned as a symbolic point wherein the imagery of protest has been particularly prominent and Mexicans in the region have been impacted by those demonstrations.³ Indeed, by the time Chávez, Huerta, and their followers made their way to the capitol steps they had entered a terrain marked with an extensive historical trajectory of ethnic Mexican political organizing. Mexicans had historic roots in the Greater Sacramento Valley stretching as

² For purposes of this dissertation the Greater Sacramento Region/Valley is defined here as El Dorado, Placer, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Solano Sutter, Yolo, and Yuba Counties. Sacramento has served as the social and cultural hub for ethnic Mexicans residing in surrounding counties. The eight-county region is expected to grow from a year 2000 population of 2.84 million, to 4.27 million by 2025 (an increase of 50 percent). Nancy Findeisen, President, Community Services Planning Council, Inc., “A Regional View of Social Disparities: A Visual Examination of the Socio-Economic Status of the Greater Sacramento Region” (Sacramento, CA: January 2004): 5.

³ I use the term “Mexican” or “ethnic Mexican” to refer to the combined population of the people of Mexican descent and heritage in the United States regardless of their actual nationality and/or citizenship status. I employ the term “Latino” as an umbrella term for descendants and nationals of Mexico, Central America, South America, and the Caribbean who reside in the United States regardless of nationality and/or citizenship status. Since the 1980s, large numbers of political refugees from Central and South America have settled in California and other states in the U.S. Thus, the term “Latino” played a more significant role during the 1990s than in previous decades when Mexicans were culturally dominant in California and the U.S. Southwest. Since the Chicano Movement of the late 1960s, many Chicano and Latino activists have viewed the term “Hispanic” as derogatory. They argue that the term strips them of their indigenous and African ancestry. Hence, I will not use the term “Hispanic” to refer to peoples from Central America, South America, and the Caribbean. In the cases where the term appears, it will be surrounded by quotation marks. The term “Chicano” is often used when referring to persons of Mexican ancestry raised and/or born in the United States. However, the term also carries political meaning—those who self-identify as “Chicano” often adhere or subscribe to a philosophical set of political convictions that grew out of the social activism of the 1960s and 1970s. They believe in the formation of a self-determined “imaginary” nation that aims to improve the conditions of its people in the United States. For purposes of this paper, I will use the terms Chicano and Mexican interchangeably and will employ it when dealing with students and/or persons who exercise political action against what they perceive to be racial, social, and economic injustices. Furthermore, given that this study is situated in the midst of the Chicano Movement, and many of the persons involved identified as Chicano, the term “Chicano” is perhaps more applicable.

far back as the Gold Rush. In fact, by the 1920s, mutual aid societies were well established to assist with the economic and social needs of the Mexican populace.



Map 1: Greater Sacramento Region Map. (Courtesy of Community Services Planning Council, Inc., “A Regional View of Social Disparities: A Visual Examination of the Socio-Economic Status of the Greater Sacramento Region,” Sacramento, CA: January 2004.)

And as was made clear in the famous UFW march, leaders in Sacramento saw themselves as part of a larger national network of Chicano community. Members of organizations such as the Mexican American Political Association (MAPA) were present to welcome the Delano marchers as they neared Sacramento.⁴ Ray Carrasco,

⁴ Founded in 1959 in California, MAPA emerged onto the political scene during a time when Mexican American activists increasingly began to demand political and civil rights on their own terms, not by divorcing themselves from their Mexican heritage, but by asserting their ethnic background. In other words, unlike the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), MAPA members refused to shy away from their heritage, but rather chose to re-claim it. According to historian David G. Gutiérrez, MAPA and similar-minded “political groups hoped to empower the Mexican American community by contributing to the election of Mexican American candidates, organizing resistance

the president of the Sacramento chapter of MAPA, greeted the farm workers from a sound truck, “The sleeping giant has opened his eyes and is beginning to stretch. This movement will soon arouse the nation.”⁵ For Carrasco, the march signified a colossal moment in Chicano political activism and finally a much awaited opportunity to make known the injustices endured by the Chicano community in Sacramento and the broader region.

against such disenfranchising policies as gerrymandering and poll taxes, and pressuring the Democratic and Republican parties to include Mexican Americans in mainstream politics.” MAPA, and others like it, represented a significant shift in political strategy tactics by employing ideals of ethnocentrism to mobilize the Mexican American and Mexican immigrant community. This strategy would later be adopted by Chicano militants. Far from being a militant group, nevertheless, MAPA did not fall apart or disappear by the time of the Chicano Movement. In Sacramento, at least, it continued to serve a central role in the Mexican American political landscape. Indeed, by the time of the Chicano Movement mainstream groups like MAPA suppressed their own objections and discord with Chicana/o militants perhaps because they realized that many of the problems they had worked tirelessly for were finally gaining national attention. This did not mean, however, that MAPA was a Chicano Movement organization, but rather that it conformed to some of the demands put forth by Chicano militants by participating in issues central to the Chicana/o/mexicana/o community. It is important to note that there were moments where MAPA activists participated and/or organized more militant actions such as in 1969 when the West End MAPA Chapter (which included Ontario, Upland, and Rancho Cucamonga) students orchestrated the first takeover of a school district in California. For the most part, though, MAPA continued to operate and depend on more mainstream political organizing tactics. Armando Navarro: *Mexican American Youth Organization: Avant-Garde of the Chicano Movement in Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995): 75-76. Also see: David G. Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995): 178, 181-183; Mario T. García, *Memories of Chicano History: The Life and Narrative of Bert Corona* (Berkeley: University of California, 1994): 245-259.

⁵ “Protest: Ranks Swell as Grape March Reaches Final Leg,” *The Sacramento Bee*, 10 April 1966.



Image 3: “Stop Destroying Our Raza,”
United Farm Workers Rally in
Stockton, CA. (Courtesy of Center for
Sacramento History, 83/146/2101,
1967.)

This dissertation will explore political activism, and the complex dynamics involved in the shifting formation of gender and ethno-cultural identities, and will pay particular attention to how local activists defined the notion of “community” in Sacramento during the Chicano Movement. It especially attempts to revisit notions of community that were employed as a unifying theme during the era. The notion of establishing utopian communities or communes in the United States was not solely a 1960s phenomenon. Indeed, utopian communities were originally instituted by religious communitarian societies—the Shakers, the Harmonists, the Mormons are all important examples—whose members, as true believers, considered themselves to be

a separate and consecrated people who were to live apart from a sinful world.⁶

Communitarian scholars tend to agree that the first major wave of communalism took place in the 1820-1850 era, with the second wave in the 1960s.⁷ Hence, the impulse to establish cohesive communities knit together by a common ideology—whether religious or political—and a shared vision of social harmony has been ever constant in American history.⁸ These ideals combined with a radical critique of American society, helped drive utopian visions of how communal living was to attain “a perfectly fulfilling existence.”⁹ Notions about establishing utopian communities were very

⁶ “As a chosen people, they were to build a city of God and await the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, which would usher in the thousand-year millennium of harmony, peace, and holiness. Religious communitarians established socially isolated but economically self-sufficient communities governed by specific scripturally based rules. Because human beings were sinful by nature, they sought to live ideal and pure lives away from the sins inherent in cities. Thus, separation would not only protect community members from persecution but also from enticements to deviate from the founder’s prescriptions for following the true ways of life.” Gerald and Patricia Gutek, *Visiting Utopian Communities: A Guide to the Shakers, Morovians, and Others* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1998): 1-2. Also see: Lawrence Foster, *Women, Family, and Utopia: Communal Experiments of the Shakers, the Oneida Community, and the Mormons* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1991).

⁷ Donald E. Pitzer, *America’s Communal Utopias* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997): xi. For studies on communitarianism and communities see: Bert Kaplan and Thomas F. A. Plaut, *Personality in a Communal Society: Analysis of the Mental Health of the Hutterites* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Publications, 1956); Werner O. Packull, *Hutterite Beginnings: Communitarian Experiments during the Reformation* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1995); Rainer Forst, *Contexts of Justice: Political Philosophy beyond Liberalism and Communitarianism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); C.F. Delaney, ed., *The Liberalism-Communitarianism Debate: Liberty and Community Values* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1984); Benjamin Gregg, *Thick Moralities, Thin Politics: Social Integration Across Communities of Belief* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Arthur J. Vidich, Joseph Bensman, Maurice R. Stein, eds., *Reflections on Community Studies* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1964); C. F. Delaney, ed., *The Liberalism-Communitarianism Debate: Liberty and Community Values* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1994); Christopher Clark, *The Communitarian Moment: The Radical Challenge of the Northampton Association* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995):

⁸ Donald E. Pitzer, *America’s Communal Utopias* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997): xi.

⁹ Rosebeth Moss Kanter, *Communes: Creating and Managing the Collective Life* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1973): 1.

much on the radar of Civil Rights activists in the 1960s and 1970s, especially among Black, Native American, and Chicano leaders who envisioned the formation of a group of self-determined and economically self-sufficient separatist communities for those they considered to be their constituencies. These activists espoused ideals of a safe haven wherein their cultural, linguistic, economic, educational, and social needs were met.

While there is no fixed definition of *community*, scholars—especially sociologists and anthropologists—have attempted to establish its meaning for some time. For instance, in 1955, sociologist G. A. Hillery Jr. in an article, “Definitions of Community: Areas of Agreement,” identified ninety-four definitions of community.¹⁰ More recently anthropologists have become more flexible in their definition of community by accounting not only for the growth of communication and transportation technology, but also by mass mobilization of goods and persons.¹¹ Historians have taken a cue from sociologists and anthropologists who have written extensively and have recognized that there are many types of communities. Yet,

¹⁰ G. A. Hillery Jr., “Definitions of Community: Areas of Agreement,” *Rural Sociology* 20 (1955). Also see: Colin Bell and Howard Newby, *Community Studies: An Introduction to the Sociology of the Local Community* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1971). In his work, Hillery found that there was one common thread among the definitions—all deal with people, while about three-quarters (73) of the definitions agreed on the joint inclusion of social interaction and common ties.

¹¹ Valerie J. Matsumoto, *Farming the Home Place: A Japanese American Community in California, 1919-1982* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993): 4.

proponents of a narrow definition of community continued to maintain that before the twentieth century the term was mainly tied to localities.¹²

These views on community, however, were challenged with Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* when he argued that it was not geographic location, nor was it personal interactions with individuals that establish communal ties, but rather it was a commonly held sense of "fraternity" that made it possible. In essence, he claimed, "communities are to be distinguished...by the style in which they are imagined."¹³ Immigrant groups provide the best lens for which this rings true, because regardless of nation-state boundaries fraternal ties tend to bind groups together. For purposes of this dissertation, community refers to the sense of affinity and solidarity that bound people of Mexican heritage together over a large geographic region. At the same time, this study acknowledges that ideals surrounding community are not fixed but rather fluid. It also accounts for human networks across the U.S.-Mexican border such as family and kinship groups, ethnic-based associations, and principles about sharing common history and culture. Indeed, the examination of Sacramento's multiple and varied networks, whether formal or informal, reflects the flexible nature of the Mexican ethnic community.

Chicanos—that is, American citizens of Mexican descent who have chosen this term as a self-referent—and other groups of color have formed geographic and social

¹² Orville Vernon Burton and Robert C. McMath, Jr., eds., *Class, Conflict, and Consensus Studies: Antebellum Southern Community Studies* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1982): xi-xii.

¹³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983): 6.

networks for some time. Similarly, then, Chicano activists espoused romanticized, even utopian, ideas about what it meant to belong to and work for the betterment of community. For them, the *Familia de La Raza* encompassed an expanded familial net bound together by a shared experience of marginalization and oppression. In essence, the concept of community forged in the 1960s and 1970s was not only geographically specific, but also used to describe cultural and ethnic ties across regional boundaries. Addressing this issue, prominent Chicano political scientist Mario Barrera observed that, “the most distinctive element [of the Chicano Movement] was the combining of communitarian and egalitarian goals under the ideological label of Chicanismo, and what might be seen as an almost nostalgic version of community.”¹⁴ They used community and equality in strategic ways, to bring people together, but they did not always practice it. Thus, the ideals surrounding community proved to be a necessary and successful organizing mechanism wherein Chicanos could instantly connect. “Nostalgia,” as noted by Barrera, not only aided as a rallying point, but proved to be a powerful tool to mobilize on a grass-roots basis. Hence, the notion of community was not only romanticized, but also exploited by activists to make the argument that their organizations best represented their interests. As would later be made clear, no singular organization or entity could fully speak for the needs of Chicanos across gender, class, regional, and generational lines.

Moreover, community has been a central trope in Chicano history and when examined historically, one can begin to discern how complex and controversial the use

¹⁴ Mario Barrera, *Beyond Aztlán: Ethnic Autonomy in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Praeger 1988): 44.

of the concept has been over time. This argument has been advanced by historian David G. Gutiérrez who claims that Chicanos and Latinos have from their earliest histories been “aware of the subtle and not-so-subtle social, cultural, and political distinctions that divide them.”¹⁵ As will also be made evident in this case study, the Chicano community has been plagued with internal divisions over citizenship/non-citizenship status, generations, language, political orientation, and class. Although little has been written about ideological splits, the 1960s and 1970s provide the clearest lens through which to examine these contradictions. In his exploration of the evolution of movement politics in Los Angeles, Ernesto Chávez supports this argument when he notes that the “failure of militant groups to recognize the heterogeneous nature and the inability to recognize and deal with the multifaceted and fractured ethnic Mexican community eventually led to the collapse of the Chicano Movement.”¹⁶ Chávez’s findings beg the question, “Did the Chicano Movement fail because its leaders constructed a narrow vision of community?” Although it is difficult to pinpoint exactly how and why the Chicano Movement fell apart, as with the trajectories of most social movements it is clear that there was no one singular movement or cause, but rather a blend and sometimes even opposing views and organizing tactics.

¹⁵ David G. Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: University of California, 1995): 2.

¹⁶ Ernesto Chávez, “¡Mi Raza Primero!”: *Nationalism, Identity, and Insurgency in the Chicano Movement in Los Angeles, 1966-1978* (Berkeley: University of California, 2002): 7 and 120.

As would be made clear at the closing of the Chicano Movement era, the notion of “community” could not sustain these mini-movements or episodes, as suggested by Chávez. The promotion of the idea of community, nevertheless, proved to be instrumental, if not ideal for organizing because of its elastic and even universal appeal. Perhaps no other slogan or notion was as widely accepted as the appeal to build a renewed “community” to mobilize ethnic Mexicans on a large scale. All the while, however, it was also fundamentally contentious because the ideals surrounding community, as Chávez argues, were potentially blinding, narrow-minded, and limiting. The most controversial question that arose at the time was, of course: who exactly encompassed community and therefore had the “right” to advance claims or solutions on its behalf? This case study demonstrates that this very question was the cause of much debate and dispute and often created division and tension in the Sacramento Chicano community.

The Chicano Movement emerged as an instance in the historical trajectory of Mexican American political activism—although it seems clear in hindsight that the movement marked a significant and transformative intensification of political activity in the Mexican-origin population as Lorena Oropeza eloquently argues in her work on this era.¹⁷ The Chicano Movement, like its immediate antecedent, the Black Power

¹⁷ Lorena Oropeza, *Raza Si! Guerra No!: Chicano Protest and Patriotism during the Viet Nam War Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005): 80. For additional works on the Chicano Civil Rights Movement see: Armando Navarro, “El Partido de La Raza Unida in Crystal City: A Peaceful Revolution,” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Riverside, 1974); Ignacio García, *Chicanismo: The Forging of a Militant Ethos Among Chicanos* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997); Armando Navarro, *The Cristal Experiment: A Chicano Struggle for Community Control* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999); Carlos Muñoz, Jr., *Youth, Identity and Power: The Chicano Movement* (New York: Verso, 1989); and Ernesto Vigil, *The Crusade for Justice: Chicano Militancy and the Government’s War on Dissent* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999);

Movement, was constructed in opposition to the pacifist and integrationist rhetoric of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1940s and 1950s. Activists of the earlier period had “sought slow, peaceful change through assimilation, through petitions for government beneficence, and through appeals of white liberal guilt.”¹⁸ By the mid 1960s Chicano youth challenged the old, integrationist orientations of their predecessors and gradually supplanted them with experiments in Chicano nationalism.¹⁹ The Chicano Movement, however, was not a unified entity. It was multi-stranded and broadly diverse, with many internal fissures and local correlations.²⁰ The insurgency was a complex phenomenon with unique traits in different localities that nevertheless tended to center on cultural nationalism and direct militant action. In its idealized form, the Chicano Movement, hoped to link people through goals, culture, and perceived notions of community. Today, it remains unmatched in its ability to reach an ethnic population across a vast geographic region.

Yolanda Alaniz and Megan Cornish, *Viva La Raza: A History of Chicano Identity and Resistance* (Seattle: Red Letter Press, 2008).

For additional works on the Chicano student movement refer to: Gerald Paul Rosen, “The Development of the Chicano Movement in Los Angeles, from 1967 to 1969,” *Aztlán* 4 (Spring 1973): 155-184; Juan Gómez-Quiñones, *Mexican Students Por La Raza: The Chicano Student Movement in Southern California 1967-1977* (Santa Barbara: Editorial La Cause, 1978); Armando Navarro, *Mexican American Youth Organization: Avant Garde of the Chicano Movement in Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995); Carlos Muñoz, “The Politics of Protest and Chicano Liberation: A Case Study of Repression and Cooptation,” *Aztlán* 5 (Spring and Fall 1974): 119-143; Carlos Muñoz and Mario Barrera, “La Raza Unida Party and the Chicanos Student Movement in California,” *Social Science Journal* 19 (April 1982): 101-120; Mario Barrera, *Beyond Aztlán: Ethnic Autonomy in Comparative Perspective* (New York: 1988).

¹⁸ Ramón Gutiérrez, “Community, Patriarchy and Individualism: The Politics of Chicano History and the Dream of Equality,” *American Quarterly* 45 (March 1993): 45.

¹⁹ Chávez, “¡Mi Raza Primero!”, 42.

²⁰ Chávez, “¡Mi Raza Primero!”, 3-7. Also see: David G. Gutiérrez, “Significant to Whom?: Mexican Americans and the History of the American West,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 24, No. 4, (November 1993): 527; Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 183-187.

By the time of the Chicano Movement, Chicanos had been exposed to well more than a decade of Civil Rights uprisings in the American South and were keenly aware of personalities like Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, and Malcolm X through different media outlets. For instance, in a recent interview, Laura Llano, a Chicana activist and artist in Sacramento during this epic moment, recalled sitting down to watch the news with her father and hearing about the African American Civil Rights Movement, and more specifically about the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).²¹ She remembered,

You heard [it] on television. I was glued to what was happening in Alabama and Mississippi...I hear SNCC and I hear about the fact that they took over various places and [were involved in] voter recruitment because Blacks couldn't vote. That's what they were doing. They were trying to get voters registered.²²

Hence, by the time Llano attended Sacramento City College in 1964 she had a heightened sense of herself as a Chicana and about the civil injustices committed

²¹ The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was founded at the University in Raleigh, North Carolina on April 1960. The students who met in Atlanta no longer saw themselves as demonstrators but as leaders of a revolutionary direct-action movement. The formation of SNCC followed the sit-ins by only a few months and not only solidified student involvement in the movement but places students in leadership roles. The formation of SNCC helped transform the student movement from one that emphasized small-scale protests to a sustained force that would challenge racism throughout American society. The students presumed they could truly bring an end to race as a source of power or privilege, of status or entitlement. For more information on SNCC see: Howard Zinn, *SNCC: The New Abolitionists* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964); Cleveland Sellers, *The River of No Return: The Autobiography of a Black Militant and the Life and Death of SNCC* (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 1990); Wini Breines, *The Trouble Between Us: An Uneasy History of White and Black Women in the Feminist Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); David Levering Lewis, "Blacks and Jews in the Civil Rights Movement" in Jack Salzman, Adina Back, and Gretchen Sullivan Sorin, Eds., *Bridges and Boundaries: African Americans and American Jews* (New York: George Braziller, 1992); Donald Von Eschen, Jerome Kirk, and Maurice Pinard, "From Civil Rights to Black Power: The Case of SNCC, 1960-1966" in John H. Bracey, Jr., August Meier, and Elliot Rudwick, *Conflict and Competition: Studies in the Recent Black Protest Movement* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1971).

²² Laura Llano, interview by author, 14 June 2010, Sacramento, California, audio recording.

against African Americans and, to a lesser extent, ethnic Mexicans. Clearly, then, the African American Civil Rights Movement helped shape Chicano political thought as Chicanos increasingly came to terms with their own second-class status in the United States.

Although Chicano scholars generally agree that the Black Power Movement did inspire Chicano leadership, they have been reluctant to explore the extent into which it did and its manifestation.²³ The Black Power Movement had an overriding affect on Chicano activists and they were genuinely moved by the demands put forward by Blacks for equality and justice. After all, Chicanos understood first-hand the meaning and power of oppression since they were also subject to over one-hundred years of U.S. colonization, not including 500 years of European colonialism. Appropriating the themes of “by any means necessary” and the “Black is beautiful” slogan espoused by the Black Power Movement, Chicanas/os were convinced that change could only come by forceful and aggressive direct action.²⁴ For instance, Olivia Puentes-Reynolds expressed this correlation with the Black Power Movement

²³ Oropeza, *Raza Si! Guerra No!*, 6.

²⁴ For works on the Black Power Movement see: Peniel E. Joseph, ed., *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Bettye Collier-Thomas and V. P. Franklin, *Sisters in the Struggle: African-American women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2001); Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Kathleen Cleaver and George Katsiaficas, eds., *Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party* (New York: Routledge, 2001); William L. Van Deburg, *A New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-1975* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Hugh Pearson, *The Shadow on the Panther: Huey Newton and the Price of Black Power in America* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1994); Clyde Taylor, *Vietnam and Black America: An Anthology of Protest and Resistance* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1973); Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981).

at the first Chicano Youth Liberation Conference, sponsored by the Crusade for Justice in Denver, Colorado in March 1969, where she recited this poem:

I've heard Black is beautiful...but
I WANT BROWN IS BEAUTIFUL
NO MORE, WHITE MAN, NO MORE
GAVACHO, GAVACHA
I'm brown, I'm beautiful
I'm a Chicana
y sabes que [and you know what], white man pig educator
no chingues conmigo más [don't mess with me no more]!²⁵

Here, Puentes-Reynolds clearly draws on one of the Black Power Movement slogan which indicates that Chicanos were influenced by the rhetoric espoused by Black militants. This sentiment was also expressed by Sacramento Movement participant, Graciela B. Ramírez, who in a recent an oral interview shared “Blacks were very, very important to us. They were, you may say, our role models.”²⁶ For Ramírez, Black activists paved the way to make the Chicano Movement possible or at the very least informed it.

Chicano militant's claims that they represented the true interests of the ethnic Mexican community in the United States “provoked strong, and even hostile, reactions from more moderate, old-line Mexican American political activists, who tended to view the militant's demands as unrealistic, counter-productive, or even racist.”²⁷

²⁵ Quoted in, Isidro D. Ortiz, “Si, se puede!” Chicana/o Activism in San Diego at Century's End” in Richard Griswold Del Castillo, *Chicano San Diego: Cultural Space and the Struggle for Justice* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2007): 132.

²⁶ Graciela B. Ramírez, interview by author, 19 March 2010, Sacramento, CA, audio recording.

²⁷ Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 186.

Indeed, some Mexican American leaders resented Chicano Movement activists for dismissing or taking credit for the political and civil rights advances made by prior generations and what seemed as outright ignorance. This view was best expressed by Bert Corona, long time labor activist and MAPA organizer, in his memoir,

They [Chicano militants] talked as if they were the only ones who were for change....They were very nationalistic and adopted the religious tenants of the Aztecs, and they were very anti-gringo [Anglo-American]....They didn't understand where the power was. They thought the power was in the cop on the street; they thought the power was in the president of the college....You simply didn't have an organized, ongoing fight against the central elements that controlled society. This isn't to say that the youth groups of the sixties didn't do some good. I think that they did. The Chicano movement was essentially a movement to rectify the inequities that had characterized Chicano life in the U.S. for years....Chicanos awakened other youth to become involved in the fight for justice against the schools, the police, and other repressive agencies... The sixties generation, unlike that of the thirties never understood that they needed to have a strong connection to a base community such as the workers. Part of the problem was that the Chicano generation didn't know its past, especially the past of the Mexican working class.²⁸

For Corona, then, the Movement was not as colossal, innovative, or transformative as Chicano militants believed it to be at the time of the Chicano Movement. From his perspective, it lacked a central vision or goal. Part of the reason for this misdirected energy, in his view, stemmed from its failure to learn its history and thus limited its understanding of the gains led by previous generations. The enemy was not the police or the college administrators or even *el gabacho* (the Anglo-American), but rather the capitalist system, Corona would argue. While he brought up some legitimate points

²⁸ García, *Memories of Chicano History*, 258-259.

and concerns, whether those involved in the Movement acknowledged or credited past generational triumphs in the courts, schools, or workplace, Chicano militants would argue that these changes were not occurring at a rapid speed.

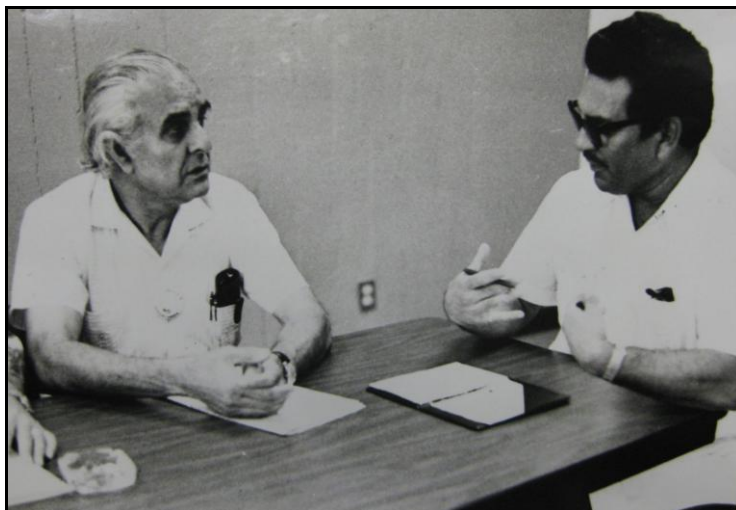


Image 4: Bert Corona (left), Chicano labor organizer, participating in a panel in Sacramento. (Courtesy of Center for Sacramento History, 84/146/2085, 1980.)

The term “Chicano Movement,” used in this study, is in the masculine form because it was known as the “Chicano Movement” and because through most of its existence the Movement ignored or shamed Chicanas into taking secondary leadership or obscure positions.²⁹ Throughout the 1970s, the initial generation of self-proclaimed

²⁹ For works on Chicanas in the Movement see: Beatriz M. Pesquera and Denise A. Segura, “With Quill and Torch: A Chicana Perspective on the American Women’s Movement and Feminists Theories,” in David R. Maciel and Isidro D. Ortiz, *Chicanas/Chicanos at the Crossroad: Social, Economic, and Political Change* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996); Alma M. García, ed., *Chicana Feminist Thought: The Basic Historical Writings* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Francisca Flores, “Comisión Femenil Mexicana,” *Regeneración* 2 (1971); Roberta Fernández, “Abriendo caminos in the Borderland: Chicana Writers Respond to the Ideology of Literary Nationalism,” *Frontiers* 14/2 (1994); Ramón Gutiérrez, “Community, Patriarchy and Individualism: The Politics of Chicano History and the Dream of Equality,” *American Quarterly* 45 (March 1993); Lorena Oropeza and Dionne Espinoza, *Enriqueta and the Chicano Movement: Writings from El Grito del Norte* (Houston, TX: Arte Público Press, 2006); María E. Montoya, “Class, Gender, and Culture as Challenges to Chicano Identity,” in *Voices of a New Chicana/o History*, Refugio I. Rochín and Dennis N. Valdés, eds. (East

Chicana feminists viewed the struggle against sexism within the Chicano Movement and the struggle against racism in the larger society as central ideological components of their feminist thought. Chicana feminists began to challenge *machismo* in the movement and the portrait of the so-called “ideal Chicana” drawn by Chicano cultural nationalists who glorified the traditional gender roles for Chicanas.³⁰ Outward examples of their subordination in the Movement became evermore glaring since women were denied leadership roles. Instead, as was also true within civil rights groups like the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee and the anti-war group Students for a Democratic Society, women in the Chicano Movement were “relegated to cleaning up, making coffee, executing the orders men gave,” and otherwise “servicing their needs.”³¹ If women did manage to assume leadership positions, as some did, they were ridiculed and charged of being “unfeminine, sexually perverse, promiscuous, and all too often, taunted as lesbians.”³²

The disregard and diminishment of Chicanas’ contribution to the movement was best noted by Laura Llano, in a recent interview, when she explained that at a Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA) meeting at Sacramento State

Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2000): 188-189; Yolanda Broyles-González, *El Teatro Campesino: Theatre in the Chicano Movement* (Austin: University of Texas, 1994): Maylei Blackwell, “Contested Histories: Las Hijas de Cuauhtémoc, Chicana Feminisms, and Print Culture in the Chicano Movement, 1968-1973,” in *Chicana Feminisms: A Critical Reader* by Gabriela F. Arrendodo, Aída Hurtado, Norma Klahn, Olga Nájera-Ramírez, and Patricia Zavella, eds. (Durham: Duke University, 2003).

³⁰ Quoted in Alma M. García, ed., *Chicana Feminist Thought: The Basic Historical Writings* (New York: Routledge, 1997): 5. Taken from Francisca Flores, “Comisión Femenil Mexicana,” *Regeneración* 2 (1971): 6.

³¹ R. Gutiérrez, “Chicano History: Paradigm Shifts and Shifting Boundaries,” 100.

³² *Ibid.*

University in 1969 or 1970 Chicanas encountered insurmountable gender bias. She recalled,

In this [MEChA] club of maybe forty people, it was always about what are we going to do, are we going to march....Isabel [Hernández-Serna] had an idea and all the guys were [yelling], "That's a stupid idea." It was a very negative comment. Twenty minutes later some guy says the very same thing that Isabel had said as a suggestion for doing something. All the women said, "Hey, she said that first!" At that point all the guys [wanted] to take a vote on it, and of course they voted that that's what they were going to do. So then the women walked out and I said, "This isn't fair!" I kind of kept my distance. We're fighting the establishment and now we have to fight the men too because they weren't giving women any respect at all. Women were just there for a party, or to bring stuff, or to cook stuff. They were not given any positions as president, or vice president or any of that stuff.³³

Llano, aware of hypocrisy of Chicanos in the Movement, would much rather disassociate herself from MEChA than to tolerate such blatant sexism.³⁴ She was clearly troubled by the way Chicanas were only viewed as assistants and never as leaders by their male-counterparts, although they were often the first to organize,

³³ Laura Llano, interview by author, 14 June 2010, Sacramento, California, audio recording.

³⁴ Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA) was founded in April 1969 at the Chicano Coordinating Council on Higher Education at the University of California, Santa Barbara. The purpose of the conference was to develop a master plan for the creation of Chicano Studies curriculum and to facilitate Chicano access to institutions of higher education. The students envisioned the development of a Mexican American student movement that would focus on Chicano recruitment and retention in all levels of education. They voted to drop their former organizational names such as United Mexican American Students (UMAS), the Mexican American Student Confederation (MASC), the Mexican American Youth Association (MAYA), and the Mexican American Student Association (MASA) and become MEChA. The adoption of the new name signified a new level of political consciousness among student activists. No longer opting to identify as "Mexican Americans," they sought a new radical self-imposed identity as Chicanos. Muñoz, *Youth, Identity, Power*, 78-79.

Likewise, at Sacramento City College and Sacramento State University MAYA chapters also changed their organizational names to MEChA in 1969 according to Graciela B. Ramírez and Laura Llano, respectively, in recent interviews. Both Ramírez and Llano were present at the MAYA meeting when the vote was made to adopt the new name, MEChA. Laura Llano, interview by author, 14 June 2010, Sacramento, California, audio recording and Graciela B. Ramírez, interview by author, 19 March 2010, Sacramento, CA, audio recording.

picket, or march. Hence, while the focus of this dissertation is the movement's mixed record of success in the Sacramento area, it also does not shy away from shedding light on its sexist tendencies.

This dissertation focuses on the unique characteristics of the Mexican community of Sacramento that gave rise to a fervent political and social movement within the context of specific urban and rural landscapes. While neither completely urban nor rural—but something in between—by 1960 the larger Sacramento valley was ripe for political activism that blended urban and rural issues. Indeed, this fluidity played a significant role in unraveling the construction of geopolitical spaces in northern California. Certainly, Sacramento's setting, outside of the immediate United States-Mexico border, helped foster Mexican nationalist ethos which evolved in different ways into different forms of a Chicano political identity. Unlike places such as Los Angeles, South Texas, or Chicago, Sacramento Chicanos lacked a critical mass. To make up for this shortcoming, Chicanos showed a stronger tendency to build coalitions with other racially and ethnically diverse groups.

Sacramento provides an ideal setting for this study for a number of reasons. As previously mentioned, it operated as a stage for political demonstrations as groups sought to attract the state and federal government's attention to their respective causes. Additionally, the Mexican community was split along immigrant versus native-born lines when dealing with educational issues. This division manifested itself clearly in 1968 when Mexican parents protested the desegregation of Washington Elementary School, located in the heart of a Sacramento Mexican *barrio*. The episode revealed

fundamental disagreements between Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans regarding the appropriate course of action to assure the academic success of *barrio* children. This incident, however, was not unique to Sacramento as the question of desegregation became a heated debate for a variety of racialized populations across the United States in the years following the *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* (1954).³⁵

Furthermore, some of the ideals of the Chicano Movement had permeated many aspects of Chicano life and work. For instance, when cannery workers in Sacramento organized a union that transformed local labor practices, it became apparent in their tactics and rhetoric that the Chicano Movement had gone beyond what some have argued were largely symbolic cultural issues centering on personal and collective identity to bread and butter economic issues that affected all segments of the Chicano community. However, it is important to note that in many regions in the nation this rhetoric was found among Chicano labor organizers *before* the Movement. For instance, in the 1930s and 1940s Emma Tenayuca, labor activist and Communist Party member, organized and regarded all Mexicans north of the border as one people and endorsed a form of political unity between Mexican Americans and Mexican nationals based on a combination of cultural and class affinities and goals.

³⁵ For examples of how some U.S. cities dealt with the issue of desegregation see: Diana Ravitch, *The Great School Wars: A History of the New York City Public Schools* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1974); Steven J. L. Taylor, *Desegregation in Boston and Buffalo: The Influence of Local Leaders* (Albany: State University of New York, 1998); Stephen Samuel Smith, *Boom for Whom?: Education, Desegregation, and Development in Charlotte* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004); J. Brian Sheehan, *The Boston School Integration Dispute: Social Change and Legal Maneuvers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984); Richard A. Pride and J. David Woodard, *The Burden of Busing: The Politics of Desegregation in Nashville, Tennessee* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1985); George R. Metcalf, *From Little Rock to Boston: The History of School Desegregation* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1983).

She reasoned that they were bound together as a predominant working-class people, shared a “common history, culture, and oppressed condition” on the North American continent.³⁶ This brings to the fore the centrality of earlier worker organizing efforts and how they helped inform and shape labor activism during the Chicano Movement and demonstrates that the 1960s represented an instance of historical continuity.

Lastly, Sacramento’s multiracial demographics, allowed for coalition building perhaps not seen in other localities. This is particularly noteworthy in the founding in 1971 of the first and only Chicano/Native American college, Deganawidah Quetzalcoatl University (DQ-U), just west of Sacramento.

This work attempts to engage and contribute to the growing fields of Chicano, gender, education, labor, and California studies. During the 1970s and 1980s Chicano scholars engaged in a debate over the nature and make-up of the Chicano community. During this especially fertile period of historical interpretation and analysis, historical scholars were generally divided into two broad camps—the more or less centrist-conservative school of thought which was best exemplified by Richard A. García, Mario T. García, Roberto Álvarez, Ernesto Galarza, and Peter Skerry; and the more militant-activist group which was composed of individuals such as Rudy Acuña, Douglas Monroy, Mario Barrera, Juan Gómez-Quiñones, and Tomás Almaguer. On one level, these scholars fundamentally disagreed over the premise of whether the

³⁶ Mario T. García, *Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology, and Identity, 1930-1960* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989): 154. For additional information on Emma Tenayuca see: Gabriela González, “Carolina Mungauía and Emma Tenayuca: The Politics of Benevolence and Radical Reform” *Frontiers* 24 (2003): 200-229.

Mexican case was exceptional or whether it was in line with other versions of the larger history of immigration to the United States.

Although each scholar brought a particular perspective or interpretive framework to their study of Mexican American history, the centrist-conservative school tended to argue that the history of ethnic Mexicans was essentially similar to the supposed historical trajectory of most European immigrant groups and thus, that Mexican immigrants and their descendants ultimately would likely “assimilate” and “acculturate” into American society. The militant-activist faction, on the other hand, cited the history of conquest of the Southwest; subsequent patterns of the racialization of Mexicans; and the continuous—and ongoing—mass labor migration from Mexico as clear evidence of a unique case. This group tended to draw inspiration from a Marxist analytical tradition and came up with a variety of models to explain Mexican American history (or what historian Juan Gómez-Quiñones called “the history of the Mexican working class north of the Río Bravo”) and to situate ethnic Mexicans within contemporary U.S. society at the time.

Chicana scholars would later critique both schools of thought and argue that they had advanced conceptual and analytical models rooted in a patriarchal understanding of community.³⁷ For instance, Cynthia Orozco and Alma M. García

³⁷ For comprehensive studies on Chicanas refer to: Irene I. Blea, *La Chicana and the Intersection of Race, Class, and Gender* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1992); Miroslava Chávez-García, *Negotiating Conquest: Gender and Power in California, 1770s to 1880s* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2004); Adelaida R. Del Castillo, ed., *Between Borders: Essays on Mexicana/Chicana History* (Encino, CA: Floricanto Press, 1990); David R. Maciel and Isidro D. Ortiz, eds., *Chicanas/Chicanos at the Crossroads: Social, Economic, and Political Change* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1996); Elizabeth C. Ramírez, *Chicanas/Latinas in American Theatre: A History of Performance* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000); Teresa Córdova, *Chicana Voices: Intersections of Class, Race, and Gender* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press,

questioned how both the vital role of women and deeply-rooted systems of gender hierarchy more generally were ignored or omitted when investigating the history and contemporary circumstances of the Chicano community. Orozco maintained that because Chicano Studies had come from the Chicano Movement it had inherited its sexist tendencies and that whenever Chicanas raised legitimate gender concerns they were viewed as “race traitors.” Given these deficiencies, Orozco argued Chicana/o scholars must understand the significance of gender in day-to-day interactions when studying the Chicano community.³⁸ Likewise, García noted that women must be incorporated in the analysis as an equal and integral part of Chicano Studies—without it the field will continue to fall short.³⁹ Orozco and García’s critique of the field is still noteworthy because although over forty years have passed since the establishment of Chicano Studies as an area of inquiry, the study of Chicanas and gender arguably remain significantly understudied.

1990); Gabriela F. Arredondo, *Chicana Feminisms: A Critical Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Alfredo Mirandé and Evangelina Enríquez, *La Chicana: The Mexican-American Woman* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979); Vicki L. Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives: Mexican Women, Unionization, and the California Food Processing Industry, 1930-1950* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987); Vicki L. Ruiz, ed., *Las Obreras: Chicana Politics of Work and Family* (Los Angeles: Chicano Studies Research Studies Publications, 2000); Vicki L. Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Patricia Zavella, *Women’s Work and Chicano Families: Cannery Workers of the Santa Clara Valley* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987); Helena María Viramontes, *The Moths and other Stories* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1995); Norma Alarcón, ed., *Chicana Critical Issues* (Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 1993); Emma Pérez, *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).

³⁸ Cynthia Orozco, “Sexism in Chicano Studies and the Community,” in Teresa Córdova, Chair of Editorial Committee, National Association of Chicano Studies, *Chicana Voices: Intersections of Class, Race, and Gender* (Albuquerque: New Mexico, 1990): 11-18.

³⁹ Alma M. García, “Studying Chicanas: Bringing Women into the Frame of Chicano Studies,” in Teresa Córdova, Chair of Editorial Committee, National Association of Chicano Studies, *Chicana Voices: Intersections of Class, Race, and Gender* (Albuquerque: New Mexico, 1990): 19-29.

It is here that we begin to see in broad terms the poles of debate on the nature of the so-called “Chicano community” that took more distinct shape in the latter stages of the heyday of the Chicano Movement. One essential question about the contested notion of community spun around the issue of the population’s own self-conception and the social trajectory they followed over the course of the nineteenth-and twentieth centuries. The concept of community has historically been a subject of controversy in Western and political thought. The notion is further obscured because its contours are far reaching given that community has no settled definition. While sociologists generally approach the study of community by distinguishing it as a social order (a society in miniature) or ecological order (product of relationships among individuals and institutions); historians have yet to agree to come to terms to an explicit definition. Nonetheless, political scientist Armando Navarro provides the more developed characterization when he notes that “a community is a collection of people who occupy a given space and share a common social relationship or interest.”⁴⁰ Sociologists, however, have recently challenged this understanding of community and “shared space” in the face of increasing globalization and loose knit communities that exist across international lines. According to this school of thought on the nature of the Chicano/mexicano population, these mixed nationality communities have long been transnational and global, sustained by different forms of communication, in the past most likely by the interlinked processes return migration and remittances. Today, of

⁴⁰ Armando Navarro, *The Cristal Experiment: A Chicano Struggle for Community Control* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1998): 10.

course, these processes have been reinforced by powerful advances in transportation and communication technologies.⁴¹

Identity and community are intimately linked. Mary S. Pardo in her work on women in East Los Angeles and Monterey Park provides compelling evidence that her subjects are active agents in constructing and (re)defining their respective communities.⁴² She explains that community identity, whether of the inner city or suburban areas, results from social processes and a “dialogue” with others—other communities, the media, and individuals. It is a socially constructed category. She states that “community, whether a territorial or a political space, is always an organization of social relationships.”⁴³ Hence, community is not necessarily tied to a specific territorial space, but can exist through social and political processes. This concept best conceptualizes the Chicana/o experience whose families often reside on both sides of the United States and Mexico borders and thus their expanded networks do not typify “traditional” concepts of communities. In essence, communities are complicated categories and are multi-dimensional, operating across confined territorial spaces and existing in social, economic, and political arrangements.

⁴¹ Leon Fink, *The Maya of Morganton: Work and Community in the Nuevo New South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003): 144-145. For changing nature of community in a global sense also see: Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Malcolm Waters, *Globalization* (London: Routledge, 1995); Peter L. Berger, “Four Faces of Global Culture,” *Public Interest* (Fall 1997); Robert D. Putman, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000); Di Leonardo, *Exotics at Home: Anthropologists, Others, American Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicano Press, 1998).

⁴² Mary S. Pardo, *Mexican American Women Activists: Identity and Resistance in Two Los Angeles Communities* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998): 80.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 254.

Of most importance in Pardo's study, however, is her argument that gender plays a fundamental role in conceptualizing community. Family and community become inseparable as noted by the way most Chicanas described their inspiration for organizing in specific places. For instance, Mexican women often explained their activism by linking "family and community as one entity."⁴⁴ Working-class women activists, Pardo claims, seldom opt to separate themselves from men or from their families. In this particular struggle for community quality of life, Pardo maintains, they fight for "the family unit and thus are not competing with men."⁴⁵ Although archival sources fail to disclose to what extent this may or may not have taken place, Chicanas in Sacramento coupled their collective desires to overcome socioeconomic oppression as similarly expressed by Chicanos. It is important to note that archival sources, oftentimes, fail to disclose women's voices as they are frequently stifled by men or are merely not reported in organizational records or news media outlets. It is in this spirit that I investigate the Chicano community of Sacramento by incorporating a gendered analysis. Here I take the lead from Chicana historians like Antonia Castañeda, Vicki L. Ruiz, Deena González, and Emma Pérez and others who have demonstrated in their works that subaltern histories not only capture layers of resistance, but also are very much gendered.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Ibid., 115.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Antonia Castañeda, "Women of Color and the Re-writing of Western History: The Discourse, Politics, and Decolonization of History," *Pacific Historical Review* 61 (November 1992) and "Gender, Race, and Culture: Spanish Mexican Women in the Historiography of Frontier California," in *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women's History*, 3rd ed., ed. Vicki L. Ruiz and Ellen Carol Dubois (New York: Routledge); Deena González, *Refusing the Favor: The Spanish-Mexican*

More recently, the question of what encompasses community has been revisited in light of the interrelated trends of globalization and the rise of social movements in the Western Hemisphere. For example, the Zapatistas and other indigenous movements in Mexico and Central and South America, and anti-globalization political and social coalitions have all challenged and helped expand the imaginations of those seeking to redefine notions of community. Additionally, the explosive growth of the pan-Latino population in the United States has helped reframe traditional understandings of the Latino community. Obviously, each of these massive developments impinges on the question of the contours of the so-called “Chicano community.”

Indeed, as discussed above, it could be argued that to even think in terms of a “Chicano community” in light of overwhelming population changes in the Mexican-origin and/or -descent population (not to mention other Latino groups) since the 1970s is an anachronism that helps to distort much more complex processes. Although this work does not address the specificities of current population and globalization trends, it hopes to, at the very least, question the effectiveness of narrowing or establishing stringent guidelines of what is or is not a “community”—whether it is defined geographically or socially. Case in point, those who endorse *Zapatismo* do not have to physically partake in the everyday happenings in Chiapas but still can be considered part of that community through organizing efforts abroad.

This case study hopes to enmesh the concept of community in the specificity of

Women of Santa Fe 1820-1880 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Emma Pérez, *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).

the Chicano Movement by employing it as a theoretical framework in specific place and time. Historians who focus on the Chicano Movement have tended to concentrate on urban sites like Los Angeles and San Antonio and on dramatic keystone historical events such as the 1968 Los Angeles blowouts and the 1970 Chicano Moratorium. Moreover, scholars overwhelmingly emphasize formal political organizations and the renowned male leaders of the era. While there have been significant results from such approaches, these studies tend to adopt a narrow focus, erasing the importance of multiple, dispersed individuals and organizations vital to the creation of social change.

There are a number of reasons for the emergence of these blind spots that stem from the original disagreement as to the origins of the Chicano Movement itself. By positing that the Chicano Movement did not originate with the 1965 founding of the UFW but rather had roots in local community politics that preceded these events, I hope to make a scholarly contribution. Although this notion is not completely new, as George J. Sánchez, David G. Gutiérrez, and Vicki L. Ruiz and others have made clear, works on the Chicano Movement still generally tend to dismiss or fail to make the connection to earlier Chicano organizing efforts. Take, for instance, the important roles of organizations such as the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) in the 1930s, or the Spanish-Speaking Congress in the 1940s, or the Community Service Organization in the 1950s. Although some have argued that these associations are all precursors to the Chicano Movement, it is crucial to demonstrate the direct correlation of how and why.

Scholars on Chicano Movement historiography disagree not only over the

emergence of the movement itself but also its purpose. For example, Carlos Muñoz argues that the Chicano Movement was largely a youth movement that was an integral part of the overall youth rebellion of the 1960s. Ignacio M. García claims, on the other hand, that the Chicano Movement was not simply a search for identity, or an outburst of collective anxiety, but rather a full-fledged transformation of the way Mexican Americans thought, played politics, and promoted their culture. More recently, the works of Lorena Oropeza and George Mariscal have tied the Chicano Movement to international causes such as the War on Vietnam and anti-colonial struggles, respectively.

It is imperative to investigate the changing meaning of community in a global context, especially because, in January 2003, the U.S. Census Bureau announced that in 2001, the combined pan-Latino population of the United States had finally surpassed people of African American descent to constitute the single largest aggregate “minority” population in the United States. By all accounts, the growth of the Latino population does not seem to slow down despite endless political and legal efforts to limit it. Ethnic Mexicans, with a combined U.S.-native and foreign-born population of nearly 21 million, or about 58.5 percent of the total, continue to represent the largest subpopulation of Latinos. David G. Gutiérrez, in his work on the demographic and changing boundaries of Latino communities in the United States, notes that the Latino population growth has also significantly affected the spatial distribution of Latinos in the country. Indeed, in recent years, the population has dispersed to the extent that Latinos can now be found in significant numbers “in

virtually every state in the nation, including Alaska and Hawaii.”⁴⁷

Given this new dynamic, how does the current global economy and labor migration flows affect our concept of community? Recently scholars have taken up this very question. For instance, Leon Fink, in his study of Guatemalan-born poultry plant workers in Morganton, North Carolina, notes that this labor trend reflects the increasing fluidity of both world investments and labor markets. Most remarkable, though, is that Mayan workers used the concept of community to “defend themselves against employer exploitation and to advance the interests of family and friends across international borders.”⁴⁸ Hence, we must re-examine and unravel the idea of community in this new context.

Excavating the Chicano Movement of the Sacramento valley required me to draw on a number of under-utilized archives. Several Chicano Sacramento history collections have proven fruitful for this study, including the Sacramento Ethnic Communities Survey-Chicano Oral Histories Collection conducted in 1983 and housed at the Center for Sacramento History. The collection documents the life histories of Chicanos who lived in the Sacramento vicinity stretching back to the 1920s. The oral histories include the narratives of Chicanas, which aided me in my quest to make gender a central focus in the dissertation.

⁴⁷ David G. Gutiérrez, “Introduction: Demography and the Shifting Boundaries of ‘Community’: Reflection on ‘U.S. Latinos’ and the Evolution of Latino Studies,” in David G. Gutiérrez, *The Columbia History of Latinos in the United States Since 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004): 7.

⁴⁸ Leon Fink, *The Maya of Morganton: Work and Community in the Nuevo New South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003): 3-4.

The Rubén Reyes Collection's (also at the Center for Sacramento History) rich assortment of documents also provided for a provocative chapter on labor and race and its positioning in the Chicano Movement. Reyes founded the Cannery Workers Committee (CWC) in Sacramento in 1968, an organization that rapidly expanded to other major cities in Central and Northern California—including King City, Vacaville, Woodland, Modesto, Salinas, and San Jose. The Reyes collection includes key newspaper articles, court cases, investigations conducted by the California Fair Employment Practice Commission and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), minutes from the Human Relations Commission and the EEOC, and CWC pamphlets and newsletters.

The Wilson C. Riles Collection was another indispensable source for this study, as it details the California State Department of Education's attempt to desegregate schools statewide. The collections, held at California State University, Sacramento, Special Collections, and the Sacramento Unified School District Board documents at the Center for Sacramento History, aided me in addressing educational grievances against the desegregation efforts at Washington Elementary. The collections consist of news briefs, court cases, memorandums, audits, letters, minutes, reports, newspaper clippings, and organization documents.

Additionally, the University Archives Collections at University of California, Davis Special Collections Department has been instrumental in providing me with the essential research on the founding of Deganawidah Quetzalcoatl University (DQ-U). DQ-U was the product of radical organizing methods of Native American and Chicano

students who took procession on an abandoned Army Communications Depot in 1970. The Jack D. Forbes Collection is extensive, offering the papers of an instrumental founder of the University that include brochures, newspaper clippings, personal letters, memorandums, flyers, DQ-U Board Member Meeting minutes, and court cases.

The rich source material allowed me to structure my study in four, in-depth, qualitatively rich, chapters. The introduction, “Community Politics in Chicana/o Sacramento,” outlines the four principal themes or tools of analysis in the dissertation—politics, identity, gender, and community—and how these interplayed in Chicano life in Sacramento and the larger region. Chapter one opens with a historical and conceptual framework delineating the ways in which the concept of “community” was adapted by *mexicanos* beginning in the California Gold Rush in the late 1840s to the Chicano Movement in the 1970s. The second chapter, “The Debate over the Benefits of Desegregation,” uses a case-study approach to detail the racial politics surrounding the desegregation of Washington Elementary School, located in the heart of Sacramento’s Mexican *barrio*, a fight that evolved from 1967 to 1972. Shortly after the Sacramento City Unified School District announced its decision to desegregate Washington Elementary, that is, to make it an integrated school, Mexicans stunned many by refusing integration, preferring to keep their Mexican-majority school in order to maintain their autonomy and control over their school.⁴⁹

Chapter three, “Cannery Workers Resist,” continues with the theme of identity politics in labor organizing by Sacramento-area cannery workers. On May 18, 1971

⁴⁹ The text for Chapter Two, “Chicano Resistance to Desegregation,” is in part a summary of material as it appears in my Master of Arts Thesis: “Chicano Resistance to Desegregation in Sacramento, California, 1962-1967” (California State University, Sacramento, Fall 2004).

Ruben Reyes, founder of the Cannery Workers Committee, won his lawsuit against his longtime employer Libby McNeill & Libby and the company's union, Cannery Workers Union Local 857. The court found that the company and union had discriminated against Reyes and other Mexican Americans. This chapter follows the plight of Chicano workers to end racial and gender discrimination in their workplace.

The fourth chapter, "Chicano and Native American Student Radical Organizing," offers a change of pace in the consideration of how the concept of identity was first negotiated in the *barrio* and follows it out of its geographic-specificity into the lived experiences of Chicano and Native American militant activists. The chapter details the efforts of college students, professors, and community members involved in the takeover of an abandoned Army communications outpost nine miles west of Davis, California, a neighboring Sacramento community, approximately 30 miles west of Sacramento, on the outskirts of Davis, California for the founding of DQ-U in 1971. The study then concludes with, "Retrospective Thoughts," returning to the theme of community to address the legacy of the Chicano Movement in Sacramento. I expect this section will provide both a retrospective coda on the major themes of the dissertation and an opportunity to reflect on the concepts of identity, community, gender, and politics.

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Writing is, for the most part, a solitary, isolating endeavor that takes tremendous self-discipline and self-motivation. The published product (notice that I say published versus final because we all know that there is always room for improvement), however, is indeed possible by the insightful and careful review of committee members and colleagues. That said, I first thank Dr. David G. Gutiérrez, the person who took me in as a graduate student, supported me financially through the dissertation writing stage and—as they say in my barrio—“had my back” in the Department of History at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD). Gracias Profe for your selfless investment of time, energy, and funding through this doctoral process.

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students. I thank Dr. Vicki L. Ruiz for consistently guiding me through the doctoral process, graciously agreeing to sit on my committee from afar, and selflessly serving as a wonderful role model and mentor over the last ten years. You are what many young Chicana scholars aspire to be! To Dr. Daniel Widener, thanks for your ever present encouragement and wonderful example as a scholar-activist. And last, but definitely not least, to Dr. Nayan Shah, thanks for expanding and challenging my knowledge on race and ethnicity through your graduate courses, which have left a tremendous impact on how I proceeded with my own work. *Mil gracias* to all of you for your insightful expertise and advice throughout this long endeavor.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Sacramento en El Movimiento: Chicano Politics in the Civil Rights Era

by

Lorena Valdivia Márquez

Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California, San Diego, 2010

Professor David G. Gutiérrez, Chair

My dissertation traces the civil rights history of ethnic Mexicans during the last half of the twentieth century in the Greater Sacramento Valley of California. My work seeks to uncover how the Chicano Movement developed in Sacramento, a site that is at the nexus of a predominantly rural experience (farm work, migrant material conditions and social issues, and the United Farm Workers) and an urban experience (protests, marches to the state capitol, and the local Chicano Movement). This combination plays a crucial role in understanding and unraveling the construction of geopolitical spaces in northern California. The study examines and analyzes political activism, identity, gender, and community in Sacramento and argues that the Chicano Movement was far-reaching and served as a motivator for local grassroots organizing efforts.

CHAPTER ONE:

COMMUNITY POLITICS IN CHICANA/O SACRAMENTO

The history of the Chicano peoples in the United States is one of struggle, resistance, and perseverance. Mexicans have resided and worked in the Southwestern U.S. longer than Anglo Americans, many of whom began to occupy the Mexican territory in significant numbers by the 1820s. Euro-American imperialist designs as well as racialized ideologies led to a forceful territorial takeover by the United States through the Mexican American War (1846-1848). On February 2, 1848 delegates representing the republic of Mexico and the United States' signed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which ended the war and established a new border between the two nations, and provided official recognition of the United States' previous annexation of Texas. Under the guise of a land purchase valued at approximate fifteen million dollars, Mexico ceded to the victorious United States one-third of its territory—modern-day Texas, California, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, Wyoming, Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma, and New Mexico.¹

With the loss of the Mexican American War, Mexicans were forced to confront a multitude of obstacles. Following the conflict, most of those who remained North of the newly formed border not only frequently lost their family and communal lands but were also subjected to racial and political discrimination. Inevitably, their eventual

¹ David G. Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995): 13. Also see: Rodolfo Acuña, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*, Third Edition (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1988): 5-24.

second-class status in the now United States territory set the pattern for the later mistreatment of Mexican immigrants during the twentieth century.² This chapter provides a brief historical overview of Chicanos in the Southwest, focusing on the experiences of ethnic Mexicans in Sacramento, California—a significant yet little known segment of that population. We know far too little about this episode in Chicano history in part because of the scarcity of sources documenting the growth, development, and maturity of peoples in the region. Yet, it remains an essential aspect of this history because it will add to our understanding of the complex Chicana/o experience in the U.S.

Mexicans have made significant impacts on the social, political, and economic climate of Northern California: yet, their contributions have been generally overlooked or minimized by historians. Recently, however, the publications of two works have impressively mapped out the histories of Chicanos in Northern California: Linda Heidenreich's study on the Napa Valley and Stephen Pitti's history of the Silicon Valley.³ Heidenreich points out that Napa's *Californiana/o* histories were tied to those of other settlers throughout Alta California who took part of the larger blueprint for settlement and conquest through the Spanish and Mexican periods.⁴ In fact, Mexicans had been in Northern California since the time Monterey (1770) and San Francisco

² Mario T. García, *Desert Immigrants: The Mexicans of El Paso, 1880-1920* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981): 1.

³ Linda Heidenreich, *"This Land Was Mexican Once": Histories of Resistance from Northern California* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007) and Stephen J. Pitti, *The Devil in Silicon Valley: Northern California, Race, and Mexican Americans* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

⁴ Heidenreich, *"This Land Was Mexican Once,"* 42-43.

(1776) were founded, and Sacramento was included as part of that greater region. Pitti reminds us that nineteenth century “Northern California witnessed a transition from European imperialism to American nationalism, from pre-capitalist relations to a capitalist society in which new extractive industries—particularly mining and agriculture—shaped the fates of the region’s working class.”⁵

GATE KEEPING IN CALIFORNIA’S GOLD FIELDS

Perhaps there is no clearer example of this transformation than that experienced in the Sacramento Valley, whose economy was significantly altered by both the mining and agricultural industries. Indeed, the “discovery” of gold at John Sutter’s Mill on January 24, 1848 changed the environmental and social landscape of Sacramento as thousands of mostly white middle-class males made their way to the region in search of gold. More recently, though, Gold Rush historians have made abundantly clear that gold seekers were not entirely white. Numerous Chileans, Mexicans, Hawaiian Islanders (referred to as “Kanakas” by Anglos), African Americans (some of which were brought to work in the mines as slaves), Native Americans, and Chinese ventured into Gold Country.⁶

⁵ Pitti, *The Devil in Silicon Valley*, 5. For works on Mexicans in Northern California see: Leonard Pitt, *The Decline of the Californios: A Social History of the Spanish-Speaking Californians, 1846-1890* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966); Rosaura Sánchez, *Telling Identities: The Californio Testimonios* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1995); Albert L. Hurtado, *Intimate Frontiers: Sex, Gender, and Culture in Old California* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999); Alexander Hunter, *Vallejo: A California Legend* (Sonoma: Sonoma State Historic Park Association, 1992); Esther J. Comstock, *Vallejo and the Four Flags* (Grass Valley: Comstock Bonanza Press, 1979); Dale L. Walker, *Bear Flag Rising: The Conquest of California, 1846* (New York: Forge, 1999).

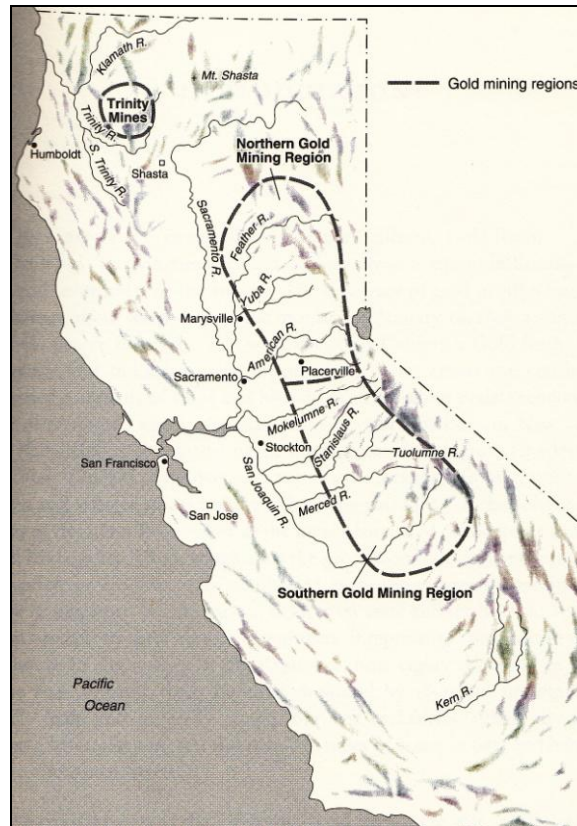
⁶ Malcolm J. Rohrbough, *Days of Gold: The California Gold Rush and the American Nation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997): 90, 221-229. For additional information on Mexicans in the southern mines, also see Susan Johnson, *Roaring Camp: The Social World of the California Gold*

Mexican miners especially made their mark during California's Gold Rush. The Southern mines, characterized today as the foothill area bordering the San Joaquin Valley, were often dominated by miners from the northern Mexican state of Sonora. Sonorans were well experienced in the mining trade because many of them had worked the silver mines in their home country. Well before the first ships arrived in the San Francisco Bay in the summer of 1849, Mexican families had settled in the Southern mines and had managed great success in the placers by the time the first of the overland wagons trains rolled into Placerville in the early autumn of that year.⁷ Their strong presence was noted by John Cowden, a forty-niner, who observed that in Stockton in 1849 as much Spanish as English could be heard on the streets. He also noted that as a precaution many white miners in Stockton armed themselves with pistols and knives to protect themselves from the Mexicans, all of which reinforced the stereotype of Mexicans as violent.⁸

Rush (New York: W. W. Norton, 2000); Sister Mary Colette Standart, "The Sonoran Migration to California, 1848-1856: A Study of Prejudice," in David G. Gutiérrez, *Between Two Worlds: Mexican Immigrants to the United States* (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1996): 4-5..

⁷ Rohrbough, *Days of Gold*, 221.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 223-224 and footnote 15, page 337.



Map 2: "Gold Mining Regions" in Malcolm J. Rohrbough, *Days of Gold: The California Gold Rush and the American Nation* (Berkeley: University of California, 1997).

The migration of Sonorans to the California gold mines was significant. In October 1848, the first organized caravan of *gambusinos* (miners working without capital or assistance) left Hermosillo, Sonora to California. Word quickly spread when Mexican newspapers carried the first accounts of gold discovery. Sister Mary Colette Standart notes that the migration started out slowly, but soon reached stampede proportions. Although the exact number remains unclear, approximately tens of thousands of Mexicans migrated to the Golden State. By January 18, 1849, Governor Manuel María Gándara reported to the Sonoran Congress at Ures that both the frontier of the state and some places in the interior were being depopulated to mine in

California. In Hermosillo alone, in January and February of that year, an estimated “one thousand Sonorans had left taking over two-thousand animals with them, and later seven hundred persons had come through from other Mexican states en route to California.”⁹ Given the tiny non-Indian population of California at the time, this first wave of migration from Mexico added significant numbers to the region. While gold mining was mostly a male enterprise, some women were able to tap into these sojourners by offering laundry services. For instance, in the early 1850s African American, Irish and Latina women together made up about eighty percent of those employed as laundresses. María Sempro and Carmen Lotha, natives of Mexico, were laundresses in 1852.¹⁰

Initially Mexican miners worked alone on their claims, yet by the time significant numbers of “migrants” from the eastern United States arrived and brought with them the ideals inherent in Manifest Destiny—an ideology rooted in the belief of Anglo American superiority—a violent clash of cultures ensued.¹¹ At first, the inexperienced Anglo Americans were largely at the mercy of the Sonorans, but Anglo Americans emulated many of their techniques, borrowed their technology, and eventually honed their own skills. The racist instincts fostered through the Mexican American War and the ideology of Manifest Destiny gained impetus from European-

⁹ Standart, “The Sonoran Migration to California,” 4-5.

¹⁰ Elaina Connolly and Dian Self, *Capital Women: An Interpretive History of Women in Sacramento, 1850-1920* (Sacramento, CA: The Capital Women’s History Project, 1995): 20-21.

¹¹ For additional information on Manifest Destiny refer to: Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981); Frederick Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963); Laura E. Gómez, *Manifest Destinies: The Making of the Mexican American Race* (New York: New York University Press, 2007).

American stories of new rich strikes by Mexican miners who were almost immediately characterized as “foreigners” despite the fact that most of the non-indigenous population of the region were themselves of very recent origin.¹²

The presumed large number of “foreigners” working the fields led European-Americans to organized vigilante committees. One such incident occurred in December 1849 under order of the *alcalde* (mayor) when a group of armed American miners rounded up nearly one hundred Mexicans and marched them to an Iowa Bar log cabin, where a local judge fined each Mexican miner one ounce of gold.¹³ Gold Rush historian Brian Roberts notes that the lynch law proved to be an especially effective way of ridding the Southern mines of Mexican competition. The “lynch law” was a code marked by the “immediate execution of moral trespassers, without trial, without sentiment, and without red tape” aimed at supposed foreigners and unwanted competition—a clear form of vigilante justice.¹⁴ But an even better mechanism for eliminating Mexicans was the California’s Foreign Miners’ Tax of 1850, which forced most Spanish-speaking persons—both Californios and Mexican-born miners—out of the placers by 1851.¹⁵ In April 1850, the California legislature passed what was generally called the Foreign Miners’ Tax. The law decreed that only native or naturalized United States citizens would be permitted to mine in California without a

¹² Rohrbough, *Days of Gold*, 221-222.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 225.

¹⁴ Brian Roberts, *American Alchemy: The California Gold Rush and Middle-Class Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000): 200.

¹⁵ Roberts, *American Alchemy*, 158.

license, the cost of which would be \$20.00 per month—this taxation was levied against “culprits of Mexico and South American States.”¹⁶ In the Northern mines Mexicans were driven out even earlier, by use of similar but more aggressive measures, as those used in the Southern mines. In his 1850 report to the secretary of state, Thomas Butler King noted that there was increasing friction and anti-foreign activity in the mines which ultimately resulted in the Mexicans’ departure.¹⁷

In spite of their hostile surroundings, Mexicans did not leave California altogether. Some settled in Sacramento and other communities in the northern and Central Valleys. By the 1860s, their presence was felt in public celebrations of Mexican patriotic holidays. For instance, the earliest *Cinco de Mayo* celebration in Sacramento took place in 1864—only two years after the Battle of Puebla in which the Mexican army defeated a superior French force of approximately two thousand soldiers, a contingent nearly three times larger than the Mexican resistance.¹⁸ The *Sacramento Daily Union* on May 6, 1864 reported:

The Mexicans to-day are celebrating the anniversary of the defeat of the French in their first attack on Puebla. They fired 101 guns. The Mexicans are holding a grand festival at Dashaway Hall to-night.¹⁹

The marking of this celebration in Sacramento confirms not only the existence of Mexicans in the Valley but also verifies an established Spanish-speaking community

¹⁶ Quoted in Standart, “The Sonoran Migration to California,” 11.

¹⁷ Standart, “The Sonoran Migration to California,” 7.

¹⁸ Laurie Kay Sommers, “Symbol and Style in Cinco de Mayo,” *Journal of American Folklore* 98 (1985): 479.

¹⁹ “By Telegraph to the Union,” *Sacramento Daily Union*, 6 May 1864, p. 2.

in Northern California. The 1850 United States Census did not count Mexicans as a group. Nevertheless, there were approximately 92,507 persons in California, of which 21,802 were categorized as “foreign born.” Given these circumstances, it is difficult to estimate the exact number of ethnic Mexicans whether foreign or U.S.-born in Northern California at this time.²⁰ By 1880 Sacramento’s population was 21,420 of which 7,048 were foreign born, one of three.²¹ While it remains unclear how many of the “foreign born” were of Mexican descent, their numbers would be augmented by early twentieth century.

In the decades following the Gold Rush, Sacramento would be in the political, economic, and social shadow of its rival Northern California city, San Francisco. This was due in part to its sizeable population and large ports which allowed for easy transport of goods and made for business-friendly atmosphere. For instance, in 1860 the population of San Francisco was only three times larger than Sacramento, but by 1910, Sacramento’s 44,696 looked scrawny compared to San Francisco’s 416,912. Sacramento, which to this point had largely been identified, and rightfully so, as a railroad town in the aftermath of the Gold Rush received a harsh blow when the Central Pacific Railroad moved its headquarters to San Francisco in 1873. At this point, Sacramento was in economic decline and turned to the creation of a new city

²⁰ *The Seventh Census of the United States, 1850*, U.S. Census Office, (New York: Arno Press, A New York Times Company, 1976): 972.

²¹ William E. Mahan, “The Political Response to Urban Growth: Sacramento and Mayor Marshall R. Beard, 1863-1914,” *California Historical Society* Vo. 69, No. 4 (Winter, 1990/1991): 357.

charter that was to centralize local businesses.²² Still, Sacramento's economy relied heavily on the Southern Pacific, the only major railroad with access into the River City. For local workers, the Southern Pacific was the city's largest employer and also providing fixed transportation costs to local companies which made for lucrative business opportunities.²³ Domestic workers, mainly women, were able to take advantage of the growing industrialization in Sacramento by offering their services as domestic workers in the late nineteenth century. For instance, María López, whose husband worked for the Central Pacific Railroad, worked as a housekeeper. While these menial jobs were largely underpaid, they allowed for women to earn their keep and help provide for their families, especially because there were limited employment options for women.²⁴

²² For additional works on Sacramento see: Shipley Walters, *West Sacramento: The Root's of New City* (Woodland, CA: Yolo County Historical Society, 1987); Dorothy Kupcha Leland, *The Big Tomato: A Guide to the Sacramento Region* (Sacramento, CA: Tomato Enterprise, 1988); The Sacramento Bee, *Sacramento Guide Book* (Sacramento, CA: The Sacramento Bee, 1938); Robert Kelley, *Battling the Inland Sea: American Political Culture, Public Policy, & the Sacramento Valley, 1850-1986* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Bill E. Durant, Assistant Specialist, Department of Applied Behavioral Sciences, University of California, Davis, Research Monograph No. 9, "Housing Sacramento's Invisible Man: Farm Workers, Hustlers, and Misfits," (Davis, CA: Department of Applied Behavioral Sciences, 1970); Sacramento Archives and Museum Collection Center and the Historic Old Sacramento Foundation, *Sacramento's Midtown* (Sacramento, CA: Arcadia Publishing, 2006); Paula Boghosian and Don Cox, *Sacramento's Boulevard Part* (Sacramento, CA: Arcadia Publishing, 2006); West Sacramento Historical Society, *West Sacramento* (Sacramento, CA: Arcadia Publishing, 2004); Lee M.A. Simpson, *East Sacramento* (Sacramento, CA: Arcadia Publishing, 2004); Sacramento Archives and Museum Collection Center and the Historic Old Sacramento Foundation, *Old Sacramento and Downtown* (Sacramento, CA: Arcadia Publishing, 2006); Faren Maree Bachelis, *The Pelican Guide to Sacramento and the Gold Country* (Gretna, Louisiana: Pelican Publishing Company, 1987); James Scott and Tom Tolley, *Historic Photos of Sacramento* (Nashville, Tennessee: Turner Publishing Company, 2007); Thor Severson, *Sacramento: An Illustrated History: 1839 to 1874, from Sutter's Fort to Capital City* (Sacramento, CA: California Historical Society, 1973); Joseph A. McGowan and Terry R. Willis, Sacramento County Historical Society, *Sacramento: Heart of the Golden State* (Woodland Hills, CA: Windsor Publications, Inc., 1983); Steven Mellon, *Sacramento: Then and Now* (Gibsonia, PA: Scripps Howard Publishing, Inc., 1984).

²³ Mahan, "The Political Response to Urban Growth," 358-359.

The Southern Pacific Railroad had become, according to Sacramento Historian William E. Mahan, “an industrial giant of national, even international power.”²⁵ The 1893 charter, however, could not sustain the economic and industrial unrest of the period. Things came to a head, however, with the Stock Market panic of 1893 and when the American Railway Union ordered its members nationwide to refuse to move Pullman sleeping cars from American railroads. In Sacramento, 2,180 chapter members answered the call on June 28, 1894 and nearly crippled the company’s operation. In a last ditch effort to maintain order, the Southern Pacific fired every worker who did not return to work on July 2. Units of the California National Guard were mobilized, but upon their arrival on scene their sympathies swayed with the workers and could not proceed with their assignment to crush the worker strike. At this point, the Southern Pacific also moved its headquarters to New York and San Francisco. From afar President Collis P. Huntington was able to defeat the worker’s movement and crush their union by allowing only the return of workers who “would sign a contract agreeing never to join a labor union.”²⁶

The Southern Pacific was able to sustain and abuse its power because it continued to control transportation costs and enjoyed exclusive control of the Sacramento waterfront and adjacent streets. This was due in large part to rights awarded by an earlier city government which hoped to keep the railroad company headquarters in Sacramento. The stockyard was located on Fifteenth and B Streets, but

²⁴ Connolly and Self, *Capital Women*, 66-67.

²⁵ Mahan, “The Political Response to Urban Growth,” 365.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

its unsanitary condition created public health problems because the city lacked a sewage and garbage collection which made for perfect conditions for rat infestation. Because the Gold Rush had attracted a large number of single men, in 1850 there were 6,169 men and only 460 women, the imbalance persisted well into the first few decades of the twentieth century. By 1900, of 6,723 foreign-born Sacramentans, 4,313 were men and only 2,410 were women. For many of these lonely men—who tended to work long hours in physically strenuous jobs—gambling, frequenting all-night bars, and soliciting prostitutes was a means to alleviate stress and as a pass time. Some Sacramentans feared that they had lost control of their city as political and economic power moved to San Francisco, clearly blaming the Southern Pacific Railroad. They further took out their frustrations on those they deemed as “outsiders,” mainly Chinese. Clear manifestations of racial backlash were marked in the 1893 charter which prohibited the city of Sacramento “from employing Chinese workers or buying products made by Chinese labor.”²⁷ The power enjoyed by the Southern Pacific and its overarching economic stronghold in Sacramento would factor in when Mexicans would supplant the largely Chinese and Anglo railroad workers at the turn of the century.

²⁷ Ibid., 366-367.



Image 5: Mexican Track Workers for the Southern Pacific Railroad. (Courtesy of Center for Sacramento History, 82/84/02, 1920s.)

CARVING OUT MEXICAN SPACE: SACRAMENTO BARRIO LIFE

The massive upheaval brought by the Mexican Revolution of 1910 played a crucial role in stimulating Mexican emigration to the United States. Many families had to make the painstaking decision to abandon their homes, schools, businesses, and communities to avoid being looted, or worst yet, killed by incoming troops.²⁸ This was the case for the Falcóns whom were forced from their home during the Revolution, eventually settling in Sacramento. Socorro Falcón Zuniga explained in a recent interview that her father, Federico Falcón (a native of Fresno, Zacatecas, Mexico and Southern Pacific worker and former musician and school teacher in Mexico) and mother, Cleofas Najera Falcón (a native of Chihuahua, Chihuahua), were reluctant to talk about what prompted them to leave their *querido* (beloved) Mexico. She recalled,

²⁸ George J. Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 132.

They never talked about it...They were ashamed to talk about it. They had to flee the country and come over here. I understand they didn't bring anything. They were lucky to get out with their lives. It was the Revolution...It was a shameful thing that they had to leave their country...They were in Chicago [first] working in an iron foundry. It must have been terrible for them because my father wasn't used to that. He was well educated. He was a musician. It must have been very hard of him, to be working like that, and not having any security—having to be in a country that was foreign to them. I think it must have been terrible, I think back to that.²⁹

Indeed, the heightened sense of fear drove both professionals and peasants to seek safety and shelter in the United States. George I. Sánchez notes, in his work on Chicano Los Angeles, that “while *campesinos* crossed the border fleeing for their personal safety, hacienda owners often fled for fear of reprisals from their employees.”³⁰ Years later, for many of those who had to flee would prefer to bury those memories than to trigger emotions of pain and despair.

In the first three decades of the twentieth century, approximately one and a half million Mexicans fled to the U.S. to escape violence, hunger, economic hardships, and social unrest.³¹ In California, alone, the Mexican population increased from 8,086 in 1900 to more than 191,346 by 1930.³² Manuel G. Gonzales, in his work on Mexicans in the United States, notes that between 1900 and 1930 Mexicans were highly transient and worked in agriculture, mining, and the railroads. As a result, most Mexicans continued to live in a rural environment and apart from the growing urban

²⁹ Socorro Falcón Zuniga, interview by author, 29 June 2010, Sacramento, California, audio recording.

³⁰ Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 20.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

³² Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 57.

centers of U.S. society's mainstream, but they were not completely sheltered from outside hostilities or influences.³³ Indeed, the ethnic Mexican population continually increased in the first few decades of the twentieth century. For instance, in 1900 the U.S. Census recorded 8,086 ethnic Mexicans in the U.S., of which 7.8 percent resided in California, in 1910 there were 33, 694, or 15.2 percent, and in 1920 there were 88,771 or 18.2 percent of the state's population.³⁴

In Sacramento, and the nation at large, the outbreak of World War One created a labor shortage and restrictive immigration laws required more aggressive means of fill these positions.³⁵ One of the ways in which the major Sacramento employer, the Southern Pacific, dealt with this was to solicit the help of *engachadores* (labor agents) in Mexico to supply the seasonal workforce.³⁶ This was made possible by the expansion of the railroad in Mexico during the 1880s by the Southern Pacific and Mexico's President Porfirio Díaz which linked the neighboring countries.³⁷ Díaz

³³ Manuel G. Gonzales, *Mexicanos: A History of Mexicans in the United States* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 132.

³⁴ Governor C. C. Young, *Mexicans in California: Governor C. C. Young's Mexican Fact-Finding Committee* (San Francisco, CA: Department of Industrial Relations, Department of Agriculture, Department of Social Welfare, October 1930): 31. Document located at the California State Library, Documents Department.

³⁵ Most notably the Chinese Exclusion Law of 1882 prohibited the entry of Chinese laborers that had made up a significant percentage of railroad workers in California. Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003): 26, 48-49.

³⁶ Ricardo Romo, *East Los Angeles: History of a Barrio* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983): 33-36, 47. For works that focus on some aspects of Mexican railroad workers see: Barbara A. Driscoll, *The Tracks North: The Railroad Bracero Program of World War II* (Austin: The Center for Mexican American Studies, 1999); Michael M. Smith, *The Mexicans in Oklahoma* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980); Mario T. García, *Desert Immigrants: The Mexicans of El Paso, 1880-1920* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981); Emilio Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker in Texas* (Austin: Texas A&M University Press, 1993).

ambitiously sought to develop Mexico's natural resources for export by railway, with the ultimate goal of generating foreign exchange for internal investment and government revenue. An unexpected consequence was the surplus transportation of mostly male single laborers to work in unskilled jobs in the U.S. Historian Michael M. Smith, in his work on railroad workers, noted that "the first wave of Mexican immigrants that migrated to Kansas and elsewhere around 1900 had consisted primarily of young single men, employed by the railroads."³⁸ This also was the case in Sacramento as noted earlier where mostly male immigrant laborers partook in the city's nightlife. Not all, however, took the journey North alone some brought their families as was the case with Porfirio Cerna and Rosa María Luna Martínez and their five children who eventually settled in Sacramento.³⁹

At the same time, Sacramento was experiencing an economic boom due in large part to the opening of the Panama Canal, which allowed Sacramento Valley farmers to tap into Eastern markets in 1914 during the First World War. Pears, plums, peaches, cherries, prunes, apricots, grapes, and pears were being grown, and together, these cash crops contributed to an approximate 150,000 tons exported by 1916. The

³⁷ In 1877, President Díaz initiated an ambitious construction campaign that increased Mexico's rail road lines from 700 miles in 1880 to more than 15,000 miles by 1910. Lorena May Parlee, "Porfirio Díaz, Railroads, and Development in Northern Mexico: A Study of Government Policy Toward the Central and Nacional Railroads, 1867-1919" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, San Diego, 1981): 32 and 162.

³⁸ Michael M. Smith, "Mexicans in Kansas City: The First Generation, 1900-1920" in *Perspective in Mexican American Studies*, Vol. 1 (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1989): 30 and 37.

³⁹ Francisco Alonzo Martínez, "Escaping from Mexico's Civil Unrest of 1910: The Saga of Railroad Workers Francisco Luna Martínez and Clan—Al Norte!" (MA Thesis: California State University, Sacramento, 2007): 28.

Sacramento Valley's most valuable product, however, was rice culture when in 1915, 720,000 sacks of rice were produced, valued at \$1.5 million and in 1916, 2.5 million sacks, valued at \$5 million. The increase in agricultural production helped boost boat activity in the Sacramento River. In turn, boats from the Valley could tie up directly beside ocean-going vessels in San Francisco. Freight rates were so low that in 1916 some 90 percent of the freight between San Francisco and Sacramento was carried by boat as opposed to by rail. Also, operations such as the Sacramento Transportation Company maintained steady business, operating fleet trucks on each side of the river to pick up crops and deliver goods. By 1925 Sacramento River commercial transportation reached its peak in 1925, when 1,366,780 tons of freight moved on the river.⁴⁰ The increase in agricultural production and with operating transport mechanisms in place, created a demand for a cheap labor force to work the crops—Mexicans would fill this need.

Not surprisingly, then, by the Great Depression Sacramento's Mexican community was also mainly comprised of immigrants who journeyed North during the Mexican Revolution.⁴¹ Ernesto Galarza's *Barrio Boy* documented the voyage of a young boy from Jalcoctán, Nayarit, México to Sacramento during this period. He noted that in the time of his arrival and following the First World War, Sacramento was a destination point for many Mexicans. Galarza described the formation of the Mexican community in Sacramento:

⁴⁰ Kelley, *Battling the Inland Sea*, 300-302.

⁴¹ George Williams, "Capital's Forgotten Ones: Biggest Minority Has Mexican Roots," *The Sacramento Bee*, 19 February 1968, p. A1.

For the Mexicans the barrio was a colony of refugees. We came to know families from Chihuahua, Sonora, Jalisco, and Durango. Some had come to the United States even before the revolution, living in Texas before migrating to California. Like ourselves, our Mexican neighbors had come this far moving step by step, working and waiting, as if they were feeling their way up a ladder. They talked of relatives who had been left behind in Mexico, or in some far-off city like Los Angeles or San Diego. From whatever place they had come, and however short or long the time they had lived in the United States, together they formed the *colonia mexicana*....Crowded as it was, the *colonia* found a place for these *chicanos*, the name by which we called an unskilled worker born in Mexico and had just arrived in the United States. The *chicanos* were fond of identifying themselves by saying they had just arrived from el *macizo*, by which they meant the solid Mexican homeland, the good native earth. Although they spoke of el *macizo* like homesick persons, they didn't go back. They remained as they said of themselves, *pura raza*.⁴²

Although clearly a more in-depth study of the origins of the Sacramento Mexican community is needed for a comprehensive analysis, Galarza's passage suggests that the Northern California community model may differ in several ways from those documented in Southern California. First, Sacramento lies 517 miles from the border, much further away than Los Angeles which experienced more continuous immigration over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In contrast, situated hundreds of miles away from the border in the center of a vast agricultural hinterland that was itself isolated from the great urban centers of the West, the nature of the Sacramento Mexican-origin community differs because its denizens experience a far greater feeling of separation from the mother country. Thus, Galarza not surprisingly noted among local *mexicanos* a deeper sense of pride and loyalty to *la patria madre* because they found it necessary to protect and preserve their identity while vowing to

⁴² Ernesto Galarza, *Barrio Boy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1971): 200.

return to the *macizo*. Second, many of the migrants to Northern California did not come directly from Mexico, but in effect, re-migrated from Los Angeles, Texas, or some other place. For example, Guadalupe Aguilar a long-time Sacramento resident was born and raised in San Antonio, Texas later making her way to Sacramento during World War II where her sister and father had moved.⁴³ Pitti also found this multiple-settlement migration trend in his work on the Silicon Valley. He notes that Mexicans traveled remarkable distances to follow crops or other forms of employment, settling down in temporary and semi-permanent homes in many locales in the U.S.⁴⁴ The aforementioned examples demonstrate, then, that the make-up of satellite Mexican communities like Sacramento were more complex than more traditional Mexican immigrant communities located near the border.

Chicano residential settlement in Sacramento, and elsewhere in the American Southwest, best reflected patterns of economic employment. In other words, barrios sprung up near place of employment to provide easy and more convenient mobility to and from work. Sacramento barrios, similar to Los Angeles, were not confined to one general area.⁴⁵ Sacramento barrios were spread across different pockets of the city, usually near or around industrial sites. One of the earliest and largest barrios was on the West End (also referred to as the Lower Side Barrio, where Galarza and his family lived). There Mexicans lived side-by-side with working-class European and Asian

⁴³ Guadalupe Aguilar, interview by Rosana Madrid, January 16 and 25, 1984, Sacramento Ethnic Communities Survey: Chicano Oral Histories, Center for Sacramento History, Sacramento, California.

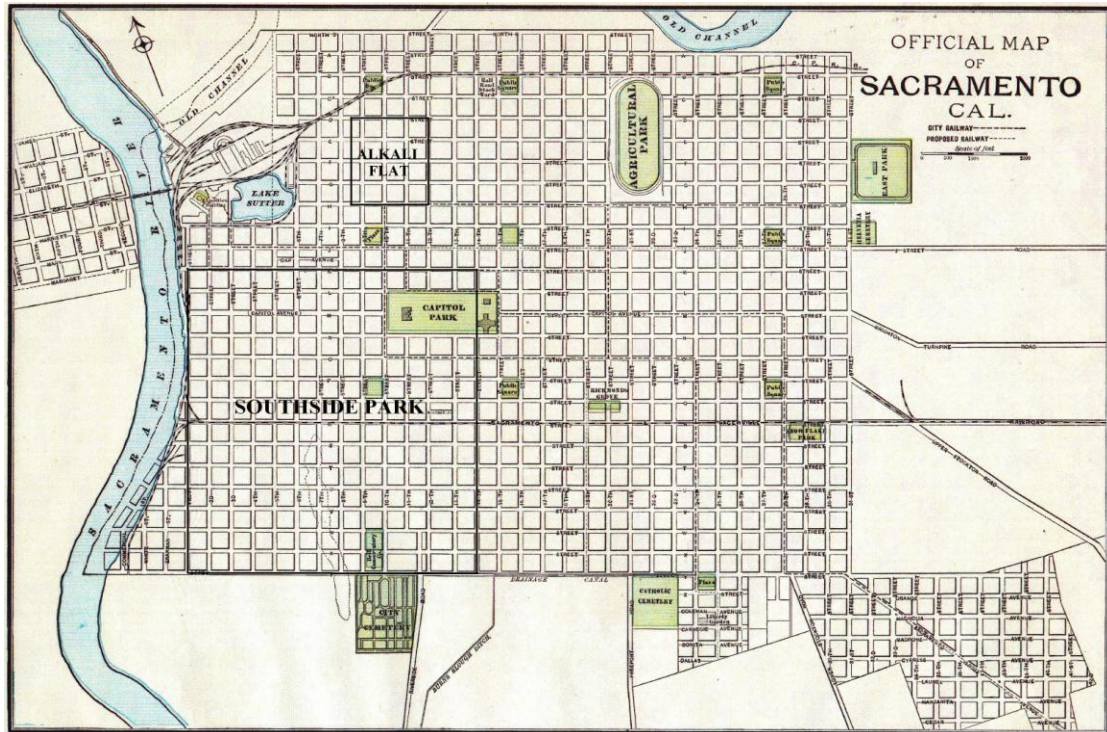
⁴⁴ Pitti, *The Devil in Silicon Valley*, 94-96.

⁴⁵ Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 195-196.

immigrants. Another contingent lived across the Sacramento River, in Bryte and Broderick (today the city of West Sacramento). This area was largely comprised of farm workers, many of whom were American-born. Following the food-packing and railroad industries, the Alkali Flats barrio flourished in the 1940s. A number of Mexican businesses thrived in this neighborhood. Another settlement was in the vicinity of Southside Park, located south of the Southern Pacific railroad tracks. Yet another significant neighborhood was in the south side of Sacramento, known as Barrio Alegre (today, the prosperous Mexican business area of Franklin Boulevard). Lastly, the Gardenland barrio in North Sacramento (west of Northgate Boulevard and nearby McClellan Air Force Base) thrived later in the 1960s.⁴⁶ More significantly, Sacramento operated as a hub for Spanish speakers in outlying agricultural communities, including those in Yolo, Sutter, and San Joaquin counties.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Donna Hasteed, ed., "Research Study on the Felt Needs of Three Ethnic Minorities in the Greater Sacramento Area: Negro, Mexican-American, Chinese" (Sacramento: Department of Anthropology, Sacramento State College, March 7, 1969): 1-2.

⁴⁷ Rosana M. Madrid, "Narrative History of Mexican/Chicano Community of Sacramento" compiled for the Sacramento Ethnic Community Survey Project, Center for Sacramento History (July 23, 1984): 28-34.



Map 3: Sacramento's Alkali Flat and Southside Park Barrios. (Courtesy of Center for Sacramento History, 1999/086/011, MC10:12.)

Mexican owned and operated businesses in Sacramento had existed since the 1910s. These included grocer-retail stores, restaurants, and saloons. Some Mexican women also owned businesses in Sacramento. For instance, forty-five year-old Honora Sánchez ran a tamale parlor in 1900 to support her three children.⁴⁸ By 1919, several Spanish-surname businesses appeared in Sacramento city directories, but they were remained small and relatively few. However, they began to thrive by the 1930s as Mexican families settled within its city limits increasing in population and therefore increasing demand. (Please refer to Table One for information on the ethnic Mexican population in Sacramento.) Indeed, in this decade Mexican owned businesses tripled

⁴⁸ Connolly and Self, *Capital Women*, 137.

according to Sacramento City Directories.⁴⁹ For instance, in 1936 some of these businesses included the Gómez Brothers groceries on 3946 Sacramento Boulevard, Carmen García Liquors on 224 “L” Street, and lunch rooms like Clamentina Vargas on 1417 3rd Street and Otilia Méndez diner on 1111 2nd Street.⁵⁰ The host of Mexican owned businesses served as premiere examples of success and a reminder of barrio accomplishment.

The barrio operated as a security blanket for the many Mexicans who called Sacramento home. Ridden by fear of deportation, racial hostility, and few economic resources, they found comfort in their neighborhood enclaves. Albert Camarillo in his community study on Chicanos in Santa Barbara and the greater Southern California region best described the particularities of barrio life when he explained that *barrioization* “meant more than just segregation from Anglo society; it was also a *process* [emphasis in original] that involved a great many social, economic, familial, and demographic factors.”⁵¹ In another important community study, Richard Griswold del Castillo further elaborated the specificities of barrio life,

The barrio gave identity and a feeling of being home for the dispossessed and poor. It was a place, a traditional place, that offered some security from the city’s social and economic turmoil. . . . In a sense the creation of the barrio was a means of cultural survival. Proximity of residence reinforced the language, religion,

⁴⁹ 1919, 1927, 1931, 1936, *Sacramento City Directories* (Sacramento, CA: Sacramento Directory Co. Publishers).

⁵⁰ 1919 and 1936, *Sacramento City Directories* (Sacramento, CA: Sacramento Directory Co. Publishers).

⁵¹ Albert Camarillo, *Chicanos in a Changing Society: From Mexican Pueblos to American Barrios in Santa Barbara and Southern California, 1848-1930* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979): 53.

and social habits of Chicanos and thus insured the continuation of their distinctive culture.⁵²

Thus, the barrio offered cultural, social, and economic survival and, in a sense, a form of protection against what many Mexicans believed to be a hostile white society. The pattern of establishing barrios where Mexicans populated in significant numbers stretched across generations and geographic locations in the United States.

Tracking the population of ethnic Mexicans in Sacramento before the 1920s is a difficult undertaking. Steve Avella's work on the Catholic Church in Sacramento documents that Spanish surnames appeared with some regularity throughout the baptismal registers of St. Rose Church and the Cathedral in Sacramento by the early 1900s, yet their numbers still remain unclear.⁵³ Numerous Sacramento newspapers report their existence through the coverage of Mexican cultural and social events though we know little of who they were and what they did. Part of the difficulty in properly accounting for Mexicans, as mentioned earlier, was that they were not limited to any one neighborhood but shifted over the course of the city's existence. Moreover, the transient nature of migrant farm workers in the area made it all but impossible for an accurate count. For instance, as is true of agricultural areas of California to the present day, during the harvest months in the larger Sacramento Valley, the Mexican populous increased, later dropping as migrants followed the next crop. One must also take note of undocumented immigrants who often lived in fear of government

⁵² Richard Griswold del Castillo, "La Raza Hispano Americana: The Emergence of an Urban Culture among the Spanish Speaking of Los Angeles, 1850-1880" (Ph.D. dissertation: University of California Los Angeles, 1974): 255.

⁵³ Steven M. Avella, *Sacramento and the Catholic Church: Shaping a Capital City* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2008): 216.

authorities and therefore may have opted not to participate or volunteer information to the Census Bureau. The uncertainty of just how many undocumented persons are included in census data has made for an inaccurate count of Latinos nationwide—and this has been largely true ever since the end of the Mexican War.⁵⁴

A more comprehensive attempt to account for population numbers of Mexicans in California came when Governor Clement C. Young appointed a Mexican Fact-Finding Committee in 1929 to assess the scope and condition of Latino growth in California. The committee consisted of the directors of the Departments of Industrial Relations, Social Welfare, and Agriculture. The 1930 report estimated that nearly 250,000 Mexicans lived in California. Sacramento County, according to the report, had only one percent of the state's Latino population, recording a mere 215 in 1910 and 850 in 1920. Such numbers must be viewed with an abundance of caution, however, since other evidence suggests a significantly larger permanent and transient Spanish-speaking population, and a significant increase in population in the decade of the Mexican Revolution.

Indeed, based even on these rough estimates, “between 1910 and 1920 Sacramento came in fourth in the fastest rate of growth in the state, gaining at least 635 new Mexican residents or an increase of 295 percent—exceeded only by a 339 percent gain in Imperial County, a 414 percent increase in Fresno County, and 470 percent growth in Santa Barbara County.” Indeed, within Sacramento city proper, “the number of Mexicans rose from 103 to 483 between 1910 and 1920, an increase of 383

⁵⁴ Clara E. Rodríguez, *Changing Race: Latinos, the Census, and the History of Ethnicity in the United States* (New York: New York University Press, 2000): 177.

percent, far surpassing the statewide rate of 159 percent.” This surge demonstrates that employment opportunities in “nearby truck gardens, hops and rice fields, canneries, and orchards” attracted many residents in the greater Sacramento Valley.⁵⁵ It is unclear if labor contractors had a role in the recruitment of Mexicans to work in area crops. American employers considered both natives and Mexican-born workers to be foreigners and thus an easily exploitable and ultimately dispensable labor source.⁵⁶

Regardless of these attempts at enumerating the *mexicano* and Mexican American populations, the legal and social ambiguity of the “racial” categorization of Mexicans often led to an undercount. For instance, when examining the 1860 census records, racial categories exist for “White, Black, Mulatto, Indian, and Asiatic” but Mexicans are excluded as a racial group. It was not until the 1930s that officials with the U.S. Census counted Mexicans as “white.”⁵⁷ The mere classification of “Hispanics” has fluctuated in the U.S. Census, not only because the “racial”

⁵⁵ Avella, *Sacramento and the Catholic Church*, 218. Governor C. C. Young, *Mexicans in California: Governor C. C. Young's Mexican Fact-Finding Committee* (San Francisco, CA: Department of Industrial Relations, Department of Agriculture, Department of Social Welfare, October 1930).

⁵⁶ For studies on ethnic Mexican workers in California's agribusiness see: Devra Anne Weber, “The Organizing of *Mexicano* Agricultural Workers: Imperial Valley and Los Angeles, 1928-1934, An Oral History Approach,” *Aztlán* 3 (Fall 1972): 307-347; Douglas Monroy, *Thrown Among Strangers: The Making of Mexican Culture in Frontier California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Douglas Monroy, *Rebirth: Mexican Los Angeles from the Great Migration to the Great Depression* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Ernesto Galarza, *Farm Workers and Agribusiness in California, 1947-1960* (Norte Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1977); Ernesto Galarza, *Merchants of Labor: The Mexican Bracero Story, An Account of the Managed Migration of Mexican Farmworkers in California, 1942-1960* (Charlotte, N.C.: McNally & Loftin, 1969); Paul S. Taylor, *Mexican Labor in the United States: Imperial Valley* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1928), *University of California Publications in Economics*, vol. 6, no. 1.; Paul S. Taylor, *An American-Mexican Frontier: Nueces County, Texas* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1934); Lloyd Fisher, *The Harvest Labor Market in California* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953).

⁵⁷ Joseph C. G. Kennedy, Superintendent of the Census, *Population of The United States in 1860; Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census, Under the Direction of the Secretary of the Interior* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1864): 33.

classification has changed but also because cultural criteria, such as language, surname and “origin” were also altered over time. For example, in 1930, first and second generation Mexicans were of the “Mexican race” unless the (usually white) census interviewer identified them to be definitely white, Negro, Indian, Chinese, or Japanese. Thus, the process of being racially categorized by U.S. census personnel was determined on an individual basis and could vary greatly. Those identified as Mexican were considered part of “other races” along with groups such as the Japanese, Chinese, and Native Americans. In his work on the category of race, David Theo Goldberg argues that “the practices of naming and knowledge construction tend to deny any meaningful autonomy to those so named and imagined, extending over them power, control, authority, and domination.”⁵⁸ Over the long run, he suggests, the U.S. Census has in many ways served to uphold white supremacy.

In 1940, the census dropped the Mexican category and stated that all Mexicans were to be reported as “white” unless they were determined, again, by the census interviewer to be “definitely Indian or of other Nonwhite races.” Part of the reason for this change, was a result of Mexican American agitation on the issue in Texas, where local activists insisted that Mexican continue to be classified as “white” as implied by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. As noted earlier, Mexicans were treated as anything but white in the labor market, political arena, educational system, and social arena, but some Mexican Americans believed that without the legal “white” classification they would continue to be discriminated against and relegated to second-class status.

⁵⁸ David Theo Goldberg, *Racial Subjects: Writing on Race in America* (New York: Routledge, 1997): 29.

Historian Ignacio García in his work on the racial classification of Mexicans notes that in Texas having another racial minority demanding their rights was an unwelcome event, but they had to do what they refused to do in everyday social interactions with Mexicans which as to proclaim Mexican Americans as white.⁵⁹ So they moved from being classified as “Mexican” unless determined otherwise in the 1930 census to being “white” unless determined otherwise in the 1940 census.⁶⁰

In 1950, the U.S. Census made another effort to identify and enumerate the Latino population including that in Sacramento. This was due, in part, to the large migration of Puerto Ricans to the United States mainland (even though all Puerto Ricans were made U.S. citizens by the Jones Act in 1917). “The 1950 census was the first to include Puerto Rico as a response to the place of birth questions typically used to determine foreign places of birth.” The next change was in 1970, when in an effort to best enumerate this diverse population, the census collected and analyzed six different “Hispanic” identifiers on two different long forms. “The identifiers included country of foreign birth or parentage, Spanish language, Spanish mother tongue, Spanish Surname, Spanish heritage, and, for the first time, self-identification.”⁶¹ The

⁵⁹ Ignacio M. García, *White but Not Equal: Mexican Americans, Jury Discrimination, and the Supreme Court* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2009): 81. For works on legal construction of race see: Ian F. Haney López, *White By Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York: New York University Press, 1996); Carlos K. Blanton, “George I. Sánchez, Ideology, and Whiteness in the Making of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement, 1930-1960” *Journal of Southern History* 72, no. 3 (August 2006): 588; Anthony Quiroz, *Claiming Citizenship: Mexican Americans in Victoria, Texas* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2005); Mario T. García, “Americanization and the Mexican Immigrant, 1880-1930” *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 6 (Summer 1978): 19-34.

⁶⁰ Rodríguez, *Changing Race*, 101-102.

⁶¹ Margo J. Anderson, Ed., *Encyclopedia of the U.S. Census* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2000): 244.

most recent modification came in 2000 when all residents of the United States were asked if they were Spanish/Hispanic/Latino. This was done in order to reflect the growing popularity of the term *Latino* in the larger society.⁶² Hence, given the ambiguity of the government issued “Hispanic” labels, it is no shock that tracking the population of Mexicans in Sacramento and elsewhere, for that matter, remains a significant challenge.

Table 1: Latino Growth in Sacramento County			
Year	Latino Population in County	Total Population	Percentage of Latino Population in County
1900	N/A	45,915 (a)	N/A
1910	N/A	67,806 (a)	N/A
1920	N/A	91,029 (a)	N/A
1930	115 (b)	141,999	.08%
1940	2,196 (b)	170,333	1.29%
1950	25,000 (a)	277,140 (a)	9.00%
1960	30,078 (c)	502,778	5.98%
1970	37,392 (d)	631,498	5.9%
1980	73,918 (e)	783,381	9.4%
1990	121,544	1,041,219	11.67%
2000	195,613 (f)	1,223,499	15.99%

(a) Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau.

(b) Source: Geospatial & Statistical Data Center, University of Virginia Library. These figures reflect the number of foreign-born from Mexico.

⁶² Anderson, *Encyclopedia of the U.S. Census*, 245.

(c) Source: “*Californians of Spanish Surname: Population, Employment, Income, and Education.*” State of California, Department of Industrial Relations: Division of Fair Employment Practices (May 1964): page 26.

(d) Source: “*Californians of Spanish Surname: Population, Education, Income, and Employment.*” State of California, Agriculture and Services Agency, Department of Industrial Relations Division of Fair Employment Practices (1976): pages 26 and 28.

(e) Source: “*Hispanics in Sacramento County*” (Sacramento: Community Serves Planning Council, February 1988): page 2.

(f) Source: David Garoogian, Ed., “*The Hispanic Databook: Detailed Statistics and Ranking on the Hispanic Population, including 23 Ethnic Backgrounds from Argentinean to Venezuelan, for 1,266 U.S. Counties and Cities,*” Second Edition (Millerton, NY: Grey House Publishing, 2004): page 10.

The abovementioned challenges elucidate the undercount of Mexicans in the Sacramento region. Employment patterns, however, best explicate the migration of Mexicans to the Sacramento Valley, a largely agricultural and railroad-dominated region. For example, in the first “Great Mexican Harvest” of 1920, many Mexicans made their way to Sacramento where they found employment at the Southern Pacific shops and at local canneries, especially after the 1920s when U.S. Congress imposed immigration restrictions on Southern and Eastern Europeans. The Southern Pacific actively recruited Mexicans to work in Roseville because of the nationwide shopmen’s strike of 1922.⁶³ Even though, Mexican immigrants made up the majority of agricultural and railroad workers, the overall permanent population remained relatively low, again probably due to the fact that so many Mexicans were transient or migrant workers.⁶⁴

ECONOMIC TURMOIL IN THE 1930S LEADS TO MEXICAN POLITICAL ORGANIZING

The 1930s were marked by fear and uncertainty in the United States due, in large part, to the 1929 Stock Market crash which affected Sacramento. Sacramento

⁶³ Madrid, “Narrative History of Mexican/Chicano Community of Sacramento,” 48.

⁶⁴ Steven M. Avella, *Sacramento: Indomitable City* (Great Britain: Arcadia Publishing, 2004): 108.

had not felt the effects of the Great Depression immediately, but as it deepened farmers began to struggle to sell their crops, canneries hired fewer workers, and merchants sold less merchandise. According to Sacramento historians Joseph A. McGowan and Terry R. Willis, between 1930 and 1932, automobile sales in Sacramento dropped from 5,560 per year to 2,236. At the same time a local welfare unit which had 354 families a month quadrupled its caseload to 1,503 families. The Salvation Army, which had prepared an average of 220 meals a day in 1931, gave out nearly triple that amount—625 meals a day—in 1932. With no federal funds available, local relief agencies were hard pressed to aid local families, let alone newcomers who had drifted into Sacramento seeking employment.⁶⁵

As is often the case in the United States, during economic crunches, immigrants in the early 1930s were viewed as responsible for having taken much needed “American” jobs. Of course, this reaction was part of a long pattern of job-related hostility that dated back to the Gold Rush. For example, the entrance of Chinese immigrants into California in the 1880s eventually led the California state government and later the federal governments to restrict immigration from China altogether.⁶⁶ David G. Gutiérrez notes that “[a]s nationwide unemployment reached six million by the end of 1930 and eleven million by the end of 1932, Mexican workers were singled out as scapegoats in virtually every locale in which they lived in

⁶⁵ McGowan and Willis, *Sacramento*, 81.

⁶⁶ For more information on Chinese immigrants refer to: Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971); Judy Young, *Unbound Feet: A social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of California Press); Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

substantial numbers.”⁶⁷ Hence, by the Great Depression local, state, and federal officials pressured an estimated 350,000 to 500,000 Mexican nationals—and an unknown but surely sizable number of their U.S.-born children—into leaving the U.S. in a massive repatriation.⁶⁸ These efforts began in early 1931 and were most starkly felt in Los Angeles where by year’s end nearly one third of its Mexican population had been repatriated. Similar efforts took place in Sacramento and although it is not clear how many local Mexicans were repatriated, accessibility to train rides undoubtedly facilitated the removal of “undesired” Mexican nationals.⁶⁹

Racial prejudice manifested itself most severely in regions such as Texas, leading Mexicans to initiate campaigns to gain acceptance as U.S. citizens—a sometimes impossible task given that full incorporation proved unattainable for most Mexican Americans. In 1929, the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) in San Antonio, Texas was founded in an effort to combat nativist sentiment against ethnic Mexicans and also to demonstrate that they too were American. LULAC has been defined by many Chicano historians as a mainstream organization committed to the principles of assimilation, but most importantly as an entity that sought full citizenship rights for its American-born membership.⁷⁰ Their members

⁶⁷ Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 72.

⁶⁸ David G. Gutiérrez, ed., *Between Two Worlds: Mexican Immigrants in the United States* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1996), xiii-xiv. Also see: Francisco E. Balderrama and Raymond Rodríguez, *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995).

⁶⁹ Avella, *Sacramento and the Catholic Church*, 219.

⁷⁰ Benjamín Márquez, *LULAC: The Evolution of a Mexican American Political Organization* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993): 1. For additional studies on LULAC see: O. Douglas Weeks,

hoped to mask or at least diminish the importance of their ethnicity by pledging loyalty to the United States and forbidding the use of Spanish at their meetings.⁷¹ They interpreted Americanization as a necessary means to end the economic, political, and cultural isolation of Mexican Americans. In his work, Mario T. García situates groups like LULAC in what he and others called the “Mexican American Generation”—a generation that “aspired to move into mainstream American life” because middle-class Mexican Americans recognized that they “could no longer adequately function in their

“The League of United Latin-American Citizens: A Texas-Mexican Organization,” *Southwestern Political and Social Science Quarterly* 10, no. 3 (December 1929): 265-266; Richard A. García, *Rise of the Mexican American Middle Class* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1991); Craig A. Kaplowitz, *LULAC, Mexican Americans, and National Policy* (College Station: Texas A&M University, 2005); Benjamín Márquez, “The Problems of Organizational Maintenance and the League of Latin American Citizens,” *Social Science Journal* 28, no. 2 (1991): 203-226; Katsuyuki Murata, “The (Re)Shaping of Latino/Chicano Ethnicity Through the Inclusion/Exclusion of Undocumented Immigrants: The Case of LULAC’s Ethno-Politics,” *American Studies International* 39, no. 2 (June 2001): 4-34; Amy Waters Yarsinke, *All for One and One for All: A Celebration of 75 Years of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)* (Virginia Beach, VA: Donning, 2004).

⁷¹ In recent, Cynthia Orozco has challenged this depiction of LULAC in her book *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed: The Rise of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009). Orozco argues that Chicano scholars—especially those of the Chicano Movement era—were too harsh and hyper-critical of LULAC for embracing an identity of “Mexican American” or “Latin American” and for adopting English as its official language in its bylaws. She holds that Chicano scholars have largely relegated LULAC as merely an assimilationist, middle-class organization that supposedly turned their back on their Mexican national brethren to gain socio and political status among whites in Texas. She maintains that not enough attention has been placed on the multiple, shifting, and contradictory identities that LULAC has had and that this interpretation also lack a periodization contextualization. Orozco offers a convincing study wherein she demonstrates that LULACers were conforming and reacting to the politics of its time and that these unique circumstances should be weighed in studying the organization. Indeed, LULAC championed civil rights for Mexican Americans by fighting for them to serve on juries, right to vote, and to integrate segregated public facilities. For purposes of this study, I will subscribe to the “older” interpretation of LULAC to draw attention to the stark differences between LULAC and other ethnic Mexican organizations of the same time period, mainly mutual aid societies in California. While, I agree with Orozco that LULAC has been viewed too harshly by Chicano scholars, I also believe that for whatever reasons some LULACers took a mainstream approach to organizing and legitimizing themselves as white. Most importantly, Mexican beneficiary organizations stood as clear examples of organizations that could also assist, outreach, and serve the needs of ethnic Mexicans without “separating” themselves from their Mexican heritage. So given the circumstances of region, period, and what Orozco argues “hybrid” identities, ethnic Mexicans had to succumb to a special set of circumstances not experienced by Chicanos in the 1960s.

marginal ethnic enclaves.”⁷² García argues that in the 1930s Mexican Americans began to stress the need for a new political direction for themselves based on two basic needs: “the importance of instilling a new consciousness” among Mexican Americans as fully vested American citizens and to organize new forms of political organizations based on their rights of citizens.⁷³

In Sacramento the need for social-political organizations such as LULAC was felt by Mexicans in the era. The influx of Mexican nationals into the region during the Mexican Revolution provided the mass for formal organizing. Indeed, the shared feelings of seclusion, lack of English language skills, poverty, and nostalgia for the mother country helped foster communal solidarity among Mexicans in the larger Sacramento Valley. They formed *mutualistas* or mutual aid societies such as the *Alianza Hispano-Americana*, a fraternal insurance society, to combat the feelings of isolation and assist in financial hardships.⁷⁴ Mutualistas represented the best form of

⁷² Mario T. García, *Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology, and Identity, 1930-1960* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 25.

⁷³ García, *Mexican Americans*, 26.

⁷⁴ The *Alianza Hispano Americana* was founded in Arizona in the 1880s. By turn of the century chapter arose in Texas and California, making it one of the largest national mutual aid association. Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed*, 67.

For additional works on mutual aid societies see: Roberto R. Calderón, “Unión, Paz y Trabajo: Laredo’s Mexican Mutual Aid Societies, 1890s,” in *Mexican Americans in Texas* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 2000), 63-77; Kaye Lynn Briegel, “Alianza Hispano-Americans, 1894-1965: A Mexican American Fraternal Insurance Society” (Ph.D. diss., University of Southern California, 1974); Julie Leininger Pycior, “La Raza Organizes: Mexican American Life in San Antonio, 1915-1930 as Reflected in Mutualista Activities” (Ph.D. diss., Norte Dame University, 1979); Arnoldo De León, *The Tejano Community, 1836-1900* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982); Emilio Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker in Texas* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1993), 86-109; Richard Griswold del Castillo, *The Los Angeles Barrio, 1850-1890: A Social History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 135-138; Albert Camarillo, *Chicanos in a Changing Society: From Mexican Pueblos to American Barrios in Santa Barbara and Southern California, 1848-1930* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 119, 147-154.

grassroots organizing at the local level. Their philosophy included fraternity, protection, patriotism, altruism, material assistance, faith, work, Mexican nationalism, and unity. Historian Emilio Zamora in his work on mutualistas in Texas holds that “[t]heir fundamental concern was to help each other survive the very difficult conditions under which they lived and worked.”⁷⁵ They operated in a sense of nostalgia for their beloved Mexico and a desire to celebrate and preserve their ethnic background and history. For instance, they organized *fiestas patrias* as a means to ensure a preservation of culture and pride. Membership was open to Mexican nationals and Mexican Americans.⁷⁶ Its popularity and success was also marked in Sacramento where the *Alianza* had at least two active chapters. Additionally, *La Junta Patriotica Mexicana*, a federation of various patriotic organizations provided cultural entertainment and fellowship to Sacramento Mexicans.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Emilio Zamora warns that mutualistas cannot be placed in one class category, for some middle class and upper class ethnic Mexicans also made up its membership. Furthermore, he sustains that these civil and social organizations did not “simply embrace a narrow self-help outlook. Mutual aid societies also reinforced collectivist values with resolute statements of purpose in support of egalitarian and moral principles, an active civic role, and strict rules that disciplined the members into conscious proponents of the ethic of mutuality and a Mexicanist identity.” Thus, intellectuals and the working class alike combined their ideals of civic unity through organizing under the umbrella of mutual aid societies. This blend allowed for persons of Mexican descent from varying economic and academic backgrounds to come together to discuss political issues in the home country and also in their now host country. Emilio Zamora, “Mutualist and Mexicanist Expression of a Political Culture in Texas,” in *Mexican Americans in Texas* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 2000): 84-85.

⁷⁶ Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed*, 67.

⁷⁷ Avella, *Sacramento and the Catholic Church*, 219.



Image 6: Alianza Hispano Americana, Primer Aniversario (First Anniversary), Logia Número. (Lodge Number) 207, Sacramento, CA. (Courtesy of Center for Sacramento History, 85/06/30A, May 1929.)

Mexican mutual aid societies have a long and important history in the United States. Albert Camarillo maintains that *mutualistas* played a pivotal role in shaping social and economic survival for Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans. They provided “mutual aid and insurance benefits,” “fraternal association,” “protection of the rights and privileges of Mexicans,” and “promotion of cultural, social, patriotic and recreational activities.”⁷⁸ By facilitating continued contact among *mexicanos*, the organizations helped maintain Mexican culture, language, and cohesiveness in an otherwise foreign society. Hence, for ethnic Mexicans, *mutualistas* provided the

⁷⁸ Camarillo, *Chicanos in a Changing Society*, 148.

answer to their socio-economic needs and helped bridge ethnic solidarity among barrio residents.

The most successful mutual aid society in Sacramento was *El Comité de Beneficencias*. Lucío Pérez, founder of *El Comité*, recalled that when the Stock Market crashed in 1929 “foreigners,” especially those of Mexican ancestry, experienced mass unemployment. He explained,

Nuestros hermanos de raza que carentes de todos recursos causaban dolor ver su situación por la cual atravesaban a raíz de la desocupación en los campos, en las fábricas, e industrias del país Americano, ahí fué en donde tuve mi cerebro una idea, me nació un deseo de hacer un algo por lo menos...⁷⁹

It broke my heart to witness our brethren who had been victims of mass unemployment in the fields, factories, and other American industries. It was then that an idea was born and my desire grew to give back...

It was at this moment that Pérez not only saw the dire need, but also the opportunity to organize a mutual aid society.

However, it was not until May 17, 1936 that the El Comité was founded in Yountville, California to assist with the burial of farm workers whose bodies often went unclaimed because their relatives resided in Mexico. City officials would routinely take custody and cremate the bodies probably because they were migrant farm workers and traveled alone to work the crops. Mexican farm workers viewed this act offensive, as many were Catholic and did not believe in cremation. Consequently, a group of eleven men organized monetary collections among farm workers to provide

⁷⁹ “Breve Historia y Datos del Comite Mexicano de Beneficencia: Viendo el Pasado en el Porvenir, Bodas de Plata 25 Años de Vida,” (April 30, 1961) brochure in author’s possession.

for “proper funerals.” Besides funeral arrangements, *El Comité*’s mission was to “counter as best as possible the many difficulties which beset those of us who live in this country.”⁸⁰ This statement alludes to the multiple barriers Mexicans encountered while residing in the United States and the need to ease these hardships through the organization.

Sacramentans of Mexican descent were also invested in helping out fellow compatriots in need. On January 1938, Pérez attended a celebration hosted by La Comisión Honorífica Mexicana in Sacramento. There Pérez propositioned Andres Molina who was in attendance at the event to start an El Comité chapter in the area. Molina along with Manuel Rey co-founded the Sacramento chapter later that year. One of the first tasks El Comité undertook was to raise funds for two Mexican boys who were hit by a Southern Pacific train in the Sacramento region and consequently lost their legs in the accident. Molina and Rey, through El Comité, began a donation drive and raised enough funds for prosthetic legs for the boys and also to pay for their return trip to Mexico. El Comité de Sacramento also worked closely with the Mexican Consulate to co-sponsor Mexican national holiday events and for rescue efforts of natural disasters in Mexico. The chapter focused on providing monetary assistance to those who lost their employment, for funeral expenses, and those expecting a newborn. These aforementioned benefits helped sustain the organization well into the 1980s.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Comité Mexicano de Beneficencia, “Reglamento Oficial del Comité de Beneficencia.” October 31, 1980. Collection: Aguilar, G., Folder No.: 84/52/01-02, Center for Sacramento History.

Whereas LULAC leaders consciously chose to emphasize the American side of their social identity as the primary basis for organizing, *El Comité Mexicano* proudly affirmed their Mexican ancestry and desire to preserve and promote their culture. Unlike LULAC, they declared, “our society will look for collective cooperation, to widen the moral material betterment of its members—and, by extension, all members of the Great Mexican family living in this county.”⁸² For them, then, creating and maintaining communal bonds took precedence over citizenship status or mastery of the English language. In fact, members conducted meetings solely in Spanish and printed organizational brochures and pamphlet information in Spanish. Thus, unlike LULAC leaders who conducted meetings in English and whose members swore allegiance to the United States, *El Comité* made no qualms about its ties either to the U.S. or Mexico and declared cultural perseverance also part of its mission. They frequently sponsored dances, dinners, and cultural events.⁸³

Like most *mutualistas*, *El Comité* had a separate “ladies auxiliary.” Vicki L. Ruiz explains that “the politics of voluntary associations”—more specifically, *mutualistas*—“negotiated class divisions, but they also articulated configurations of gendered identity.”⁸⁴ This was due, in part, to the belief in the nurturing nature of

⁸¹ “Breve Historia y Datos del Comité Mexicano de Beneficencia: Viendo el Pasado en el Porvenir, Bodas de Plata 25 Años de Vida,” (April 30, 1961) brochure in author’s possession.

⁸² Comité Mexicano de Beneficencia, “Reglamento Oficial del Comité de Beneficencia.”

⁸³ Aguilar, interview by Rosana Madrid, January 16 and 25, 1984.

⁸⁴ Vicki L. Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998): 88.

women and strength in family orientation.⁸⁵ Indeed, women sought to help their neighbors; they worked within their communities in a public way, although their organizing generally remained invisible outside the barrio. In 1960, Angelita Bribeiesca of Sacramento established its first women auxiliary. The separate auxiliary attended to the specific needs of women, especially in issues of childcare and healthcare. For instance, expecting moms were provided with monetary support to pay for the delivery and any additional costs related to the care of the newborn.⁸⁶

The desire to assist fellow compatriots lured women such as Guadalupe Aguilar to *El Comité* in 1973. Although Aguilar did not participate in *El Comité's* early history, her reflections in an oral interview suggest that little had changed in the makeup and structure of the organization. Moreover, her views and experience in *El Comité* provide a window into the gender ideologies and practices of the organization. For instance, Aguilar admittedly shied away from participating in organizations until her husband's death. She spoke candidly in noting that her husband tried to steer her away from "political" involvement. She explained that he vehemently believed her role was *en la casa* (at home) as a housewife.⁸⁷ The restrictions Aguilar faced during her marriage highlight patriarchal roles, yet at the same time, her experience also illustrates ways women negotiated around them.

⁸⁵ Denise A. Segura, "Ambivalence or Community? Motherhood and Employment among Chicanas and Mexican Immigrant Workers" in Vicki L. Ruiz, ed., *Las Obreras: Chicana Politics of Work and Family* (Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Publications, 1993): 181.

⁸⁶ "Breve Historia y Datos del Comité Mexicano de Beneficencia: Viendo el Pasado en el Porvenir, Bodas de Plata 25 Años de Vida," (April 30, 1961) brochure in author's possession.

⁸⁷ Aguilar, interview by Rosana Madrid, January 16 and 25, 1984.

Indeed, women have always discovered ways to navigate gender ideologies and practices enabling them to organize in their respective communities. The concept of operating both public and private spaces has been widely explored by feminist scholars. For instance, in her larger study on American women Sara Evans argues that voluntary organizations provided the vehicle for which to navigate both public and private spheres.⁸⁸ Mary Pardo concurs and adds that women tend to “explain their community work in relation to family responsibilities, class and ethnicity further specify the work they do to create kinship networks.”⁸⁹ Thus, for Aguilar and other women of Mexican descent, deciding to venture outside the private also provided great fulfillment because they were able to tend to the extended *familia*. While gender dynamics were clearly drawn in Aguilar’s household, her wish for bettering the conditions of her community eventually overrode even her husband’s desires.

Undeniably, voluntary organizations have not only serviced and assisted immigrant communities, they have also aided them with the tools necessary to advance their social, educational, financial, medical, and political agendas.⁹⁰ These organizations have had multiple functions and duties, oftentimes establishing transnational ties with the ethnic group’s home country.⁹¹ The participatory act of

⁸⁸ Sara M. Evans, *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America* (New York: The Free Press, 1989): 313.

⁸⁹ Mary Pardo, “Creating Community: Mexican American Women in Eastside Los Angeles,” in *Las Obreras*, 130.

⁹⁰ S. Karthick Ramakrishnan and Celia Viramontes, *Civic Inequalities: Immigrant Volunteerism and Community Organizations in California* (San Francisco, CA: Public Policy Institute of California, 2006): 3.

engaging with voluntary associations facilitates ways of learning civic and civil politics in the host-country.⁹² Social relations through voluntary organizations act as a resource for immigrants who depend on these groups as a go-between. Furthermore, well-established mutual aid or voluntary associations “provided newcomers with emotional and cultural support and various other practical resources, including aid to realize their coming to the United States, initial housing and food, knowledge of employment opportunities, and general information about U.S. culture and society.”⁹³ Through these need-based organizations, immigrant and U.S.-born ethnic groups sustained a reciprocal relationship and mutual regard and understanding. Hence, Sacramento, like many other localities in the U.S. with large immigrant populations, had functioning and successful volunteer associations to serve the needs of ethnic Mexicans.

⁹¹ For information on voluntary organizations among immigrant groups see: S. Karthick Ramakrishnan and Irene Bloemraad, “Making Organizations Count: Immigrant Civic Engagement in California Cities” in S. Karthick Ramakrishnan and Irene Bloemraad, Eds., *Civic Hopes and Political Realities: Immigrants, Community Organizations, and Political Engagement* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2008): 45-76; Shannon Gleeson, “Organizing for Immigrant Labor Rights: Latino Immigrants in San Jose and Houston,” in *Civic Hopes and Political Realities*: 107-133; Caroline B. Brettell and Deborah Reed-Danahay, “Communities of Practice’ for Civic and Political Engagement: Asian Indian and Vietnamese Immigrant Organizations in a Southwest Metropolis” in *Civic Hopes and Political Realities*: 195-221; Sofya Aptekar, “Highly Skilled but Unwelcome in Politics: Asian Indians and Chinese in a New Jersey Suburb,” in *Civic Hopes and Political Realities*: 222-243; Daniel Melero Malpica, “Indigenous Mexican Migrants in a Modern Metropolis: The Reconstruction of Zapotec Communities in Los Angeles,” in Enriqueta C. Ochoa and Gilda L. Ochoa, *Latino Los Angeles: Transformations, Communities, and Activism* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2005): 111-136; Susan Bibler Coutin, “The Formation and Transformation of Salvadoran Community Organizations in Los Angeles,” in *Latino Los Angeles*: 155-177; Adelaida R. Del Castillo, “Mexican Women in Organization,” in Magdalena Mora and Adelaida R. Del Castillo, Eds., *Mexican Women in the United States: Struggles Past and Present* (Los Angeles: Chicano Studies Research Center Publication, University of California, Los Angeles, 1980): 7-16.

⁹² Brettell and Reed-Danahay, “Communities of Practice,” 197.

⁹³ Malpica, “Indigenous Mexican Migrants in a Modern Metropolis,” 123.

FROM THE BRACERO PROGRAM TO MEXICAN AMERICAN IDEOLOGY

The establishment of *mutualistas* in Sacramento in the 1930s provided a social safe haven and safety net for the thousands of Mexican workers who made their way to the region during the Second World War. The Mexican population surged when the United States faced a severe farm labor shortage as a result of conscription and World War II mobilization.⁹⁴ To address the labor deficiency, U.S. farmers mobilized by petitioning the government to recruit workers from Mexico. This call was also due in large part to the fact that farmers could not keep up with the demand for both food and fiber “for national consumption and the armed forces as well as the Allies.”⁹⁵ Indeed, as early as 1942, critical labor shortages caused manpower drains to the military and exploding defense industries threatened farm production.⁹⁶ The severity of the situation was captured in an article in *The Sacramento Bee* on June 4, 1942:

Although local efforts today continued to brighten the farm labor shortage problem in the Sacramento area, the general California farm picture still was spotlighted by warnings that millions of dollars in crop losses may be expected if a complete answer soon is not found. Throughout the state registration of volunteer workers is being resorted to and it is apparent at least in Sacramento, the Food For Victory Program so far is receiving a good response. Roy C. Donally, manager of the United States Employment Service office in Sacramento said between 500 and 600 persons already have volunteered for farm work this summer.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Gutiérrez, *Between Two Worlds*, xiv.

⁹⁵ Erasmo Gamboa, *Mexican Labor and World War II: Braceros in the Pacific Northwest, 1942-1947* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990): xvii.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ “Local Plans Brighten Outlook for Adequate Farm Manpower,” *The Sacramento Bee*, 4 June 1942.

But even local volunteer recruitment efforts proved insufficient to meet the labor demands. In an attempt to address this scarcity, the United States and Mexico embarked upon an unprecedented labor agreement in August 1942, which soon became commonly known as the Bracero Program, that provided the statutory authority to renew “recruitment and contracting of temporary migrant workers” in Mexico and the Caribbean.⁹⁸

Shortly thereafter, the United States government set an aggressive recruitment campaign across the border for workers through newspapers and radio ads and by establishing headquarters at the National Stadium in Mexico City. At this recruiting center, the War Food Administration (WFA) interviewed potential employees about their work experience in agriculture. If they were determined to have appropriate skills, they had to undergo “comprehensive health and physical examinations, including chest X-rays and serological tests for venereal disease.”⁹⁹ Alberto Cortes Heredia originally from Puebla, Mexico explained the process:

Después de pasar un rigurosisimo examen físico. Era de acuerdo de ellos decir este va o este no va. Había una selección de trabajadores los que físicamente estábamos en condiciones de aguantar las tremendas condiciones de trabajo que había en aquel entonces, aquí en el Sur Pacífico. Pues, así fue como logré engancharme, digamos así, en el primer enganche de trabajadores Mexicanos para trabajar con el Sur Pacífico de aquí en los Estados Unidos.

[We had to undergo a rigorous physical exam. They ultimately decided who qualified. Those who were viewed with the physical stamina to endure the Southern Pacific’s tremendously difficult

⁹⁸ Manuel García y Griego, “The Importation of Mexican Contract Laborers to the United States, 1942-1964,” in David G. Gutiérrez, *Between Two Worlds: Mexican Immigrants in the United States* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1996), 47.

⁹⁹ Gamboa, *Mexican Labor and World War II*, 50-51.

work conditions were given the go ahead. This is how I embarked to be one of the first Mexican contract laborers to work for the Southern Pacific here in the United States.]¹⁰⁰

Heredia eventually arrived in Roseville, California on May 18, 1943 and began work the very next day for the Southern Pacific.¹⁰¹

Even though the Bracero Program was national in scope, local, federal, and state officials tailored the federal farm labor system to meet regional labor market demands. Mexican workers were contracted in their homeland and brought to locals where their labor was needed.¹⁰² By 1943 thousands of braceros were recruited to work on railroad yards including those of the Southern Pacific in Sacramento and Roseville.¹⁰³ In that same year, the government of Mexico opened a consulate in Sacramento. While the consulate played a quiet role in defending the rights of Mexican nationals in employment, it was most effective in assisting Mexicans organize social and cultural events.¹⁰⁴ The establishment of the Mexican consulate in the capitol city seems to have been a calculated measure by the Mexican government to assure the well-being of its workers in the region. Gilbert G. González in his work on Mexican Consuls in the Southwest notes that under the original Bracero Agreement

¹⁰⁰ Alberto Cortes Heredia and Carmen Gámez Heredia, interview by Dolores Delgado-Campbell, October 1983, Sacramento Ethnic Communities Survey: Chicano Oral Histories, Center for Sacramento History, Sacramento, California.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Gamboa, *Mexican Labor and World War II*, xix.

¹⁰³ Madrid, "Narrative History of Mexican/Chicano Community of Sacramento," 50.

¹⁰⁴ Avella, *Sacramento and the Catholic Church*, 220.

and subsequent renewals, “Mexican consulates were responsible for overseeing Mexican labor’s compliance with its terms.”¹⁰⁵

Although the Mexican government agreed to export contract laborers, it was wary of U.S. intentions and concerned for the treatment of its citizens. The Mexican government was keenly aware of widespread racial discrimination in the United States and of its legal segregation policy that forbid Mexicans from entering “white” establishments or public accommodations. In an effort to curtail these social and legal policies and to protect its workers abroad, Mexico instituted a provision to “blacklist states, counties, or employers that were found to discriminate.” Furthermore, the Bracero agreement stipulated that when discrimination complaints were filed, a joint investigation would proceed by U.S. and Mexican representatives, upon which a determination would be reached. This provision, however, was curtailed in 1954 probably due to an overwhelming caseload or perhaps the inability of both governments to come to an agreement over how to proceed with such complaints. In 1951, another provision was added that dealt with braceros “right to select representatives from their own ranks to ‘communicate’ with employers.” This did not include the right to alter other terms in the bracero agreement, and definitely did not establish the right of collective bargaining. Lastly, the bracero agreement made two distinctive parties: on the one hand, the individual bracero worker; and, on the other, the United States government as employer.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Gilbert G. González, *Mexican Consuls and Labor Organizing: Imperial Politics in the American Southwest* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999): 208.

The experiences of braceros in Sacramento often fell short of expectations. Those who arrived at the Sacramento and Roseville railroad yards not only found work conditions poor but also living quarters unsanitary. For instance, the Southern Pacific provided braceros the option of renting boxcars near rail yards that doubled as residences, but these boxcars had no running water, electricity, or bathroom facilities. To make matters worse, because of the location of the boxcars, children were forced to cross busy railroad tracks to attend local schools. Braceros often felt obligated to accept these dwellings and reasoned that the tradeoff was close proximity to work.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004): 140.

For additional works on the Bracero Program refer to: Richard B. Craig, *The Bracero Program: Interest Groups and Foreign Policy* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971); Henry P. Anderson, *The Bracero Program in California, with Particular Reference to Health Status, Attitudes, and Practices* (Berkeley: School of Public Health, University of California, Berkeley, 1961); Stephen N. Varrelman, "Fraud in the Fields: The Collapse of the Bracero Program" (Thesis, MA History, California State University, Sacramento, 2006); Barbara A. Driscoll, *The Tracks North: The Railroad Bracero Program of World War II* (Austin: Center for Mexican American Studies, University of Texas, Austin, 1999); Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S.* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Richard J. Coronado, "A Conceptual Model of the Harvest Labor Market: The Bracero Program and Factors Involved in Organization Among Farm Workers in California, 1946-1970" (Ph.D. Diss., University of Norte Dame, 1980); Alicia R. Schmidt Camacho, *Migrant Imaginaries: Latino Cultural Politics in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (New York: New York University Press, 2008); Norma A. Gutiérrez, "Testimonios: Oral Histories of Elder Migrant Farm Workers (Thesis, M.S.W., Social Work, California State University, Sacramento, 2004); Robert L. Judmeyer, *The Bracero Program, 1942-1951: Mexican Contract Labor in the United States* (Ph.D. Diss., University of Missouri-Columbia, 1993); George Claude Kiser, "The Bracero Program: A Case Study of Its Development, Termination, and Political Aftermath" (Ph.D. Diss., University of Massachusetts, 1973); Erasmo Gamboa, "The Bracero Program," in Erasmo Gamboa and Carolyn M. Buan, Eds., *Nosotros The Hispanic People of Oregon: Essays and Recollections* (Portland, Oregon: The Oregon Council for The Humanities, 1995): 41-44; Don Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land: Migrant Workers and the California Landscape* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Erasmo Gamboa, *Mexican Labor and World War II: Braceros in the Pacific Northwest, 1942-1947* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990); Frank Leroy Hull, Jr., "The Effects of Braceros on the Agricultural Labor Market in California 1950-1970: Public Law 78 and Its Aftermath," (Ph.D. Diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1973); María Herrera-Sobek, *The Bracero Experience: Elitlore Versus Folklore* (Los Angeles: UCLA Latin American Center Publications, 1979); Howard L. Campbell, "Bracero Migration and the Mexican Economy, 1951-1964" (Ph.D. Diss., The American University, Washington D.C., 1972); Ernesto Galarza, *Merchants of Labor: The Mexican Bracero Story* (Charlotte: McNally and Loftin Publishers, 1964).

¹⁰⁷ Madrid, "Narrative History of Mexican/Chicano Community of Sacramento," 50.

In Roseville, approximately seven families lived in these boxcars and shared one bathroom that was located in a designated exterior area. Carmen Gámez Heredia, spouse to Alberto Cortes Heredia, shared the difficulty of both being the wife of a railroad worker and having to reside in the boxcars. She remarked that it was difficult to see her husband working under adverse weather conditions. In the winter months the boxcars would get extremely cold and to keep warm, she recalled, they would have to get up in the middle of the night to start a fire.¹⁰⁸ For the Heredias, then, they had little choice but to make do with both poor working and living conditions.

As laborers under contract, braceros were expected to adapt and stay on the job under arduous conditions. Often times the most strenuous and worst paid jobs were reserved for Mexicans.¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, braceros experienced racial hostility and resentment from white coworkers. For example, in Roseville, the mostly Italian-American and Greek-American railroad workforce accused Mexicans of “stealing” their jobs. Heredia noted,

Había también algunos mayordomos y otras personas que no se sentían muy bien que nosotros los mexicanos llegásemos a desempeñar los trabajos, que según ellos eran los únicos que lo hacían aquí.¹¹⁰

[Some of the foremen and other persons who didn't feel comfortable that Mexicans came to take their jobs. According to them, they were better fit for those positions.]

¹⁰⁸ Heredia and Heredia, interview by Dolores Delgado-Campbell, October 1983.

¹⁰⁹ Gamboa, *Mexican Labor and World War II*, 54.

¹¹⁰ Heredia and Heredia, interview by Dolores Delgado-Campbell, October 1983.

Heredia and his fellow compatriots were made aware that their presence was not welcomed. Racism fueled these sentiments as Heredia best explicated:

Se sentían un poquito superiores ha nosotros, pero nosotros tenemos la experiencia como mexicanos de nunca dejarnos. Siempre nos presentamos trabajando, trabajando.¹¹¹

[They felt superior to us, but we knew we were capable and as Mexicans we weren't going to let them push us around. We are always present and ready to work, always work.]

Braceros were also subject to the regional dual wage structure, in which Mexicans received considerable less pay than “white” workers performing the same job.¹¹² Mexican laborers worked a ten hour workday without overtime pay and received inferior meals (usually beans with dried chili and bread) than did their white counterparts. Heredia noted that many braceros fell ill due to dehydration because they were not provided with salt pills or access to the same levels of medical care that whites received. Hence, Mexicans were subject to unfair treatment and payment at the jobsite.

Nevertheless, braceros resisted their maltreatment on the job by filing formal complaints and sought the aid of the Mexican Consul when payment for their labor fell short. As noted earlier, braceros had the right to file complaints if they believed the employer violated the contract and many exercised their right by filing complaints to the nearest Mexican consul.¹¹³ For example, Heredia explained that “mi voz se me levantó [I began to protest]” and placed a grievance with the Mexican Consul, who in

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 25.

¹¹³ Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 143 and 145.

turn reported it to the War Manpower Commission. Government officials from both agencies came to investigate the working conditions of braceros. According to Heredia, within a matter of weeks they were given the same pay and rights as “white” workers. Some of the rights gained included an eight-hour work day, overtime pay, and improvement in their living headquarters. Heredia described the poor living conditions: “Yo creo que la prision más triste tenían mejores colchones que nosotros [I think that even the worst prisons had better mattresses than we did].”¹¹⁴ Because of this complaint they also received new mattresses. Hence, at least at the Roseville site of the Southern Pacific, some of the grievances put forth by braceros were addressed. In his work on Mexican consuls, historian Gilbert G. González notes that “where Bracero Agreements were in effect throughout the United States, it was only in ‘exceptional instances’ that consuls protested violations, in spite of the fact that consuls were delegated by the Secretariat of Foreign Relations with protecting the braceros and enforcing the contract terms.”¹¹⁵ Nevertheless, as would be evident in years following the enactment of the bracero program, the mere “good will” of both U.S. and Mexican governments to ensure worker rights fell short of expectations as the volume of bracero workers increased and the administration to oversee these workers failed to grow with it, making their impact to curtail worker abuse severely limited.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Heredia and Heredia, Interview by Dolores Delgado-Campbell, October 1983.

¹¹⁵ Gilbert G. González, *Mexican Consuls and Labor Organizing*, 211.

¹¹⁶ Galarza, *Merchants of Labor*, 183.

Although Mexican farm workers had provided the backbone for the U.S. economy for some time, the Bracero Program changed the make-up and process in which they were viewed by the larger society. This was due in large part to the significant number of braceros from 1948 to 1964, the U.S. issued contracts to, on average, 200,000 braceros a year, involving some 4.6 million workers.¹¹⁷ Of these, a substantial number of braceros eventually applied for and received the right to settle permanently in the United States. By doing so, they altered the belief that Mexicans were transient in nature. Previously ethnic Mexicans had largely been characterized as temporary residents who would return to their home country after the end of the agricultural season.¹¹⁸ In the Sacramento region, many erstwhile braceros settled in industrial sites which provided accessibility to employment. For example, many Mexicans settled in Sacramento's Franklin barrio where men found work on the rail yards nearby and women at the canneries.

For many Mexicans laboring in the larger Sacramento Valley union organizing became crucial for ensuring worker rights and benefits. This was evident in the flourishing Sacramento canneries where the growing Mexican workforce actively participated in the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA).¹¹⁹ Indeed, by 1940 the Mexican labor force constituted

¹¹⁷ Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 138-139.

¹¹⁸ For the statistics from 1940 see, Avella, *Sacramento*, 108; and for statistics from 1928 refer to Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003): 171.

¹¹⁹ Madrid, "Narrative History of Mexican/Chicano Community of Sacramento," 44.

approximately forty to fifty percent of all cannery workers, whereas in 1928 they had represented only ten percent of the workforce.¹²⁰ UCAPAWA emerged from a meeting in Denver, Colorado in 1937 attended by a small number of cannery and packinghouse locals from across the country, among them were members of Mexican, Japanese, and Filipino agricultural associations in California. These representatives helped establish the blueprint for a national decentralized labor organization, which allowed for chapters to address labor issues autonomously from national headquarters.¹²¹ The union was particularly attractive to workers because unlike many other American unions, UCAPAWA was one of those rare CIO affiliates that actively recruited Mexican skilled/unskilled and documented/undocumented workers, encouraged them to assume leadership positions in the locals, and most significantly, encouraged women to participate.¹²² According to historian Vicki L. Ruiz, in her groundbreaking study on cannery workers in California, “UCAPAWA leaders showed a genuine commitment to worker-oriented, worker-controlled farm and food-processing unions.”¹²³ This became evident when union representatives worked at incorporated women of color into the decision making process.¹²⁴

¹²⁰ Vicki L. Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives: Mexican Women, Unionization and the California Food Processing Industry, 1930-1950* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1987): 26.

¹²¹ Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives*, 43. For the establishment of UCAPAWA in inland southern California see: José M. Alamillo, *Making Lemonade out of Lemons: Mexican American Labor and Leisure in a California Town, 1880-1960* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006): 124-128.

¹²² Madrid, “Narrative History of Mexican/Chicano Community of Sacramento,” 44.

¹²³ Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives*, 40.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 38-39.

Thus, it is no wonder why UCAPAWA proved to be so effective and popular in Sacramento canneries where Mexican women made up the majority of the workforce. The unionization efforts of Chicana workers in Northern California foreshadowed larger mobilization efforts by the mexicano community in the area over the next twenty-five years. Indeed, Northern California food processing employees generally responded enthusiastically to unions. Ruiz notes that “workers did more than simply sign pledge cards, they also established approximately twenty-five functioning Food, Tobacco, Agricultural, and Allied Workers of America (FTA) locals from Sacramento to Sunnyvale to Modesto.”¹²⁵ In 1944, UCAPAWA’s name was changed to Food Tobacco, Agricultural and Allied Workers (FTA) to account for what had become the second largest block of union members—cigar rollers and tobacco strippers in its membership. The name change, however, did not reflect changes in its leadership, organizational structure, or—most importantly—philosophy.¹²⁶ The significant interest and growth in FTA in the area prompted national union officials to hold an election in October 1945 specifically covering Northern California, and approximately sixty plants participated.¹²⁷

Collective efforts at work transcended the shop floor and reached into the community. In the late 1930s, the Sacramento Mexican community pulled together and formed a collective to raise funds for the building of a Mexican Center that would include a bilingual school, library, social club, and cultural center. Guadalupe Aguilar

¹²⁵ Ibid., 106.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 57.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 106.

recalled the need for such a space: “For years and years, since before the [Second World] War, people were wanting to build a place, have a place, where they could meet for social activities.”¹²⁸ The idea of such a center prompted some, who did not consider themselves “organizers,” to get involved with the Mexican Center Committee. For instance, Linda M. Sánchez Jordan, a Sacramento native, shared in a recent interview that she was eager to help and was encouraged by the fact that the Mexican Center Committee was split into a men’s and women’s auxiliary. She explained, “I heard about this other Mexican club that was being organized and it had women in it. So, I just got active in the ladies group and we raised money [for the Mexican Center].”¹²⁹ When questioned why the need for separate auxiliaries she responded, “It was different in those days. They didn’t want women in their organization. So we just organized ourselves.”¹³⁰ Perhaps the Mexican Center Committee took the lead from mutual aid societies who often split the sexes. Still, Sánchez Jordan recognized the sexist tendency to exclude women from the “main” organization. In spite of this, the women’s auxiliary allowed for female agency and empowerment without the watchful eye or silencing efforts of a husband or male relative. Indeed, both groups came together to raise funds, mostly through dances, but also hosting a series of fiestas and dinner parties. The Mexican Center Committee’s

¹²⁸ Aguilar, interview by Rosana Madrid, January 16 and 25, 1984.

¹²⁹ Linda M. Sánchez Jordan, interview by author, 11 June 2010, Antelope, CA, audio recording.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

efforts finally paid off when in 1941, they had raised \$4,000 and purchased lots in the Southside Park barrio, on Sixth and W Streets.¹³¹



Image 7: Mexican Center, Ladies Auxiliary, Linda M. Sánchez Jordan (bottom row, fourth from right), Sacramento, CA. (Courtesy of Linda M. Sánchez Jordan, private collection, 1947-1949.)

However, wartime building restrictions halted plans temporarily and leadership momentum was lost when the Mexican consul departed in 1945. It was not until 1948, when Mexican Consul Adolfo G. Domínguez stepped in and revived the idea of a cultural center that plans for a grand opening resumed. Under his direction the group formed a private corporation, *El Centro Mexicano de Sacramento*, which sold stock shares at \$5.00, \$10.00, \$15.00, or \$25.00 to Mexican area residents and migrant workers who temporarily resided in the city during harvest season. The point was to keep shares low so that farm workers and the like could afford to purchase them. Finally, on May 5, 1948, an elaborate dedication ceremony took place to honor both

¹³¹ Avella, *Sacramento and the Catholic Church*, 220.

the opening of the center and *Cinco de Mayo*. California Governor Earl Warren sent American flags and speakers lauded the building as the “only one of its kind in the country.”¹³² The endless efforts for the construction of a cultural center showed the commitment of Mexican residents to carve a cultural and safe space for themselves in an otherwise hostile environment.



Image 8: Centro Mexicano Banquet and Dance in celebration of new Mexican counsel after Adolfo G. Domínguez left. Sacramento, CA. (Courtesy of Center for Sacramento History, 85/06/04, 1949.)

The organizing upsurge that occurred in the 1930s and 1940s involved at its core an attempt to change negative perceptions of Mexicans and to better their socio-economic standing. U.S.-born children of turn of the century immigrants took up these struggles. The lived experiences of the U.S.-born generation differed greatly from those born and raised in Mexico. In particular, the issue revolving around the question

¹³² Avella, *Sacramento and the Catholic Church*, 220.

of ethnic and national identity proved to be the biggest divide between them. Sons and daughters came to realize that they had developed very different attitudes toward *la madre patria*; while they admired the beauty and tradition of Mexico—over time they identified had increasingly come to identify as “American.” On the other hand, parents had to come to terms with their children’s new identity, realizing that they chose to leave Mexico to advance their family’s economic standing and thus were partially responsible for this divide. George J. Sánchez in his work on second-generation Mexicans in this era argues that it was the profound yearning for justice and the hope to dignify what is “Mexican” in the U.S. by uplifting their community that forged these two generations together.¹³³ The leadership that emerged was drawn from both immigrants and their children, however, perhaps due to their profound exposure to racism in public schools and limitations in the workplace that the second generation was able to articulate a civil rights agenda that linked social, educational, and economic inequities together. Sánchez asserts that “from the start, women were central to this effort.”¹³⁴

Conflicts between immigrants and their children, however, reached beyond nationalistic divides. As David G. Gutiérrez reminds us, “[c]ollective ethnic awareness developed slowly over a number of years and varied significantly in content and expression depending on local circumstances, including local economic conditions,

¹³³ Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 262-263.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 249.

and the extent of interethnic contact, and other factors.”¹³⁵ To add to the mix, generational perceptions of these elements also greatly affected ethnic identity and experience. Indeed, the most intense differences materialized themselves over the language or languages they preferred to communicate in, music interests, cultural traditions they hoped to preserve or discard, self-expression whether through dress, make-up use, or hair style, to more common issues over parental authority or uninvited meddling in their social lives.¹³⁶ Mexican immigrant parents had to come to terms with generational differences. As became evidently clear the temptations of modern society were far too great to guard against. Nonetheless, in an attempt to the very least protect their children Mexican immigrant parents often instituted chaperonage.¹³⁷ Still, these methods proved sometimes unsuccessful as adolescent and young women found ways around this tradition.¹³⁸ Similar to whites, Mexican American teens, in particular, were influenced by popular culture and consumerism. Mexican barrios were not immune to American consumer culture. For instance, “advertisements aimed at women promised status and affection if the proper bleaching cream, hair coloring, and cosmetics were purchased.”¹³⁹ These generational divides would continue to the present day as immigrant parents and their American-born children continue to negotiate trends, ideals, and identity.

¹³⁵ Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 29.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹³⁷ Vicki L. Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998): 65.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 71.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 57.

Regardless of these generational rifts, ethnic Mexicans found ways to bridge these gaps by coming together to organize on behalf of their communities. The *Madres Mexicanas de Guerra* exemplified the finest example of Mexican American women's activism in the Sacramento region during this era—and should be considered a local example of the kind of dynamic historian George J. Sánchez identified in Southern California. The group focused on honoring families whose sons served in the United States armed forces during both World War I and World War II. According to Linda M. Sánchez Jordan, whose husband served in the U.S. Navy during World War II, *Las Madres* were an offshoot of the Mexican Center Committee. She recalled,

It trickled down to Las Madres. They came after this organization here [the Mexican Center Committee]. Some of these ladies were instrumental in organizing [Las Madres]. Right after the [Second World] War the men came home and some of the boys got killed and they wanted to organize the club to honor the boys who served and who were killed in the War.¹⁴⁰

Indeed, Sánchez Jordan herself had been a member of the Mexican Center Committee and pointed out that it was the women in that organization who contemplated the idea of forming a separate group to honor local Mexican American servicemen. Founded in 1946 by Enriqueta Andazola and Antima Pérez, the *Madres Mexicanas* hosted a series of fundraising events that included dances and dinner parties to erect a monument for Mexican Americans who had served and died during World War II.¹⁴¹ The statute was of a Mexican serviceman in U.S. uniform and originally stood at *El Centro Mexicano* in Sacramento (the statute is currently on the grounds at the California Capitol State

¹⁴⁰ Linda M. Sánchez Jordan, interview by author, 11 June 2010, Antelope, CA, audio recording.

¹⁴¹ Madrid, "Narrative History of Mexican/Chicano Community of Sacramento," 68.

Park). The organization also served Mexican food at United Service Organization (USO) monthly meetings (a private, non-profit, service organization founded in 1941 that provides moral and recreational services to members of the U.S. military worldwide); helped raise funds for the Veterans Home of California in Yountville (a veteran's institution devoted to the care of widows and orphans of U.S. servicemen); worked with the Veterans Affiliated Council (a non-profit umbrella organization of veteran organizations, military associations and their auxiliaries) to fundraise for military uniforms; and stood in honor guards and otherwise assisted with burial services for Mexican American soldiers killed in war.¹⁴²

¹⁴² Aguilar, interview by Rosana Madrid, January 16 and 25, 1984.



Image 9: Pictured with the Mexican American War Monument for World War II veterans are: Lidia and Olivia Ramírez, Josefina Alfaro, Diana Salgado, Virginia Medinilla, Juanita Alfaro, Enriqueta Andazola and Tina Martínez. Mexican Center, Sacramento, CA. (Courtesy of Center for Sacramento History, 85/06/13, 1962.)

Overshadowed by the political climate of World War II that called for every “American” to join the war effort, Chicanas/os found themselves caught in-between the propaganda of joining forces and the reality of living in segregated communities and the second-class status that they held in the United States. In other words, many felt the need to address this discrepancy but also saw themselves as part of the American fabric. This contradiction has been explored by Chicano scholars who tend to view World War II as a politically defining moment in Chicano history—a period when returning servicemen for the first time fought for their rights as citizens.

Historian George J. Sánchez, on the other hand, disagrees with this claim and instead argues “that much of the cultural identity and sense of self of the Mexican American second generation was already shaped before the war.”¹⁴³ While Sánchez brings up a valid point, it is also important to acknowledge that the politics of American patriotism forced Chicanas/os to choose loyalties and negotiate their identity whether cultural or national to Mexico and that given this dynamic ethnic Mexicans had to perhaps better articulate their sense of belonging and place in U.S. society.

Indeed, even though the majority of the women were born and raised in Mexico, they also felt a great sense of gratitude and debt to the United States. While at surface level these attitudes may seem conflicting and even oppositional, from the time of the Mexican American War ethnic Mexicans have always had to come to terms with differences in U.S. and Mexican culture, often straddling both, but actively making choices for themselves and their families.¹⁴⁴ This phenomenon is best explained by Vicki L. Ruiz in her work on Mexican women in the twentieth century where she coins the term, “cultural coalescence,” to describe the ways “immigrants and their children pick, borrow, retain, and create distinctive cultural forms... [Indeed,] when standing at the cultural crossroads, Mexican women blended their options and created their own paths.”¹⁴⁵ Hence, in an effort to come to terms with their roles as mothers of servicemen or war veterans, *Las Madres Mexicanas* developed fluid identities. For instance, Guadalupe Aguilar, whose husband served in World War One

¹⁴³ Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 256.

¹⁴⁴ Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows*, xiv.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 49-50.

and World War Two, recalled that “some of the mothers were glad, well you know, they were worried and concerned about their sons’ return and safety and all of that, but they were proud...that their sons were going to serve their country.”¹⁴⁶ Aguilar acknowledged that *Las Madres Mexicanas* experienced a sense of joy because their sons had made the greatest contribution to their home country.



Image 10: Enriqueta Andazola’s, co-founder of Las Madres Mexicanas de Guerra, family during World War II. (Courtesy of Center for Sacramento History, 85/06/42.)

Even if they found fulfillment in honoring the United States through service, *Las Madres Mexicanas* never rejected their Mexican heritage. Indeed, when analyzing organizational documents this often contradictory view comes to light. Take for instance what is written in Las Madres organization:

¹⁴⁶ Aguilar, interview by Rosana Madrid, January 16 and 25, 1984.

Por poner en alto el nombre de Mexico, a costa de nuestras vidas y a las de nuestros propios hijos tragedia que ha pasado ya y que fue el origen para el desenvolvimiento de este grupo de Madres Mexicanas...¹⁴⁷

[To place the name of Mexico in high honor, at cost of our lives and those of our children, tragedy which they have endured and which has inspired the development of the Mexican Mothers of War...]

Thus, for *La Madres Mexicanas* it was not only service to the United States that mattered, but they also felt a sense of responsibility to represent and honor Mexico.

Language, for instance, was another important marker for *Las Madres Mexicanas*. As natives of Mexico, most of them found that maintaining Mexican cultural ties required little effort. For example, in their view, swearing allegiance to the United States at their general meetings did not necessarily mean disloyalty to Mexico. In fact, the pledge of allegiance was recited in Spanish. It can be argued, even, that the mere act of reciting the pledge of allegiance in Spanish demonstrated just how comfortable *Las Madres Mexicanas* were in adopting multiple identities. Furthermore, because most of its membership was Spanish-language-dominant, meetings were conducted and leaflets were written in Spanish.

The makeup and structure of the Mexican community that followed in the next decade was informed largely by both the politics of assimilation and local Mexicanos' continuous effort to retain what was deemed Mexican. These complex intersections were addressed through the makeup of social service organizations that tended to the needs of both migrant and settled resident Mexicans in the larger Sacramento Valley.

¹⁴⁷ Mexican War Mothers, "Directorio de los oficiales de la mesa directiva de la sociedad de madres mexicanas," Brochure (1958). Center for Sacramento History, Enriqueta Andazola Collection, Sacramento, California.

By the 1950s the Mexican community of Sacramento had grown considerably to 25,000. Its visibility and special needs attracted the attention of Community Service Organization (CSO) organizers Fred W. Ross and Cesar Chávez, who came to Sacramento to establish a CSO chapter for Mexicans in the area. Originally founded in 1947 as an outgrowth of Edward Roybal's unsuccessful bid for the Los Angeles ninth district council seat that year, the CSO soon caught the interest of Fred Ross, a long-time organizer affiliated with the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) and the American Council on Race Relations.¹⁴⁸ The IAF was run by Saul Alinsky, Ross's mentor, who had accomplished noteworthy success in Chicago because of its strategic tactics to support local community organization efforts. Influenced largely by Ross, the CSO "concentrated its community service efforts on non-partisan voter registration and education drives, neighborhood improvement, legal advice, youth activities, health screening and referral, and legislative advocacy at the local and state levels."¹⁴⁹ Likewise, in Sacramento Chávez and Ross focused on registering voters; operating a six-week long "problem clinic" for Spanish-speaking at the Mexican Center where bilingual counselors were on hand to provide tips on services available to city residents; and, training a staff to take over the operations of the clinic after their

¹⁴⁸ In 1949 Edward Roybal was the first American of Mexican descent elected to the Los Angeles City Council since 1881. Manuel G. Gonzales, *Mexicanos: A History of Mexicans in the United States* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 182-183. For an extensive study on the career of Edward Roybal, see Katherine Underwood, "Process and Politics: Multiracial Electoral Coalition Building and Representation in Los Angeles' Ninth District, 1949-1962," (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, San Diego, 1992).

¹⁴⁹ Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 168-169.

departure.¹⁵⁰ Their volunteer service inspired local leaders to adopt a more centralized and professional approach to organizing, especially with the growing needs of Mexicans in the area.

POST-WAR SACRAMENTO: THE MAKING OF A CHICANO CIVIL RIGHTS AGENDA

Indeed, by the middle of the twentieth century Sacramento was a medium-sized city, whose ethnic “minorities,” especially the Black and Mexican populations, had significantly increased in number.¹⁵¹ In 1950 Sacramento’s population was 137,572—growing to 191,667 in 1960, and 800,592 by 1970.¹⁵² The bulk of Sacramento’s growth was the result of a number of annexations that began in 1946 and ended in 1959; before the annexations, when the entire city was located south of the American River.¹⁵³ By 1970, the combined total of all racial “minorities” in Sacramento comprised a little more than one-fourth of the city’s population, of which eleven percent was Black, eight percent Mexican, three percent Chinese, three percent Japanese, and two percent were categorized as other nonwhite racial groups.¹⁵⁴

Even though the U.S. Bureau of the Census recorded that Blacks made up the largest ethnic group in Sacramento, it remained clear that many Mexicans had been

¹⁵⁰ Avella, *Sacramento and the Catholic Church*, 235. For additional information on Chávez and Ross’s working relationship refer to: Dan La Botz, *César Chávez and La Causa* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2006): 21-26.

¹⁵¹ Holden, *The Bus Stops Here*, 287.

¹⁵² U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *1960 Census of Population: Detailed Characteristics*, (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1963): 6-140 and U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *1970 Census of Population: Detailed Characteristics*, (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1972): 1137.

¹⁵³ Holden, *The Bus Stops Here*, 283.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 286-287.

overlooked in the count. At least one member of the press, George Williams, a staff writer for *The Sacramento Bee*, who knew the communities intimately, argued that Mexicans made up the largest “minority” group in the city.¹⁵⁵ Indeed, although a significant number of Mexicans worked and resided in the Sacramento Valley, they were virtually ignored by the dominant population. On one important level, the local community was perhaps ignored because of its youthful composition—fully fifty percent of the Mexican population was under the age of twenty.¹⁵⁶ Additionally, Mexicans represented the largest aggregate group of foreign born. Although approximately fifty-six percent lived in the United States for at least two generations when the 1960 census was taken, more than two in five of all local mexicanos had been born in Mexico.¹⁵⁷ In the urban areas, the Sacramento Chicano community faced a multitude of social, political, and economic disparities during the 1960s. Their greatest challenge was poverty. The United States Bureau of the Census recorded in 1960 that the annual family median income of Mexicans in Sacramento was \$5,582, compared to that of African-American’s \$5,710, and whites at \$6,943. Unemployed males among Mexicans were twelve percent, compared to African-Americans at eight percent, and whites at six percent.¹⁵⁸ About one in every four persons of Spanish-

¹⁵⁵ George Williams, “Capital’s Forgotten Ones: Biggest Minority Has Mexican Roots,” *The Sacramento Bee*, 19 February 1968, p. A1.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. A4.

¹⁵⁷ Holden, *The Bus Stops Here*, 286.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 294-295.

surnames persons was below the low-income level in 1970, compared to one out of three for Blacks, and only one of ten for whites.¹⁵⁹

In the rural areas, Mexicans labored in nearby agricultural fields and contributed greatly to California agricultural economy. In 1963 alone, California farmers produced 35.4 million tons of crops. This figure ultimately translated to California agri-business providing for the United States total production of: “56 percent of the tomatoes, 59 percent of the lettuce, 47 percent of strawberries, 96 percent of the lemons, 100 percent of almonds,” and many other fruits, nuts, vegetables and field crops.¹⁶⁰ These crops were largely cultivated, picked, pruned, planted, and thinned by Mexican farmhands. Mexican migrant agricultural workers faced a multitude of disparities both on the worksite and in the larger community. For instance, similar to the living quarters of braceros working the rail yards in the 1940s, migrants lived in makeshift homes without running water, refrigeration, or provision for adequate garbage disposal. In the 1960s families often lived, cooked, and slept in one room. Furthermore, migrant farm workers were disproportionately exposed to disease, injuries, and dangerous chemicals not experienced by the larger society. For example, in 1961 farm workers under the age of eighteen experienced a total of 426 disabling injuries. Additionally, exposure to chemicals, such as parathion sprays,

¹⁵⁹ Department of Mexican American Affairs, Diocese of Sacramento, “Hollowing the Migrant Trails,” (June 15, 1972). Center for Sacramento History, Sacramento, CA.

¹⁶⁰ Stephen J. Mewort, Ed. and Director of Research, Records and Evaluations Committee on Social Agriculture, “The Committee on Social Agriculture: A Survey of Activities Undertaken during 1965-1966” (Sacramento State College: August 1966): Report located at California State University, Sacramento Archives, Series 6, Carton 1:15, Folder: Committee on Social Agriculture “Activities in the Field,” Volume II, Part I, 1965-1966.

caused several deaths among peach pickers in Stanislaus County in that same year. Though poisoning often went misdiagnosed for heat prostration or food poisoning, the California Department of Industrial Relations reported more than 3,000 diagnosed poisonings between 1951 and 1960. This included the deaths of twenty-two adults and 63 children of Mexican descent.¹⁶¹

Perhaps, though, no one was more affected by the poor living and health conditions and transient lifestyle of migrant farm workers than their children. A publication by the Department of Rural Education in 1954, which surveyed 665 migrant families, found that half of the migrant children failed to maintain the “normal” pace of one grade per year and almost two-thirds of them were placed over-age for their current grade. Of course, the main cause for their academic shortcomings was that, unlike most of their peers that settled permanently near local neighborhood schools, migrant children in rural areas were subject to constant dislocation as their parents followed the seasonal crops and thus were constantly pulled out of school. Partly to blame, however, was the local school’s inadequacy to deal with the special needs of migrant children and the overall indifference towards Mexicans. For example, local schools failed to foresee and appropriately accommodate for the influx of migrant children during harvest season. Schools routinely turned away migrant children because they did not provide school transfer records or even in extreme cases city attendance laws barred transients altogether. Furthermore, teachers lacked the proper bilingual and cultural sensitivity training to tend to Mexican migrant needs.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

Together these barriers contributed to the poor education and consequent remedial stage of some migrant children.¹⁶²

The educational barriers experienced by migrant children in the larger Sacramento Valley carried over to urban Chicano communities. Indeed, many of the problems Mexican pupils faced in rural schools overlapped with inner-city schools. First, the make-up of the Mexican student population was also comprised of migrant children whose parents labored in area fields or in local canneries. Thus, migrant children were also routinely pulled out of school by their parents even in urban areas. Second, Mexican children tended to reside in barrios and consequently their neighborhood schools were highly segregated. This presented another problem that would be addressed by the Sacramento City Unified School District. Third, Sacramento Chicano youth disproportionately dropped out of school. In 1968, U.S. Senator George Murphy reported that some fifty percent of Spanish-speaking students dropped out by the time they reached the eighth grade.¹⁶³ In Sacramento, the median years of school completed among Mexicans were 8.8, compared to 12.1 of whites.¹⁶⁴ Lastly, the lack of English-language skills posed another obstacle for Mexican children.¹⁶⁵ This barrier was addressed by putting in place bilingual classes.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ George Williams, "Capital's Forgotten Ones: Biggest Minority Has Mexican Roots," *The Sacramento Bee*, 19 February 1968, p. A1.

¹⁶⁴ Holden, *The Bus Stops Here*, 294.

¹⁶⁵ George Williams, "Americans of Mexican Descent Remain Silent on Local Problems," *The Sacramento Bee*, 20 February 1968, p. A4.

However, education was but one of a multitude of obstacles Mexicans faced in Sacramento. Most damaging to the Mexican community were the various stereotypes associated both with Mexican nationals and U.S. citizens of Mexican descent as reported and promoted by local news media. For instance, journalist Williams and others claimed that Sacramentans of Mexican descent had a tendency to be humble and passive in seeking redress for their grievances. This notion of the “Sleeping Giant” is highlighted in Williams’ news coverage,

The reason why the Anglo community seldom hears about the problems of Americans of Mexican descent is that this silent minority is not accustomed to sit-ins, lie in, march or otherwise demonstrate in an overt way for its share of the American dream.¹⁶⁶

He further stated that,

That this is a little known fact [that Mexicans make up the largest minority group in Sacramento,] is emblematic of the problem faced by Sacramentans of Mexican descent: They are a minority the “Anglo” knows little about. . . .Sacramento’s largest minority group—Americans of Mexican descent—encounter special problems of a size to match their numbers. However, one seldom hears of them.¹⁶⁷

While in many ways, Williams was accurate in stating that Chicanos faced multiple social ills; he was inaccurate in his analysis of the Mexican community. Historian Rubén Donato, in his work on Chicano education during the civil rights era, notes that “the notion that Mexicans were complacent about their educational conditions became

¹⁶⁶ George Williams, “Minority Group Keeps Silent on Problems in Community,” *The Sacramento Bee*, 20 February 1968, p. A1.

¹⁶⁷ George Williams, “Capital’s Forgotten Ones: Biggest Minority Has Mexican Roots,” *The Sacramento Bee*, 19 February 1968, p. A1.

an entrenched myth” probably because “very little was researched or written about their resistance to unequal education.”¹⁶⁸

Access to quality education, however, was not the only barrier Chicanos in the state or Sacramento, in particular, had to encounter they also lacked elected political representation in either house of the California Assembly. The single exception is Representative Edward Roybal who served Los Angeles in the Congress of the United States. Their absence was felt in the Sacramento City Council, the Sacramento City Unified School District, the Board of Supervisors of Sacramento County, and judicial positions at all levels of the U.S. court systems. Nevertheless, by the early 1960s the tide was turning for Mexicans in Sacramento for political power. This was due in large part to the formation of the Mexican American Political Association (MAPA) in 1963, which helped secure Mexicans with local elected political representation. MAPA was founded in Fresno, California at the Fresno Convention in April 1960 when approximately 150 delegates assembled to establish a non-partisan organization that focused on registering and mobilizing voters as an ethnic block.¹⁶⁹ David G. Gutiérrez notes that MAPA “hoped to empower the Mexican American community by contributing to the election of Mexican American candidates, organizing resistance against such disfranchising policies as gerrymandering and poll taxes, and pressuring the Democratic and Republican parties to include Mexican Americans in mainstream

¹⁶⁸ Donato, *The Other Struggle for Equal Schools*, 2.

¹⁶⁹ Mario T. Garcia, *Memories of Chicano History: The Life and Narrative of Bert Corona* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994): 197-198.

politics.”¹⁷⁰ Hence, with two branches, one in Sacramento and one in Roseville, led by Alfonso Gonzales and Rodolfo Cuellar respectively, MAPA created the footwork needed to establish a notable political front.

MAPA was strongly invested in forging a viable political front for Mexican Americans based on ethnic allegiance. MAPA leaders lobbied not only for Mexican American rights, but also endorsed only Mexican American political candidates. By thumbing their nose to the Democratic Party when they refused to help them in their efforts, the MAPA leadership advocated that their politics were unique. This move not only alienated outsiders, but also fostered a sort of cultural nationalism. Ernesto Chávez notes that MAPA avoided “involvement with white political groups and underscored its ethnic allegiance, an emphasis that became even more pronounced in ethnic Mexican organizations of the Chicano Movement era.”¹⁷¹ Thus, MAPA represented a watershed in Mexican American politics by shifting the well accepted integrationist approach to one oriented more toward aggressive action by a distinct ethnic organization. It is important to note, however, that MAPA did not seek its own political party as did later La Raza Unida Party. It nonetheless indicated a move towards more forceful means of political organizing.

MAPA served an instrumental role in mobilizing the Mexican American community by securing elected political representation in Sacramento through a series of campaign efforts. For instance, in 1965 MAPA endorsed a candidate for City Council, yet their efforts proved unsuccessful because they were unable to secure the

¹⁷⁰ Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 181.

¹⁷¹ Ernesto Chávez, “¡Mi Raza Primerol”, 37.

necessary votes. Undeterred, they tried again in 1969 and this time they were victorious. In the second round they had a larger pool of candidates to choose from. In order to address this large interest, MAPA leadership decided to hold a community convention, where potential candidates delivered speeches and made their plea for candidacy. The town hall meeting was widely publicized and drew a crowd of 250 mostly from the Mexican community. The candidate with the most ballots was decidedly the winner. Manuel Ferrales won overwhelmingly, winning not only MAPA's endorsement but, most importantly, the backing of the Chicano/Mexicano community. The election of Ferrales demonstrated that through an organized front the Mexican community could achieve victories.



Image 11: La Casa de MAPA, Mexican American Political Association members hold MAPA banner in Roseville, CA. (Courtesy of Center for Sacramento History, 83/146/208, 1975.)

Indeed, the political ambitions of the Chicano community stretched far and beyond. Sacramento residents resisted racial and economic inequality by forging a political and social space wherein they were able to dictate their own destiny. What

ensued in the next decades was nothing short of a momentous change for Chicanos in Sacramento and in California more broadly. Armed with strength in numbers they set out to chart their own destiny and advocated self determination. The ways in which they expressed their desires and fought for their rights is explained in Chapter Two, “The Debate Over the Benefits of Desegregation.” The chapter charts the racial politics surrounding the desegregation efforts of the Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD) at Washington Elementary School, located in the heart of Sacramento’s Mexican *barrio*, from 1967 to 1972. It attempts to comprehend why Mexican parents resisted this type of desegregation. A close analysis of the arguments waged by Chicano community activists, Mexican parents, school personnel, SCUSD, and the greater Sacramento community offers intriguing and revealing glimpses into the emergence of racial and class tensions within the Chicano/Mexicano community, between civil rights advocates, and a substantial portion of the Sacramento *barrio*. What follows are their stories as best recovered through available Sacramento periodicals, California Department of Education government documents, and Sacramento City Unified School District records.

CHAPTER TWO:

THE DEBATE OVER THE BENEFITS OF DESEGREGATION

On February 5, 1968 the Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD) board members unanimously adopted a desegregation plan for Washington Elementary School, located in the heart of a Sacramento's Mexican *barrio* (neighborhood). At the time, students of Mexican origin or descent represented fully 51 percent of the school's population.¹ The desegregation plan, which had been under discussion for some time, involved the busing of Mexican children to schools with white majorities in the southernmost part of the district, with the farthest school destination being twelve miles away.² In the first phase, children in grades K-3 would be relocated. In the second phase, students in grades 4-6, would follow, leading to the closure of the Washington Elementary by 1971.³ The desegregation plan, which for many of those involved at the time was a logical step in the ongoing quest for civil rights in California, was received with astonishing resistance from Mexican barrio residents who immediately mobilized against the school board's decision.⁴ Opposition to the plan simmered for months among barrio residents until July 24, 1968, when

¹ Anna Holden, *The Bus Stops Here: A Study of School Desegregation in Three Cities* (New York: Agathon Press, Inc., 1974): 359.

² "Board of Education will Reconsider School's Closing," *The Sacramento Bee*, 9 August 1968.

³ "SCUSD Board of Education Minutes," 5 February 1968, 57.

⁴ The information in this chapter is taken largely from my Master of Arts thesis: Lorena V. Márquez, "Chicano Resistance to Desegregation in Sacramento, California, 1962-1967" (Master of Arts Thesis, California State University, Sacramento, 2004).

hundreds of Washington Elementary parents, aided by the Washington Neighborhood Council, a local social service agency, held a meeting to decide whether they were in favor or opposed to the school board's decision. They voted overwhelmingly in favor of keeping the school open—of those parents, 560 persons voted in favor and only fifteen against—a ninety-seven percent landslide for salvaging Washington Elementary.⁵ On August 8, 1968, Jesús González, a member of the Mexican American Political Association (MAPA), reported the community's decision to SCUSD board members at a special meeting held to discuss the controversial closure of Washington Elementary. In light of their choice, González demanded that “the school board change its decision inasmuch as it was their duty to support the will of the people.”⁶ In essence, he argued, their expressed “will” was to remain segregated—or, at the very least, keep their children at the neighborhood school.

This chapter explores the paradox of how a Chicano community dealt with substandard education and schooling during an early phase of the Chicano Movement in Sacramento. It examines how and why residents resisted desegregation efforts at Washington Elementary School. Ironically, Chicano leaders in Sacramento and in many other places in the greater Southwest advocated for school desegregation as a means to attain equality, yet most Mexican families at Washington Elementary chose

⁵ “Board of Education will Reconsider School's Closing,” *The Sacramento Bee*, 9 August 1968.

⁶ “SCUSD Board of Education Minutes,” 8 August 1968, 410.

to reject this action as a strategy to address their children's education.⁷ Although the activist parents and their supporters did not use the term "segregation" to describe what they sought from the school board—or from the public education system more generally—they seemed to believe at a very profound level that segregation was not the social evil school administrators and some Mexican American activists made it out to be. And, yet, in the end both factions in this local debate believed that they were exercising self-determination, a notion that had by that time become a central organizing principle of the series of political protests that collectively was becoming known as the Chicano Movement. Inspired by developments in the political philosophy and expression that had been emanating from the Black Power struggle in the previous several years, Chicano activists in different places—including Sacramento—had begun to put the term to use to express their quest to liberate ethnic Mexicans from "racism, poverty, political powerlessness, historical neglect, and internal defeatism," and to determine their own future on their own terms.⁸

⁷ For information on Chicanos and educational segregation/desegregation refer to: José F. Moreno, ed., *The Elusive Quest for Equality: 150 Years of Chicano/Chicana Education* (Cambridge: Harvard Educational Review, 1999); Rubén Donato, *The Other Struggle for Equal Schools: Mexican Americans during the Civil Rights Era* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997); Thomas P. Carter, *Mexican Americans in School: A History of Educational Neglect* (New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1970); Thomas P. Carter and Roberto D. Segura, *Mexican Americans in School: A Decade of Change* (New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1979); Guadalupe San Miguel, Jr., *Brown, Not White: School Integration and the Chicano Movement in Houston* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2000); Guadalupe San Miguel, Jr., "Let All of Them Take Heed": *Mexican Americans and the Campaign for Educational Equality in Texas, 1910-1981* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987); Charles Wollenberg, *All Deliberate Speed: Segregation and Exclusion in California Schools, 1853-1973* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976); Stanton Wortham, Enrique G. Murillo, and Edmund T. Hamann, eds., *Education and the New Latino Diaspora* (Westport, CT: Ablex Publishers, 2002); George I. Sánchez, *Concerning Segregation of Spanish-Speaking Children in Public Schools* (Austin: University of Texas, 1951).

⁸ Ignacio M. García, *Chicanismo: The Forging of a Militant Ethos among Mexican Americans* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1998): 133.

While Sacramento Mexicans were entrenched in a battle over salvaging Washington Elementary, Chicanos in other localities were also challenging the public educational system in aggressive new ways. Although Mexican Americans had engaged in local struggles to gain better access for their children to the different public education systems in the southwestern states ever since the end of the U.S.-Mexican War, this struggle began to expand from the courtroom to the streets in the 1960s. Rumblings of this new type of educational activism had been heard in Mexican neighborhoods in places like Denver, Colorado, and Crystal City, Texas as early as 1966, but by 1968, the issue exploded onto the national political stage. The most well-known episode of educational protest occurred in East Los Angeles in March 1968 when thousands of Chicano high school students walked out of their classrooms in protest of unequal conditions in Los Angeles Unified School District. The spring 1968 walkouts, which soon became known as the Chicano Blowouts, generated the framework and eventual transformation of student activist organizations into a full-blown student movement in southern California. In his study of the Chicano youth movement, the political scientist Carlos Muñoz, Jr. argued that the student strike was the “first loud cry for Chicano Power and self-determination, serving as the catalyst for the formation of the Chicano student movement of which it became the important sector.”⁹ Hence, the notion of self-determination for Chicano youth was very much grounded on the basis of creating an agenda based on ensuring justice for their

⁹ Carlos Muñoz, *Youth, Identity, Power: The Chicano Movement* (New York: Verso, 1989): 66.

community. It is within this broader context that the battle for Washington Elementary emerged.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the notion of self-determination was not first brought to the Civil Rights scene by Chicanos, but rather by Black Power and Native American activists. Chicanos eventually appropriated and defined the concept of self-determination for their own use to address the multiple needs of their communities. According to political scientist Jorge M. Valádez, self-determination is based on conceptions of autonomy and equality by respecting “human agency and the capacity for self-direction within a universalistic context.”¹⁰ For African Americans self-determination was grounded in the principles of Black Nationalism—a consciousness of a shared historical experience of oppression at the hands of whites. African Americans believed that they must take foremost responsibility for liberating themselves and that only through this collective action could they have control of their own destinies.¹¹ Black Power leaders drew as far back as the teachings of Booker T. Washington who counseled Blacks in the late nineteenth century to “depend on self” and challenged them to develop their own trade and industry and ultimately be economically self-sufficient.¹² Later, Black leader like Marcus Garvey, and of course, Malcolm X, preached different versions of Black self-reliance and autonomy.

¹⁰ Jorge M. Valádez, *Deliberative Democracy, Political Legitimacy, and Self-Determination in Multicultural Societies* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2001): 150.

¹¹ Sterling Stuckey, *The Ideological Origins of Black Nationalism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972): 6.

¹² Raymond L. Hall, *Black Separatism in the United States* (Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1978): 225.

By the early 1960s, such ideas had gained more traction in an expanding segment of the African American population, especially among young Blacks with at least some college education. With a schism growing between more moderate leaders like Martin Luther King, Jr., and more radical activists associated with groups like the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), young firebrands began to reject integrationist politics for a platform they called “Black power,” a term popularized by Stokely Carmichael, among others. According to historian Clayborne Carson, Carmichael was not only responsible for popularizing the Black Power slogan, he also helped transform Afro-American political consciousness by fostering Black pride as a racial identity. All this tied into a call for self-determination in what Carmichael claimed was a need “to reclaim our history and our identity from the cultural terrorism and depredation of self-justifying white guilt.” He argued that Black people would “have to struggle for the right to create our own terms to define ourselves and our relationship to the society, and to have these terms recognized.”¹³ Likewise, Native Americans called for the right to control their own lands, economy, and ultimately their own lives, without having to depend on federal funds. They also sought to put an end to the painful times when Indians were forced to relocate to reservations leaving behind their ancestral lands and Indian children were removed

¹³ Quoted in, Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981): 216. For more information of African American political ideologies see: Marcus D. Pohlmann, ed., *African American Political Thought: Confrontation vs. Compromise: 1945 to the Present*, Volume 2 (New York: Routledge, 2003).

involuntarily from their tribal groups and were forced to “assimilate” at the expense of their own culture and heritage.¹⁴

This chapter examines the Sacramento Chicano community’s resistance to the desegregation of Washington Elementary School, specifically analyzing the motivations for, responses to, and fears expressed about the proposed busing of inner-city Mexican children to nearly all-white schools. The discussion begins by tracing the major developments that led to the call for desegregation of Washington Elementary and compares it to the attempts to desegregate Black schools in Sacramento. Not surprisingly, the white majority opposed the busing of Mexican children to their schools. Next, the focus is on the resistance mounted by Mexican parents of school children at Washington Elementary, detailing the strategies and principle reasons they ended up fighting the desegregation plan. Parents were most concerned about the school’s ability to meet what they saw as the crucial culturally-, ethnically-, and racially-specific educational, social, and mental-health needs of their children. Not everyone sided with the parents, however. School board members as well as some Chicano leaders believed that busing and desegregation in general would provide the best route to assimilation and, in turn, economic success. As was true in the larger Chicano Movement elsewhere in the Southwest and Midwest at the time, disagreements over both short-term political tactics and political strategies over the longer term were becoming more heated—and more common even among those who otherwise were in rough agreement about long-term objectives. Finally, the chapter

¹⁴ Troy R. Johnson, *The Occupation of Alcatraz Island: Indian Self-Determination and the Rise of Indian Activism* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1996): 34.

shows that despite the inability of Mexican parents to keep Washington Elementary open, their efforts to preserve educational and cultural resources were not in vain. Rather, they demonstrated the resiliency of the collective will to struggle against seemingly insurmountable odds, a lesson they would use in the future.

THE CALL FOR DESEGREGATION IN SACRAMENTO

The issues that erupted in Sacramento at this time encapsulated a growing discussion in “minority” communities across the country as people struggled to grapple with the implications of the *Brown v. Topeka, Kansas* case decision some two decades after that landmark decision had been handed down by the Supreme Court.¹⁵ In Sacramento, there were three major prevailing schools of thought over the Washington Elementary School debate. The first position was articulated by Mexican parents who wished to keep Washington Elementary in the barrio—and, of course, their children close to home. A second position was expressed by those local Mexican American activists who had adopted what can be called a more centrist or “traditional” politics that reflected some of main currents of thought in the larger Civil Rights agenda. Such individuals tended to accept as an article of faith that integration was the best path toward achieving educational and upward socioeconomic mobility.

¹⁵ For works on the U.S. national desegregate cases see: Diane Ravitch, *The Great School Wars: A History of The New York City Public Schools* (Baltimore, Maryland: The John Hopkins University Press, 1974); Mary F. Ehrlander, *Equal Educational Opportunity: Brown's Elusive Mandate* (New York: LFB Scholarly Publishing LLC, 2002); J. Brian Sheehan, *The Boston School Integration Dispute: Social Change and Legal Maneuvers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984); Seven J. L. Taylor, *Desegregation in Boston and Buffalo: The Influence of Local Leaders* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998); Stephen Samuel Smith, *Boom for Whom?: Education, Desegregation, and Development in Charlotte* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004); George R. Metcalf, *From Little Rock to Boston: The History of School Desegregation* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1983); Sandra Astor Stave, *Achieving Racial Balance: Case Studies of Contemporary School Desegregation* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1995).

However, by 1968, a third, more “radical” group that included young people but also significant number of adults, had come to reject most of the integrationist assumptions of the centrists and demanded immediate structural change on a variety of fundamental issues. While all these entities shared a common goal of bettering the conditions for the Chicano community, their ideas of how to achieve this objective differed significantly.

In a way, then, the call for self-determination by this juncture could be viewed from two diametrically opposed positions. For those Mexican Americans who continued to subscribe to some form of the mainstream civil rights agenda, desegregation was viewed as part of a large gradualist political strategy that was considered the best path to the eventual emancipation of the Mexican American people.¹⁶ For those imbued with the heady new rhetoric of the Chicano liberation movement, however, integration with “white” students had come to be seen as little more than another disguised demand that Mexicans “assimilate” into the purported American social and cultural mainstream.¹⁷ Historian George J. Sánchez has

¹⁶ For an overall favorable view on desegregation refer to: Thomas J. Cottle, *Busing* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976); Bentley T. Edwards and Frederick M. Wirt, eds., *School Desegregation in the North: The Challenge and Experience* (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Co., 1967); and Alice Pisciotta and Samuel S. Rubin, *Racial Interaction in School and Society* (New York: Vintage Press, 1974). For works that perceive desegregation as beneficial to Chicano students, refer to Guadalupe San Miguel, “Let All of Them Take Heed:” *Mexican Americans and the Campaign for Educational Equality in Texas, 1910-1981* (Austin: University of Texas, 1987); Gilbert G. González, *Chicano Education in the Era of Segregation* (Philadelphia: The Balch Institute Press, 1990); Rubén Donato, *The Other Struggle for Equal Schools: Mexican Americans during the Civil Rights Era* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1997).

¹⁷ For a critique to desegregation refer to: Derrick Bell, *Silent Covenants: Brown v. Board of Education and the Unfulfilled Hopes for Racial Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Derrick Bell, “Serving Two Masters: Integration Ideals and Client Interests in School Desegregation Litigation” in *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995); Clare Cushman and Melvin I. Urofsky, eds., *Black, White, and Brown: The Landmark School*

thoroughly explored the systematic effects of externally imposed programs of Americanization and assimilation on ethnic Mexicans in early twentieth-century Los Angeles and argues that at the turn of the century educators, bureaucrats, and social reformers were on a mission to compel or coerce them to an “Anglo-conformity” model of social integration. As one advocate of such a program put it at the time, the objective was to: “assimilate and amalgamate these people [Mexicans] as part of our American race, and to implant in their children, so far as can be done, the Anglo-Saxon conception of righteousness, law and order, and popular government.”¹⁸

However, by the mid-1960s, the strategy of assimilation was discredited by a growing number of increasingly militant activists in the African American, Native American, and Latino populations. Drawing energy and intellectual inspiration from anti-colonial, national liberation movements abroad and from the increasing militancy in the Black power struggle and antiwar campaigns at home, activists and ordinary people began to experiment with new ways to comprehend their own social position and to plan for a different future. As a consequence, more and more Mexican

Desegregation Case in Retrospect (Washington D.C.: The Supreme Court Historical Society, CQ Press, 2004); Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, eds., *The Derrick Bell Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2005); Glenn Adams, Monica Biernat, Nyla R. Branscombe, . . . , eds., *Commemorating Brown: The Social Psychology of Racism and Discrimination* (Washington D.C.: American Psychology Association, 2008); Amy Stuart Wells, Jennifer Jellison Holme, Anita Tijerina Revilla, . . . , eds., *Both Sides Now: The Story of School Desegregation's Graduates* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); Fernando Reimers, *Unequal Schools, Unequal Changes: the Challenges to Equal Opportunity in the Americas* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); Richard Fossey, ed., *Race, the Courts, and Equal Education: The Limits of the Law* (New York: AMS Press, 1998); Wartham Stanton, Enrique G. Murillo Jr., and Edmund T. Humman, eds., *Education in the New Latino Diaspora: Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Westport, CT: Alex Publishing, 2002); and Carl L. Bankstom III and Stephen J. Caldas, *A Troubled Dream: The Promise and Failure of School Desegregation in Louisiana* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2002).

¹⁸ Quoted in George J. Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993): 95.

Americans began to question the wisdom of integrated education—especially if it meant the uprooting of neighborhood kids from their own communities. Thus, in this particular case, the growing debate over the best way to provide for the education of Chicano children gave rise to a fervent disagreement as to how to deal with the Sacramento school board's decision to desegregate Washington Elementary.

As noted above, members of the Chicano community were not alone in grappling with ways to carry out differing political agendas. Although most civil rights activists in both the ethnic Mexican and African American communities had long held that the immediate integration of schools—and, for that matter, *all* public institutions—were fundamental, non-negotiable goals, as Chicano militants thought through the meaning of self-determination for their own local communities, their faith in the power of integration with white students began to wane.¹⁹ The situation grew more complicated as people began to reconsider the importance of neighborhood schools in the larger debate over desegregation and the winning of equal rights. Generally speaking, it was on some level logical that individuals would be torn on the question about how best to achieve better access to public education. In those cases where the physical plant, teaching levels, and access to curricular and extracurricular resources was so abysmal as to appear hopeless, integration-through-busing might have held certain appeal to parents of children in inner-city schools. Indeed, this

¹⁹ For similar political struggles in the African American community see: Steven Gregory, *Black Corona: Race and the Politics of Place in an Urban Community* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998); Karen Ferguson, *Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Bettye Collier-Thomas and V. P. Franklin, eds., *Sisters in the Struggle: African American in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2001).

circumstance provided the basis of much of the support for court-ordered remedies to blatant and persistent educational inequality at this time. Despite widespread support for traditional neighborhood schools in inner cities whose populations were overwhelmingly colored and poor, their very existence came under severe attack during the civil rights era because some community leaders understood the intrinsic tie between educational segregation and poverty. School districts across the United States faced this very issue and had to painstakingly decide whether to preserve a particular neighborhood school or dismantle it.

However, others saw this complex issue in very different terms. In a volatile political atmosphere in which people had begun seriously to reconsider the significance of racial and cultural difference in contemporary life, the idea that local institutions, customs, and practices rooted in these differences had intrinsic value gained force and power. After years in which racialized populations had been taught that their cultures and customs were inferior, the rise of the Black Power movement—and the equally aggressive corollary aesthetic assertion that “Black is Beautiful”—caused a revolution in the way people began to conceive of themselves and their communities. In this environment, the same kind of differences that used to be excoriated and shunned now became sources of pride and solidarity not only in Black communities, but increasingly among other people of color as well. So it is not surprising that as the notion of democratic self-determination began to be elaborated by militants in different populations, the cultural expression of difference became valorized as a vital component of new ideologies of liberation. Of course, this shift

was seen in a wide variety of manifestations ranging from shifts in musical styles and expressions, styles of dress, hair, and makeup, the use of slang, cant, and “Black English,” and in many other ways, whether one thinks of the increasing explicitly political content of African-American and Mexican-American popular music, the sporting of “Afro” hairstyles by Black men and women or Zapata moustaches by Chicano men, and the renewed interest among African Americans in learning African languages and a resurgent interest among Latinos in either reacquiring Spanish—or learning it for the first time.²⁰

In this context, then, it was not surprising that neighborhood residents across the country also began to look at local institutions in a different light—whether it was the local market, bodega, bakery, store-front church, savings-and-loan—or neighborhood school. Although such local institutions usually were not nearly as flashy or opulent as those frequented by white middle-class customers in more affluent areas, the cultural pride movement that flowered in this period caused people to reassess their function and to see them as physical manifestations both of the value of difference and, to an important extent, of self-determination and local community

²⁰ For African American youth culture in the 1960s see: August Meier, ed., *Black Experience: The Transformation* (New York: Aldine Publishing Company, 1970); Armstead L. Robinson, Craig C. Foster, and Donald H. Ogilvie, eds., *Black Studies in the University* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969); Harvard Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality* (Canada: Harper Collins, 1981); Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1964); Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

For Chicano youth culture in the 1960s see: Chad Richardson, *Batos, Bolillos, Pochos, and Pelados: Class and Culture in the South Texas Border* (Austin: University of North Texas Press, 1999); Vicki L. Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Yolanda Alaniz and Megan Cornish, *Viva La Raza: A History of Chicano Identity and Resistance* (Seattle: Red Letter Press, 2008); Oscar Zeta Acosta, *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973).

control. Usually run by members of the neighborhood to serve a local clientele, such small-scale enterprises came to be seen a crucial components of what made a distinct neighborhood a neighborhood, regardless of how modest they may have been.

It was at least partially in this light then, that local struggles over desegregation and the fate of specific local schools began to play out in the era of court-ordered school education. As we have seen, while many bought into prevailing wisdom about the inherent value of integrating students of color with white children (first articulated in systematic form during the actual deliberation of the *Brown* case), as the cultural pride movement spread among different ethnic and racial populations during this time, some began to take issue with such assumptions. On the most elementary, and in hindsight, on the most logical level, some began to raise objections to some of the fundamental premises underlying the linked constructs of integration and “assimilation” because they seemed to reinforce existing racial hierarchies based on the notion that since white schools were, in fact, predominantly white, they were somehow necessarily “better.” While many inner-city and rural schools serving predominantly “minority” populations were obviously inferior on any number of levels, activists and parents began to question whether integration as it had been prescribed was the only answer. Could it be, they wondered, that an emphasis on the internal cultural strengths of existing communities might serve as a better framework around which to build well-rounded and well-educated students in local schools?

Once this question was raised, it was only a matter of time before educational reformers and parents began to question current modes of desegregation and to

develop alternative views. Soon, some began to suggest that, when viewed from another perspective, neighborhood schools could provide multiple benefits to both school districts and the students. First, they obviously presented the cheapest, safest, and fastest means of getting the student from home to school and back again.²¹ Second, the neighborhood school allowed for small-sized classes, which was one of the issues brought forward by Ray Carrasco, representative of the Sacramento Concilio (a local social service organization). Carrasco noted that students who were relocated during phase one were placed in larger class sizes and consequently received less academic attention. At Washington Elementary School, he argued, pupils had an ideal student-teacher ratio of 24:1.²² Third, educators also had come to believe that elementary students benefited from the security that comes from learning and living in the same familiar social and cultural environment—a claim overwhelmingly upheld by Mexican parents. Finally, educators sought a close relationship between the school and the family. Thus, the neighborhood school could reflect the values and goals of the community it served and gain the community's loyalty and support.²³ Washington barrio residents were keenly aware of the benefits associated with neighborhood schools and united against school administrators who wished to dismantle the school.

²¹ Allan Blackman, "The Neighborhood School versus Racial Integration: A Report to the Planning Profession." This paper was read at the American Institute of Planners, California Chapter, Northern Section, "New Ideas and Planning" meeting on March 21, 1964. Document located at the California State Library, Government Publications.

²² "SCUSD Board of Education Minutes," 1 December 1967, 505.

²³ Allan Blackman, "The Neighborhood School Versus Racial Integration: A Report to the Planning Profession," 2.

The benefits of the neighborhood school were largely debated during the dismantling of segregation nationwide in the years following the 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka* case. The main opposition came from white parents who tended to unanimously opposed “forced busing,” but fundamentally they were opposed to racial mixing and feared that Black and Brown students would undo white supremacy. When examining court-ordered desegregation of public schools in the United States, two of the most well-known cases were in Boston, Massachusetts and Buffalo, New York. In the Boston case, considered as the “worst-case scenario,” on the very first day in which the desegregation order took place in September 1974 violence erupted and followed as the school year progressed. For instance, “violence took the form of stoning of buses, several stabbings, and racial brawls in a few of the high schools” and also outside of the school in some of the neighborhoods affected by the court order.²⁴ On the other hand, the Buffalo desegregation program, regarded as the “best case scenario,” that began in 1976 had no violent incidents reported. Its introduction of “magnet schools” in Black neighborhoods made way for a voluntary movement of many white students to inner-city Black schools.²⁵ While in Sacramento, there were no recorded violent incidents, the anger and fervor against the SCUSD’s decision to desegregate Washington Elementary was very real.

The American South was also inflected with racial conflicts and divides over the issue of desegregation. Indeed, in the aftermath of the *Brown* decision many white Southerners refused to undo centuries of social and educational segregation, stretching

²⁴ Taylor, *Desegregation in Boston and Buffalo*, 3.

²⁵ Ibid.

back to the institution of slavery, and the threat of it prompted some to violence. For example, in Nashville, Tennessee the relationships between Blacks and whites were highly demarcated along racial lines. By the 1950s Blacks, allied with sympathetic whites, began to rebel against this system in the American South by targeting public institutions, demanding an end to segregated arrangements on buses, movie theaters, swimming pools, and lunch counters. All the while, whites resisted Black claims to status equality in communal and societal relationships.²⁶ However, when Robert W. Kelley tried to enroll one of his children at East High School and was turned away he filed suit on September 23, 1955 along with twenty-nine other plaintiffs, *Kelley v. Board of Education*, with it he challenged status-quo racial practices in Nashville. The court ordered the immediate desegregation of Nashville schools and as a result the implementation of the “Nashville Plan” was instituted—“a stair-step, grade-a-year program for desegregation starting in the first grade.”²⁷ The Plan was kicked-off on September 9, 1957, when thirteen Black children matriculated in formerly all-white first-grade classes. While the first day seemed a peaceful success, this did not last long when the very next day at about two o’clock the next morning someone threw a dynamite bomb in one wing of the Hattie Cotton School. According to historians Richard A. Pride and J. David Woodard, in their work on desegregation in Nashville, “this bombing, the first violence since the *Brown* decision, shook white Nashvillians from their apathy and helped shift public opinion toward support of the school board’s

²⁶ Richard A. Pride and J. David Woodward, *The Burden of Busing: The Politics of Desegregation in Nashville, Tennessee* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 16-17.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 55.

plan for desegregation.”²⁸ The multiple incidents of violence that erupted in response to desegregation efforts throughout the American South begs the question—when white supremacy is challenged, will children and activists pay the highest consequence? And even after the implementation of the “Nashville Plan,” Black leaders countered that the federal government was not doing enough to bring justice to the land. They consistently charged that desegregation statistics failed to show how shallow integration was even after desegregation plans were implemented. For instance, schools were considered integrated even if the number of Black students remained relatively low, and even though they remained overwhelmingly white.²⁹ These complaints were commonplace in most American cities wherein desegregation was mandated in the 1950s and 1960s, usually after the ruling in local courts.

The moment in which Sacramento began to desegregate its schools, Chicano and Black Nationalist groups were arguing beyond the utilitarian arguments presented by Washington School advocates. For instance, the Black Panther Party’s after-school programs in Oakland and elsewhere promoted and fostered racial and cultural pride—and were openly intended to imbue that pride into children. Furthermore, the Panthers and, among Chicanos, groups like various local chapters of the Brown Berets and the Crusade for Justice in Denver, advocated for self-determination and community control of local institutions that had by that time become central planks in both the African American and Chicano separatist movements.³⁰ While the scarcity of primary

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 66.

sources makes unclear why most Sacramento Mexican parents rejected desegregation, existing sources suggest that some parents were making similar claims as militant activists. These sources reveal that they too, were arguing for the importance of community control, autonomy, and cultural preservation. At the same time, however, not all Mexican Americans agreed with such perspectives. Indeed, in hindsight, it became clear that at least some Mexican parents were inherently associated with the *conservatism* of traditional Mexican culture and family values in the local context.

For many Mexican parents, then, school segregation as it existed in the specific context of the Washington barrio offered a number of important advantages, including the possibility of exerting community control, maintaining strong parental involvement, and ensuring the preservation of the Spanish language and Mexican culture. Again, this emphasis on the cultural dimensions of education marked an important breakthrough not only for Washington School parent-activists but was also being heard with increasing intensity in many communities in the Southwest in which Mexican-origin pupils represented either pluralities or outright majorities in local schools. Although the notion of bilingual/bicultural education had been anathema in most American school districts ever since the language hysteria and intensive campaigns of coerced Americanization that occurred during the era of the First World War, the changing ideological and demographic realities of the late 1960s had

³⁰ For information on Brown Berets see: Ignacio M. García, *Chicanismo: The Forging of a Militant Ethos among Mexican Americans* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1997): 106-107. For more information on Black Panthers Breakfast Program see: "Fred Speaks," speech excerpts from Fred Hampton, in Clayborne Carson, David J. Garrow, Gerald Gill, Vincent Harding, and Darlene Clark Hine, eds., *The Eyes on the Prize Civil Rights Reader: Documents, Speeches, and Firsthand Accounts from the Black Freedom Struggle* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991): 504-509.

reopened a debate about the benefits of using various kinds of cultural difference as part of the educational toolbox.³¹

These issues were common complaints that came out of the Chicano activism in the Southwest at this time, but then, as now, there were always deep divisions in the Chicano/mexicano population regarding specific reforms—especially around cultural issues like language. The United States has had a long standing ambivalence with public bilingual schooling stretching back to the 1830s when German was the only non-English language admitted as a medium of teaching except for French in Louisiana, and later in 1848, Spanish in New Mexico. Also, this period saw the beginning of French schools in New England and Scandinavian and some Dutch schools in the Midwest. In the post Civil War-era, Pole, Lithuanian, and Slovak bilingual schools also sprang up to welcome newcomers from Eastern and Southern Europe. By the early twentieth century, Chinese and Japanese schools were established in Hawaii and the West Coast.³² For Chicanos, the issue over the rights to bilingual education had been linked to Article IX of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848 which was supposed to protect the liberty, civil rights, and property of its

³¹ For works on bilingual/bicultural education see: Carlos Kevin Blanton, *The Strange Career of Bilingual Education in Texas, 1836-1981* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004); Armando L. Trujillo, *Chicano Empowerment and Bilingual Education: Movimiento Politics in Crystal City, Texas* (New York: Garland Publishers, 1998); James Crawford, *Bilingual Education: History, Politics, Theory, and Practice* (Trenton, New Jersey: Crane Publishers Company, 1989); Arturo Tosi, *Immigration and Bilingual Education: A Case Study of the Movement Population, Language, Change, and Education within the EEC* (Oxford, New York: Pergmon Press, 1984).

³² Francesco Cordasco, *Bilingual Schooling in the United States: A Sourcebook for Educational Personnel* (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1976): 3-5. Also see: James Crawford, *Bilingual Education: History, Politics, Theory, and Practice* (Trenton, New Jersey: Crane Publishing Company, Inc., 1989): 18-30.

citizens who lived in the ceded territory.³³ However, the U.S. Congress weakened the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo before its ratification, by revising Article IX, which dealt with citizen rights in the newly established U.S. territory.³⁴ Although Chicanos in the 1960s claimed that cultural and language rights were included in the clause, it remains a source of contention.

Furthermore, attempts to acculturate and assimilate Mexicans into American society were longstanding and Sacramentans of Mexican descent were not exempt from such efforts. In fact, as early as World War I Americanization programs were established in Los Angeles, California where these efforts coincided with nativist attempts to limit immigration from Mexico. Historian George J. Sánchez in his work on Mexican Americans in Los Angeles argues that “Mexicans became the primary targets of Americanization programs in California during the decade preceding the Great Depression.” This was especially true in Southern California where Americanization came to mean negative attitudes toward Mexican immigrants.³⁵ In 1915, the California state legislature passed the Home Teacher Act, a law which allowed school districts to employ teachers “to work in the homes of pupils, instructing children and adults in matters...in relation to the English language...fundamental principles of the American system of government and the

³³ Malcom Ebricht, “Land Grant Adjunction in New Mexico Under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo,” in John Porter Bloom, Ed., *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, 1848: Papers of the Sesquicentennial Symposium, 1848-1998* (Las Cruces, New Mexico: Doña Ana County Historical Society and Yucca Tree Press, 1999): 56.

³⁴ Otto Santa Ana, Ed., *Tongue-Tied: The Lives of Multilingual Children in Public Education* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004): 88-89.

³⁵ Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 97.

rights and duties of citizenship.”³⁶ After the First World War the home teacher program was moved and incorporated into school curricula within the public school system. In the schools, Americanization values and English language skills were emphasized and taught as the determinate to social and economic stability. The ultimate price was the complete replacement of everything Mexican—believed to be “inferior”—for the supposed enjoyment of full benefits into American society.³⁷

Though perhaps Mexican parents at Washington Elementary did not recognize the full implications of segregation such as poor schooling facilities and educational structure; this recognition did not outweigh the perceived need to maintain community control. Despite the daunting challenge of going against school personnel, Mexican parents eloquently and forcefully presented their claims to retain the neighborhood school. Ultimately, they wanted Washington Elementary to remain segregated—on their own terms—so that they could control and access internal community resources. Indeed, it was Mexican parents who resisted the proposed desegregation and even went against some prominent Chicano activists, school and administrative personnel, and others who believed that desegregation was the panacea to the “problem-stricken” community. On a larger plane, in their work on the history of Chicano education, Thomas P. Carter and Roberto D. Segura argue that at the time educators wholeheartedly believed that desegregation held the key to improving the overall educational condition of Chicano children. In fact, they claimed that the mere act of interacting with white children would automatically improve the grades and test scores

³⁶ Ibid., 99.

³⁷ Ibid., 105.

of Chicano children.³⁸ However, in Sacramento and apparently in other places around the country, Mexican parents often did not view desegregation in the same positive light and argued that if given adequate educational resources their children could fare just as well in ethnically concentrated schools. From their vantage point, those arguing for desegregation as the be-all and end-all of the educational crisis had lost sight of their own community's internal resources.

Although Mexican parents were perhaps not well versed with the history or larger implications of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, they understood the fundamental ambiguities involved in patterns of racial discrimination. Furthermore, based on available evidence, it remains unclear as to the extent to which Mexican parents were influenced by the Black liberation struggle and Chicano movement activists who had been articulating a separatist message and developing ideas about what "self-determination" meant in practice. Regardless, Mexicans were widely aware that their presence was not desired or welcomed in the larger American society. As discussed in previous chapters, Sacramento residents were fully aware of the history of racism and exclusion that other ethnic Mexicans had experienced in the Greater Sacramento Valley, and like their compatriots elsewhere, they also had come to seek certain level of safety and security in their secluded ethnic enclaves. It was within the confines of the barrio that they were comparatively free to roam the streets and frequent local businesses without fear of molestation or unwanted glares. In the barrio, Spanish was the primary language of communication and at least there they

³⁸ Thomas P. Carter and Roberto D. Segura, *Mexican Americans in School: A Decade of Change* (New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1979): 322.

were not looked down upon because they did not speak English properly. Indeed, from the point of view of many barrio residents, it was the safest place for them and their offspring to *be Mexican*.³⁹

Perhaps unaware of the larger ramifications of segregation, Washington Elementary Mexican parents thus decided to take action to ensure that their children not be exposed to direct racism as they had often endured in their own schooling. The last thing they needed, in their view, was for American-raised and educated Chicano activists to advise them what was best for them or their families. In many ways, they were resentful and suspicious of these so called Mexican American leaders who, as far as they were concerned, had long abandoned their communities. From their vantage point, they no longer shared common values and therefore pointedly asked how Mexican American activists could claim to represent them or their interests.⁴⁰

³⁹ For more information of the multiple functions of Mexican barrios see: Albert Camarillo, *Chicanos in a Changing Society: From Mexican Pueblos to American Barrios in Santa Barbara and Southern California, 1848-1930* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979); Matt García, *A World of Its Own: Race, Labor, and Citrus Making in Greater Los Angeles, 1900-1970* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); José M. Alamillo, *Making Lemonade Out of Lemons: Mexican American Labor and Leisure in a California Town, 1880-1960* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006); Mary S. Pardo, *Mexican American Women Activists: Identity and Resistance in Two Los Angeles Communities* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998); George J. Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); and Gilbert G. González, *Labor and Community: Mexican Citrus Worker Villages in a Southern California County, 1900-1950* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

⁴⁰ For studies on departure in political ideologies see: Carlos Muñoz, *Youth, Identity, Power: The Chicano Movement* (New York: Verso, 1989); Ignacio M. García, *Chicanismo: The Forging of a Militant Ethos Among Mexican Americans* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1997); Ignacio M. García, *United We Win: The Rise and Fall of La Raza Unida Party* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1989); Ernesto Chávez, *"Mi Raza Primero! (My People First!)": Nationalism, Identity, and Insurgency in the Chicano Movement in Los Angeles, 1966-1976* (Berkeley: University of California Press,); and Lorena Oropeza, *Raza Si! Guerra No!: Chicano Protest and Patriotism During the Viet Nam War Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

Despite the strength of their convictions, the Washington school parent-activists faced a significant challenge from middle-class co-ethnics who held very different views of the issues at hand. As was true elsewhere in the Mexican American Southwest at this juncture, Sacramento Mexican American middle-class activists tended to subscribe to a significantly more accommodationist politics and largely as a result, tended also to support integration as a solution to the crisis in public education. The historian Ignacio M. García, who has written extensively on the shifting political climate of the Chicano Movement era, argues that middle-class leaders tended to see themselves as “spokespersons and negotiators” for their communities—even if they made little effort to ask their supposed constituents about their own feelings on the issues of the day. The middle-class leaders tended to represent a sense of American individualism that they had acquired as a part of their socialization in American society.⁴¹ Even though many had “come up” from much more modest socioeconomic circumstances, Mexican Americans who were recognized by Anglos as “community leaders” often developed a rigid and inflated understanding of their role *as* leaders that led them to suggest reforms at odds with the actual wishes of working-class residents of the barrios. Furthermore, by attempting to hold on to a middle-class liberal agenda and out-dated organizing tactics they consequently managed to socially distance themselves from working-class mexicanos and prevented them from fully comprehending the different points of view that had emerged during the Chicano Movement. Indeed, their abomination of Chicano nationalism created a deep divide

⁴¹ García, *Chicanismo*, 131.

among young Chicano militants who were calling for confrontational, rather than integrationist politics.⁴² People like this tended to believe strongly that strategies that led to assimilation or acculturation were the only way up and out of poverty. Any deviation presented a potential threat to potential “progress” of the mexicano community.

The wide ideological divide between the Mexican American middle class and Mexican parents came to light in the Washington Elementary case. Although most working-class mexicanos probably aspired to reach middle class status, while at the same time holding even more traditional social values than many of their middle class counterparts, they were painfully aware that they continued to hold a second-class status in American society. This case demonstrates, then, that understanding Chicano politics on the ground at the time was more complicated than simply viewing ideological differences among them in “conservative” versus “liberal” terms. While some Mexican parents may have held that remaining segregated offered the most plausible condition for improving the education of their children, whether their reasoning for it fell within the spectrum of “conservative” or “liberal” political thought was often difficult to discern. Indeed, often times, their points of view represented a blend of ideologies.

CHICANO USE OF COURTS IN THE FIGHT FOR EDUCATIONAL INTEGRATION

Various forms of *de facto* educational segregation were practiced throughout the U.S. Southwest. Chicanos have challenged this unequal system through use of the

⁴² García, *Chicanismo*, 73.

courts most notably in states with large Chicano populations like California and Texas. For example, in the 1930 case, *Independent School District vs. Salvierra*, lawyers for local Chicanos were successful in getting the Texas Court of Civil Appeals to agree with the trial court that school authorities had no power to arbitrarily segregate Mexican children and exclude them from schools maintained for children of “other white races,” merely or solely because they were Mexicans. In California, the first instance of court-ordered desegregation occurred in Lemon Grove one year later in 1931. Again, after local Chicanos brought suit, the court ruled in the landmark case, *Roberto Álvarez vs. The Board of Trustees of the Lemon Grove School District*, that ample previous legal precedent had determined that Mexicans were of the Caucasian race and not “Negro, Mongolian, or Indian” and thus segregating them violated state law, and significantly also, contradicted the equal protection and due process clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment.⁴³ Although the Lemon Grove case had limited applicability as a broad legal precedent, the judge’s ruling in this direction provided an indication of the strategic path other activists would follow later when challenging segregation cases in public education, transportation, housing, and other facilities and institutions.

The end of World War II saw renewed protests against segregation by Mexicans residing in the United States. In the arena of desegregation litigation, the most prominent and overarching case took place in Westminster, California when several parents organized a bond proposition for the construction of a new integrated

⁴³ For detailed information on the *Roberto Álvarez vs. The Board of Trustees of the Lemon Grove School District* see: Roberto Álvarez, “The Lemon Grove Incident: The Nation’s First Successful Desegregation Case,” *The Journal of San Diego History* 32 (2) (1986): 116-35.

school. The voters turned it down and consequently, on March 2, 1945, five fathers—Gonzalo Méndez, Thomas Estrada, William Guzmán, Frank Palomino, and Lorenzo Ramírez—brought suit in a case that became known as *Méndez vs. Westminster* in what would become one of the most controversial court cases regarding the desegregation of Chicano children. The litigants in *Méndez* employed a strategy similar to that followed by the plaintiffs in the *Lemon Grove* case more than a decade before, with the Westminster plaintiffs claiming that their children were the victims of unconstitutional discrimination. The parents won their case and with it came an end to *de jure* segregation in California schools. The *Méndez* case paved the way for similar litigation in other states like Texas and Arizona, challenging segregation schemes.⁴⁴ For instance, in 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court held, in *Hernández vs. Texas*, a case involving discrimination against Mexican Americans in jury selection, that Mexican Americans were protected by the Fourteenth Amendment but limited its holding to the facts of the case rather than considering the broader question of whether the group constituted its own ethnic category. While the earlier cases fought for Mexicans to be legally considered “white,” much of the discussion and legal maneuvering of *Hernández* revolved around the ethnicity of Mexicans because “being ‘in-between’ white and Black provided the foundation for rampant discrimination and exclusion of people of Mexican descent.”⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Christopher Arriola, “Knocking the Schoolhouse Door: *Méndez vs. Westminster*, Equal Protection, Public Education, and Mexican Americans in the 1940’s” *La Raza Law Review* 8 (1995): 166-208.

⁴⁵ Ignacio M. García, *White But Not Equal: Mexican Americans, Jury Discrimination and the Supreme Court* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2009): 3.

Mexican Americans would have to wait until 1970 with *Cisneros vs. Corpus Christi Independent School District*, to be classified as “an identifiable ethnic minority group” to be considered in school desegregation cases. Thus, Americans of Mexican descent were at last legally protected under the *Brown* case as African Americans had for some time now. This influential ruling paved the way to win other cases against school boards that had systematically discriminated against Mexican Americans. It was not, however, until the Supreme Court took up this issue of whether Chicanas/os were a “suspect” class such that they were entitled to protection under the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. In *Keyes v. School District No. 1*, a case originating in Denver, Colorado, the Supreme Court posited that “though of different origins, Negroes and Hispanics in Denver suffer identical discrimination in treatment when compared with the treatment accorded Anglo students.”⁴⁶ The court’s ruling—in likening the Chicano experience to that of African Americans in the United States—finally provided some acknowledgement of the second-class status ethnic Mexicans were subject to since the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Unfortunately, though, the *Keyes* case lasted in continuous litigation for nearly thirty years from 1968-1997.

The historical battles waged by ethnic Mexicans in the courts to first stubbornly claim a white identity and later to challenge this claim by adopting a position that Mexican Americans were, after all, non-white, is largely a microcosm of the internal political divide that historically has separated Mexican public opinion in

⁴⁶ Quoted in: Margaret E. Montoya, “A Brief History of Chicana/o School Segregation: One Rationale for Affirmative Action,” *La Raza Law Journal* 12 (2001): 170.

the United States. It is in this complex and multi-layered legal arena that the Mexican parents of Washington Elementary entered a widely debated history of whether ethnic Mexicans should be legally protected as whites and therefore be afforded the privileges of whites. The Sacramento case demonstrates, at the very least, that the legal and popular point-of-view of Civil Rights leaders was not always aligned with the voices of the local people on the ground. In other words, at the height of the nationwide campaign for the desegregation of public schools, Mexican parents in Sacramento challenged desegregation head-on—albeit perhaps without much knowledge of the precedent cases put forth by previous generations of ethnic Mexicans. For the parents at Washington Elementary, segregation as it existed in their barrio school was a desirable outcome—at least insofar as it provided a culturally safe haven for their children. In short, activists involved in the Washington Elementary controversy raised important questions about who ultimately should decide such complex issues in large populations: the courts, the school board, middle-class Mexican Americans, or those affected most—local children and their parents? While it is impossible to answer these larger questions based on the historical evidence explored in this single case study, it is imperative that they be addressed. Perhaps, the parent’s voice needs to be considered in greater detail than it has been in the past.

DYNAMICS OF THE WASHINGTON BARRIO

The Washington barrio was one of the most vibrant Mexican neighborhoods in Sacramento, despite the fact that it operated as a transitional space for migrant farm workers who labored in the agricultural fields of Yolo County, West Sacramento, and

in some cases, at even more distant work sites. In 1968, Mexicans made up only about twenty-six percent of the residents of the greater Sacramento area. According to anthropologist Clark Taylor, the Washington barrio functioned as a refuge for the marginalized immigrant community, but once residents acquired enough money, they moved to “better” localities. Consequently, he argued, the Washington barrio had a high population turnover.⁴⁷ Perceptions of the neighborhood’s decline were one of the reasons cited by the Sacramento City Unified School District for the permanent closure of Washington Elementary. In turn, the school board’s proposal to shut the school prompted some Washington area residents to move since their children could no longer attend a nearby school.⁴⁸ City leaders and school administrators used this development to bolster their argument that the neighborhood was in decline and only operated as a transitional space for Mexican migrant workers and provided further justification for closing the school.

Although Sacramento city leaders and local news media reported that the Washington barrio had fallen into economic disrepair, Mexican residents who actually lived there, frequented local businesses, and took advantage of various local social service agencies had very different perspectives on the nature and value of the neighborhood. For instance, the Washington barrio was bound together by three community agencies that offered assistance to its residents: the Washington Community Council, part of the Sacramento Area Economic Opportunity Council; the

⁴⁷ Sacramento State College was later renamed California State University, Sacramento, and more recently Sacramento State University. Taylor is cited in Holden, *The Bus Stops Here*, 292.

⁴⁸ “Board of Education will Reconsider School’s Closing,” *The Sacramento Bee*, 9 August 1968.

Washington Neighborhood Center, an affiliated agency of the United Crusade; and *El Concilio*, a community center developed by a federation of Mexican civic organizations and founded in the late 1960s.⁴⁹ The Washington Neighborhood Center, located at 400 16th Street, provided services and entertainment to local and surrounding barrio residents.⁵⁰ The Center organized several community events such as dances, holiday dinners, Mexican cultural events, and art exhibits.⁵¹ Mexican families in the area often took advantage of the various programs. For instance, Socorro Falcón Zuniga, who moved to the Washington barrio in 1953, recalled taking her sons to the Center probably to participate in the art program.⁵² Given that many greater Sacramento County Mexicans took advantage of services offered by the Washington Community Council and Concilio, the Washington barrio served as a focal point for the approximately 75,000 Mexicans living in and around Sacramento County.⁵³

⁴⁹ “Turkey Task,” *The Sacramento Bee*, 19 November 1968.

⁵⁰ “Mural Growing in Yard,” *The Sacramento Union*, 12 August 1968.

⁵¹ “Family Fiesta, Dance are Called Off,” *The Sacramento Bee*, 7 June 1968; “Turkey Task,” *The Sacramento Bee*, 19 November 1968, p. B1; No Title, *The Sacramento Union*, 18 August 1968.

⁵² Socorro Falcón Zuniga, interview by author, 1 June 2010, Sacramento, California, audio recording.

⁵³ Holden, *The Bus Stops Here*, 292.

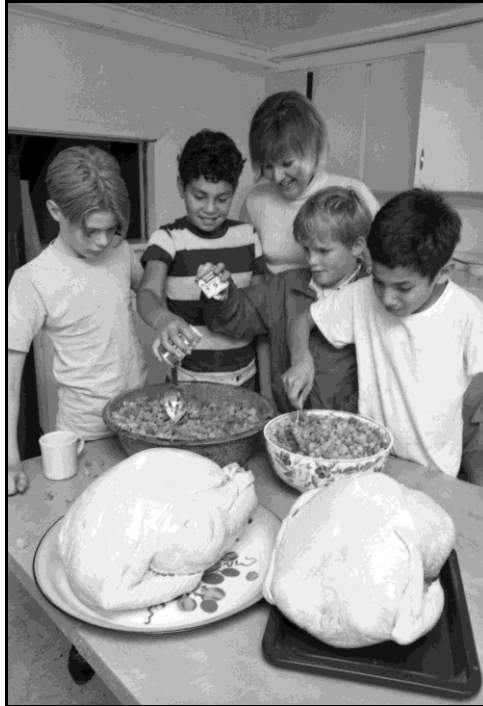


Image 12: “Turkey Task” Boys of the Washington Neighborhood Center prepare stuffing for a Thanksgiving dinner at the center. (Courtesy of Center for Sacramento History, The Sacramento Bee Collection, 1983/001/Robert Jacobs, 11-18-1968.)

Washington Elementary was an extension of the barrio. For years, Mexican parents had personally walked their children to school and taken advantage of the many special programs offered at the school. The school historically had provided cultural events and extended invitations to area residents. For example, in May 1968, the school organized a Music Festival where first grade students performed.⁵⁴ During the summers, Washington Elementary School served as a preschool for students from “disadvantaged” backgrounds participating in the Head Start Program. In 1968 alone

⁵⁴ No Title, *The Sacramento Union*, 30 May 1968.

1,100 students were enrolled in the program.⁵⁵ In addition, Washington provided adult education evening classes to those interested in learning English.⁵⁶ Unquestionably, then, Washington Elementary was far more than “just” a school for barrio inhabitants. How could they be asked to sacrifice these programs with no guarantee that they would be reproduced and/or available at the other elementary schools in the district?



Image 13: “A Rebirth of Chicano Art” opened on August 18, 1968 at the Washington Community Council headquarters, 14th and E Streets. The Washington Community Council, the Washington Neighborhood Center and the Congress of Young Adults combined efforts for the public show, which featured paintings by 25 youngsters and artists. In addition, there was a Chicano cultural program presented. (Courtesy of Center for Sacramento History, The Sacramento Bee, 1983/001/Dick Schmidt, 8-17-1968.)

⁵⁵ Head Start was a federally financed program but received eighty percent of its funds from the Office of Economic Opportunity, administered by the Sacramento Area Economic Opportunity Council. It provided every student enrolled in the program with breakfast. The Program employed some seventy teachers and seventy teacher aides and was in its fourth year of existence in Sacramento. The students came from low-income households. The county coordinator for the Head Start Program, Mrs. Richard Foley, explained that the program was a “concentrated effort to fill nutritional, physical, psychological and sociological needs of disadvantaged children and children from low income families.” She added that the main purpose of the program was to aid “children in getting along with other children their own age as well as with those of other ages, races and creeds.” Bob Taylor, “1,100 Get Head Start: Day Begins with Full Stomach,” *The Sacramento Union*, 15 July 1968, p. C1.

⁵⁶ “SCUSD Board of Education Minutes,” 1 December 1967, 459-460.

SCUSD ADOPTS PLAN TO DESEGREGATE ITS SCHOOLS

Efforts to desegregate Washington Elementary coincided with those initiated by state governments across the United States to implement legislation forcing local school districts to end both *de jure* and *de facto* segregation.⁵⁷ In California, the first major step began in the 1966-1967 academic year, when school districts were state-mandated to conduct annual surveys of the racial and ethnic distribution of students and employees in public schools.⁵⁸ These ethnic and racial studies assisted the Commission on Equal Opportunities in Education and the California Department of Education in determining which appropriate actions to take in order to attain equitable racial distribution and to determine the types of educational programs necessary for improving integrated educational opportunities for members of all groups.⁵⁹ This was an important step towards implementing the U.S. Supreme Court's *Brown* decision within California's boundaries. However, ethnic surveys were not new to the Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD), which was the first city to conduct

⁵⁷ The California Department of Education defined "imbalanced" or segregated schools as those whose racial or ethnic enrollment differed by more than fifteen percentage points from that for all the schools in the district. California State Department of Education, *Procedures to Correct Racial and Ethnic Imbalance in School Districts: California Administrative Code, Title 5, Education, Sections 2010 and 2011* (1969): 1.

⁵⁸ These surveys provided the California State Department of Education with the information necessary to determine the extent to which school districts were complying with state laws, policies, and regulations. The California State Department of Education first began to notify school districts whose survey reports indicated that they had one or more imbalanced schools in the fall of 1969. Districts were asked to file a notice of their intention to develop corrective plans to the Department no later than January 15, 1970. California State Department of Education, *Procedures to Correct Racial and Ethnic Imbalance in School Districts: California Administrative Code, Title 5, Education, Sections 2010 and 2011* (1969): 2.

⁵⁹ California State Department of Education, *Racial and Ethnic Survey of California Public Schools, Part One: Distribution of Pupils, 1967* (Sacramento: Government Publications, 1967), iii.

such studies.⁶⁰ Its first survey (1963) proved worthy in determining which efforts SCUSD needed to take in order to end *de facto* segregation.

Sacramento schools were organized on a neighborhood school basis at all levels, without any special efforts on the part of the SCUSD to select sites or adjust boundaries, which subsequently mirrored housing segregation patterns within its jurisdiction creating a kind of double segregation for students of color.⁶¹ Case in point, Blacks, Mexicans, and Asians not only made the majority in certain inner city schools, but they also tended to attend aging, run-down schools. All the while, the district concerted its efforts and economic resources to build new schools in the suburbs to the great benefit of white pupils. For example, from 1954 to 1968, the district built a total of 20 new elementary schools, of which 19 were located outside Sacramento's city limit and served a predominantly white student population. The blatantly disproportional distribution of monies to build schools outside the city-proper left the communities of color dissatisfied given that little was being done to improve the run-down schools their children were attending.⁶²

Concerned parents of color complained that the SCUSD outwardly neglected efforts to dismantle *de facto* segregated schools years after the *Brown* ruling.⁶³

⁶⁰ Sacramento City Unified School District, *The Ethnic Composition of the Pupil Population of the Sacramento City Unified School District, Fall, 1969* (Sacramento: December 1, 1969): 1.

⁶¹ Holden, *The Bus Stops Here*, 306.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 301.

⁶³ Black students composed the largest racial group in local schools. Black student enrollment grew from 4,848 in 1963 to 7,040 in 1968. The proportion of Blacks in the total school system increased from ten percent to fourteen percent during this time period. Holden, *The Bus Stops Here*, 300.

According to the 1970 U.S. Census, eleven percent of the people of Sacramento were Black compared with six percent Mexican. Although both groups were relatively small in comparison with whites, they were highly concentrated in certain pockets in Sacramento.⁶⁴ In the summer of 1963 Stanford Junior High, a predominantly Black school was set on fire—and consequently destroyed—by one of its students.⁶⁵ Shortly thereafter the Sacramento school district voted to move portable classrooms onto the Stanford site and to prepare for student attendance in the fall of that year. However, these plans never materialized because in late August 1963 Reverend Cyrus Keller—father of a Stanford student and National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Sacramento branch president—filed an injunction suit, under the auspices of the NAACP, in the Sacramento County Superior Court on behalf of his son. He charged that Stanford Junior High School had failed to develop and “execute a nondiscriminatory plan for distribution of the Stanford student population.”⁶⁶ Reverend Keller sought an injunction to prevent the school board from erecting portables and returning students to the temporary on-site Stanford campus. On October 8, 1963, Judge Irving Perluss ruled in favor of Keller and ordered the board and superintendent to develop a plan in “accordance with the law” for the correction of racial imbalance at Stanford Junior High School no later than September 1, 1964.⁶⁷ Approximately one week after the Perluss ruling, the Sacramento Board of Education

⁶⁴ Holden, *The Bus Stops Here*, 286-287.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 301.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 304.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

adopted a far-reaching desegregation plan for Stanford Junior High School, which included the permanent abandonment of the Stanford site and, even more significantly, the redrawing of attendance boundaries of six junior high schools in the central and eastern part of Sacramento in order to redistribute the Stanford students.⁶⁸

Opposition to integration did not, at least initially, arise from the African American community, but from whites who rallied behind the slogan of preserving neighborhood schools and against the busing of Black children into “their” neighborhoods and schools. The controversy began in earnest when the Citizen Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunity—a committee formed by the Sacramento City Unified School District on November 26, 1963 to address *de facto* segregation—issued a recommendation to the school district to eliminate ethnic imbalance in elementary schools by abolishing existing attendance boundaries and grouping schools together in “clusters.”⁶⁹ Between mid June and the early July 1965, SCUSD school board members, the superintendent, and other administrators received a total of 4,506 letters, petition signatures, and telegrams reacting to the Citizens Advisory Committee report.⁷⁰ The following table provides evidence of the overwhelming negative response to desegregation by its mostly white constituency.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 307.

⁶⁹ The Citizens Advisory Committee on Equal opportunity was composed of fifteen members that included professionals, business persons, and a minister. The group included ten Caucasians, two Blacks, one Mexican, one Chinese, and one Japanese. The Advisory Committee was set up to (1) study and evaluate evidence of racial tension arising from ethnic imbalance; (2) recommend ways and means by which to reduce or eliminate existing tensions; (3) and investigate and recommend means by which equal educational opportunities could be offered to all students in the district. Holden, *The Bus Stops Here*, 324-326.

⁷⁰ Holden, *The Bus Stops Here*, 327.

Table 2: Reaction to Report of the Citizens Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunity, June-July 1965

Type of Communication	Total	In favor of Report	Anti-Busing, Pro-Neighborhood School	Ambiguous or Could Not be Classified
Signatures on Petitions	3,764	26	3,549	189
Form Letters	505	0	505	0
Individual Letters and Communications	237	7	227	3
Total	4,506	33	4,281	192⁷¹

The bulk of the petitions and letters came from residents of newer predominately white residential areas of the district. Although some protest did arrive from inner-city “minority” communities, most of the opposition came from attendance areas with few or no Black students enrolled. Additionally, most correspondence came from the same areas where petitions and letters originated. A “minority” member (his name was not provided) of the Citizens Advisory Committee could not believe the “public uproar” over the report and stated that whites were accusing the committee of “trying to mongrelize our people.”⁷² Anna Holden, in her work on desegregation in Sacramento, argued that the “anti-busing hysteria was clearly a panic reaction of white homeowners who had by choice settled themselves away from the pressing problems of Blacks and the inner city.”⁷³ Because of the backlash to the recommendation, the

⁷¹ Table in Holden, *The Bus Stops Here*, 329.

⁷² Quoted in *Ibid.*, 331.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

Citizens Advisory Committee dissolved upon the release of the report, but the SCUSD continued with its plan to desegregate.⁷⁴

The soaring negative response to integration clearly points to the unsettled racial environment in Sacramento during this increasingly tense period. In this instance Sacramento resident's reaction was similar to those experienced in other cities in the United States. For instance, in New York City when the school board advanced an integration plan in the fall 1959, allowing the first trial of permissive zoning, approximately 400 Black elementary students in Bedford-Stuyvesant were transferred to all-white schools in the conservative Glendale and Ridgewood neighborhoods. This plan was met with outright resistance from the Glendale-Ridgewood neighborhoods in their efforts to maintain their so-called property value, but also clearly reflected underlying racial fears. Indeed, on the first day of school in September, approximately 50 percent of white Ridgewood and Glendale elementary students, under the advice of their parents, stayed home. The boycott ended after the first day; thus, school administrators believed that the first test of permissive zoning was a success.⁷⁵

Likewise, in Sacramento, the school board had declared the integration efforts of Black students a success and moved forward with its plans to address the *de facto* segregation of predominantly Chicano schools. Yet, it is important to note that from the moment in which the Sacramento school board began to tackle segregation in

⁷⁴ Ibid., 333.

⁷⁵ Diane Ravitch, *The Great School Wars: A History of the New York City Public Schools* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1974): 258-259.

1963, Chicano leaders were also making demands on behalf of their own communities. The most outspoken was attorney Alfonso A. González, former president of the Mexican American Education Association (MAEA) and the sole Mexican member of the Citizens Advisory Committee for Equal Opportunity Education. González fervently protested the exclusion of Chicano students from the original desegregation plan. He argued that the needs of Chicanos, yet again, had been overlooked or not taken seriously by the SCUSD.⁷⁶ González's early frustration with the board indicates that he had made previous attempts to address the needs of Chicano students, but had failed to gain their support. He would continue to be a constant advocate for Chicano students throughout the desegregation efforts of Washington Elementary.

At the time of the original discussions to desegregate Sacramento schools, the board had decided to wait before addressing the "Mexican problem" because they viewed it as even more complicated than the issue of Black students in the district. The district's 1968-1969 student population was 35 percent minority, with fourteen percent of the enrollment being Black; twelve percent Mexican; eight percent Asian; and one percent American Indian and other nonwhites. An annual racial and ethnic census conducted by the district between 1963 and 1968 showed that the number of Mexican students had increased from ten percent in 1963 to twelve percent in 1968, starting a long-term trend that continues to the present day.⁷⁷ The SCUSD board members were keenly aware of the English-language limitations and special migratory

⁷⁶ Holden, *The Bus Stops Here*, 358.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 300.

status of some of the Mexican students at Washington Elementary and realized the transition to a new school would be a challenging undertaking. For years, schools located in rural areas had to account for grower demands for child labor and consequently had adjusted their schedules to accommodate the coming and going during picking seasons. Such schools usually started at 7:00 a.m. and continued until noon, so that children could join their parents in the groves and fields. Although Mexican children by that time statistically began to outstrip their parent's generation in years of schooling, migrant children seldom attended beyond the fifth grade and rarely entered high school. Additionally, in a pattern that to some degree continues to the present day, many migrant families spent the winters in Mexico and would consequently take their children out of school. Thus, it was clear to many reformers in the Sacramento area that any attempt at desegregation in agricultural areas needed to address the multiple educational obstacles migrant children faced.⁷⁸

However, it was not until the California State Board of Education publicly criticized the Sacramento City Unified School District for not desegregating Mexican schools that a plan was devised.⁷⁹ In early 1967, the school board began to investigate the condition of the Washington Elementary and found that it presented a serious safety risk because it was aging (the school was built in 1915) and had consequently

⁷⁸ For more information on the education of migrant children, refer to Gilbert G. González, *Chicano Education in the Era of Segregation* (Philadelphia: The Balch Institute Press, 1990): 94-135. Sacramento City Unified School District had a significant number of migrant students in its jurisdiction based on Sacramento newspapers and SCUSD board meeting minutes. See "SSC Community Affairs Program Established Aid for Migrant Workers, Study Centers," *The Sacramento State Hornet*, 17 June 1968, p. 6.

⁷⁹ "SCUSD Board of Education Minutes," 19 August 1968, 420.

failed to meet earthquake safety standards imposed by the California state legislature.⁸⁰ The school board considered costs to renovate the school (\$864,888) too high.⁸¹ Furthermore, after a year of concentrated compensatory education at Washington Elementary, test results indicated that students had made insignificant improvements which revealed that the school was failing to meet general educational standards. Thus, under the guise of safety concerns and failing test scores, board members concluded that they had more than sufficient premise to argue for the closing of the school.⁸²

⁸⁰ “Board of Education will Reconsider School’s Closing,” *The Sacramento Bee*, 9 August 1968.

⁸¹ The other problems noted by the Sacramento school board for consideration of the closure of Washington Elementary were: (1) the school was located on a small site of 2.5 acres, which would limit recreational and educational opportunities; (2) the location of the school was a cause of concern because the living pattern of the community had changed materially since it was placed on the present site; (3) if the school was rehabilitated or rebuilt, with its present attendance boundaries, or a modification thereof the school would still remain *de facto* segregated; (4) the McAteer Act, enacted by the California Legislature in the early 1960s to assist and promote educational programs for under-serviced children, contained provisions that indicated that nothing in the Act should be construed to “sanction, perpetuate, or promote racial or ethnic imbalance in the public schools”; (5) and the school’s consistently low achievement test records were of great educational concern and the “environmental conditions may be a strong factor in this picture.” *Sacramento City Unified School District Board of Education Minute Records*, document located at the Sacramento Archives and Museum Collection Center (SAMCC), December 1, 1967, 504.

⁸² “SCUSD Board of Education Minutes,” 19 August 1968, 421.



Image 14: “The last gasp for old Washington. The crash of demolition equipment resounded in the older residential part of Sacramento today as wrecking crews began tearing down the 59-year-old Washington Elementary School at 1716 E. Street. Sacramento City voters sounded the death knell for the old school last November when they approved a measure which authorizes the Sacramento City Unified School District to float up to \$5.6 million ‘for the repair, reconstruction or replacement’ of certain schools which failed to meet the earthquake resistance standards of the California Field Act.” Sacramento, CA. (Courtesy of Center for Sacramento History, [The Sacramento Bee](#) Collection. 4-26-1975.)

The board took precautionary measures in informing Mexican parents of the desegregation plan and made what appears to be an honest effort to gain their support. This notion of “good faith” was put forth by Dr. Lawson, head of the desegregation committee, who noted that:

The staff has been taking the statement seriously of the board’s policy on de facto segregation, and that the suggestions [to desegregate Washington Elementary School] made in the report before the board were concrete evidence of the staff’s effort to keep faith with the written policy.⁸³

⁸³ “SCUSD Board of Education Minutes,” 16 October 1967, 427.

The first step the SCUSD board took was to send Spanish-proficient personnel door-to-door in the Washington neighborhood to inform parents of the plans under consideration for desegregation.⁸⁴ They then set up a series of “special meetings” at the Washington Elementary School Auditorium and provided a Spanish-language translator for the non-English speakers in attendance.⁸⁵ According to SCUSD Board of Education President, Adolph Moskovitz, “the purpose of the meeting was to give citizens an opportunity to react to possible plans for the alleviation or elimination of the adverse effects of de facto segregation at the Washington Elementary and similar problems at the Lincoln School.”⁸⁶ Concerned parents were encouraged to express their points of view and pose questions to the board.

CHICANO POLITICAL DIVISIONS ARISE OVER WASHINGTON ELEMENTARY

Despite these rudimentary efforts at community outreach by the SCUSD, it soon became clear that many of the Washington *barrio* parents had a different point of view when it came to the kind of mandatory school desegregation preferred by local officials. This became more evident when the Washington Neighborhood Center began an aggressive survey campaign of the Washington *barrio* through “coffee

⁸⁴ The district proposed four alternate plans involving the Washington Elementary School that could go into effect in the fall of 1968. The plans were: (1) Reduction of the attendance area of the Washington Elementary Schools where space is available; (2) Redistribution of all Washington kindergarten pupils to more distant schools in the fall of 1968; (3) Redistribution of the first three grades and kindergarten from the Washington School in the fall of 1968, with the remaining of students to be moved in the fall of 1969; (4) Redistribution of students in the first three grades and kindergarten at both Lincoln and Washington Elementary Schools in the fall of 1968, and the remaining Lincoln and Washington students to be moved in the fall of 1969. “SCUSD Board of Education Minutes,” 16 October 1967, 426.

⁸⁵ There was a total of three “special meetings” held by the SCUSD board of education members to discuss the Washington Elementary. The first took place on December 1, 1967; the second on August 8, 1968; and the third on November 18, 1968.

⁸⁶ “SCUSD Board of Education Minutes,” 1 December 1967, 503.

klatches”—a method in which a resident’s home was identified to host a meeting or gathering with their immediate neighbors, and *pan dulce* (Mexican sweet bread) and coffee was provided. The purpose, according to Senón M. Valádez, a graduate student at Sacramento State College and Washington Neighborhood Center organizer, was to investigate where Mexican parents stood on the desegregation issue. These gatherings, Valádez would later argue in a recent interview, were invaluable because,

The coffee klatches allowed us the opportunity to know the neighborhood, know who the parents were, where the leaders were, the quiet people, and give them an opportunity to talk. What we found is that Mexicans don’t like to air their problems with other people. Part of the cultural thing is you handle things on your own. They wouldn’t open up.⁸⁷

The parents’ reluctance to speak could be attributed to issues of distrust of authority figures; they were afraid to make matters worse for their children; there was a sense of pessimism and therefore most apparently believed they had little control or influence; or perhaps, they were not interested in participating.

Washington Neighborhood delegates, however, came to discover that while it was a noble idea, it would take a concentrated effort to gain the parents’ trust. One of the problems they ran into was that oftentimes women did not want to participate because their husbands did not approve of them meddling in public affairs. Valádez recalled that some the women would often state,

My husband doesn’t want me to be involved in none of this stuff. He wants me to be quiet and not to go...Dice que ustedes son chismosos. Que handan de metiches...El no quieren líos con nadien...Que hagan lo que quieran ellos, son los maestros, son los

⁸⁷ Senón M. Valádez, interview by author, 15 June 2010, Sacramento, California, audio recording.

directores. [He says you are a bunch of troublemakers. That you are getting into other people's business. He doesn't want any problems with anyone. Let them do what they want, that's why they are the teachers and directors.]⁸⁸

The machismo at the home front may have deterred some mexicanas from attending coffee klatches, but the vast majority of participants were indeed women. This reveals that husband's attempts to dominate and control their wives were largely unsuccessful. Some of the parents felt inadequate to oppose the school personnel's recommendation to desegregate Washington Elementary because, after all, they were authority figures on the matter. At the same time, some of the parents, were afraid that if they got involved it would get "back to their place of employment and they could lose their jobs."⁸⁹ In other words, drawing attention in this way may paint them as "agitators"—a label they did not wish to be associated with.

The Washington Neighborhoods Center's persistence and commitment eventually paid off when more and more parents were now willing and able to express their concerns. Valádez recalled what they told the parents in order to assure this,

All we [The Washington Neighborhood Center delegates] want to do is hear what your thinking is. This is going to happen [desegregation]. It is coming to this neighborhood. They [the students] are going to probably be bused out of here. You need to speak up if you don't want this. If you want this you don't have to participate. It's O.K.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Senón M. Valádez, interview by author, 15 June 2010, Sacramento, California, audio recording.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

They discovered that the vast majority objected to the desegregation plan, although a few families supported it. For instance, Valádez recalled in a recent interview, “The Colmonares [family] were more on the side of assimilation. [They thought] there is nothing wrong with integration. [From their point of view,] these kids really need to speak more English....As long as they stay here [at Washington Elementary,] they’re not going to learn it.”⁹¹ While the Colmonares represent a faction in favor of desegregation, by all accounts, they appear to have been a minority in the Washington barrio who overwhelmingly opposed it.

It is unclear whether area parents actually sought to maintain a policy of active segregation in public education, but when it came to a question of keeping their children close at hand or letting them get dispersed throughout the school system, most chose the former. In Valádez’s view, Mexican parents did not understand desegregation, but they certainly understood busing.⁹² In an effort to stop the busing of their children, Mexican parents circulated petitions, organized rallies, and even staged a series of protest meetings.⁹³ Although it remains unclear whose help they solicited and what organizations or entities worked together to assure that their demands were being heard, a few individuals stood out. For example, María Herbert-Córtez, chairperson of the district’s newly established Community Educational Advisory

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ *Sacramento City Unified School District Board of Education Minute Records*, document located at the History of Science Division, Sacramento Archives and Museum Collection Center (SAMCC), 1 December 1967, 507.

Committee on Compensatory Education (Title I) and an active proponent of bilingual and bicultural programs for Mexican children, served as the parent's major ally. At the December 1, 1967 SCUSD board meeting held to discuss the plans for Washington Elementary, Herbert-Córtéz presented the board with a petition objecting to the closing of Washington Elementary. The petition was signed by seventy-three adults and represented approximately 123 students at the school.⁹⁴ The efforts of Mexican parents to keep Washington Elementary open even gained the support of "Anglo president of the Washington PTA and several predominantly Anglo groups such as the Volunteers of the Unitarian Church, the United Friends of the Farm Workers, and a new citywide multiethnic group, Understanding Each Other."⁹⁵

The local Chicano community did not have faith that an amicable relationship could develop with whites given the latter group's tendency to relegate Mexicans to second-class status regardless of citizenship. Thus, this segment of the Chicano/Mexicano community of Sacramento appeared, on this issue at least, to more closely identify with Blacks than they did whites. Like African Americans, Chicanos were more likely to live in poverty, lack adequate housing and educational opportunities, and live in segregated enclaves. That local Chicanos and Mexicanos might harbor such views is not surprising given the findings of scholars exploring similar struggles in other locales. For example, in his larger study on desegregation and identity politics in Texas, the historian Guadalupe San Miguel argued that by the 1960s most Chicano activists adamantly rejected the white racial status of the past

⁹⁴ Holden, *The Bus Stops Here*, 360.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 368.

“Mexican-American generation” for several reasons—the primary being a deviation from former mainstream political organizing tactics. Furthermore, he maintained, that in the place of a white racial identity, “activists adopted a new identity that was influenced by personal experiences, legal developments, and their growing experience with political developments emanating from the Chicano Movement.”⁹⁶

Similarly, Mexicans residing in Sacramento were also influenced by their environment and at least some of them also appeared to forge some form of a non-white identity based on their experiences. These sentiments were echoed by Chicano Movement participant and Sacramento resident, Graciela B. Ramírez, who explained in a recent oral interview that when she arrived from Mexico as a young adult she did not comprehend why Chicanos were causing havoc during the 1960s given that they were in the “land of opportunity.” However, her view changed once she experienced discrimination at a Sacramento cigar store when a white owner/manager accused her of shop lifting. She recalled,

My English was so poor that I could not defend myself and I was really shocked because I was never in my life treated like that. Never! ... But that day I understood the Chicanos. I really realized why they are the way they are. Because it's really hurtful to be treated like that.... Because in reality being from Mexico, we are all Mexicans. I began to see myself in the same boat as the Chicanos. I wasn't different [from Chicanos].⁹⁷

This false accusation of stealing left a great impression of Ramírez's life and she then realized that Chicanos were onto something tangible when they spoke of racism.

⁹⁶ Guadalupe San Miguel, Jr., *Brown, Not White: School Integration and the Chicano Movement in Houston* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2001): 201.

⁹⁷ Graciela B. Ramírez, interview by author, 19 March 2010, Sacramento, CA, audio recording.

Given this awakening, then, Ramírez aligned herself with Chicanos and their cause for justice and equality by becoming active first in MAYA at Sacramento City College and later MEChA at Sacramento State University—and continues her activism to present day.

The debate over desegregation centered on two major principles. On the one hand, in the eyes of members of the Sacramento school board, desegregation and the resulting exposure to white students and the resources of their communities provided the only means to ensure the academic success of Mexican students. The notion that desegregation was another means to help Black and Chicano students become more like whites was not new. Prominent educators' thinking at the time had long argued that "contact between races would cause minority students to become more similar to the white majority in their personalities, values, beliefs and behavior."⁹⁸ SCUSD board members wholeheartedly believed that they had the best interest of Chicano and Black students in mind and wanted to take into account parents' concerns. This is best summarized by one SCUSD board member, Hugh F. Melvin, who admitted that the strong response against desegregation by the Washington community "had been thought about and considered by the board for a long time."⁹⁹ Yet, in the end, he still held that desegregation was the best and perhaps only realistic answer for remedying the situation at Washington Elementary. Again, reflecting the prevailing mode of thought at the time, Melvin explained that

⁹⁸ Carter and Segura, *Mexican Americans in School*, 323.

⁹⁹ "SCUSD Board of Education Minutes," 8 August 1968, 413.

Project Aspiration was adopted in order to provide a better learning situation for children so they get a better education. A good education will mean better jobs with higher incomes and provide students the things in life they want most.¹⁰⁰

Put another way, Melvin and the school board maintained that they understood, even better than the parents, what was best for the Mexican students of Washington Elementary School.

On the other hand, the arguments mounted by Mexican parents against the school board's desegregation plan focused on two major concerns. First, they argued that one-way busing—the removal of students from their neighborhood school to a predominantly white school—was unfair given that white students were not being removed from their environment and bused in the opposite direction. Second, they did not want their children exposed to the psychological trauma related to inferiority—the notion that whites were somehow superior in intelligence, esthetics, and economic standing. Overwhelmingly, parents favored the rehabilitation or rebuilding of Washington Elementary School, but demanded, most importantly, that improvements be made to the educational curriculum system-wide. Even though the larger Chicano/mexicano population was keenly aware of the multiple obstacles Mexican children endured in the educational system, they did not agree on the appropriate course of action to address these problems.

Shortly after the Sacramento school board announced its decision to move forward with the extant desegregation plan at Washington Elementary, Mexican parents voiced their discontent with the board's resolution to the superintendent. They

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

made overarching claims regarding the socioeconomic injustices forced upon them by what they viewed as a monolithic, homogeneous U.S. culture. The Sacramento Bee reporter, George Williams, reported that in a closed sit-down meeting with a “local school district superintendent” (whose name was not disclosed) that a group of Mexican mothers from the Washington neighborhood expressed their collective grievances:

We don't have a language and we don't have an identification
because we speak half English and half Spanish.
Children are degraded.
Because of our language our children are degraded, embarrassed.
You must give us a chance to find out how we can help ourselves.
Why do you look down on us because we dress differently?
Why do you use text books which are published in the East where
they don't know a thing about our problems?¹⁰¹

These sentiments sum up the views of many Mexican parents affected by desegregation. They wanted to be given an opportunity to address their own problems at Washington Elementary on their own terms. In essence, they ultimately argued for self-determination. They believed that if their children were moved away from the security of the barrio they would be ridiculed, “degraded,” by non-Mexican students. They alleged that the Sacramento school board and the larger educational system did not understand their experiences—as immigrants, as Mexicans, and as an economically stratified community. They claimed that the very textbooks used at the

¹⁰¹ Quoted in George Williams, “Americans of Mexican Descent Remain Silent on Local Problems,” *The Sacramento Bee*, 20 February 1968.

schools their children attended were extremely Eurocentric in nature and ignored their very existence.¹⁰²

Only a handful of language-centered programs existed in the early 1960s, but the Civil Rights Movement pushed lawmakers to do something in regards to the schools' negligence toward children with limited English skills. Technically, bilingual education means using two languages for instructional purposes. In actuality, though, it is used to refer to “a wide range of programs that may have different ideological orientations toward linguistic cultural diversity, target populations, and goals for those populations.”¹⁰³ For example, the Bilingual Education Act was signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson on January 2, 1968 allowed for bilingual education instruction in public schools and demonstrated a commitment by the federal government to address learning issues for English-language learners.¹⁰⁴ In short, the Bilingual Education Act was a leap of faith; an experiment based more of good intentions than good pedagogy. Indeed, the Bilingual Education Act did not require schools to use a language other than English to receive federal funding. The law targeted children who were viewed both as poor and as educationally disadvantaged due to their English language

¹⁰² For the deplorable and substandard conditions of Chicanos in K-12 education see: G. Louis Heath, *Red, Brown, and Black Demands for Better Education* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1979): 74-81; Russell N. Campbell, “Bilingual Education for Mexican-American Children in California,” in Paul R. Turner, Ed., *Bilingualism in the Southwest* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1973); William A. Sampson, *Black and Brown: Race, Ethnicity, and School Preparation* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Education, 2004); Herschel T. Manuel, *Spanish-Speaking Children of the Southwest: Their Education and the Public Welfare* (Austin: University of Texas, 1965).

¹⁰³ Rebecca D. Freeman, *Bilingual Education and Social Change* (Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters Ltd., 1998): 2.

¹⁰⁴ James Crawford, *Educating English Learners: Language Diversity in the Classroom*, Fifth Edition, (Los Angeles: Bilingual Educational Services, Inc., 2004): xiii.

limitation skills and was explicitly compensatory.¹⁰⁵ Although the ideological debate over bilingual education continues to rage, in the three decades since its passage, there have been “enormous advances in curricula, methodologies, materials, and teacher training.”¹⁰⁶

The accessibility of bilingual aides and teachers at the “new schools” was a major source of concern for Mexican parents. At Washington Elementary, these services and personnel were always on hand to assist Spanish-dominant students. Lois Clark, a white teacher of twenty years and student at Sacramento State College, brought up the issue of language when she questioned,

How do you think an Anglo parent would feel trying to learn basic skills in a foreign language? How in God’s name do you think the Chicano parent has felt for one hundred years?¹⁰⁷

Clark was alluding to the educational neglect Chicanos historically faced. She understood the difficulties of learning a second language and believed that the omission of instruction in Spanish would only hinder the intellectual process of a Mexican child.

However, not all held this belief; some Chicanos continued to support integration because it would ultimately force Mexican children to learn English. For

¹⁰⁵ Crawford, *Bilingual Education*, 32-33. Also see: Lester S. Golub, “The Impact of Descriptive and Evaluative Research of Bilingual Education Programs of Federal, State, and Local Policy” in Raymond V. Padilla, *Bilingual Education and Public Policy in the United States* (Ypsilanti, Mich.: Department of Foreign Languages and Bilingual Studies, Eastern Michigan University, 1979): 361.

¹⁰⁶ Crawford, *Bilingual Education*, 12.

¹⁰⁷ “SCUSD Board of Education Minutes,” 11 November 1968, 558.

example, Brother Richard González, of St. Francis Seminary in Galt, California, stated that “he had been unable to learn the English language as a child in school and learning was very hard for him.”¹⁰⁸ Likewise, Phyllis Thompson, a teacher at Lincoln School, a predominantly Mexican school, indicated that “more should be done to encourage parents to speak English at home [because] children who speak Spanish in their homes, find it difficult to learn English at school.”¹⁰⁹ In their larger work on Chicanos in the educational system state that during the 1960s, scholars Thomas P. Carter and Roberto D. Segura note that a widely held and accepted view at the time claimed that Chicano students were essentially “alingual” and did not truly have command of any language. While recent scholarship and studies have discredited these earlier notions that bilingualism somehow causes mental confusion, these were the dominant themes at the time.¹¹⁰ Surveys conducted in the early 1970s found that parents the main reason they wanted their children to learn English was so that they could advance socio-economically, whereas the main reason for wanting their children to learn Spanish was for them to be able to communicate with family members.¹¹¹ These surveys were consistent with attitudes at Washington Elementary where preservation of the Spanish language was not only valued but encouraged.

¹⁰⁸ “SCUSD Board of Education Minutes,” 1 December 1967, 508.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Carter and Segura, *Mexican Americans in School*, 91-95.

¹¹¹ Fernando Peñalosa, “Chicano Bilingualism and the World System,” in Raymond V. Padilla, Ed., *Ethnoperspectives in Bilingual Education Research: Theory in Bilingual Education* (Ypsilanti, Michigan: Eastern Michigan University, 1980): 11.

Similar to the controversial topic of immigration, bilingual education has also been a much contested and debated issue in the Chicano community. One of the most outspoken public personas to speak against bilingual education was Richard Rodríguez, who, in his autobiography, *Hunger for Memory*, argued that bilingualism harmed immigrant children in succeeding in school and slowed assimilation.¹¹² He defended his stand by noting that,

Only when I was able to think of myself as an American, no longer an alien in *gringo* society, could I seek the rights and opportunities necessary for full public individuality. The social and political advantages I enjoy as a man result from the day that I came to believe that my name, indeed, is *Rich-heard Road-ree-gues*.¹¹³

For Rodríguez, the tradeoff—abandoning his Mexicanness in favor of becoming “American”—was worth it. In the end, he would argue, his mastery of the English language, at the expense of the Spanish language, earned him admittance into Stanford University and eventually wide acclaim as a writer.

Rodríguez’s views have been the premise for debate of two separate and distinct historiographies concerning bilingual education. The first group of studies was undertaken in the 1960s and was for the most part authored by non-historians who sought to use history to bolster the concept of bilingual education with a sense of historical legitimacy. The second group of language-training studies took place during the 1970s and 1980s when critics sought to discredit bilingual education by casting doubt on its historical legitimacy. Weighing in on this debate, Carlos Kevin Blanton,

¹¹² Richard Rodríguez, *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez* (New York: Bantam Books, 1981): 26.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 27.

in his historical examination of bilingual education in Texas, argues that “the pro-bilingual activists in writing the first draft of history on bilingualism in the United States can be rightly accused of writing poor history.”¹¹⁴ At the same time, he maintains that the anti-bilingual group also reproduced deficient works.

Historically, the U.S. educational system in most cases forced Chicanos to shed their language and culture and adopt those of the dominant group. During the debate regarding the Washington School, Dr. Leonard Cain, professor at Sacramento State College, observed that “the motive of integrating the children to other schools appeared to be one of attempting to change the Mexican community to fit a monolithic culture.”¹¹⁵ In his historical work on the educational segregation of ethnic Mexican students, Gilbert G. González notes that in the first half of the twentieth century, the U.S. educational system “constructed a cultural demarcation between the inferior and superior culture.”¹¹⁶ At its core, assimilation was racially motivated and involved the elimination of Mexican culture and the Spanish language because they were perceived by the dominant society as undesirable and inferior. González argues that “nothing short of total cultural transformation would satisfy many educational leaders.”¹¹⁷

The possibility of having their children exposed to the overt racism of white students terrified many Mexican parents. This sentiment was expressed at the first

¹¹⁴ Carlos Kevin Blanton, *The Strange Career of Bilingual Education in Texas, 1836-1981* (College Station: Texas A&M, 2004): 4.

¹¹⁵ “SCUSD Board of Education Minutes,” 1 December 1967, 423 and 506.

¹¹⁶ Gilbert G. González, *Chicano Education in the Era of Segregation* (Philadelphia: The Balch Institute Press, 1990): 36.

¹¹⁷ González, *Chicano Education in the Era of Segregation*, 39.

“special meeting” held to discuss desegregation efforts at Washington Elementary School on December 1, 1967. Jesús M. León, a parent, had had first-hand experience with desegregation and now lamented that his children, who were transferred to American Legion Elementary School, were being “asked to sacrifice too much since they were forced to get up earlier and arrived home later and felt inferior with children who had more than they did.”¹¹⁸ The 1960 U.S. Census showed an economic gap between the total city population median family income of \$6,943 and that compared with the median family income of Mexican families of \$5,582.¹¹⁹ Given the economic standing of most Mexican children in Sacramento, it was perhaps not surprising that once they were exposed to children with “better” material possessions—particularly more expensive clothes and accessories—Mexican children would realize their economic standing, but, perhaps worst of all, they would be made to feel inferior. This point was best noted by a Washington Elementary teacher, Hope English, who “feared that children may be humiliated going to other schools because they are poor and will not be as well dressed as other children.”¹²⁰ Children have always been painfully aware of the different markers of class. María Herbert-Córtéz echoed similar sentiments:

They [Mexican children] feel inferior already. . .and it would make them even more inferior to be with other children with better things in life.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ “SCUSD Board of Education Minutes,” 1 December 1967, 506.

¹¹⁹ Holden, *The Bus Stops Here*, 294.

¹²⁰ “SCUSD Board of Education Minutes,” 1 December 1967, 509.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 507.

Hence, in her judgment, it did not make sense to remove the children from the neighborhood school—since at least at Washington Elementary, most of the student population was of a similar socio-economic standing. In her view, at Washington Chicano students were protected from vicious and demoralizing class denigration by more affluent children.

The notion of an inferiority complex among oppressed groups is not new. Some scholars have maintained that the school segregation (*de jure* or *de facto*) not only perpetuates an ideology of inferiority, but that it sends students of color a message that they do not merit a quality education offered to their white peers. Following this line of reasoning, then, the message behind Mexican school segregation was that Mexican children were inferior and did not deserve society's investment in education. Educator and scholar Dolores Delgado Bernal, in her work on Chicano education during the Civil Rights era, holds that school segregation itself suggested an inferiority that was greater than any attempt to provide equal school facilities, making them inherently unequal. Thus, she argues that years after the end of *de jure* segregation in 1945, Mexican students remained segregated in public schools and were still labeled as members of an inferior group, assigned to substandard schools and/or relegated into vocational tracking systems.¹²²

Certainly, some Mexicans in Sacramento were keenly aware that the dominant white population believed them to be inferior because they did not possess command

¹²² Dolores Delgado Bernal, "Chicana/o Education from the Civil Rights Era to the Present" in José F. Moreno, *The Elusive Quest for Equality: 150 Years of Chicano/Chicana Education* (Cambridge: Harvard Educational Review, 1999): 80.

of the English language, lived in substandard housing, and resided at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder. Mexican parents understood that just as white parents did not want their children “mixing” with Blacks, and could infer that they did not want them mingling with Chicanos. Unfortunately, some of the Mexican parents’ fears came to a realization when their children were bused to predominantly white schools. Senón M. Valádez, a Washington Neighborhood Center volunteer, recalled some of the Mexican students coming back and sharing that “Nobody wanted to play with them or if somebody was playing with the kickball they didn’t include them. They were calling them names. So they would come back scared.”¹²³ Although Valádez did not specify whether the name calling was racially or class oriented, the insults and badgering were enough for the students to protest returning to the receiving schools. Logically, some of the parents were concerned for their children’s safety and feared that the bullying may become physical.

Additionally, a commonly held belief existed among Mexican parents that keeping their children at the Washington School would allow their daughters and sons to be “happier” individuals. This concept of maintaining a content Chicano student body, emphasized by Roger Moreno, Connie García, Johny Cruz, Paul García, and Bill Durant of the Congress of Young Adults, indicated that the “parents in the area are fearful that their children will not be happy in another school situation.”¹²⁴ Herbert-Córtez claimed that the parents “would like to have their neighborhood school because they feel that the children’s backgrounds are similar and they are happier

¹²³ Senón M. Valádez, interview by author, 15 June 2010, Sacramento, California.

¹²⁴ “SCUSD Board of Education Minutes,” 18 March 1967, 113.

grouped together.”¹²⁵ She pointed to the insecurities and feelings of displacement Mexican parents experienced themselves in Sacramento. According to Herbert-Córtéz, Mexican families felt most comfortable in the space already created and maintained within their enclave—there, at least, they could be themselves without having to deal with harsh judgment from outsiders.

The quandary over who is best qualified and/or has the best interest at heart for the educational advancement of Chicano children has been a long standing dilemma. On the one hand, teachers and school administrators have undergone professional training to teach and deal with the special educational needs of different groups of children. While parents clearly understand the personal needs of their children and can legally intervene on their behalf against “harmful” practices. But what happens when these two sides collide? Who is better equipped or knows best? Which side is the voice of reason? While the answer is not straightforward, but rather complicated, there are a few factors to consider. Teachers and school administrators should most definitely have a say in the ways children are educated and their expertise is needed to properly instruct them in subject matters. At the same time, historically in the United States and elsewhere in the world where oppressed groups are in the hands of the oppressor, as Paulo Freire so eloquently outlines in his internationally acclaimed book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, children of color and/or oppressed groups have always received the lesser quality education, social services, medical attention, and political representation while their well-to-do counterparts reap the best attention and socio-

¹²⁵ Ibid.

economic services.¹²⁶ This must be forever present in the minds of educators, and therefore on the question as to whether working-class ethnic people have the choice to “protect” their kids by keeping them isolated. In the case at hand, local parents insisted that the answer was “yes” because they believed that, as parents, they offered important checks and balances to teachers and administrators who were not nearly as culturally sensitive as they should have been. In other words, benevolence is not enough to correct oppressive institutions or change the system.

The one-way busing system was an additional major concern for parents at Washington Elementary. Michael Singer, chairman of the education committee of Understanding Each Other, described the school board’s decision as “extremely unfair” and argued that “the whole community should share the burden of the integration process.”¹²⁷ Singer added that the busing of minority pupils reflected an

¹²⁶ Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, has perfected a method for teaching illiterates mostly in Third World countries—more specifically, Latin America. However, at a closer glance, we see how their struggles to become free subjects and to participate in the transformation of their society are similar to the struggles of disenfranchised groups in the United States. Freire, himself, was born and raised in one of the most extreme situations of poverty and underdeveloped, led him to discover what he describes as the “culture of silence” of the dispossessed. “He came to discover that their ignorance and lethargy were the direct product of the whole situation of economic, social, and political domination—and of paternalism—of which they were victims...[I]t became clear to him that the whole educational system was one of the major instruments for the maintenance of this culture of silence.” *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was the creation of six years of work, while in political exile from Brazil. The pedagogy of the oppressed is the pedagogy of men engaged in the fight for their own liberation. And those who recognize, or begin to recognize, themselves as oppressed must be among the developers of this pedagogy. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury Press, 1970): 30. For more works by Paulo Freire see: *Pedagogy of the Heart* (New York: Continuum, 1997); *Letters to Cristina: Reflections on My Life and Work* (New York: Routledge, 1996); *Cultural Action for Freedom* (Cambridge: Harvard Educational Review, 2000); *Educational for Critical Consciousness* (New York: Seabury Press, 1973); *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998); *Daring to Dream: Toward a Pedagogy of the Unfinished* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2007).

¹²⁷ The Understanding Each Other organization had a membership of 300 persons in 1968, who were predominantly white and prominent in recent months for picketing for equal employment

“inherently racist attitude [by the school board].”¹²⁸ The one-way busing of “minority” students to predominantly white neighborhood schools was intrinsically biased. If SCUSD’s objective was to desegregate schools, then, critics charged, this could very well have been accomplished by busing white students to predominantly Mexican or Black schools. Yet, the fact that the district had instituted one-way busing since 1963 indicated a flawed educational system favoring one ethnic group over the other. Some parents simply did not want their children bused far from their homes and neighborhoods. José Alvarado reflected those who objected to busing children across town and demanded that his “children go to schools closer to the area.”¹²⁹ Likewise, Herbert-Córtez, chairperson of the Sacramento City School District’s Citizens’ Advisory Committee on compensatory education and a mother of ten children, explained that “the majority [of parents] was [*sic*] against the busing and closing of the school.”¹³⁰

The busing issue was the topic of great controversy not only in Sacramento, but across the United States as school districts began the process of integration. In fact, busing school children for desegregation became one of the most divisive political issues on the U.S. scene in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when thousands of

opportunities. Quoted in “Group Seeks More Busing,” *The Sacramento Union*, December 16, 1968: p. C1.

¹²⁸ Quoted in, “Group Seeks More Busing,” *The Sacramento Union*, 16 December 1968.

¹²⁹ “SCUSD Board of Education Minutes,” 1 December 1967, 508.

¹³⁰ George Williams, “Americans of Mexican Descent Remain Silent on Local Problems,” *The Sacramento Bee*, 20 February 1968, and Quoted in George Williams, “Americans of Mexican Descent Remain Silent on Local Problems,” *The Sacramento Bee*, 20 February 1968.

white and Black inner-city parents bitterly resisted busing, albeit for different reasons.¹³¹ James Bolner and Robert Shanley in their larger study about the controversy, *Busing: The Political and Judicial Process*, argued that opposition was centered on: 1) “fears of racial conflict and violence” in both public schools and neighborhoods; 2) “opposition to neighborhood integration” based on a belief that property values would drop once Black residents moved into white neighborhoods; 3) fears concerning the “loss of social, [class,] racial, and community identity”; 4) parent anxiety stemming from busing children to distant schools in unfamiliar neighborhoods; 5) beliefs among white parents concerning the loss of quality education and the possibility of diminishing district funds or priority to their neighborhood schools; and 6) “Black parents’ concern about unsympathetic administrators and teachers in predominately white schools who foist white middle-class values upon Black children”.¹³² Lastly, Bolner and Shanley point out that the issue over desegregation, more broadly, and busing, more specifically, “aggravated” long standing racial tensions, fears, and anxieties between the Black and white communities.¹³³

By the early 1960s the Black civil rights movement was moving towards a more militant political approach and becoming ever more critical of the pursuit of integration. Black militant leaders had known for some time, that the fight for

¹³¹ James Bolner and Robert Shanley, *Busing: The Political and Judicial Process* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974): v.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 244.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 249.

integration had gone on for far too long, with little outcome. To say the least, they were becoming increasingly impatient and frustrated with the low economic, poor educational, and second-class status blacks held in American society. Ideals of separatism had always been present in African American politics and the notion became more attractive especially among the youth.¹³⁴ Perhaps the best known separatist group was the Nation of Islam, whose spokesperson Malcolm X had gained national attention. Later, the Black Panther Party and the Republic of New Africa concluded that earlier civil rights groups had it all wrong in the ideological or strategic approach to Black liberation. For instance, the Republic of New Africa proposed a radical idea to establish a Black nation in the “Wilderness of North America.”¹³⁵ In the case of Sacramento, where residents grappled with the problem of segregation in the white, Black, and Chicano communities, all or nearly all of the abovementioned issues applied to the response to desegregation. Moreover, not only did busing provoke “separatist feelings,” but so did the prospect of changing the racial makeup of neighborhood schools.

Some Mexican parents protested that their children were being singled out because of their low-income status.¹³⁶ In fact, Alfredo González directed a question based on this very belief to the Sacramento school board members. He asked how many of them “would be willing to bus their children two miles or more away from

¹³⁴ Hall, *Black Separatism in the United States*, 97

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 123.

¹³⁶ “SCUSD Board of Education Minutes,” 8 August 1968, 410.

their homes.”¹³⁷ Here, González alluded to the fact that their (white) children, enrolled in predominantly white schools, did not have to endure the hardships of being bused to unfamiliar neighborhoods. Byron Barker, director of Sacramento Area Economic Opportunity Council, agreed that

One way busing may make integration statistics look good for the district, but does not necessarily benefit those who are bused. It is the board’s responsibility to be doing what is right and not necessarily to be doing what everyone wants.¹³⁸

González and other community leaders favored two-way busing, believing that the busing of only “minority” students was discriminatory and unjust.

The closing of the Washington Elementary School also prompted parents to believe that their children would lose many of the privileges associated with attending neighborhood schools. For instance, Herbert-Córtez, after speaking to several Mexican parents, noted, “the parents feel that their children will not have the opportunities and privileges of other children who live near the school of attendance.”¹³⁹ Consequently, Mexican parents overwhelmingly favored the rebuilding of the school and demanded an overhaul of the school’s faculty and curriculum. Daniel Ortego suggested that the school “be replaced by a new facility, with provisions for playgrounds and parks for the children, as well as a new staff and teachers.”¹⁴⁰ For Ortego and other Mexican parents, the teachers also needed to be replaced as well because they had failed the

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ “SCUSD Board of Education Minutes,” 8 August 1968, 411.

¹³⁹ “SCUSD Board of Education Minutes,” 18 March 1968, 113.

¹⁴⁰ “SCUSD Board of Education Minutes,” 8 August 1968, 410.

students by not bringing their test scores to prevailing academic standards.

Furthermore, Alfredo González charged that if the Washington Elementary School had been located in an affluent area, the community “would have a new school in the neighborhood.”¹⁴¹ Here again, parents expressed the belief that one’s economic standing allowed for certain privileges. While Ortego and González’s views were different from Chicano separatist groups, at the core, both were calling attention to the issue over educational neglect of Mexican children. Hardly advocating for separatism, Mexican parents and their supporters wanted an improvement in the quality of education for all students at Washington Elementary school.

As the battle continued over the Washington school, community members and parents struggled over the ideological specificities of a Chicano school. Luis S. Colmenárez, president of the Washington Neighborhood Council expressed the general sentiment when he “called for the rebuilding of the school and the establishment of a cultural enrichment program” that would include an institute for the development of a bilingual and bicultural curriculum; adult vocational training classes for the Washington *barrio* residents; and facilities for youth and senior citizens.¹⁴² Colmenárez also called for the development of a nearby public park complete with a swimming pool and baseball diamond.¹⁴³ In his view, this was exactly what the student population at Washington Elementary needed to raise their educational and

¹⁴¹ Quoted in “SCUSD Board of Education Minutes,” 8 August 1968, 410.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 410-411.

¹⁴³ “Board of Education will Reconsider School’s Closing,” *The Sacramento Bee*, 9 August 1968, p. B1.

emotional morale. The call for educational programs that met the language and cultural needs of Mexican students was fundamentally tied with the goals of the Chicano Movement. Indeed, as Guadalupe San Miguel, Jr., points out in his work on educational equality in Texas, by the late 1960s bilingual education came to be viewed as the best mechanism for meeting the language needs of Mexican children. It was also believed that these programs would force school officials to have better working relations with the parents. Furthermore, support of compensatory programs such as migrant education, childhood education, adult English classes, and dropout programs were forerunners in Chicano Movement leaders' agendas. The call for educational equity during this era "complemented" previous efforts made by the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF), American G.I. Forum, League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), and countless other organizations.¹⁴⁴ Hence, Sacramento ethnic Mexicans were not alone in their quest for implementing cultural and language sensitive programs.

Still, some Chicano "traditional" community leaders stood in solidarity with the school board. Local Chicano activists from established Sacramento organizations such as MAPA, the Mexican American Education Association (MAEA), and the Sacramento Concilio came out in strong support of desegregation.¹⁴⁵ Likewise, Ray

¹⁴⁴ San Miguel, *Let All of Them Take Heed*, 192-195.

¹⁴⁵ Bert Corona, founder of the Mexican American Political Association, writes that the organization was founded in 1958 to mobilize broad sections of the Mexican community to register to vote, to participate in political campaigns, and to encourage those Mexicans who were not citizens to become citizens in order to vote. He explained, "We thought that the time had come to organize an independent electoral organization that could take up questions pertinent to the Mexican communities without having to compromise itself with other groups inside the Democratic Party." Quoted in Mario

Carrasco, chairman of El Concilio—an association of twenty-one Sacramento-area Spanish-speaking organizations—defended the school board’s decision. He assured the board that he was representing the sentiments of his group and “that the organizations are for integration because they believe that it will upgrade their children.”¹⁴⁶ Thus, Carrasco insisted that integration would translate into better educational opportunities for Chicano children. He further endorsed the view that the closure of the school was the only way to break the cycle of poverty in the Washington barrio and end segregation, which maintained and perpetuated the low-economic status of Mexicans.¹⁴⁷ Carrasco claimed to be speaking on behalf of Sacramento’s Mexican American population, who wished “that their children be integrated into other schools as soon as possible.”¹⁴⁸ This, of course, was not the case. As noted earlier, most Mexican parents did not want their children to be integrated, and they definitely did not demand immediate implementation of desegregation.

This faction of “traditional” Chicano activists agreed with SCUSD board members in principle and argued that Mexican children needed to adapt culturally to Anglo society. This argument was made by Dr. Paul Salmon who concluded, based on his “considerable experience in dealing with Mexican-American people,” that Mexicans want to retain their culture, “but in order to be effective citizens in our

T. García, *Memories of Chicano History: The Life and Narrative of Bert Corona*, with forward by David Montejano (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994): 197.

¹⁴⁶ Quoted in “SCUSD Board of Education Minutes,” 11 November 1967, 459.

¹⁴⁷ George Williams, “Americans of Mexican Descent Remain Silent on Local Problems,” *The Sacramento Bee*, 20 February 1968, p. A4.

¹⁴⁸ “SCUSD Board of Education Minutes,” 13 November 1967, 459-460.

country. . .they have to be able to relate to the Anglo culture,” and that “unless we can put the two cultures together, the Mexican-American is defeated in his effort.”¹⁴⁹ Hence, in his view, Mexican children needed to acculturate in order to be successful in school and U.S. society in general. Interestingly, there is no mention of how white students would benefit from interacting with Chicano children. In this sense, then, for some Chicano moderates or conservatives Chicano children are deficient or lacking appropriate American socialization skills. Of a similar view was Frank G. Sánchez, chairman of the Sacramento branch of the Mexican American Political Association (MAPA) and also a supporter of desegregation.¹⁵⁰ He said,

The Mexican American wants to perpetuate his culture, and will, but he can only gain by associating with a society with whom he must compete. The Mexican American wants to be a part of the American way of life because he lives here.¹⁵¹

For Sánchez, if Mexican children were exposed to the dominant white culture early on, they would be in a better position to compete with them when they reached adulthood.

It was the belief that Americanization offered the best vehicle to educational success that Sacramento integrationists believed Mexican students would overall benefit and become better citizens overall. For instance, Ray Carrasco argued that Mexican Americans could integrate and reach a happy medium between the two cultures. He was keenly aware that “[i]nherent in desegregation. . .is loss of political

¹⁴⁹ “SCUSD Board of Education Minutes,” 12 December 1968, 602.

¹⁵⁰ George Williams, “Americans of Mexican Descent Remain Silent on Local Problems,” *The Sacramento Bee*, 20 February 1968.

¹⁵¹ “SCUSD Board of Education Minutes,” 1 December 1967, 507.

power and the dilution of respect for cultural values. . .[and] was convinced that reducing the causes of poverty must take precedence.”¹⁵² It appeared, therefore, that Carrasco understood the painful costs of acculturation, but to him it was a necessary evil to alleviate poverty within the Chicano community. Carrasco’s point of view must be situated within the historical legacy of Chicanos in the United States.

The notion that acculturation would assure acceptance was promoted by organizations such as LULAC and the American G.I. Forum as early as the 1920s and 1930s. For instance, LULAC’s founders believed that the time had finally come to seek the civil rights of Mexican Americans who had for too long been relegated to second class citizenship status and therefore denied full enjoyment to their privileges as American citizens. Both LULAC’s constitution and the LULAC Code called its members to organize not as Mexicans, but as American citizens in their attempts to remedy their socio-economic standing. It is important to point out, however, that although LULAC was invested in promoting Americanization among its constituents, they were vigilant of racial injustices against Mexican Americans and often organized campaigns to end discrimination.¹⁵³ As noted earlier, by the Civil Rights era, many Chicano activists began to question this notion and were frustrated because despite their predecessor’s efforts the Chicano community continued to struggle with poverty, segregation, and discrimination. Chicano Movement leaders were painfully aware that in the end their efforts to become “Americanized” did not matter in the larger scheme

¹⁵² George Williams, “Americans of Mexican Descent Remain Silent on Local Problems,” *The Sacramento Bee*, 20 February 1968.

¹⁵³ Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 77.

of things, because as Mexicans they would always hold second-class status. It is important to note, however, that although acculturation was losing popularity in the Mexican American community some Mexican American activists still held on to this belief. Thus, Mexicans residing in the United States have constantly found themselves negotiating the cost of acculturation.¹⁵⁴

Traditional Chicano leaders also favored the removal of students from Washington Elementary School because they believed schools with large white populations would offer a better education. Indeed by the 1960s educators widely held that if Chicano students were around white students, they would begin to mimic their “good” habits. In his work on Chicanos in segregated schools, Gilbert G. González schools notes that a standard approach used by teachers to foster assimilation drew invidious comparisons between “flawed” Mexican culture and values and “superior” Anglo culture and values.¹⁵⁵ Alfonzo González, chairman of the education committee for the Mexican American Education Association, likewise endorsed the view that a “better education” was attainable only through integration with whites. He urged the board to move forward with the plan to desegregate Washington Elementary, warning that “any delay now would be depriving the children in that school from receiving an opportunity of quality education.”¹⁵⁶

Not surprisingly, some Sacramento school district personnel were dumbfounded by the very fact that Mexican parents resisted desegregation. For

¹⁵⁴ For a critique of the Mexican American liberal agenda see: García, *Chicanismo*, 19-42.

¹⁵⁵ González, *Chicano Education in the Era of Segregation*, 39.

¹⁵⁶ “SCUSD Board of Education Minutes,” 3 March 1968, 113.

instance, Dr. Ervin Jackson, the district official in charge of desegregating Sacramento city schools through Project Aspiration, empathetically insisted the closure of Washington Elementary School was a “good” thing. Angrily, Jackson responded to the opponents of integration,

Many people asked for the proof of integration. We have two years of proof it is working. To those who believe in segregated education, I ask this question: Where is your proof? No facts ever have been brought forward to prove segregation is working.¹⁵⁷

Although Jackson adamantly disagreed with the Mexican parents, he challenged them by questioning their reasoning behind segregation. From his perspective, segregation had not worked since the time of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) and it was certainly not working now. So, in his view, the Mexican community in the Washington *barrio* had no basis for its opposition and could not possibly understand the inequities associated with segregation. Thus, from his point of view, it was even more necessary that the SCUSD needed to step in even if it had to forcefully desegregate Washington Elementary. In other words, if the district had decided to keep the Washington Elementary open, it would not only be breaking the law, it would be fostering racial injustice.

The issues surrounding segregation have not disappeared. To the contrary, schools have once again become hyper or super segregated and Latinos continue to fall behind in standardized tests and have the highest dropout rates, approaching 50 percent in many areas. In 2000, 43 percent of all Latinos had not graduated high

¹⁵⁷ Quoted in “Board of Education will Reconsider School’s Closing,” *The Sacramento Bee*, 9 August 1968, p. B1.

school and less than 11 percent of all Latinos had graduated college (compared to 85 and 26 percent, respectively, of the non-Hispanic white population). The problem is further aggravated by poverty: Latino poverty is twice as high as in the general population.¹⁵⁸ Recently the Alliance for Excellent Education studied the 45 largest metropolitan areas in the United States, including Sacramento. They found that in Sacramento an estimated 7,100 minority students dropped out of the class of 2008. Of those, 2,000 were Latino, 650 were Asian American, 550 were African American, and 50 were American Indian.¹⁵⁹ These numbers are staggering, but indicate that the issues Chicano students face have far from been addressed by local school personnel. Furthermore, the mere volume of the Latino population is enough to draw pause from politicians and government officials. There are now close to 38 million Latinos in the United States, who represent almost 13 percent of the U.S. population and by all statistical accounts their numbers probably will not dwindle anytime soon, even if immigration from Latin America subsides. When the U.S. Census Bureau announced in January 2003 that Latinos constitute the largest “ethnic minority,” finally surpassing African Americans, it became clear for many that Civil Rights would push new boundaries—breaking down the white/Black paradigm.¹⁶⁰ Today, it would be nearly logistically and economically impossible to institute a busing program to desegregate

¹⁵⁸ David G. Gutiérrez, “Introduction: Demography and the Shifting Boundaries of ‘Community’: Reflection on ‘U.S. Latinos’ and the Evolution of Latino Studies,” in David G. Gutiérrez, *The Columbia History of Latinos in the United States Since 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004): 23.

¹⁵⁹ Melody Gutiérrez, “Study: Lower Dropout Rates could Boost Local Economy,” *The Sacramento Bee*, 10 July 2010.

¹⁶⁰ Gutiérrez, “Introduction: Demography and the Shifting Boundaries of ‘Community,’” 7.

schools. Perhaps, then, a more reasonable approach is to go back to the drawing board and institute some of the demands made by Mexican parents who urged the SCUSD to focus on quality education for all its pupils, rather than desegregation.

The narrow focus on desegregation sometimes got in the way of solving the educational crisis faced by Chicano students. For instance, this was the case with Jackson who maintained that desegregation was the end-all solution to eliminating the grave educational problems Mexican students faced. He argued,

Washington School has been below standard for years, and something had to be done about it. Results cannot be achieved by compensatory [bilingual instruction] education alone. . . .The ghetto does not represent the mainstream of our country so it is necessary to get the children into other areas where they can benefit from association with other children and be exposed to the type of competition they will have to meet in their lifetime. . . .[I] am aware that this was a highly emotional problem with these [Mexican] people but it was the board's responsibility to make a decision on sound judgment.¹⁶¹

In his view, the ghetto was a symptom of social, political, and economic conditions. How could children be expected to dream beyond the confines of the ghetto if they were not exposed to alternative ways of life, or if they were constantly reminded by their surroundings that there was no way out? In his eyes, contact with white children, their future “competitors,” would prepare them for the future. Of course exposure to affluent neighborhoods is important, but there is no guarantee that it alone provides a tangible way “out” of the ghetto or barrio. Furthermore, it can equally work the other way around by exposing wealthy children to impoverished neighborhoods they can learn that life, as they know it, is not as “easy” for all. Perhaps, Dr. Jackson wanted a

¹⁶¹ “SCUSD Board of Education Minutes,” 8 August 1968, 415.

different experience than that of his own childhood for these children. Maybe, he wholeheartedly believed that had he been given access to the right resources—those provided to white children in suburban neighborhoods with adequate educational facilities and resources—life would have been much “easier” for him as a Black professional. After all, he knew firsthand what was required of him, since he had experienced racialization his entire life.

On the other hand, the Chicano community enjoyed support from non-Chicano minority organizations in its bid to preserve the Washington School. For example, George Choung, a Black director of the Congress of Young Adults, angrily opposed the desegregation policy instituted by SCUSD.¹⁶² He identified himself as a “Black racist” and admitted to “hate whitey.” In a special meeting held to discuss the fate of Washington Elementary, Choung explained his position to the SCUSD board members,

Whitey is the system that teaches racism and disrespect for his [Black] people ...[Racism exists] because individuals perpetuate it. The white system of government is racist. . . .When 200 or 300 whites tell you that you are not going to teach sex education, you don't teach sex education, but when 500 Mexican Americans tell you that you can't bus their kids, you bus their kids. Racism exists because public institutions breed racism. In your textbooks, you don't teach pupils to respect black people or Chicanos.¹⁶³

In his view, the entire U.S. educational system was flawed because it was based on a racist framework. In essence, he believed that the SCUSD board members were racists. He questioned the grounds for which the board made decisions on the future

¹⁶² Ibid., 19 August 1968, 423.

¹⁶³ “SCUSD Board of Education Minutes,” 16 December 1968, 599.

educational status of students if it did not operate fairly—given that when 300 white parents protested sex education, the board had sprung into action, but when 500 parents opposed the busing of their children, they ignored their pleas. For Choung, Mexican parents never stood a chance, even if they had brought in more signatures and petitions, organized more protest meetings, or boycotted. Why? Because, from Choung's perspective, the SCUSD board members did not place importance on the needs of Mexicans.

SCUSD MOVES FORWARD WITH DESEGREGATION PLAN

Despite widespread resistance from Mexican parents and various Sacramento community organizations, the SCUSD commenced its desegregation plan of Washington Elementary and by fall 1968 students in grades K-3 were bused to predominantly white schools. Although they lost the battle to keep Washington Elementary School segregated, Mexican parents and their supporters continued to organize against the board's decision. Their attempt to save the Washington Elementary School gained the attention of government agencies such as the Sacramento Area Economic Opportunity Council (SAEOC) Executive Board, one of the most influential organizations in Sacramento and the leader in the local War on Poverty campaign. SAEOC intervened in the Washington Elementary case after hearing from a group of Mexican barrio residents and antipoverty workers that school officials had used intimidation tactics to force them to go along with the busing program. Washington parents claimed that school officials threatened to put them in jail if they did not support the integration program. The parents consequently staged a

boycott of the school district's desegregation program and kept their children home on the first day of classes. On September 10, 1968 over seventy Washington Elementary students, who had been dispersed among several South Sacramento-area schools, were kept home and missed classes. The parent-led boycott was of great concern to the school district, which now was losing state funds because of the student absences.¹⁶⁴

To further complicate matters, parents also complained that a number of their children were lost after they took the wrong bus home on September 10, 1968. They protested that their children had endured "unnecessary shock." For example, José Serrano, a five-year-old, was one of the children sent to a wrong location on his ride home. However, Sacramento Board of Education member John Mamola stated that Serrano was the only student who was "accidentally" lost. Nevertheless, a Washington Elementary mother responded that "even if he was the only one, he was one too many."¹⁶⁵ According to Senón M. Valádez the Washington Neighborhood Center received several calls regarding lost children. He specifically recalled the Serrano case and angrily noted that school personnel were always pushing the problem off to others and never taking responsibility for their own actions and wrongdoings.¹⁶⁶

In spite of the continual community protests and another threatened boycott in May of 1969, the Washington children stayed in desegregated schools throughout the

¹⁶⁴ George Williams, "Opportunity Council Backs Opposition by Washington Parents," *The Sacramento Bee*, 11 September 1968, p. B1.

¹⁶⁵ Quoted in George Williams, "Opportunity Council Backs Opposition by Washington Parents," *The Sacramento Bee*, 11 September 1968.

¹⁶⁶ Senón M. Valádez, interview by author, 15 June 2010, Sacramento, California, audio recording.

1968-1969 academic year. From the viewpoint of district officials, the first year of Washington desegregation was a success. However, the receiving schools were not yet accustomed to the special circumstances associated with Mexican children. For one, they did not understand why some Mexican children missed school more often at mid-year as their parents followed the harvest or went on vacation to Mexico for as long as six weeks.¹⁶⁷ Neither were they equipped with Spanish-proficient personnel to assist in the translation of letters, newsletters, and announcements or the daily reality of dealing with non-English-proficient students and their parents.¹⁶⁸ And, finally, the schools lacked the capability of dealing with problems associated with poverty experienced by Washington barrio children. Poor home nutrition created health problems that were exacerbated by the budget cuts in 1969-1970 that drastically cut both the free lunch program and the existing health services at the school. The problems did not end there; in August 1969, the district issued an evaluation of the academic progress of children in Project Aspiration that assessed the achievement of bused and resident children in the Washington receiving schools, and the study concluded that integration “generally had no apparent effect on the rates of achievement of the resident pupils.”¹⁶⁹

Regardless of these findings, the SCUSD decided to continue with the desegregation plan and, at the beginning of the 1969-1970 academic year, moved forward with their plan to bus children in the upper-elementary grades to four receiving schools. Special education and pre-kindergarten classes, which were housed at Washington during the

¹⁶⁷ Holden, *The Bus Stops Here*, 371.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 372.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 374.

1970-1971 academic year, were moved out by fall of 1971 when the district completed new facilities for the physically disabled.¹⁷⁰

While the fight for Washington Elementary School ultimately proved to the larger Sacramento community that Mexicans were far from apolitical and passive, the experience also left barrio residents feeling that the Sacramento school board members did not truly represent their interests. María Córtez-Herbert best noted this to the SCUSD board members on February 10, 1969 when she stated that “many of these people have lost faith in the school district.”¹⁷¹ From her point of view, the district ignored the Chicano community’s demands, lacked any understanding of its needs, and consequently did not deserve the trust or respect of the parents. Mrs. Lee Anderson, president of Washington Elementary P.T.A., speaking on behalf of the Mexican parents, complained that the “board [was] not communicating with the people in the Washington area,” who are still adamantly against the busing of their children and demand “to retain the school in the area.”¹⁷² Mexican parents continued to resist desegregation and hold on to the hope of building a new school on the Washington site, even after desegregation had already been set in motion by the SCUSD. Their persistent opposition demonstrates, then, that Mexican parents remained unhappy with the district’s policies and disappointed that their demands were not addressed.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 375.

¹⁷¹ “SCUSD Board of Education Minutes,” 10 February 1969, 85.

¹⁷² “SCUSD Board of Education Minutes,” 10 March 1969, 132.

Nevertheless, by 1971 the SCUSD had completed desegregation efforts at Washington Elementary School and the most recent Chicano student test scores showed significant improvements. Inspired by the evidence of success, board member Adolph Moskovitz offered self-congratulations for ending school segregation in the Washington barrio. He noted proudly,

This is an issue [desegregation] on which the country is being torn apart. . . . In our district we have bused. We have put kids on buses and they've been taken outside their neighborhoods, and the results have been good—if we're to believe these statistics—it is good, educationally good. And when read closely, the comments of parents and teachers about how the kids behave, they've been good in other ways. And if busing does it, that awful word, then by golly use busing. And if it works here, let's extend it.¹⁷³

In the end, Moskovitz and other SCUSD board members never doubted they had contributed positively to the welfare of the Mexican student population. Obviously pleased with the results of desegregation, despite the barrio's overwhelming opposition to busing, Moskovitz proclaimed that the school board was “right” in pushing forward with the plan for desegregation and “right” in ignoring the pleas of the Mexican parents.

CONCLUSION

This specified study on Mexican resistance to desegregation in Sacramento goes against the current of many studies written on integration, especially those written on and by Chicanos. Most Chicano scholars have argued that Mexicans never accepted segregation. For example, Gilbert G. González notes, “If oppression is never

¹⁷³ *The Sacramento Bee*, 21 September 1971, p. B1., quoted in Holden, *The Bus Stops Here*, 379.

permanent, it is only so because the victims rise up against their oppressors, and in the Southwest the Mexican community engaged in a political struggle to dismantle segregation.”¹⁷⁴ Although it is true that Chicanos have historically fought against legal segregation, this work on Sacramento reveals that by the 1960s the issue of community autonomy and cultural pride made the quest for school integration much more complicated. But was the Washington barrio case unique? How often did Mexican parents resist integration that ensured the busing of their children into culturally foreign and insensitive neighborhoods? The subject awaits further research.

The Sacramento case demonstrates—at the very least—that the desire for self-determination played out in a very different way. In Sacramento, the Chicano/Mexicano community rose up against status quo efforts to desegregate because they believed that their children would be better protected from racism if they remained in the neighborhood school. It also points to a distinctive strategy for political action one that was layered and that developed through struggle. In other words, Chicano political activism cannot be summed up in a singular case or tactic, but rather each region, issue, and community offered varying approaches to assure their respective needs.

The history of Chicano activism in education, as this case study reveals, was and remains complex, contradictory, and contested. It was continually affected by a variety of internal and external factors. Of particular importance was the role that Chicano organizations played in influencing and encouraging participation from all sectors of

¹⁷⁴ Gilbert G. González, “Segregation and the Education of Mexican Children, 1900-1940,” in *The Elusive Quest for Equality*, 71.

the greater Sacramento community—young and old, male and female, radical and moderate, and novice and experienced. However, it is not only their story that is worthy of telling, but that of Mexican parents who stood up against all odds and did not waver in their demands. United on one common front—the right to preserve Washington Elementary School, they fought as well for larger demands based on an unequal U.S. educational system that has often shortchanged the most marginalized communities. Mexican parents of Sacramento did not want their children to be bused to surrounding white schools, which likely would ignore their children's interests, as they always had. Demanding community control and autonomy, Chicano parents insisted that what mattered most to them was that their children be provided a safe space to be who they were—Mexican and that they be educated in a space where their parents had some control over their education. Senón M. Valádez, who worked closely with Washington Elementary Mexican parents said it best when he reflected in a recent interview that

For these parents, in that kind of a setting, as contested and fiercely defended by the school district as it [desegregation] was. It was a struggle they weren't going to necessarily win and the kids were the ones that were going to suffer the consequences there.¹⁷⁵

This begs the question, who were the losers when it came to the ultimate closure of Washington Elementary—the SCUSD, the parents, or the students? It could easily be argued that they all lost. The SCUSD lost the respect and trust of many of the parents in the Washington barrio for ignoring and overriding their concerns, the parents lost

¹⁷⁵ Senón M. Valádez, interview by author, 15 June 2010, Sacramento, California, audio recording.

their quest to keep their neighborhood school open, and lastly the students who were caught in the mist of a desegregation battle and were often times left confused and scared over what was being decided for them.

The following chapter picks up on theme of resistance and unifying theme of community through labor organizing. It follows the court case of Ruben Reyes against his long-time employer of Libby, McNeill & Libby and Cannery Workers Union Local 857. Reyes sued on the basis of racial discrimination and won his case. The chapter also follows the founding and success of the Cannery Workers Committee, established as an alternative to the company's union. The Cannery Workers Committee's grew to include canneries all over Northern California, helping shape labor activism.

CHAPTER THREE:

CANNERY WORKERS RESIST: A CASE OF STUDY OF INTERSECTIONALITY



Image 15: Cannery Workers Committee Bumper Sticker designed by the Royal Chicano Air Force, a group of artists and poets in Sacramento, California founded in 1969. Sacramento, California. (Courtesy of Center for Sacramento History, Rubén Reyes Collection.)

When cannery worker Rubén Reyes of Sacramento sued Libby, McNeill & Libby and Cannery Workers Union Local 857 in 1971 on the grounds of racial discrimination, few believed he stood a chance against big agricultural business that held a political and economic stronghold in California. After all, there were few precedents to his action. Indeed, even though many unions had systematically discriminated against Mexican American and Mexican workers over the long and checkered history of the union movement, Reyes's unconventional approach to hold the cannery and its union accountable for its unfair practices was far from ordinary.

When Reyes courageously charged that Libby and the Union had not only discriminated against him but also that these practices were widespread and that Mexican Americans were particularly vulnerable to such attacks, he set in motion a wave of protests against the cannery establishment in Northern California. Reyes had been a strong advocate for Mexicans and was fired on ludicrous grounds. Not only had he stood against racial injustice, he also fought against gender discrimination in the

workplace. He sued and the court agreed and found on May 18, 1971 that Libby, McNeill & Libby had deprived Mexican Americans of promotions to higher paying positions and failed to adequately promote such opportunities by not making material available in Spanish. Furthermore, it declared that the Cannery Workers Union Local 857 discriminated against Reyes and Mexican Americans by failing to: carry out grievance procedures in an expeditious manner, resolve complaints, and to provide by-laws and other pertinent documents in Spanish in view that 40 percent of their members were Mexican American.¹ Reyes's victory against his long-time employer and union altered work place conditions for marginalized cannery workers.

Reyes's fervor and drive for justice did not end with the winning of his lawsuit. To the contrary, he along with fellow co-workers founded their own union, the Cannery Workers Committee (CWC), to address racial and gender bias within local canneries. Motivated by the utter disregard and dismissive practices they experienced from Local 857, the CWC carried the slogan of justice and a promise of true worker representation. Word of its success in Sacramento spread quickly, and, consequently, within a year CWC chapters expanded to numerous canneries in Northern California, eventually making it one of the most powerful unions in the region. CWC not only operated as a union and advocate for cannery workers, it also was instrumental in setting a series of investigations that led to legal penalties against employers who discriminated on the basis of race and gender. For instance, the Equal Employment

¹ *Ruben Reyes vs. Libby, McNeill & Libby and Cannery Workers Union Local 857*, Case No. 70-29, May 18, 1971, "Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations."

Opportunity Commission launched an investigation on behalf of five CWC members against three canneries and two unions on January 27, 1971.

CWC members saw themselves as part of the larger Chicano Movement and employed the rhetoric of civil rights current at the time to mobilize fellow cannery workers to join their cause. This was best illustrated in the CWC newsletter publication, The Cannery Worker, where iconography and symbols of the United Farm Workers (UFW) eagle, the power fist, along with Emiliano Zapata and Ernesto “Che” Guevarra appeared with frequency. Reyes, himself, identified as Chicano and grounded his philosophy in ideals espoused by the Chicano Movement. Furthermore, he linked the Chicano worker struggle with those of other racially oppressed groups in the United States such as the Chinese Americans and, more particularly, African Americans. In this sense, he made claims of shared experience and struggle. Reyes and the CWC also viewed the Mexican cannery worker cause in alignment with the goals of the Civil Rights Movement. The CWC made claims that as workers, residents, and tax payers of the state they merited and earned equal access and opportunities.²

² For studies on Chicana/o labor studies see: Carey McWilliams, *Factories in the Field: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1935); Matt García, *A World of Its Own: Race, Labor and Citrus in the Making of Greater Los Angeles, 1900-1970* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Patricia Zavella, *Women's Work and Chicano Families: Cannery Workers of the Santa Clara Valley* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987); Zaragoza Vargas, *Proletarians of the North: A History of Mexican Industrial Workers in Detroit and the Midwest, 1917-1933* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Erasmo Gamboa, *Mexican Labor and World War II: Braceros in the Pacific Northwest, 1942-1947* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990); José M. Alamillo, *Making Lemonade out of Lemons: Mexican American Labor and Leisure in a California Town 1880-1960* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006); Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Doméstica: Immigrant Workers Cleaning and Caring in the Shadows of Affluence* (Berkeley: University of California, 2001); Vicki L. Ruiz, ed., *Las Obreras: Chicana Politics of Work and Family* (Los Angeles: Chicano Studies Resource Center Publications, 2000); and Vicki L.



Image 16: The Cannery Worker, Cover page, August 1976, Spanish Edition, Sacramento, California. (Courtesy of Center for Sacramento History, Rubén Reyes Collection.)

This chapter seeks to situate labor organizing in the framework of Sacramento Chicano community politics, but also in the context of the larger Chicano Movement. It argues that the Chicano Movement was far reaching and impacted unionization efforts by uniting workers and providing them with the rhetoric to articulate race and gender oppression in the workplace. In the early 1960s and ending in the late 1970s a political consciousness of being *mexicano* in the United States gave rise to what historian Ignacio M. García, has called the “militant ethos”—a “body of ideas, strategies, tactics, and rationalizations that community uses to respond to external

Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives: Mexican Women, Unionization, and the California Food Processing Industry, 1930-1950* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987).

challenges.”³ This ethos sought to synthesize the problems of the Mexican American community by addressing years of discrimination, violence, and neglect from the American mainstream.⁴ The role of workers in the Chicano Movement remains largely understudied, yet in the 1960s Chicanos became increasingly impatient with low-wage labor and especially with the lack of opportunities for advancement. Likewise, Mexicans in Sacramento understood and had experienced firsthand racism and sexism and nowhere was this more prominent than on the cannery floor. Although Mexican cannery workers endured multiple forms of race and gender discrimination and had voiced their grievances since the 1930s, and in some cases before, their pleas and complaints went unattended in most cases.

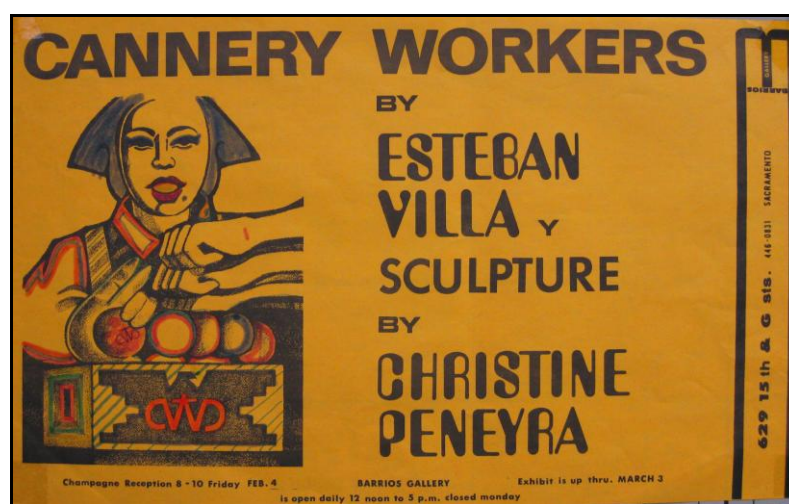


Image 17: Poster designed by Esteban Villa of the RCAF. The Cannery Workers Committee (CWC) influenced segments of the Chicano Movement, just as the CWC was influenced by the Chicano Movement. (Courtesy of Center for Sacramento History, Rubén Reyes Collection, 1970s.)

³ Ignacio M. García, *Chicanismo: The Forging of a Militant Ethos among Mexican Americans* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997): 4.

⁴ Ibid.

This chapter explores the legal, economic, and social implications of the *Reyes vs. Libby* case and how it intersected with the Chicano Movement. It also unravels the larger linkages of racial and gender inequality in the American Southwest by looking at a particular worksite in the Sacramento area—the canning industry. It first investigates the early life and politicization of Rubén Reyes and how his beginnings helped develop his consciousness. Born and raised in segregated Arizona, Reyes was deeply impacted by the inequalities he experienced and witnessed around him. Thus, when Chicana/o activists began to espouse the new rhetoric of justice and self-determination, Reyes was inspired to revolutionize cannery worker conditions. Second, this chapter maps out the history of canneries in Sacramento and the Teamsters Union. It also investigates the critical positioning of Mexican women in canneries. Third, it traces the formation of the Cannery Workers Committee, a union formed by Chicana/o cannery workers at Libby, and its successful expansion to canneries in Northern California. The chapter concludes by mapping the legacy of Reyes not only on cannery workers, or the Sacramento community, but also on the Chicano Movement at large.

EARLY LIFE OF RUBÉN REYES AND CONSCIOUSNESS OF RESISTANCE

Born into a long legacy of miners in Superior, Arizona on November 13, 1930, Rubén Reyes was acutely aware of hard work and family honor. His grandparents had made their way to Arizona in 1912 from Sonora, a well-known mining state in Mexico. Indeed, Sonorans had historically left to work lucrative mines in the United States. This was starkly noted during California's Gold Rush when in 1849 alone

some 10,000 Sonorans migrated to work the gold fields.⁵ As was the case during the mid 1800s, ethnic Mexicans continued to be viewed with dismay and resentment for their skills and success in mining.⁶ When mines began to expand in Arizona later in the nineteenth century Arizona's mining towns proved to be no exception to these patterns. However, by the turn of the century economic mining conditions in Arizona had worsened making it so that there was "no way men could support their families single-handedly."⁷ This was the case in the Reyes household where Rubén's mother worked as a laundress to help make ends meet. According to historian Linda Gordon in her work on a mining town in Arizona, Mexican women often took jobs of washing and sewing to help augment family incomes.⁸

When Rubén was a few years old his father abandoned his family, leaving his mother to raise their two children. Although Reyes gives no reason for his father's departure, perhaps the stress of providing for his family on a low income and the strenuous work he performed in the mining camps provided sufficient motive to leave. Gordon notes that Mexican "mining camps seem to have been more patriarchal than other working-class communities" and that class identity reinforced women's

⁵ Brian Roberts, *American Alchemy: The California Gold Rush and Middle-Class Culture* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000): 147. Also see: Sister Mary Colette Standart, "The Sonoran Migration to California, 1848-1856: A Study of Prejudice," in David G. Gutiérrez, *Between Two Worlds: Mexican Immigrants in the United States* (Wilmington, Delaware: A Scholarly Resources Inc. Imprint, 1996).

⁶ Roberts, *American Alchemy*, 10.

⁷ Linda Gordon, *The Great Arizona Orphan Abduction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999): 129.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 130.

subordination where physical and verbal abuse appeared more commonly.⁹

Subsequently, his mother relocated them to Phoenix where there were more employment opportunities. His father's departure had far reaching affects on Rubén, especially academically. He quit school after completing only the eighth grade to help provide for his family. It is here that Rubén's most vivid memories began and that he grew aware of social inequalities.

Mexicans in the American Southwest were subject to systematic segregation. Phoenix was also prone to such practices wherein Mexicans were not permitted to go swimming in the northern part of town. Historian Rodolfo Acuña traces this phenomenon in Arizona to the late 1800s when commercial agriculture caused a tremendous influx of whites to the area. The flood of newcomers intensified discrimination and segregation based on race. Newly arrived Mexican immigrants moved into barrios isolated from whites. Acuña notes that even after the railroad integrated Arizona into the U.S. market system, Mexicans continued to trade with Mexico maintaining not only economic but cultural ties. Consequently, he argues, "culturally Mexicans and Anglos grew further apart as the twentieth century approached."¹⁰

By the mid twentieth-century segregation was rampant in the American Southwest, wherein a system of inequality and subjugation helped sustain a white supremacist social order. Reyes explained this harsh reality, "I grew up in a place

⁹ Ibid., 136-137.

¹⁰ Rodolfo Acuña, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*, third edition (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1988): 93.

where they wouldn't serve me food, they wouldn't allow me in any restaurants, we couldn't swim in your [designated for whites] swimming pools."¹¹ For Reyes, this would have a tremendous impact on his outlook on life. Racial segregation caused hostility and distrust between Mexicans and Anglos in Phoenix and these social divisions lasted well into the twentieth century. Reyes reflected, "The memories and the experiences that I had had in Arizona were very strong and I was very angry with the system. And I was very, very anti-white. I think I still am."¹² Reyes experienced social trauma from what he viewed as an abuse of power by whites. He explained that from the time he had reason he was able to discern that whites had a clear socio-economic advantage over Mexicans and for his part this helped create a deep level of resentment against the status quo.

The starkest example of this imbalance of power was noted at the workplace.¹³

According to Reyes:

When I left Phoenix in 1949 [at the age of 19], I left it for the sole reason that I could never find employment there. Aside from working in the fields that's all that was open to us [Mexicans], and of course there were the sheds, of which is one step up from farm labor. Working in the sheds meant better pay and it was all white people's work. A few Mexicans used to get hired and eventually we just worked our way into the [melon, carrot, and lettuce] sheds.¹⁴

¹¹ Rubén Reyes, Interview by Rosana Madrid, 5 December 1983. Transcribed by Lee Ann McMeans. "Sacramento Ethnic Community Survey-Chicano Oral Histories," Sacramento Archives and Museum Collection Center (Sacramento, CA): 10.

¹² Reyes, interview by Rosana Madrid, 5 December 1983, 2.

¹³ For more information on the history of Mexican labor in the U.S. refer to: David G. Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 44-51.

¹⁴ Reyes, interview by Rosana Madrid, 5 December 1983, 2.

The clear demarcation between Mexican work and Anglo work left little opportunity for better pay or less stringent occupations for Reyes. As noted by David G. Gutiérrez, by 1940 Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans were locked into the lowest echelons of the regional economy. For instance, ethnic Mexicans constituted a great majority of labor intensive occupations such as agricultural labor, mining work, and railroad construction.¹⁵

Due to work limitations, Reyes made the painstaking decision to leave Phoenix for California where he had received word that there was ample work. It is important to note, however, that during this period segregation was also commonplace in California.¹⁶ He first stopped in Southern California, where he picked field crops.¹⁷ It was not until a friend informed him of better employment opportunities at local canneries that he made his final stop in Sacramento. As is often the case in migratory patterns, friends or family members inform loved ones back home about better work prospects and encourage their relocation, offering their homes as a transitional space until they can get settled on their own.¹⁸ Likewise, for the first few years Reyes stayed with former Phoenix residents, on 12th and E Street in downtown Sacramento. Once he found employment at Libby, McNeill & Libby Cannery, Reyes saved enough money

¹⁵ Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 45. See also Denise A. Segura, "Chicanas and Triple Oppression in the Labor Force," in Teresa Córdova, Editorial Committee Chair, *Chicana Voices: Intersections of Class, Race, and Gender* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990).

¹⁶ Acuña, *Occupied America*, 254.

¹⁷ Robert Dávila, "Ruben Reyes Obituary," *The Sacramento Bee*, 15 September 2007.

¹⁸ For additional information on immigration patterns refer to George J. Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993): 135-138.

to send for his mother and sister who were still in Phoenix. When they arrived, he moved out of his friend's house and got a place for the three of them. Both his sister and mother also secured employment at local canneries.

Once his mother and sister had settled into Sacramento, Reyes met, fell in love with, and married Esperanza "Hope" González. The couple would have seven children.¹⁹ He and his wife moved into a federal housing project, on Broadway Boulevard and 'X' Street. The move to subsidized housing disturbed Rubén's sensitivities by reminding him of a racially segregated Arizona. Those painful memories motivated him to relocate to another part of town. He reflected,

I didn't want my kids being taught in a neighborhood where I knew the teachers had this attitude that I had experienced, the resentment towards minorities. And I figured, if my kids were going to go to school, Washington [Elementary] School, which was all Mexican, almost at the time, they were going to get the same kind of treatment that I had received in growing up in Phoenix. And, my goal was, the first chance I get I want to put my kids in a neighborhood where there are these white people who get the best quality education in this country and whether they like it or not, they are going to have to teach my kids in the same way. And that is my reason for moving into this neighborhood.²⁰

For Reyes, segregated schooling meant substandard education. He had experienced it first hand in Phoenix and now witnessed it in Sacramento. Whites, in his view, were privileged and thus often awarded the best resources. He wanted his children to be afforded the same opportunities to a quality education. Reyes's educational concerns were brought to the fore during the Chicano Movement in Sacramento, as was made

¹⁹ Robert Dávila, "Ruben Reyes Obituary," *The Sacramento Bee*, 15 September.

²⁰ Reyes, interview by Rosana Madrid, 5 December 1983, 13.

clear in Chapter Two when divisions in the Mexican community arose over this very issue.

Hence, Reyes eventually moved his family to the “white” side of town in East Sacramento. There his children attended David Lubin Elementary School. He boasted, “They’ve got quality education here, and its where all the rich kids go.”²¹ As predicted by Reyes, the socio-economic demarcation was made clear at David Lubin Elementary where his children were classmates with the children of Earl Warren Jr., son of former Governor of California and 14th Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. Reyes was determined to ensure that his children receive a quality education and that they be provided the same opportunities as white children. He was also concerned that they not be subject to outward institutional racism.

The move to East Sacramento, however, came at a cultural and language cost for the children. Both Rubén and Hope Reyes made certain that their children took an interest in mastering the English language and were avid readers, but they did so at the expense of teaching them Spanish. In retrospect, Reyes regretted not having them learn the Spanish language. He explained,

One of the mistakes I made in life was I didn’t teach them any Spanish. I was so involved in making sure that they had the right tools for this society, and the right tool to me was understanding the [English] language first of all, and I figured that if they had to learn Spanish, they could always learn it later.²²

The Reyes’s wanted their children to excel in a highly competitive English language environment. Indeed, school officials often cited the Spanish language a “crutch” and

²¹ Reyes, interview by Rosana Madrid, 5 December 1983, 14.

²² Reyes, interview by Rosana Madrid, 5 December 1983, 15.

often used it as an excuse for not providing Mexican children proper education. The standard response by educators tended to suggest that the problem lay in Mexican Americans themselves. Therefore, educators argued that Mexican Americans were inherently less intelligent and often cited I.Q. tests as proof of their cerebral inferiority. They claimed that Mexican Americans “came from backgrounds that did not encourage education; and they were culturally handicapped by their reliance on Spanish rather than English.”²³ In this sense, then, the Reyes’s were protecting their children from such harsh underpinnings.

Reyes believed racism to not only be limited to educational institutions but also believed it to be widespread in all segments of U.S. government. He expressed this defiance when he was drafted into the service in 1951 during the Korean War. Reyes explained, “I definitely told them, from day one, that there was no way in the world that I was ever going to fight for this country.”²⁴ He served eighteen months until he received honorable discharge for refusing to fight abroad. Reyes noted,

I just, from the core, to this very day, I believe this is about one of the most racist countries in the world. I believe that and I live with that. I didn’t believe this was a free country or that there was equal opportunity.²⁵

Reyes could not justify fighting and possibly even dying for a country that failed to meet its promise of equality for all. In his view, the U.S. government had no right to

²³ Mario T. García, *Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology, and Identity, 1930-1960* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989): 254.

²⁴ Reyes, interview by Rosana Madrid, 5 December 1983, 9.

²⁵ Ibid.

ask him for such a sacrifice when it allowed and even sanctioned racism on the home front. From his standpoint, if children were exposed to overt racism in education, the U.S. government had no limits to maintaining an unequal social order. Consequently, he was discharged from the service in May 1953. Reyes would then go to apply the same kind of demand for justice at the shop floor at the Libby, McNeill & Libby Cannery and this motivation led to the creation of one of the most powerful Cannery unions in California history.

HISTORY OF CANNERIES IN SACRAMENTO

For most of the twentieth century, Sacramento has served as a significant site for canneries because of its prime location at the intersection of both of California's central and northern valleys. Hence, the longevity and success of canneries in Sacramento is due to its prime location, surrounded by lucrative agricultural fields that yield an abundance of crops to sustain profits. Sacramento historian Steve M. Avella traces their important development to the opening of the Panama Canal in 1914 which not only facilitated trade operations, but also helped boost demand for canned goods and consequently fostered the building of new canneries across the golden state—making for a very profitable enterprise. For instance, Hunt Brothers launched canning operations in Davis and Marysville. By 1912, Libby, McNeill & Libby's Sacramento facility had become one of the largest in California. The California Packing Company and Bercut Richards also built substantial facilities making for large canning output and substantial yearly earnings. The consolidation and growth of the canning industry caused some growers and shippers to come together to formally organize under

various cooperatives, associations, and exchanges. For instance, Sacramento's most well-known and regarded example is the California Almond Growers Exchange. The expansion in the packing and canning industry also allowed for a vibrant working-class culture across the larger Sacramento Valley. Indeed, canneries represented one of the most diverse workplaces in Sacramento because its employees were largely composed of immigrant women, many of who sought to augment their impoverished family incomes. Avella notes that "the net result of the increasingly diverse workforce was a slow but steady increase in Sacramento's population."²⁶ The arrival of the Reyes family to Sacramento, like that of the Galarza's before then, was part of this growth and demonstrates the strong pull of job opportunities in Sacramento canneries.

Undeniably, the continuous accessibility of workers to fill labor intensive posts added to the region's cannery industry success. In the beginning, its workforce was comprised mostly of immigrants from various European countries like Germany, Italy, Spain, and Yugoslavia. Cannery business, however, was not always booming and like so many industries, was severely weakened by the Great Depression. Indeed, Sacramento canneries were hard pressed and those employees who were able to hold onto their jobs during this difficult economic period were deemed "lucky."²⁷ In Sacramento, the first industry to be affected by the economic crisis was the seasonal canning industry. For instance, as early as September 1930, 153 employees of the California Cooperative Producers Canning Company—a Sacramento company—were

²⁶ Steve M. Avella, *Sacramento: Indomitable City* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2003): 59-60.

²⁷ Reyes, interview by Rosana Madrid, 5 December 1983, 45.

laid off without pay when demand plummeted for canned goods. Workers responded by filing petitions at the State Labor Bureau, but their complaints went unanswered. To make matters worse, in early December 1932 a dreadful freeze hit valley citrus crops and destroyed at least half of the citrus trees, particularly oranges—practically crippling canning manufacturing. Cannery officials, now under heated public pressure, promised to keep operations going. All the while, there was an increased backlash against immigrant workers and in order to calm hostilities aimed at canning officials, they pledged to employ only “local residents.”²⁸

World War Two presented new challenges, but also opportunities for local canneries and their workers. For instance, the war effort placed a heavy demand on canned goods to feed and supply U.S. troops at home and abroad, as well as the increased needs of civilians on the home front. In response to the overwhelming demand, packing houses and canneries were awarded thousands of federal U.S. contracts and California’s agri-business, in particular, benefited greatly.²⁹ According to historian Vicki L. Ruiz, from 1939 to 1950 California led canned fruit and vegetable production in the nation and “in 1946 the state’s share in the U.S. fruit pack was approximately 50 percent.”³⁰ By 1947 the canned fruit and vegetable industry had made tremendous economic headway and was the largest manufacturing employer in

²⁸ Avella, *Sacramento Indomitable City*, 97.

²⁹ Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives*, 80.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

California.³¹ Now facing completely different economic circumstances than just a decade earlier, the canning industry could not fill enough posts to meet production demand. At the same time that California's canning industry was successfully expanding, the defense industry was also booming. In fact, both the canning and defense industries began competing from the same pool of workers. Canning companies, however, could not meet the higher wages offered in the defense industry. Thus, by the early 1940s, "cannery operatives, who were usually at the bottom end of the socio-economic scale," had become what Ruiz calls "labor aristocrats," if only in a situational sense."³² This was also the case in Sacramento where the predominantly European immigrant workforce began to leave the canning industry for employment opportunities in the defense industry in the San Francisco Bay Area, southern California, and elsewhere in the West.³³

The impact of both experienced workers leaving to work for better paying jobs in defense industries and the recruitment of able-bodied men to enlist in the military created a severe labor shortage. It was at this crucial moment that the shift from a predominantly white cannery workforce to one of Mexican origin took place in Sacramento. This change was augmented by the 1942 labor agreement between the U.S. and Mexico, known as the Bracero Program (noted in more detail in Chapter One). The agreement had far reaching impact, dramatically altering work conditions in

³¹ Patricia Zavella, *Women's Work and Chicano Families: Cannery Workers of the Santa Clara Valley* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987): 51.

³² Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives*, 80.

³³ Reyes, interview by Rosana Madrid, 5 December 1983, 45.

California agricultural businesses. Immediately after its signing, thousands of braceros began harvesting California crops and also canning fruits and vegetables. Braceros not only had to put up with severe worker conditions, but they were largely viewed as cheap, indispensable, and scab labor. Worse yet, at any moment's notice they could be fired, replaced, or let go without pay for hours worked.³⁴

The transition of a European immigrant workforce to a predominantly ethnic Mexican one gave way to the starkest example of an ethnic division of labor which, above all, demonstrated that Mexican work was not valued. The concentration of ethnic Mexicans in these low-status occupations in many ways helped to reinforce and perpetuate negative stereotypes about Mexicans' native abilities. Unfortunately, over time whites began to regard ethnic Mexicans as unskilled laborers. Historian David G. Gutiérrez explains that "this status became institutionalized in some ways by the emergence of an ethnic division of labor characterized by a dual wage structure, in which Mexican workers were consistently paid less than 'white' workers performing the same work."³⁵ Hence, by the 1940s this unfair pay structure was systematically practiced in the Southwest, and Sacramento was no exception. Ruiz found similar conditions in her study on cannery work in southern California. She notes, "It should be pointed out that many Mexican and Filipino farm workers did not experience any upward mobility as the result of World War II."³⁶ Indeed, Mexican Americans and

³⁴ Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives*, 56.

³⁵ Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 25.

³⁶ Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives*, 56.

Filipinos continued to labor in the fields alongside the newly arrived braceros; thus, unlike their European immigrant co-workers they continued to be relegated to low-pay, low-skill employment.

By 1946 “Spanish-speaking” individuals made up about one-third of the northern California cannery labor force eligible to vote in union elections. In addition, in that year, braceros made up approximately 13,000 of the California citrus grove workforce, or 80 percent of all pickers.³⁷ The ethnic Mexican workforce would play an important role in the ongoing union rivalry. Internal divisions, however, stalled the CIO counter-offensive. This was best observed by CIO organizer, Emilio Sóliz, who viewed recent migrants from Texas and Mexico as an organizing obstacle because they refused to support any union.³⁸ Members of the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing, and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA) took note of the impact of the Bracero program when “wage rates fell from one dollar to seventy-five cents an hour in the Imperial Valley alone.”³⁹ They were also concerned that these workers who were, by and large, easily exploited. Not only were braceros unaware of the recent conflicts between the CIO and Teamsters, braceros were terrified of losing their jobs—the very reason that brought them to the United States in the first place. Regardless of these rifts between Mexican Americans and Mexican nationals, cannery workers staged protests and formed picket lines around canneries.

³⁷ Matt García, *A World of Its Own: Race, Labor and Citrus in the Making of Greater Los Angeles, 1900-1970* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001): 175.

³⁸ Zavella, *Women's Work and Chicano Families*, 50.

³⁹ Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives*, 56.

Sacramento canneries benefited greatly from the Bracero Program which not only aided in augmenting its workforce but also led to cheap labor and exacerbated unfair labor practices.⁴⁰ At first, braceros were not able to make fair labor practice demands because they were under contract. The Mexican government was supposed to protect them under the bi-national program; however, they failed to put in place an administrative structure to deal with the outpouring of labor complaints. Reyes was not surprised by the way cannery employers responded to the Mexican national workforce. He explained,

The mentality of the white man is that ‘hey all of a sudden we don’t have white people in the canneries anymore. All of the Mexicans are taking over. It’s time for a change, a radical change.’ So it just shows you what white people think of other people, you know, and basically what they see the Brown people as in this country....That they didn’t feel that we as Mexicans, or Chicanos, were worth as much as the whites that were working there before.⁴¹

Clearly for Reyes, whites “always” disregarded people of color and this was no exception. To make matters worse, in practice braceros routinely earned less than what their contracts promised. This was justified because they made more than what they received for the same work in Mexico. Matt García in his work on citrus workers in the San Gabriel and Pomona Valleys in eastern Los Angeles county notes that “by 1958, the hourly wage for Mexican American workers rose slightly to between 80 cents and \$1, depending on the season, but employers often paid braceros between 10 and 15 cents less than their local coworkers. By the end of the season, local workers earned an average weekly gross income of \$43.20 compared with \$38.40 for

⁴⁰ Avella, *Sacramento Indomitable City*, 109.

⁴¹ Reyes, interview by Rosana Madrid, 5 December 1983, 25.

braceros.”⁴² Furthermore, in her work on the Mexican immigration policies, Kitty Calavita found that by the early 1950s the Bracero Program, in partnership with the Immigration and Naturalization Service administration, were closely allied with growers to maintain a steady legal workforce and to control illegal crossings.⁴³

THE RISE OF THE TEAMSTERS UNION IN SACRAMENTO

Cannery workers of Mexican descent not only had to deal with an unfair wage system, but were largely ignored by the labor union that was supposed to protect them from such abuses. Before the predominant Mexican workforce, Sacramento cannery unions had endured a series of highs and lows. For instance, during the 1930s, the Sacramento branch of the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union was active and strong. Statewide the union had won twenty-one of twenty-four strikes, nearly doubling agricultural wages for some workers. The union sought a forty-hour work week and hourly wages of 25 to 35 cents an hour and had accomplished its mission. Despite the Depression and high unemployment, the CAWIU was increasingly successful in its efforts to win better pay and working conditions for farm workers.⁴⁴

The successes of the 1930s were short lived, however, when the union changed hands from the American Federation of Labor (AFL) to the International Brotherhood

⁴² García, *A World of Its Own*, 175.

⁴³ Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S.* (New York: Routledge, 1992): 110-111. Also see: Devra Weber, *Dark Sweat, White Gold: California Farm Workers, Cotton and the New Deal* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

⁴⁴ “Agricultural Workers’ 1934 Trial put spotlight on City,” *The Sacramento Bee*, 31 December 1999.

of Teamsters (IBT) on May 2, 1945. The decision was made by AFL President William Green, with the backing of the executive board, who had succumbed to Teamster intimidation tactics.⁴⁵ This change, however, left most members dumbfounded because it severely undercut their role in the union. They were shocked that this decision was made behind closed doors, without their input, or without proper voting procedures.⁴⁶ In response, some workers staged protests and even temporary worker stoppages in places like Sacramento, Stockton, and Modesto.⁴⁷ In August 1945, Food Tobacco, Agricultural and Allied Workers (FTA) (formally UCAPAWA), under the direction of Luisa Moreno, launched a campaign to organize Northern California food processing workers. Moreno was chosen to head this ambitious undertaking because of her success to organize Southern California food processing workers. Moreno, as vice-president of the California CIO Council, urged her colleagues to pledge their support to the cannery workers in their efforts to organize an election.⁴⁸ In an unexpected turn of events, FTA won the election for union representation of cannery workers, defeating the powerful Teamsters union and company unions.⁴⁹

The Teamsters would not take the election results quietly; they demanded a recount and filed a claim with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), charging

⁴⁵ Zavella, *Women's Work and Chicano Families*, 49.

⁴⁶ Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives*, 104.

⁴⁷ Zavella, *Women's Work and Chicano Families*, 49.

⁴⁸ Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives*, 104-105.

⁴⁹ Zavella, *Women's Work and Chicano Families*, 49-50.

that “at least a thousand votes were improper.”⁵⁰ The Teamsters quickly organized a major counteroffensive by keeping intense pressure on the NLRB. Their attempts to overturn the election results that had declared the FTA the union representative winner ultimately proved successful when the NLRB withdrew the results and ordered a new election under their supervision. Patricia Zavella in her work on Cannery workers in the Santa Clara Valley, notes “in the spring of 1946, California Processors and Growers, otherwise known as the CPG, an industry group, and the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT), in flagrant violation of the law, defied the NLRB and entered into a closed-shop agreement.”⁵¹ In a desperate attempt to ensure their self-interest, the canneries agreed to have the Teamsters represent both Northern California production and warehouse workers—an ideal situation to control all workers and to deal with one entity for bargaining purposes. For these reasons the CPG and cannery employers actively encouraged Teamsters unionization.⁵²

The decision, made from management, angered Northern California cannery workers who banded together to protest the Teamsters takeover. In Sacramento at the Libby, McNeill and Libby plant, for instance, in April 1946, approximately twelve hundred workers outright refused to pay IBT dues.⁵³ Outraged by these actions, and unwilling to yield its power, management responded by shutting down the production line. Cannery workers promptly organized a picket line carrying signs, one of which

⁵⁰ Ibid., 50.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives*, 109.

read “We Will Work—But Not One Cent of Tribute to the Teamsters,” and chanting in unison against the Teamsters takeover.⁵⁴ Tensions quickly escalated to violence when “on May 7, the Teamsters and Seafarer thugs, using brass knuckles and other weapons, attacked an all-female picket line at Libby’s in Sacramento.”⁵⁵ The violence and fear, however, did not deter the women, who sang the national anthem instead of responding with the same acts of violence used against them. The scene of resistance and resilience was so overwhelming that even the recently recruited scabs from the local bartenders’ union could not break the line of women to enter the Sacramento facility. However, things quickly escalated when one of the protestors, Pat Verble (130-pound), resisted an attack of a Teamster goon (200-pound) when he grabbed a hold of her lapel on her coat, eventually tearing it off. To add insult to injury, Sacramento police intervened on behalf of the canneries that promptly arrested Verble. “After this incident, the Sacramento Police Department helped escort scabs into the [Libby, McNeill and Libby] plant and checked each person entering the facility for possession of a Teamster membership card.”⁵⁶

All the while, California Processors and Growers hired a public relations firm and took out full-page ads in various Northern California newspapers which painted the NLRB as the bully and themselves as the victims of bureaucratic business. Those who sided or sympathized with the FTA “were red-baited and subjected to violence

⁵⁴ Quoted in *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

and intimidation.”⁵⁷ The Teamsters strategy to solicit support extended far beyond newspaper advertisements and directly to the communities in which cannery workers resided. For instance, in San Jose, priests encouraged their predominantly Italian and Portuguese cannery worker parishioners to vote for the Teamsters on the Sunday before the second election was to take place. The involvement of the Catholic Church along with tactics of intimidation proved so effective that in “August 1946 the Teamsters won the second election by 1,400 votes out of a total of 31,800 votes cast”—the Teamsters now officially represented cannery workers.⁵⁸ Thus, through means of threats, pressure, and suppression of rival unions, the Teamsters won, which completely undermined a true “democratic election.”

The Teamsters’ victory caused resentment and suspicion among the very workforce they would represent for years to come. For instance, Ruben Reyes blamed “the [United States] government itself, [for] being the racist government that it is, [by] allow[ing] the canneries to bring in the Teamsters in violation of the laws of the land.”⁵⁹ In his view the U.S. law enforcement and courts should have stepped in to assist in a peaceful and fair election. Instead, Reyes believed that they permitted bloodshed when “the Teamsters went out in the street with their goons, [to] beat up people. There was violence all over the place.”⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Zavella, *Women’s Work & Chicano Families*, 50.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Reyes, interview by Rosana Madrid, 5 December 1983, 26.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 27.

Reyes began working at Libby, McNeill & Libby in 1949, shortly after the Teamsters Union takeover of Sacramento canneries. Although he arrived after the tumultuous Teamster victory he noted, “It didn’t take me long to find out that we didn’t have a union when I came to work there.”⁶¹ To make matters worse, once in power the Teamsters Union used “sweetheart contracts,” and continuously violated the bargaining agreement. Already by the 1950s the workforce at Libby’s was about 35 percent Mexican and the Teamsters Union was doing little to address their needs. Essentially, Reyes explained, the canneries did as they wanted and had a tradeoff with the Teamsters to control the retirement and pension plan funds.

The victory of the Teamsters Union coincided with the rise in mechanization in the industry, wherein the makeup of the canning operation moved from conveyor production to full-scale automation.⁶² Reyes was among one of the very few Mexican workers who benefited greatly from this mechanization revolution and was hired at Libby in the capacity of a “caser”—a better pay and higher ranking position. His job was to run a casing machine—the apparatus that moves cans on a conveyer line. Reyes’s duties included folding a piece of cardboard, placing it over a particular metal box, while the machine pushed the cans out into the case.⁶³ Within his first year of

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁶² Peter A. Charles, “An Exploratory Study of Can Damage and its Effect on Profitability in Sacramento Area Canneries” (Master of Business Administration, California State University, Sacramento, 1974): 22.

⁶³ Peter Charles in his study on the canning industry in Sacramento explains the mechanization process and notes that filled and sealed cans moved by cable conveyer to the labeling machine to be labeled and then to the casing machine to be cased. Finished cases were loaded by hand on pallets or moved by conveyer belt to a case palletize, there the cases were stacked mechanically on pallets. Once

working at Libby, Reyes was promoted to label machine operator and had a crew working under his direction, which included the caser and two or three people to work the line. Reyes's starting salary was around \$1.30 an hour. He prefaced this by stating that it "was pretty good pay in those days."⁶⁴ By the third year at Libby's, he began working the most "complicated" labeling bottle machine—called the ketchup line.

Work conditions at the canneries were tedious, difficult, and dangerous. Indeed, in the period from 1958 to 1970 canneries averaged nine work-injury rate points higher than all manufacturing. In fact, "in 1976 the food and kindred-products industry had the second highest rate of work-related injuries in California, after the lumber-manufacturing industry."⁶⁵ For instance, some cannery workers who peeled and packed chilies barehanded had chronic painful blisters. Julia Luna Mount recounted: "After work, my hands were red, swollen, and I was on fire! On the streetcar going home, I could hardly hold on, my hands hurt so much."⁶⁶ Indeed women who worked on the lines as sorters characterized these jobs as the most tedious and the constant repetition on the conveyer belt strained their bodies. In fact, the mere act of standing in one place for hours, repeating the same task at the same pace all to meet production demands, made it not only physically painful but also the monotony

cases were stacked on pallets they were moved to the warehouse stacks by lift trucks. Charles, "An Exploratory Study of Can Damage and its Effect on Profitability in Sacramento Area Canners," 41.

⁶⁴ Reyes, interview by Rosana Madrid, 5 December 1983, 31.

⁶⁵ Zavella, *Women's Work & Chicano Families*, 108.

⁶⁶ Quoted in Ruiz, *Cannery Workers, Cannery Lives*, 36.

made it boring.⁶⁷ Similarly, those who worked with lemons and peaches complained of small lacerations from thorns and skin irritation caused by peach fuzz respectively.

In addition to the threat of job related injury, employees also often complained of ill treatment and harassment on the shop floor. For example, at Libby, Reyes likened the cannery work experience to slavery,

The attitude of the foreman and the people that were in charge of the canneries was one of a Simon Legree personality, you know, the guy with the whip, pushing people, pressing people to work harder, and if you went to the union you just got a deaf ear. Nothing was ever done. So consequently, the attitude of people in the canneries was one of a slave driver, with no respect. Everything was done through yelling and shoving and pushing.⁶⁸

Of course, Simon Legree is a fictional character in Harriet Beecher Stowe's anti-slavery novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, who was the abusive plantation owner.⁶⁹ Although Reyes's historical assessment and his comparison of cannery work to work on slave plantations was far from accurate, his point offered some insight into the manner in which he felt cannery workers were mistreated by being physically and psychologically abused by the forewoman or foreman and points to the abuse in power.

This sort of conduct was commonplace in canneries across California. Workers often complained of abusive conduct by supervisors who employed their power by harassing their workforce. Reyes also made note of this abuse at Libby,

⁶⁷ Zavella, *Women's Work & Chicano Families*, 104.

⁶⁸ Reyes, interview by Rosana Madrid, 5 December 1983, 28.

⁶⁹ Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (New York: Penguin Putnam Inc., 1998).

When I formed a [Cannery Workers] Committee in 1969, they were still grabbing people by the back of the neck. You know, and running them 'HEY!', just like a little school kid. 'Hey, you get over there!' and grabbing them by the arm, physically handling people.⁷⁰

The combination of both verbal and physical harassment added stress to a job that was not only physically demanding, but also failed to pay its workers adequately. Cannery workers were under constant pressure to work faster and harder and the tactics used to keep them in "their place" were abusive and degrading.

The cannery work conditions Reyes described at Libby, McNeill & Libby were similar to those experienced in other northern California canneries. For instance, Zavella also found parallel employee abuse in her study on Chicana cannery workers in Santa Clara in a later period. She took note of the manner in which floor ladies often pushed their workers too hard often to keep up the pace or to meet production goals set by cannery management. Perhaps, Santa Clara cannery worker Connie García best captured the resentment when she noted:

We were treated just like cattle, just driven constantly. You couldn't even pick up your head a little to look around, or else there would be floor lady right there wondering why you weren't working hard enough, and they would work alongside of you to show that you weren't doing your job.⁷¹

The constant vigilance created fear and a state of alarm on the shop floor and made for a demeaning work experience across canneries in Northern California.

Dominant views on the inferiority of the Chicana body, and consequently on their limitations, contributed to a situation in which Chicana and Mexicana cannery

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Quoted in, Zavella, *Women's Work & Chicano Families*, 105.

workers were usually the last to be considered for promotions. This rationalization, which was commonplace at the time, is best explained by sociologist Denise A. Segura who claims that “women are viewed at a very deep level by employers as mothers (or future mothers), [thus] they encounter discrimination in job entry and advancement.”⁷² All these factors made for an unpleasant and abusive workplace for mexicanas and helped justify the positioning of women in low pay jobs. Ruiz explains this phenomenon when she notes that “[a]n ethnic division of labor existed side by side with a division of labor by gender.”⁷³ Mexican women were often relegated to low-pay, low-skill posts, while their Anglo co-workers often received promotions or supervisory positions.⁷⁴ Hence, Mexican women were generally relegated to undesirable tasks without possibility of upward mobility.

Indeed, in Sacramento, Mexican women often had to endure more rigorous and stringent work and were also the first to be reprimanded for not meeting factory production quotas. Reyes was aware of gender inequalities. For instance, Reyes acknowledged, “Women have it worse. They put most of the women on the belt—the toughest job in the cannery.”⁷⁵ For Reyes, then, Chicanas were in the “worst” position because not only were they exposed to racism, but were also exposed to sexism. In this

⁷² Denise A. Segura, “Ambivalence or Continuity?: Motherhood and Employment among Chicanas and Mexican Immigrant Workers,” in Vicki L. Ruiz, ed., *Las Obreras: Chicana Politics of Work and Family* (Los Angeles: UCLA Studies Research Center Publications, 2000): 185.

⁷³ Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives*, 29.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Quoted in, “Reyes Speaks on California Canning Situation,” *The State Hornet*, 14 September 1976.

sense Reyes challenged Chicano nationalist impulses. Orozco clearly demonstrates that the Chicano Movement “did not attempt to end patriarchy, the system by which men dominate women, but in a way tried to justify it.”⁷⁶ Chicano Movement male leaders often used the concept of “la familia” as a means to relegate women to secondary activist positions. For instance, women were often relegated to fundraising positions wherein they sold tamales, tacos, and other Mexican food items or served as secretaries taking care of paperwork while men often assumed the role of public speaker and leader.⁷⁷ However, in Reyes’s case, perhaps not all Chicano leaders were misogynistic and in fact some dared to challenge the system of patriarchy by vocalizing their contempt against it.

Work conditions for Chicanas at Sacramento canneries were not only deplorable, but also posed health hazards. Mexicanas generally worked the belts, considered to be the harshest and most demanding position. Reyes described the intolerable working conditions women workers were exposed to:

When you work the belt, it is awfully hard work to stand in one place, the steam, the heat, or the cold, and this belt moving in front of your eyes for eight hours. Women used to faint up there. Plus the handling of the product itself was such that women [were at the] the nurses office every day before each shift was full of women, they couldn’t tend to all of them because they would come in and get bandaged up. What was happening was that they were handling the product coming in off the fields full of insecticides. They developed sores, what have you. Rashes. They thought [from the] peach fuzz,

⁷⁶ Cynthia Orozco, “Sexism in Chicano Studies and the Community,” in Alma M. García, *Chicana Feminist Thought: The Basic Historical Writings* (New York: Rutledge, 1997): 265.

⁷⁷ Marisela R. Chávez, “We Lived and Breathed and Worked the Movement”: Contradictions and Rewards of Chicana/Mexicana Activism in el Centro de Acción Social Autónoma-Hermandad General de Trabajadores (CASA-HGT), Los Angeles, 1975-1978,” in Ruiz, ed., *Las Obreras*: 100.

or the acid from the tomatoes. This is the explanations the canneries gave. It took us years to find out what was really going on.⁷⁸

Reyes was referring to the harmful side effects of pesticides later discovered. In the 1980s, the United Farm Workers led a taskforce to investigate the affects of pesticides on farm workers. Startling U.S. government reports found that in the 1980s farmers used approximately 2.6 million tons of chemical pesticides per year and that at least 300,000 people suffered serious illness due to its use. Not only were farm workers exposed to this poison, but so were their children who lived and played near agricultural fields. In fact, the mere act of sharing the same living headquarters exposed children to unusually high rates of pesticides. The most devastating effects were the large accounts of cancer clusters—unusually high rates of disease, especially among the young—which divided small communities in the San Joaquin Valley, just south of Sacramento, and again pitted the local power establishment against farm worker advocates.⁷⁹ Although there were no medical reports of pesticide affects on cannery workers in Sacramento at this time, clearly they were not immune to such chemicals.

Chicanas were not only exposed to hazardous pesticides, but were also paid less than their male counterparts. For instance, they were not given the opportunity to work in the warehouse, run machinery, or drive trucks or forklifts, which were not only considered “easier” jobs, but were much better paid. At best, Reyes noted, there

⁷⁸ Reyes, interview by Rosana Madrid, 5 December 1983, 40.

⁷⁹ Susan Ferriss and Ricardo Sandoval, *The Fight in the Fields: Cesar Chavez and the Farmworkers Movement* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1997): 234.

were a handful of “cute white women,” in his words, who worked in these positions and “the foremen would be patting them on the behind.”⁸⁰ The blatant sexual harassment often went unchallenged and women found little refuge in reporting this abuse to union official or cannery administration.

Chicanas on the cannery shop floor were also often victims of racialized sexual harassment. Sumi K. Cho explains that racialized sexual harassment denotes a particular set of injuries resulting from the unique complex of power relations facing women of color in the workplace. She notes that race and gender combine to alter conceptions of both the “primary injury” (the offending conduct legally recognized as sexual harassment) and the “secondary injury” (the actions of employers and institutions that ally with harasser).⁸¹ She argues further that this dual form of exploitation derives from a much longer and more complicated tradition of “colonial and military domination that is interwoven with more contemporary forms of sexual domination to provide the ‘ultimate western male fantasy.’”⁸²

Additionally, while men in the packing and canning industry were usually afforded the opportunity to work year around, the overwhelmingly majority of women were often limited to seasonal positions forcing them to be unemployed for the better part of the year.⁸³ This was commonplace in canneries statewide. Ruiz explains that

⁸⁰ Reyes, interview by Rosana Madrid, 5 December 1983, 40.

⁸¹ Sumi K. Cho, “Converging Stereotypes in Racialized Sexual Harassment: Where the Model Minority Meets Suzie Wong,” in Adrien Katherine Wing, Ed., *Critical Race Feminism: A Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2003): 350.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 351.

⁸³ Reyes, interview by Rosana Madrid, 5 December 1983, 40.

“women at large received very little for their labors, due to the seasonal nature of their work and piece rate pay scale.”⁸⁴ To add insult to injury, when women went on maternity leave, they lost all rights to their pensions even after working 10 to 15 years for a cannery. Reyes believed this to be one of the biggest “rip offs” to take place by cannery management. Canneries were able to get away with this because they cited it as “a break in service,” under the bargaining agreement, which allowed for pension plans to be wiped out. Reyes protested,

So consequently, you have thousands, and I’m talking about thousands of women in the cannery who worked for years, who periodically had a break in service and ended up relinquishing their pensions to the Teamsters, only because they weren’t informed of their rights or educated in the break in service clause.⁸⁵

Reyes, concerned about this discrepancy, informed long-time cannery worker advocate lawyer Tony Ganston who then referred him to the Senior Citizens Law Center located in San Francisco.⁸⁶ Women were also paid an estimated three slots lower than the lowest paid position held by men, according to Reyes.

Because of his insight and knowledge on cannery rights, Reyes was hired by the Senior Citizens Law Center to interview hundreds of mostly white women about their pension plan. The women who retired in the 1970s were of German, Yugoslavian, Russian, and Spanish descent and had worked in canneries before the mostly Mexican workforce had replaced them. Reyes reported that some of these

⁸⁴ Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives*, 72.

⁸⁵ Reyes, interview by Rosana Madrid, 5 December 1983, 43.

⁸⁶ The National Senior Citizens Law Center was founded in 1972. It advocates before the courts, Congress, and federal agencies to promote the independence and well-being of low income elderly Americans, especially women, people of color, and other disadvantaged Americans.

women had worked in the canneries for 40 years and were only receiving \$30 a month. The Senior Citizens Law Center sued on behalf of these cannery workers. Reyes cited one of the major problems was getting the retirees to understand their rights. Information was distributed through the mail, but after receiving little feedback from the retired cannery workers the Senior Citizens Law Center held meetings to try and inform workers of their pension benefits, which ended up being a “monumental task” according to Reyes.⁸⁷

Reyes was not only concerned for the rights of retirees, he was also keenly aware of the correlation between race, class, and gender and that Chicana cannery workers were confronting triple oppression.⁸⁸ Reyes believed that the “hierarchy in the canneries was both racist and sexist.” He noted that this was most noted in the division of the seven employment brackets, where Chicanas/os seldom made it into the top three positions. In Sacramento, only two top positions were filled by Chicanos, and none by Chicanas, regardless of the fact that this ethnic group made up the majority of workers in California canneries.⁸⁹ Sociologist Tomás Almaguer in his work on the origins of white supremacy in the California notes that “differences among racialized populations in class, gender, and ethnicity functioned as intervening markers that had important consequences in each group’s collective history.”⁹⁰ Clearly for mexicanas

⁸⁷ Reyes, interview by Rosana Madrid, 5 December 1983, 43.

⁸⁸ For information on the concept of triple oppression see: Beatriz M. Pesquera and Denise A. Segura, “There is No Going Back: Chicanas and Feminism,” in Norma Alarcón, Rafaela Castro, Emma Pérez, Beatriz Pesquera, Adaljiza Sosa Riddell, and Patricia Zavella, eds., *Chicana Critical Issues* (Berkeley: Third Women Press, 1993).

⁸⁹ “Reyes Speaks on California Canning Situation,” *The State Hornet*, 14 September 1976.

who labored in canneries their work was not only viewed as obsolete because of its “menial” nature, but was also regarded as insignificant. This was despite the fact by mid 1970s 60,000 workers were employed at 74 canneries in California, at peak season, 58 percent were women, of which 62 percent were minorities. To make matters worse, most of the workers on the “regular” list were male, while virtually all persons on the seasonal list were female.⁹¹

Mexican women were not only relegated to poor wage, low end jobs, they also lacked representation or consideration in union positions. While the CWC was critical of the lack of women and minorities in top level work or union positions, they were less fault-finding of their own role in the lack of women in leadership positions. For instance, the CWC publicly denounced sexism and advocated for gender rights at all levels of cannery work, but did not promote women in the ranks of CWC. This is seen clearly noted in the long-term “spokesperson” position held by Reyes.

Even though the CWC did not promote women to leadership positions, they did not silence them completely. For example, Woodland resident and CWC member Frances Macías of Woodland and member of CWC spoke out against worker discrimination at the City-County Human Relations Commission meeting. She noted that she had witnessed such practices in her 20 years experience and that once she began speaking up, she received “the silent treatment” by fellow employees and

⁹⁰ Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994): 209.

⁹¹ “Promotion Decree: Another Issue Stirs in Strike,” *The Sacramento Bee*, 27 July 1976.

supervisors.⁹² CWC recognized that women played a crucial role in their quest for justice and equality in the workplace. Therefore, the testimony of Chicanas was crucial in their aim to achieve this. Macías provided this much needed evidence for sexist and racist practices on the cannery floor.

Reyes made known that in the beginning mostly men attended the Cannery Workers Committee meetings. He specified that for every fifteen or twenty men in attendance at CWC general membership meetings, there were only one woman, even though they made up approximately 50 percent of the cannery workforce. Reyes's attributed their absence not to a lack of ability to organize, but rather to the sexist tendencies of Mexican men and culture. He noted, "We are probably more sexist than anybody else, you know, the husband, hey, they don't want their wives involved in the meetings, or you know, they don't mind them working and bringing home the paycheck, but they don't want their wives at the meetings where all these men were."⁹³ Reyes did not agree and critiqued this viewpoint. He knew that women did the hardest work, for less pay, and therefore could be just as effective at organizing.

Although at first women did not make up the leadership in the CWC, once chapters began to form in other canneries in Northern California women began to take the reins. Chicana cannery workers resisted sexism and racism by participating in the CWC. They were far from passive and by all means demonstrated bravery and strength. For instance, Delfina Lozoya, who had 14 years seniority as a cannery

⁹² "Chicanas in Canneries Rap Top Jobs Lack," *The Sacramento Bee*, 28 November 1970.

⁹³ Reyes, interview by Rosana Madrid, 5 December 1983, 39-40.

worker in Alameda County, not only served on the Board of Directors of the Cannery Workers Committee, but was also elected Chairperson of the Executive Board for the Bay Area CWC.⁹⁴ One of the ways mexicanas made headway in the cannery industry was to assure that they were granted seniority privileges, despite the fact that most women worked as seasonal laborers. Lozoya explained that first step to assure worker rights for women was to set up a subcommittee within the Cannery Workers Committee. They then set out to enumerate how many women received promotions since 1972, the year in which CWC won their settlement agreement. They found that over 80% of cannery workers who qualified for seniority were women, and thus eligible for “high bracket jobs.” Rather than dismiss their male co-workers, Lozoya noted that “We realized that the seniority system was going to be really unfair the way they had stated it in the Conciliation Agreement because women would be way above men.”⁹⁵ They decided to approach this dilemma by citing the date of hire to determine seniority. In 1976 the CWC went to court to ratify the Agreement and they got more than they expected, when the judge ordered that canneries honor seniority dating back to 1964 and not 1972, to fall in conjunction with the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

Likewise in Sacramento, efforts to sue on the basis of sex discrimination gained ground in 1972 when attorney Milton L. McGhee filed a \$12,500 sex discrimination suit against Campbell Soup Company charging that it used separate

⁹⁴ “Cannery Affirmative Action,” *Convoy: National Voice of Teamsters for a Democratic Union*, (date of publication unknown).

⁹⁵ Quoted in, “Cannery Affirmative Action,” *Convoy*.

seniority lists for men and women doing corporate work at their Sacramento plant. This suit was the one of the first in the state to target gender based discrimination. The suit was brought forth by a white female employee, Vivian Hunter, who contended that only women were laid off in April 1972 on a seniority basis and not male employees doing comparable or similar work. Hunter had returned to work in August of that year only after word of her suit spread to Campbell management. She estimated a loss in wages of at least \$2,500.⁹⁶

Despite the persistence of this type of working conditions, canning remained among the top five manufacturing industries in California until 1963, and was among the top ten as late as 1977. In fact, the industry was monopolized by three corporations, Del Monte; Hunt Wesson; and Libby, McNeill & Libby. By the mid sixties, as the canning industry came into maturation, it also underwent another process of concentration and also experienced an increase in mechanization. The impact of mechanization severely affected employment opportunities, particularly in unskilled positions (Table 3).⁹⁷ By the early 1970s, the California canning industry packed approximately 300,000,000 cases of fruits and vegetables in roughly 100 highly automated canneries. This is equivalent to about 35% of the total United States fruit and vegetable pack.⁹⁸ In 1974, more than 146 million cases were produced in California canneries.

⁹⁶ "Suit Charges Canner with Discrimination" *The Sacramento Bee*, 6 April 1973.

⁹⁷ Zavella, *Women's Work and Chicano Families*, 53.

⁹⁸ Charles, "An Exploratory Study of Can Damage and its Effect on Profitability in Sacramento Area Canneries," 22.

Table 3: Average Annual Number of Production Workers in California Canning Industry, 1939-1972

Year	Production Workers
1939	25,093
1947	37,416
1954	37,662
1958	45,146
1963	45,027
1967	44,600
1972	43,400 ⁹⁹

THE FORMATION OF THE CANNERY WORKERS COMMITTEE IN SACRAMENTO AND ITS EXPANSION TO NORTHERN CALIFORNIA CANNERIES

The abuses Reyes witnessed at Libby, McNeill & Libby reminded him of the racial and economic injustices he experienced in Arizona, and this motivated him to action. Reyes became involved in worker's rights when he was asked by the Libby management to interpret for newly arrived Mexican immigrants, who did not speak English, during work related disputes. He explained,

What happened, the way that they would beat the Mexicans and deny them the opportunities, was that they would tongue lash them. And most Mexicans, not being able to deal with the language, this was basically the biggest weapon that the canneries had against the Mexicans.¹⁰⁰

Being exposed first hand to verbal abuse toward Mexican immigrants opened his eyes to the overt racism in canneries. Although he himself had experienced work related exploitation, participating as a go-between politicized him even more. It was at this critical moment that Reyes began to speak up against such maltreatment. According to Reyes, mexicanos were routinely screamed at in front of their peers on the shop floor.

⁹⁹ Table found in Zavella, *Women's Work and Chicano Families*, 52.

¹⁰⁰ Reyes, interview by Rosana Madrid, 5 December 1983, 29.

Intimidated by such tactics, embarrassed by the public humiliation, and afraid of losing their jobs, most Mexican immigrants when confronted with this situation would simply put their heads down and walk away.

Reyes viewed this abuse as methodical and sustained through a system of racism over centuries in the United States. From his standpoint, Libby, McNeill & Libby operated under this structure and would continue to do so if left unchallenged. He explained how Blacks and Mexicans had taken the brunt of racial injustice:

Basically, the attitude of the white guy, that he was in charge, since, you know, very few Mexican foreman, if any, very few Mexican mechanics, very few minorities, and Blacks were the last to be hired and first to be fired. And at the tail end of all the machines where all the hard stacking is done, it was always a Black guy. When the season started, there was always this saying, 'Hey, we're getting, starting like number 9, get us a couple of niggers or buckers.' So at the tail end of the machines were the Black guys doing the stacking, doing the dirtiest work.¹⁰¹

Reyes believed that racism was commonplace and regularly practiced against both Mexicans and Blacks. Clearly, Blacks were also subject to racist practices and were assigned the most physically demanding jobs, while all along Mexicans were not allowed into supervisory positions—keeping both ethnic groups in subordinate positions.

Reyes's view on race and racism fell in line with civil rights beliefs at the time. Michael Omi and Howard Winant in their work on racial formation in the United States explain that the later 1960s signaled a "sharp break" from the early civil rights movement which subscribed to the belief that integration would be the vehicle through

¹⁰¹ Reyes, interview by Rosana Madrid, 5 December 1983, 28-29.

which to overcome racial prejudice. However, the failed promises of *Brown vs. Board of Education* made it clear that racial inequality and injustice had much deeper roots. Indeed, racial discrimination had been in existence for centuries and had become entrenched in U.S. society and was allowed to exist through structural and legal policies that had for too long relegated and maintained persons of color in an almost permanent second-class status. Omi and Winant argue that “it was this combination of relationships—discrimination, and institutional inequality—which defined the concept of racism at the end of the 1960s.”¹⁰² Hence, decades before the publication of Omi and Winant’s work, Reyes’s understanding of racism appeared to anticipate and to some extent, to be aligned with this more layered meaning.

Reyes later earned the reputation of being a “troublemaker” among the Libby, McNeill & Libby administration for constantly defending Mexican immigrant workers. Soon after protesting demeaning practices, he was separated from the Mexican immigrant workers and given jobs that did not require him being on the “line.” Consequently, Reyes was moved out of his position in the warehouse and became “weigh master” whose duties included grading, shipping, receiving, and weighing the product. He noted that this was a difficult job because it required extensive math skills, but he gradually learned and mastered the position, ultimately working in that capacity for ten years. When Libby, McNeill & Libby dismissed the two workers who assisted him, he filed arbitration for a strenuous workload and won. The ruling in his favor was based largely on the fact that the cannery had violated its

¹⁰² Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*, second edition (New York: Routledge, 1994): 69.

own worker contract. To compensate for the short handedness, Libby, McNeill & Libby gave Reyes a ten cent an hour raise.

Eventually, Reyes decided that the additional workload was not worth the pay raise and made the painful decision to take a pay cut and work as a forklift operator. This decision was especially difficult given that Reyes was the sole provider for his wife and seven children. He was relocated to the Libby, McNeill & Libby warehouse on Florin-Perkins Road and noted that this is where “the problems started.” When he returned to the Florin Perkins location, he became more aware of severe hiring practices inequities. According to Reyes, the breaking point was when “they were hiring white people to come in and giving them some of the higher paying jobs, and not allowing the Mexican workers to fill these positions.”¹⁰³ From his standpoint, this was incredibly unfair given that some of the Mexicans had worked at Libby’s for 10-20 years and not only had the expertise, but seniority that warranted opportunity for upward employment mobility. For Reyes, then, this was the clearest form of racial discrimination and provided sufficient grounds and evidence to make a claim of unfair hiring practices.

It was at this junction that Reyes started to organize cannery workers to contest such hiring practices and on February 1968 with other cannery workers at the same plant formed the Cannery Workers Committee.¹⁰⁴ He recalled,

When we formed the Cannery Workers Committee back in 1968, we thought it was going to be so easy. We figured that we would get all the workers together and take over a whole union local within five

¹⁰³ Reyes, interview by Rosana Madrid, 5 December 1983, 37.

¹⁰⁴ “Chicanos in Canneries Rap Top Jobs Lack,” *The Sacramento Bee*, November 28, 1970.

years. We figured we'd be able to kick the Teamsters out across the state. Horseshit! Those guys are big; they have all the money and the government behind them. I think we woke up to the fact that it's not gonna be easy.¹⁰⁵

Unfortunately, the road to justice for cannery workers was even longer than they had anticipated.

In the beginning, the Cannery Workers Committee was made up of Libby, McNeill & Libby employees and lacked organizational structure. For instance, unlike membership procedures at the Cannery Workers Union, at CWC members were not required to sign a membership card. In order to attain membership, they simply needed to attend a meeting. Meetings were held on a weekly basis. The first year, according to Reyes, was slow in increasing membership numbers. However, by early 1969 word spread to other plants that there was an opposing union to the Teamsters, and hope finally reigned among cannery workers for justice. Once information got out that the Cannery Workers Committee leadership was composed of Chicanas and Chicanos that were addressing issues of race and gender discrimination, cannery workers from various plants in Sacramento began attending meetings. Reyes initially served as spokesperson for the newly formed CWC.

At first the lax organizing approach worked, when membership grew and especially after cannery workers from other plants joined, Reyes and the "loose knit" leadership were questioned for assuming such critical positions without a proper election. To address these concerns, a formal election was held in March 1969. Despite the fact that other cannery plant workers, specifically from Sacramento's Del

¹⁰⁵ "Reyes Speaks on California Canning Situation" *The State Hornet*, 14 September 1976.

Monte location, were present during the election only Libby's workers were nominated. Reyes expressed disappointment because he thought CWC would hold more political and bargaining clout if its leadership was composed of representative from various Sacramento area plants. However, the threat of losing their jobs and being labeled as "troublemakers" deterred many from seeking officer positions. The board was made up of seven people and they were all Libby workers and male. Board members later made the attempt to recruit women to serve on the board, subsequently three women were added. Threatened by increased membership, Libby, McNeill & Libby and the Cannery Workers Union joined efforts to infiltrate and co-opt the Cannery Workers Committee. To discourage interest, cannery management offered CWC leaders better paying jobs or "favors." Reyes expressed disillusionment when he learned of such measures.¹⁰⁶



Image 18: New Board Members at Sacramento Cannery Workers Committee meeting (Rubén Reyes at center, standing). The board was clearly male dominant. Sacramento, CA. (Courtesy of Center for Sacramento History, Rubén Reyes Collection, 84/104/19, 1970.)

¹⁰⁶ Information of the formation of the Cannery Workers Committee taken from: Reyes, interview by Rosana Madrid, 5 December 1983, 55-57.

The Cannery Workers Committee served as the frontline organization against race and gender discrimination in canneries in the Sacramento and eventually Northern California. Reyes served as the chairperson during the first few years and led not only a personal lawsuit against Libby, McNeill & Libby and the Cannery Workers Union, but also helped organize a large-scale lawsuit against other canneries in Northern California on the basis of racial discrimination. The CWC first initiated a meeting with Libby, McNeill & Libby and the Cannery Workers Union. However, both Libby, McNeill & Libby and the Cannery Workers Union refused to participate or meet with the Cannery Workers Committee. When all attempts failed, Reyes contacted government agencies and the labor department. Reyes admits that the process of seeking redress was overwhelming and intimidating. He was not a trained union spokesperson nor did he have prior organizing experience. Regardless, he proceeded forward by attending Cannery Worker Union meetings to address concerns of discrimination, speaking on behalf of the CWC, but was always silenced and threatened with removal from the meeting.¹⁰⁷ Because Reyes was not aware of legislation that would help him in his cause, like the Civil Rights Bill of 1964, he was slowed down by the bureaucratic red tape.¹⁰⁸ He noted, “I didn’t know much about

¹⁰⁷ Linda Neal, Consultant, “The Cannery Union and Discrimination,” May 1972 (SAMCC, Rubén Reyes Collection, Sacramento, California).

¹⁰⁸ The Civil Rights Bill outlawed Jim Crow in public accommodations of every kind, in every city and state and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act forbids systematic patterns of segregation union locals and racist job referral policies. Manning Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction in Black America, 1945-1990*, Second Edition (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1991): Civil Rights Act 81 and Title 7, 117.

Title VII, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. If I would have known I could have saved myself a lot of work and gone directly to them, but I learned step by step.”¹⁰⁹ Indeed, the process to seek justice for cannery workers was difficult and required a stubborn persistence of which Reyes was committed.

The fight against discrimination was not only waged against the canneries themselves, but also the Cannery Workers Union which was an offshoot of the Teamsters union. Zavella notes that by the early 1970s “many Chicano cannery workers identified with the Chicano nationalist movement and the United Farm Workers (UFW), since they had either been farm workers themselves or still had relatives and friends who were farm workers.”¹¹⁰ At this time, the UFW and the Teamsters were battling over which union would better represent food-processing workers. Having had its own long struggle with the Teamsters, the CWC attempted to organize several decertification elections to remove the Teamsters.¹¹¹ This was also the aim in Sacramento when the Teamsters, through the Cannery Workers Union, had run out of favor with the cannery workers.

Indeed, Reyes and the Cannery Workers Committee did not ease off nor did they falter when they did not receive adequate response from Libby, McNeill & Libby and the Cannery Workers Union. In fact, the company and union’s lack of interest only encouraged them to fight harder. To draw attention to their cause, the CWC organized a large scale meeting on February 6, 1969 at the headquarters of the

¹⁰⁹ Reyes, interview by Rosana Madrid, 5 December 1983, 38.

¹¹⁰ Zavella, *Women’s Work & Chicano Families*, 64.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

Sacramento-area Concilio headquarters, a Sacramento-based organization that served as a consortium of Chicano organizations. In attendance were 60 cannery workers from Sacramento, Woodland, Yuba City, and Vacaville. Reyes notes that it was critical for workers from other plants to meet and discuss cannery issues, “Somehow being in the presence of other people with a similar problem, seems to instill courage in people.”¹¹² Also in attendance were representatives of the Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), Human Relations Commission, and the Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC). This first public meeting was deemed a success by CWC organizers because of the sparked interest of cannery workers from other plants to form a CWC chapter and because the agencies present promised to assist the workers.



Image 19: Rubén Reyes (left, standing) recruits cannery workers into the Cannery Workers Committee in Vacaville, CA. (Courtesy of Center for Sacramento History, Rubén Reyes Collection, 84/104/23, 1970s?)

As part of the follow up to this initial public meeting, the Cannery Workers Committee, including Reyes, met with the executive director of the Human Relations

¹¹² Reyes, interview by Rosana Madrid, 5 December 1983, 48.

Commission, Robert Tyler, on June 10, 1969 to seek assistance and guidance to address employment discriminatory patterns in employment at Libby, McNeill & Libby. Tyler noted that during their meeting “They were apprehensive about what the commission could do, and appeared to be somewhat dejected.” The CWC was beginning to lose faith in these types of agencies because at this point they had been organizing for at least a year, with little outcome to account for. Despite the Cannery Workers Committee’s hesitation, together with Tyler they formulated a plan to bring attention to their cause; this included contacting the Office of Contract Compliance, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the Fair Employment Practices Commission, and the Human Relations Commission.¹¹³

The Cannery Workers Committee was successful in getting the attention and eventual involvement of the Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). In 1969 the EEOC launched a thorough inquiry into Sacramento area canneries to investigate worker complaints of race and gender discrimination. EEOC agents interviewed Mexican workers and analyzed hiring practices and payroll information. The heightened public interest, but more significantly, the investigation led by government agencies, added pressure to cannery employers. This was best illustrated when representatives of the company approached Reyes and said, “Hey Rubén, things have been pretty bad for you people, we feel that we should have some Mexican foreman, we feel that we should upgrade, having training programs for mechanics.”¹¹⁴ Reyes

¹¹³ Robert Tyler, Executive Director, Human Relations Commission “Statement of the General History of the Case” May 18, 1971. Document located at Sacramento Archives and Museum Collection, Ruben Reyes Collection, Sacramento, California.

noted that shortly thereafter approximately eight Mexicans were placed in mechanic training programs and Libby even took proactive steps to give women more opportunities in higher paying positions. In his view, these were piecemeal and were clear tokenism tactics used by the company to silence dissent. While these were all positive changes, Libby fell short of the CWC's goal of holding canneries to honor seniority.

The canneries were not only afraid of legal repercussions, but were also concerned about losing union representative control. To tackle this latter issue, Sacramento area canneries began to offer promotions to workers who were most vocal against employment discrimination practices. For instance, a few employees, including Chicanas, were given promotions at Libby, McNeill & Libby: Frank González was moved from his position in the warehouse to clerk, Luis Colmanares was made foreman, and Ruth García was given a job in the personnel office. Likewise, Reyes was promoted to foreman, a bittersweet victory given that he had applied for the position on three different occasions and had been denied each time. Reyes resentfully recalled how he pleaded for the job, "Hey man, you are bringing in all kinds of new guys, white guys, all the time, and we'd have to break them in, we'd have to break these new guys in to be our foreman," only to send him away disappointed.¹¹⁵ During these interviews they praised his work ethic by conveying that he was "a great worker" and that they would keep him in mind for the position in the future. Reyes recalled that it was not until the Cannery Workers Committee was formed that "all of a

¹¹⁴ Reyes, interview by Rosana Madrid, 5 December 1983, 57.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 52.

sudden I was good enough to be foreman.”¹¹⁶ Once the “agitators” were moved to higher paying positions, cannery management successfully created the outcome they hoped for—a breakdown in the Cannery Workers Committee leadership. Reyes was clearly upset by this when he angrily conveyed to these “defected” coworkers who were bought out with promotions,

Bullshit, nothing is going right now! You guys got better jobs, but what about all of the other thousands of Mexicans out there? What about them? This is exactly what I was leading to awhile ago when I said that the system takes to buy the leaders off.¹¹⁷

Although this was a minor setback, CWC’s organizing efforts moved forward. Then in April 1972 the Canneries took a different approach in hopes of dismantling CWC leadership. Reyes noted, “they are trying to bankrupt our movement by firing all our leaders.”¹¹⁸ However, these attempts did not succeed.

One of the first major attempts to challenge the Teamsters Union came when Cannery Workers Committee members decided to run a slate of officers for union leadership in 1969. Reyes ran for the secretary/treasurer, the highest position in the Cannery Worker Union, but according to union officials lost the election by a supposedly “very narrow margin,” although they were never given the count. It was not until further investigation into this election was conducted by the U.S. Labor Department five years later that he was notified that the election was “rigged.” This experience and loss fueled Reyes’s desire for change in union handlings and he poured

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 53.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Quoted in “FEPC Finds Canneries Have “Deep Bias’ on Minorities,” *The Sacramento Bee*, 8 April 1972.

all his energies into organizing the Cannery Workers Committee. Now chairman of the Cannery Workers Committee, Reyes went before the City-County Human Rights Commission and wrote letters to the State Fair Practices Committee, federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Department of Defense Contract Compliance Bureau, and the Human Relations Commission.¹¹⁹ In the end, the Cannery Workers Committee were successful in creating change on the shop floor when Northern California canneries filed suit and won their case against the canning industry for discriminating against women and minorities.

The Cannery Workers Committee perhaps met its greatest challenge when Rubén Reyes received a suspension and was eventually dismissed from his employer of 20 years, Libby, McNeill & Libby, for refusing to take down a poster of Mexican Revolutionary icon Emiliano Zapata from his office wall.¹²⁰ Reyes would only concede to removing the Zapata poster if Libby, McNeill & Libby would strip off restroom graffiti of “nigger” and “spic.” Reyes suggested, “Paint it over man. Paint is cheap.”¹²¹ Since Libby did not meet Reyes’s request, Reyes did not remove the Zapata poster from his office and was consequently suspended for failing to comply with company rules and orders. Libby held that others felt threatened by the revolutionary figure and therefore were merely acting on worker complaints. On the other hand,

¹¹⁹ “Minority Workers Seek Cannery Anti-bias Actions,” *The Sacramento Bee*, November 1970.

¹²⁰ For information on Emiliano Zapata see: Samuel Burk, *Emiliano Zapata!: Revolution and Betrayal in Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press).

¹²¹ Quoted in “For Cannery Workers, Hearings but No Relief,” *The Hornet* (Sacramento State University student newspaper), 6 March 1973.

Reyes questioned the cannery's true intentions when nothing had ever been done to address the numerous complaints of racial slurs written on bathroom walls, a communal space wherein workers were constantly exposed to racist propaganda.



Image 20: Rubén Reyes holds up controversial Emiliano Zapata poster for which he was suspended for hanging in his office at Libby McNeil & Libby Cannery. (Center for Sacramento History, [The Sacramento Bee Collection](#), 1983/001/Owen Brewer, 3-5-1971, Frame 8).

Reyes sought the representation of Nathaniel Colley, attorney at law and NAACP West Coast legal counsel, to fight his case against Libby, McNeill & Libby. Colley reported on the case, “Mr. Reyes is not a slave. I have advised him that he was perfectly within his rights to hang the poster. What he did was no different than if I

had hung a poster of George Washington crossing the Delaware.”¹²² Colley’s comparison of Zapata to Washington was merely his attempt to draw attention to the relativity of what one considers a revolutionary national hero. Reyes’s suspension lasted four and a half months and was lifted only after union arbitration found that he was within his civil rights to hang the poster. At the time, Reyes had to provide for his seven children and wife yet was only compensated for two months of lost earned wages.¹²³ In the meantime, while Reyes awaited deliberation on his complaint, he was forced to apply for public assistance to help feed his family. Reyes’s suspension did not alter his activism and leadership role in the Cannery Workers Committee. To the contrary, this only confirmed his belief that canneries would use their power to dismantle and squash any dissent from workers who fought against worker injustice.

However, Reyes’s problems with Libby, McNeill & Libby did not end there. His troubles only worsened when Libby rang up new charges against Reyes, alleging that he failed to report to work on September 30, 1972 without prior notification. When Reyes showed up to work as scheduled on Monday, October 2, 1972, he was immediately instructed to go to the personnel office where he met with David Childs, Libby’s manager. Childs requested that Reyes sign a suspension notice for missing work without permission, but Reyes simply tore up the paper in his face. Reyes refuted the charges maintaining that he had taken proper protocol by asking for the day off well in advance. Childs set an unlimited suspension against Reyes pending an

¹²² Quoted in “Foreman Plan suit as Libby Extends Suspension over Zapata Poster in Office,” *The Sacramento Bee*, 10 March 1971.

¹²³ “For Cannery Workers, Hearings but No Relief,” *The Hornet* (Sacramento State University student newspaper), 6 March 1973.

investigation by the Cannery Workers Warehousemen Union, Local 857, which represented Libby's employees. Reyes believed that his suspension was a reprisal for his role in CWC over the years and more specifically a recent dispute with the company and union wherein cannery workers requested higher pay and a 40-hour work week, instead of the usual 48 work-week that included Saturdays with no overtime compensation. Libby, McNeill & Libby had denied their demands.¹²⁴

On the date in question, Reyes met with Pacific Change, originally the Eldridge Foundation, in San Francisco, who awarded the Cannery Workers Committee \$10,000 to cover organizing expenses. George Williams, writer for *The Sacramento Bee*, also accompanied Reyes to the meeting and was assigned to cover the story. Over the years, Reyes, through his organizing efforts on behalf of CWC, had developed a lasting friendship with Williams. He recalled, "We became very close friends because, George always says that he got kicked upstairs because of all the stories he wrote about the cannery workers."¹²⁵ Once the story was covered in *The Bee*, Reyes was suspended and told that he would be called to work once the investigation was conducted, but he was never called back. Reyes took the opportunity during his suspension to help start Cannery Workers Committee chapters in King City, Oakland, and Hayward.

Reyes protested that Libby, McNeill & Libby had orchestrated this entire situation to finally rid themselves of him once and for all and hopefully also quash the Cannery Workers Committee organizing efforts. Reyes was not surprised by the

¹²⁴ "Workers will ask Kleinsdienst Aid" *The Sacramento Bee*, 8 October 1972.

¹²⁵ Reyes, interview by Rosana Madrid, 5 December 1983, 59.

actions given that past reprisals included being sent to work in a North Sacramento warehouse for about eight weeks while the U.S. Equal Opportunity Commission investigated discrimination charges. “They wanted to keep me out of the way,” he stated. “They had me in a warehouse in North Sacramento just sitting and doing nothing—me and another guy—while the government was doing its investigation.”¹²⁶ Lorenzo Patino, of El Concilio, agreed that the cannery’s action was a reprisal against Reyes for his union organizing activities, which included a class action suit against the firm. El Concilio organized a petition drive that was to be presented to U.S. Attorney General Richard Kleindienst on October 9th in hopes that he intervene on behalf of Reyes.

The Chicano community activists of Sacramento came to Reyes’s defense. For example, Tony Vásquez, executive director of the Urban Coalition, publicly stated that,

Ruben’s suspension only reinforces the belief of the minority working man that he is really without opportunities. It is no wonder that minorities have struck out in such frustrated anger these recent years. The system does not work for them and what else can they do? Libby’s arbitrary action may well backfire on them [the company and union] because they may have succeeded in really making Ruben a martyr and solidifying his position as a rallying point for all the minority cannery workers.¹²⁷

For Vásquez, then, the civil unrest of the late 1960s materialized because those who were oppressed continued to get doors slammed on them until they could no longer

¹²⁶ Quoted in “Workers will ask Kleinsdienst Aid” *The Sacramento Bee*, 8 October 1972.

¹²⁷ Quoted in “Zapata Picture in Office, Cannery Foreman: Poster Coast Job,” *The Sacramento Bee*, 5 May 1971.

control their frustration. He believed that the cannery workers were also growing increasingly impatient.

The Sacramento Cannery Workers Committee gained momentum by not only accessing different community and government agencies, but by inviting friendly press to meetings. Most notably, The Sacramento Bee and The Sacramento Union, the two major newspapers in Sacramento, extensively covered stories on the Cannery Workers Committee efforts to address racial discrimination issues at local canneries. Thus, media coverage became an essential recruitment tool for the Cannery Workers Committee because it not only helped increase local membership, but most importantly assisted in spreading word of the union's success to cannery workers in nearby cities.

Shortly after the initial coverage, Reyes received multiple phone calls and letters inquiring on how to start a CWC chapter from cannery workers in Stockton, Modesto, Vacaville, and King City. Excited by the prospect of increasing membership, Reyes traveled to these interested sites and provided information on CWC. He explained, "I was using my own money [to travel]. We didn't have anything. So I was driving my own car."¹²⁸ Reyes's efforts paid off when one by one Cannery Workers Committees chapters sprung up in Stockton, Modesto, Vacaville, King City, and later San Francisco, Hayward and Oakland. The increased interest and forming of CWC chapters in Northern California provided Reyes the leveraging power to seek redress at the state and federal level on behalf of cannery workers. Keen to this newfound

¹²⁸ Reyes, interview by Rosana Madrid, 5 December 1983, 55.

“power,” Reyes started “exaggerating the figures [of membership] and saying that we had large representation of workers everywhere. Believe it or not they swallowed the whole thing.”¹²⁹

Not only was the CWC able to grow in membership, but at last they were able to get the attention of federal agencies. By February 1972, CWC effectively organized a broad-based charge of discrimination against minorities and women against all 76 canneries in Northern California through the assistance of Commissioner William H. Brown III of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. The charge was also made against labor unions and canners’ employer associations by deliberately allowing discrimination practices to exist.¹³⁰ Their persistence eventually paid off when on March 7, 1972 the California Fair Employment Practice Commission presented a report titled: “Nine Canneries in Sacramento, Yolo, and Solano Counties.” The nine canneries included American Home Foods, Basic Vegetable Products, Inc., Campbell Soup Company, Contadina, Del Monte Plants No. 11 and No. 238, Hunt-Wesson Foods, Libby, McNeill & Libby, and Sacramento Foods. The report found that not only were Chicano cannery workers discriminated against by their employment but they were widely discriminated against by the policies and practices of their own unions of which they represented 40% of the membership but yet are only 10% of the union structure. The report went on to note that the union further discouraged Chicano involvement in the union by holding elections in the off-season,

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ “US Claims 76 North State Canneries Discrimination” *The Sacramento Bee*, 24 February 1972.

at which time the Chicano membership is at its lowest percentage. Moreover, the union had denied repeated requests to publish minutes, reports and other union notices in Spanish for its constituents.¹³¹

This report was groundbreaking because never before had cannery workers in Northern California assembled in such an organized fashion to challenge status-quo racial and gender discrimination. The CWC steering committee was made up of Rubén Reyes, president, of Sacramento; Rudy García and Pete Naranjo from San Jose; Agapito Aguirre from Vacaville; Adrian Mondajano, Peter Zeygolis, and Anna Zavella of King City. Together they brought forth charges against the canneries alleging that minority employees were not proportionately represented in higher skilled jobs, that they were given separate pay rates for the same types of work, and exposed to harassment of employees because of race and national origin. They also charged that the cannery unions were violating collective bargaining agreements, failing to represent minority employees' complaints of discrimination and discouraging minorities from taking part in union activities, especially in their quest for union officers.¹³² Finally, CWC was forcefully bringing more general awareness to issues of sex and race bias in Northern California at cannery plants.

Reyes and CWC continued to make known that it was not only the canneries themselves that had discriminated against Chicanas/os, but the Teamster Union's operatives did as well. Indeed, at a State Fair Employment Practices Commission

¹³¹ Linda Neal, Consultant, "The Cannery Union and Discrimination," May 1972 (SAMCC, Rubén Reyes Collection, Sacramento, California).

¹³² "Chicano Workers Map Bias Battle" *San Jose Mercury*, 11 March 1972.

hearing in San Francisco cannery workers from Sacramento, King City, Gilroy, Vacaville, Woodland, and San Jose testified on the ill-treatment of Mexican workers and other minorities by both companies and unions.¹³³ In the eyes of Chicana/o cannery workers, unions and companies alike used their power to keep worker rights at bay. To back this allegation, agencies including the California State Fair Employment Practices Commission, Sacramento City-County Human Relations Commission, and the Federal Employment Opportunity Commission found institutional discrimination in the state food processing industry. The City-County Commission ruled that although minorities made up 40 percent of the area cannery workforce, they held only 2 percent of the better-paying jobs. The Federal Commission also found that 76 canneries in Northern California discriminated against women and minorities in hiring, wages, and promotions. Metropolitan Sacramento Urban Coalition chairman, Alden W. Brosseau, noted that despite these findings these aforementioned agencies were not successful in resolving these problems. Brosseau stated, “As the legitimate aspirations of the minority workers continue to be frustrated, we conclude that justice can only be achieved in the courts.”¹³⁴

It was not until 1973 that the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission was able to act on legal grounds against discrimination in the workplace when Congress amended the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which prohibits job discrimination on the basis of sex, race, or religion, allowing the EEOC to sue. Previously, the commission was

¹³³ “Cannery, Union Probe Goes to Attorney General” *The Sacramento Bee*, 6 June 1972.

¹³⁴ Quoted in, “Kleindienst Asked to Act on Cannery ‘Bias,’” *The Sacramento Bee*, 28 September 72.

empowered only to investigate complaints of discrimination.¹³⁵ However, this lawsuit would take another three years to litigate. On May 6, 1976 Judge William H. Orrick of the U.S. District Court in San Francisco ordered in a consent decree that women and minorities be given a promotion priority over white males when they bid for higher-bracket jobs. The decree noted that of the 60,000 workers employed at 74 canneries in the state, at peak season, 58 percent were women; 62 percent were minorities. Yet, “most of the workers on the regular list are male...virtually all persons on the seasonal list were female,” read the decree. Canneries kept a seniority promotion list of year-round “regulars” who accumulate 1,400 hours of work a year, and “seasonals” who work less than that. And as a rule, each year seasonal workers went to the bottom of the list even if they were hired long before the regulars, because seniority did not begin until a worker became a regular. The decree also found that “females and minorities have been denied opportunities to obtain high bracket and regular positions with the industry.” It set a guideline that all women and minorities who bid for better jobs since July 2, 1965, the date of the Civil Rights Act, could move up in seniority according to their original date of hire, not the date they made “regular.”¹³⁶

As might have been anticipated, representatives of the canneries first opposed the decree. Patricia L. Palafox, director of the Affirmative Action Trust Fund, noted that “They [canneries] only decided they wanted it after they decided it would be better than fighting it in court.” Frustrated by the unwillingness and constant resistance of canneries to adhere to the decree, Palafox placed her two week resignation notice

¹³⁵ “EEOC sues to Enforce Civil Rights Act,” *The Sacramento Bee*, 6 April 1973.

¹³⁶ “Promotion Decree: Another Issue Stirs in Strike,” *The Sacramento Bee*, 27 July 1976.

on July 27, 1976. When questioned as to why she had made such a severe decision she simply replied, “Let Ruben Reyes’s comments speak for themselves.”¹³⁷ Reyes acknowledged that Palafox was placed in a difficult position because she was not getting compliance from canneries and Teamsters concerning the broad spectrum of civil rights that she “was forced to quit.” Reyes commented, “The canneries are keeping the decree a secret. They don’t want the workers to know the decree allows for a \$5 million compensation trust fund, and that they can get some of that money if they have a justified grievance.”¹³⁸ According to the decree, the money was to be paid by the canneries and distributed by a panel of Teamsters and cannery representatives. At last, after nearly a decade, the Cannery Workers Committee received some form of validation by gaining compensation for the cannery workers they so desperately tried to defend.

In places like San Jose, the CWC continued to be an entity worth reckoning with. For instance, in 1978 the CWC, in an effort to regain union control against the Teamsters, ran a multiethnic slate, including one woman, for office. The CWC message was clear, as demonstrated in their slogan, “Vote for Change,” calling attention to the Teamsters shortcomings to truly represent cannery workers. Similar to earlier demands of Sacramento CWC, the San Jose CWC “sought translations of the union contract, bilingual meetings, and an end to ‘special assessments,’ better health and safety plants, worker input into contract negotiation, and the education of cannery

¹³⁷ Quoted in, “Promotion Decree: Another Issue Stirs in Strike,” *The Sacramento Bee*, 27 July 1976.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

workers regarding their contractual rights and grievance procedures.”¹³⁹ Their campaign resonated with many workers and in the end they were able to gain six of the ten office seats. The CWC expanded their vision for change to their communities when they teamed up with the San Jose Catholic Church’s Campaign for Human Development in September of that year. The Church provided institutional support for the opening of the Cannery Workers Service Center that “offered bilingual classes in shop-steward training, produced a newsletter, and provided legal counseling and referrals to social services.”¹⁴⁰ Perhaps, though, one of the biggest achievements of this partnership was that they were finally able to get the canneries to provide contracts in Spanish—a battle that lasted two years. The aforementioned victories demonstrate that CWC was making greater inroads in their plight for worker rights and finally attaining equal representation for all workers.

CONCLUSION

Despite the numerous victories, the Cannery Workers Committee disbanded for reasons that remain unclear. Perhaps it was due to leadership exhaustion and the failure to replenish it with new energy. Nevertheless, by the late 1970s Sacramento’s CWC began to fizzle out and by the early 1980s seemed to have disappeared without much of a trace. Reyes believed that the CWC came to an end because it was infiltrated. He stated that the

Government came in after their investigation and they came up with that they called a Consent Decree. They rammed it through the

¹³⁹ Zavella, *Women’s Work & Chicano Families*, 68.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 69.

Federal Courts in San Francisco. We were double-crossed by some of the attorneys that we had hired to represent us. At one point, we were trying to kick them out.¹⁴¹

Reyes thought that the long list of government agencies that were supposed to aid cannery workers, like the Employment Opportunity Commission, Human Relations Commission, and the Fair Employment Practices Commission, had all conspired with the lawyers to settle with a Consent Decree that cheated workers of their rights. Based on what is admittedly an incomplete record, Reyes seemed to have been disappointed with himself—as if he had somehow let his fellow co-workers and organizers down.

Reyes's involvement in cannery unionization ultimately “destroyed” his family life and left him in economic ruin. He noted that, “I never made any money in organizing. I did it because I wanted to do it. But I paid a price. The price was that I lost my job in 1972. They kicked me out.”¹⁴² Years later, in an interview with Rosana Madrid in 1983 at his home, he broke down at one point and sobbed when he sadly pointed to his surroundings, “If I took you through this house you would understand half of my story. This house is just falling apart.”¹⁴³ To make matters worse, his wife left him in 1973 because he was overly committed to organizing and spent very little time at home. Eventually the pressure was too much to bear for his family. He explained, “We never got together again, you know. It was something that changed

¹⁴¹ Reyes, interview by Rosana Madrid, 5 December 1983, 21.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

our whole lives. She never could understand why I was in it.”¹⁴⁴ Moreover, Reyes commented, “The end result of my work is that I have been blacklisted” and therefore could not secure employment.¹⁴⁵ For Reyes the ultimate downfall of his life was symbolized by the ruins of his home. Things got so bad that the housing authority intervened because he had a gaping hole in his roof for fifteen months. Unfortunately, he did not have the financial means to fix the roofing problem. Like many activists, Reyes’s life story reflects the high costs paid by many civil rights leaders.

The following chapter, “Radical Organizing,” follows up on this vision for self-determination for the Chicano people by “any means necessary” by exploring another local case study of Chicano militants’ activism—as shown in the takeover of an abandoned government army communications outpost nine miles west of Davis, just northwest of Sacramento, for the formation of the first Chicano/Native American college in California. Deganawidah Quetzalcoatl University (hereafter referred to as DQ-U) was founded in 1971. It offers a change of pace in the consideration of how the concept of identity was first negotiated in the barrio and follows it out of its geographic-specificity into the lived experiences of Chicano and Native American militant activists in the broader Sacramento region. The chapter details the efforts of college students, professors, and community members involved in the takeover of an abandoned Army outpost. It continues with the theme of community during the turbulent 1960s where youth experienced explosive identity politics. To date, there is no such era to surpass the civil unrest experienced in that period.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

CHAPTER FOUR:

CHICANO AND NATIVE AMERICAN STUDENT RADICAL ORGANIZING



Image 21: “Think Indian Sign” placed at entrance of former Communications Army Depot. *Third World News*, 11-9-1970. (Courtesy of Arturo J. Apodaca, personal collection.)

The twenty five Indians who scaled the fences before dawn yesterday morning to occupy the Army communications site west of Davis have been joined, all during yesterday and during the rains last night, by fifty more from San Francisco, Sacramento, Pit River Santa Cruz, and elsewhere, more people are said to be on their way, some militants from as far as Minneapolis, tents have been put up, supplies flow regularly from town, the rains are coming down, and the occupation force vows to turn the affair into one establish a college for ethnic studies on the Army communications site west of Davis.¹

This account, published in *The Davis Enterprise*, a local newspaper, appeared on November 3, 1970 when Native American students occupied an abandoned army communications depot (just northwest of Sacramento) in hopes of establishing the first

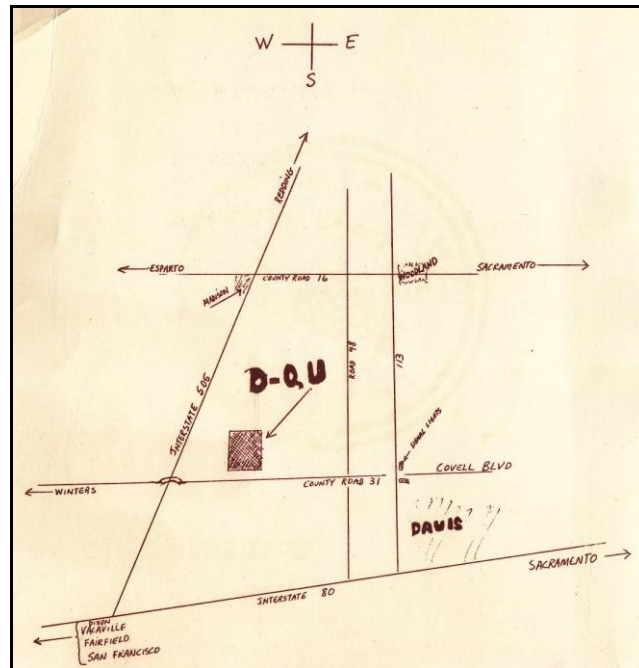
¹ “Funding Key Issue in D-Q U and HEW Fight,” *Davis Enterprise*, 4 November 1970.

Native American and Chicano community college.² The plan was carefully orchestrated by Native American and Chicana/o faculty, staff, students, and community members after the University of California at Davis (UCD) was awarded the site by the United States Department of Health, Education and Welfare. What ensued shortly thereafter was the formation of a Native American and Chicano coalition to hold legal rights to the land and to establish an accredited community college. In the end, their efforts paid off when they successfully founded the first and only Native American and Chicano college in the United States—the Deganawidah Quetzalcoatl University, which soon became known simply as DQ-U.³

² In this chapter I use the terms “Native American” and “Indian” interchangeably as it was used to self-identify by this ethnic group and my media outlets at the time. I use the term “Indigenous” to refer to the original descendents of North, Central, and South Americans before European contact.

³ “Deganawedah [spelling differs] was held in high respect by members of the Iroquois League because he was the one that the Creator spoke to in a vision.” The Iroquois League [consisting of five tribes: the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca], was formed to bring peace among the five tribes and end decades of warfare. Prior to this, it was war custom to incapacitate enemy warriors; in turn, it was the responsibility of tribal members to seek revenge through the killing of a member of the offending tribe. This had resulted in thousands of deaths and some tribes were nearly wiped out by warfare. According to legend, “while in a trance, Deganawedah received a vision from the Creator in which he was given instructions on how to end the blood feud: from the five tribes into a league, each with equal representation. Although each tribe belonged to the league and had equal voting representation, they did not surrender their autonomy or sovereignty.” Deganaweda, then, was able to establish peace and harmony among the Iroquois people and one honorary seat was set aside for him. Information taken from: Troy R. Johnson, *Red Power: The Native American Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2007): 70.

According to Aztec legend, Quetzalcoatl—a tall, bearded, white god also known as the feathered serpent or Kukulcan to the Mayas—had gained prominence several centuries earlier, during the Toltec rule. Quetzalcoatl had left the Tenochtitlán valley (now Mexico City) when the Toltec empire had demised, promising to return to rule once again. So when Hernán Cortes—Spanish conqueror and ultimately responsible for the downfall of the Aztec empire—appeared and seemingly fit the description in 1519 the Natives believed Cortes to be Quetzalcoatl incarnated, returning from the east intent on bringing back the good, moral, and just life. Once Cortes discovered this confusion, he exploited it by claiming to be the feathered serpent ready to take back his rule. This led to an eventual Spanish occupation in 1521. Information taken from: James Diego Vigil, *From Indians to Chicanos: The Dynamics of Mexican American Culture* (Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland Press, Inc., 1980): 42-43.



Map 4: DQ-U Map, D-Q University Catalog, 1973-1974 (April 14, 1973): back of front cover page. (Courtesy of Arturo J. Apodaca personal collection.)

This chapter explores the ways in which Native Americans and Chicanas/os came together, as a strikingly new kind of community, across racial and ethnic lines to build an institution of higher learning that would enable them to have control over their present and future lives and ultimately that of their respective communities. The chapter demonstrates how the struggle to establish and maintain DQ-U, in the Civil Rights era, enabled Chicanas/os, in particular, to reaffirm their indigenous identity within the context of the Chicano Movement. It also demonstrates how local Native Americans and Chicanas/os tried to develop a new kind of politics by forming a cross-ethnic and cross-racial coalition based on a shared history of Euro-American oppression and conquest, underscoring the uniqueness of the collective group, as most ethnic/racial groups in the Civil Rights Movement organized generally as a single race

or ethnic group. In this instance, Native Americans and Chicanas/os challenged notions of racial separatism by emphasizing their similarities rather than differences and came together by uniting forces in an attempt to build an educational institution designed to meet rather than hinder the exploration and development of their individual and newly forged collective identities and cultures. Despite the significance of working across racial, ethnic, and ideological lines, however, ultimately DQ-U could not resolve the internal discords over identity politics, leading to the eventual fracturing of the fragile coalition formed by Chicano and Indian students in the ongoing fight for self-determination and educational rights. Nevertheless, the short-lived DQ-U experiment represents an important moment in Chicana/o history of cross-ethnic and cross-racial coalition building.

The chapter begins by tracing the historical experiences of Native Americans in the educational system in the United States by examining their treatment at one of the most notorious places of cultural genocide, boarding schools. It then explores how Native Americans used that history of colonization and conquest as a tool to organize a larger agenda, including the reclamation of stolen lands, during the Civil Rights Movement. Next the chapter outlines the historical experiences of Chicanas/os in the public schools and within the educational system more broadly, demonstrating how and why, in the 1960s and 1970s, they worked to build institutions that met what they argued were their particular cultural, linguistic, historical, political, and educational needs. It reveals how Chicanas/os also drew upon their experiences of oppression to actively seek change in their communities. The chapter then maps out how and why

Native Americans and Chicanos came together to achieve their educational goals for this brief moment in time. It explores the uneven and often contradictory process that unfolded when Chicanos began to make claims to be “indigenous” and then used that claim to explore new lines of collective identity and community. Lastly, the chapter explores how and why their goals for DQ-U fell apart, demonstrating that changing conceptions of identity politics, internal discord, and limited federal funding worked to unravel the fabric they once called community.

RED POWER: THE AMERICAN INDIAN MOVEMENT

After centuries of war, conquest, and colonization imposed by Europeans and Euro-American colonists, Native Americans faced new opponents in the nineteenth century: missionary reformers who sought to “Americanize” or assimilate the “heathen” Indians. One way in which they did this was through the removal of Indian children from their traditional environments and their families, resulting in the near obliteration of their cultural heritage and the imposition of white middle-class American values.⁴ In his work on American Indian boarding schools, David Wallace Adams notes that the benevolent idea to “civilize” Indians in the nineteenth century emerged from a series of assumptions commonly held by whites about Indians. The widespread belief in Native American inferiority “served as a legitimizing rationale for the hegemonic relationship that had come to characterize Indian-white relations and served as a compelling justification for dispossessing Indians of their land.”⁵ The

⁴ Robert A. Trennert, Jr., *The Phoenix Indian School: Forced Assimilation in Arizona, 1895-1935* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press): xi.

⁵ David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas: 1995): 12.

process of this conversion from “savage to civilized” required many Native American families to pay the ultimate painful price of having their children removed from them and sent to faraway Indian or boarding schools.⁶ It is important to note, however, that not all tribal groups had to suffer this given that some tribes had not yet been “identified” by the United States government, nor did all tribes live on reservations where the majority of these students were drawn.

But reformers not only wanted to civilize Indians, they wanted to acculturate them to American life and institutions. The first priority was to provide the Indian child with the rudiments of an academic education, including the ability to read, write, and speak the English language at the expense of Native traditions of oral testimony, storytelling, and other rituals. Reformers reasoned, “This language, which is good enough for a white and a black man, ought to be good enough for the red man.”⁷ According to Michael C. Coleman’s study on Indian education, the concept of boarding schools was influenced by Protestant missionary efforts whose “goal remained the extirpation of tribal cultures and the transformation of Indian children into near-copies of white children.”⁸

The boarding school experience and the stripping of Native American cultures, though complex and varied across time and space, eventually became one of the key points of protest and central rallying cry for indigenous activists—such as the

⁶ Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 19.

⁷ Quoted in, *Ibid.*, 21.

⁸ Michael C. Coleman, *American Indian Children at School, 1950-1930* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1993): 40.

American Indian Movement (AIM)—in the 1960s seeking self-determination. In that decade, American Indian activists launched a series of systematic protests to claim their rights and to resist continued injustices faced by their community for hundreds of years. For instance, “[i]n 1964, the National Indian Council led hundreds in the fish-ins in Washington State that resulted in massive arrests, violence, and litigation.”⁹

Four years later, George Mitchell, Clyde Bellecourt, and Dennis Banks—all Ojibwas—founded AIM in Minneapolis, Minnesota to protest police brutality—another common point of protest in the Civil Rights era. With *Red* as its rallying color, much like the colors Black and Brown served as rallying banners for African Americans and Chicanos, respectively, AIM’s use of direct action attracted young people in particular. AIM’s appeal spread quickly in locales where Native Americans constituted in significant numbers and soon more than forty chapters flourished in the United States and Canada. Movement leaders soon connected with reservation-based elders and spiritual leaders to assure that Native traditions continued to be respected and preserved—another one of AIM’s missions.¹⁰

By politicizing youth en masse, the American Indian Movement took shape in ways the Native American communities had never experienced. For instance, in November 1972, hundreds of Native Americans, representing different Indian nations,

⁹ Rudolph O. De La Garza, Z. Anthony Kruszewski, and Tomás A. Arciniega, *Chicanos and Native Americans: The Territorial Minorities* (Englewood, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1971): 3.

¹⁰ Donald L. Fixio, “Witness to Change: Fifty Years of Indian Activism and Tribal Politics” in Daniel M. Cobb and Loretta Fowler, eds., *Beyond Red Power: American Indian Politics and Activism since 1900* (Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, 2007): 5. For American Indian Movement also see: Kenneth S. Stern, *Loud Hawk: The United States versus the American Indian Movement* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994); Ward Churchill, *Agents of Repression the FBI’s Secret Wars against the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement* (Boston: South End Press, 1990); Rex Weyler, *Blood of the Land: The Government* (New York: Everest House, 1982).

from across the country gathered at Washington D.C. to discuss deficiencies in Indian policy. While there, they took over the Bureau of Indian Affairs and refused to move until the U.S. government met all their demands. Clearly seeking to draw public attention to the centuries of abuse of power and neglect, Native Americans sought to forcefully make the United States accountable for its actions. A few months later, in February 1973, American Indian Movement members captured Wounded Knee South Dakota, “the site of the 1890 massacre of hundreds of Sioux, and held the residents captive to insure that government officials recognize the depth of their anger and deal in good faith with their demands.”¹¹ The time had come, Native Americans argued, for the U.S. to come to terms with their history of colonization, genocide, imperialism, and forceful assimilation.

Lastly, in relation to the previous two events, in California, a group of Native Americans took over Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay and held it from November 1969 to June 1971.¹² The group calling itself Indians of All Tribes (IAT) hoped to establish a Center for Native American Studies and cultural centers and museums on the island. IAT released a statement upon its occupation requesting “to purchase said Alcatraz for \$24 in glass beads and red cloth, a precedent set by the white man’s purchase of a similar island about 300 years ago.”¹³ Making direct correlation with the purchase of Manhattan Island by the Dutch during the colonial era, they demanded

¹¹ De la Garza, Kruszewski, and Arciniega, *Chicanos and Native Americans*, 3.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Quoted in, Larry R. Salomon, *Roots of Justice: Stories of Organizing in Communities of Color* (Berkeley: Chardon Press, 1998): 110.

justice. Mad Bear Anderson, a leader of the Alcatraz takeover, declared “The only people who have a right to live on Alcatraz are the Indians and the Chicanos.”¹⁴ In Anderson’s view, only Chicanos and Native Americans, who experienced conquest and colonization at the hands of European powers, could rightfully claim the land.¹⁵ It appears that, for Anderson, “Chicanos” were detached from the history of colonization during both the Spanish and Mexican period, but not all Native American activists viewed it in the same light. In the next five years, in at least sixty separate episodes, American Indians occupied government lands and buildings in a largely symbolic effort to regain lost lands. Among these was the occupation of the army communications depot for the establishment of DQ-U, which occurred simultaneously with the takeover of Alcatraz.¹⁶ IAT, like many organizations of the Civil Rights Movement eventually fractured, for reasons that remain unclear, though some blame internal discord. As will be made clear later in this chapter, disagreements over whether Chicanos constituted an indigenous group would emerge. Although many

¹⁴ Quoted in De la Garza, Kruszewski, and Arciniega, *Chicanos and Native Americans*, 4.

¹⁵ Eight years earlier (1964), Native Americans had tried to reclaim Alcatraz. A Lakota woman, Belvia Cottier, along with six Sioux men, used the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868, which stated that unused federal lands could be reclaimed by Indian people. The takeover only lasted four hours, but one of the Sioux men, Richard McKenzie, pursued the claim for title to the island through the federal court system. The occupiers, citing the 1946 Indians Claims Commission which yielded 65 million net acres from California Indians at 47 cents an acre, offered to purchase the land for the same prize. The original 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty could only reclaim land adjacent to the Great Sioux Reservation in South Dakota. Therefore, it would be impossible to stretch any interpretation to include land in California. Hence, McKenzie’s law suit was ultimately dismissed. Information taken from: Johnson, *Red Power*, 39 and Salomon, *Roots of Justice*, 109.

¹⁶ Salomon, *Roots of Justice*, 115. For more information on Alcatraz also see: Paul Chaat Smith and Robert Allen Warrior, *Like a Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee* (New York: The New Press, 1996); Troy R. Johnson, *The Occupation of Alcatraz Island: Indian Self-Determination and the Rise of Indian Activism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996).

Chicano activists made this claim without giving it much thought, they still faced the vexing question of how to come to terms with the troublesome legacy of colonization of the Western Hemisphere. The notion that Chicanos had indigenous ties to the land would be questioned to the very end.

BROWN POWER: THE FORGING OF CHICANA/O IDENTITY POLITICS

Like their Native American counterparts, but not as severe, the experiences of Mexicans in the United States were shadowed with painful attempts to strip them of their cultural heritage through systematic Americanization efforts. Historian George J. Sánchez notes that, after World War I, with the passage of the Home Teacher Act in 1917 and the enactment of the home teacher program—a program taught by single, middle-class, Anglo women—reformers singled out Mexican women, believing they were the principle transmitters of culture. Americanization advocates, he argues, “were primarily interested in the contribution Mexican women could make in transforming their families’ habits from those of a rural, pre-industrial lifestyle to an industrial, capitalist one.”¹⁷ As one such reformer put it, “The children of these foreigners are the advantages to America, not the naturalized foreigners. These are never 100% Americans, but the second generation may be.”¹⁸ Indeed, by the 1920s the Americanization campaign had formally moved into the schools and community centers hoping to reach both the young and old. Mexicans and Mexican American children in particular were taught that the Spanish language presented a barrier to

¹⁷ George J. Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993): 99.

¹⁸ Quoted in, *Ibid.*, 98.

social advancement in American society. They were also told that Mexican culture was “malleable,” undesirable, and also counter to industrialization and modern society. The Americanization efforts were never intended to create equality among the races. Quite the contrary, Mexicans were to continue to serve as manual laborers, loyal American residents, and grateful and respectful foreigners.¹⁹

It was historical moments or episodes of Americanization efforts such as these that would later, in the 1960s, propel young Chicanas and Chicanos to take matters into their own hands. In that decade, young Chicanas/o activists significantly changed their political tactics to obtain civil and human rights. Rather than attempting to claim citizenship by claiming whiteness and pursuing various strategies of cultural assimilation and political integration, they consciously explored new senses of a non-white identity to bring attention to their plight as second-class citizens and in doing so, aligned themselves with other racially oppressed groups in the United States.²⁰ This did not mean, however, that the Chicana/o Movement did not benefit or build on the many contributions and successes of their politically active predecessors. In fact, the prior generation was instrumental in laying the foundation for political activism.²¹

All the while, some Chicano scholars began to adopt the internal colonialism model as the most effective lens through which to view and understand the oppressed

¹⁹ Ibid., 106-107.

²⁰ Ignacio M. García, *Chicanismo: The Forging of a Militant Ethos among Mexican Americans* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1998): 7-8.

²¹ García, *Mexican Americans*, 299.

conditions of the Chicano community. Tomás Almaguer was among the first Chicano scholars to pioneer this notion in an article titled “Toward the Study of Chicano Colonialism” in 1971.²² In it, he claimed:

[T]he very organization and structure of the United States society have blocked Chicano mobility. The important distinction to be made here is that discrimination and racism have not been the cause of marginality as much as they have served as the *justification* [italicized in original text] for exploitation and racial domination of Third World people.²³

Building on Robert Blauner’s definition of internal colonialism, Almaguer argued that Chicano’s relationship to white society was an internal colonial one, which came about by a classic colonial conquest, the Mexican-American War of 1846.²⁴

Understanding the Chicano community through the internal colonial model helped explain not only their oppressed condition, but also placed them alongside Native Americans and other colonized peoples.

The Chicano Movement was not only a struggle over identity politics and the reaffirmation of Mexican culture and heritage but also about seeking different—often times more radical and based on direct action—political measures to assure civil rights

²² Tomás Almaguer, “Towards the Study of Chicano Colonialism” *Aztlán* vol 2., no. 1 (1971): 8. Also see: Mario Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest: A Theory of Racial Inequality* (Norte Dame, Ind.: University of Norte Dame Press, 1979); Tomás Almaguer, “Historical Notes on Chicano Oppression: The Dialectics of Racial and Class Domination in the North America,” *Aztlán* vol. 5, no. 1 (1974); and Tomás Almaguer, “Ideological Distortions in Recent Chicano Historiography: The Internal Model and Chicano Historical Interpretation,” *Aztlán* vol. 18, no. 1 (1987).

²³ Robert Blauner argued that “the establishment of domination over a geographically external political unit, most often inhabited by people of a different race and culture, where this domination is political and economic, and the colony exists subordinated to and dependent upon the mother colony.” Quoted in: Almaguer, “Towards the Study of Chicano Colonialism,” 9.

²⁴ Almaguer, “Towards the Study of Chicano Colonialism,” 11.

for their community.²⁵ Chicano activists pushed the envelope in more ways than one by espousing a separatist agenda and by making demands as a racially oppressed group. Although many Mexican Americans refused to self-identify as Chicana/o—let alone endorse a separatist and militant political actions—even they had to recognize that the Chicano generation had managed to get federal and state agencies to acknowledge the socio-economic disparities ethnic Mexicans faced in the United States. Finally in 1971, the U.S. District Court ruled the *Cisneros* case that “Mexican Americans constituted an identifiable ethnic minority group entitled to special federal assistance.”²⁶ An identity as *brown* and not white was central to Chicano Movement activists because it represented the actual experiences of the great majority of the Mexican-origin population of the United States.²⁷

The insistence in defining a Mexican identity as brown also lent itself to consideration and adoption by some of an increasingly strong affiliation with the indigenous components of their historical heritage. Indeed, some Chicanas and Chicanos embraced their brownness and forged a new understanding of themselves as indigenous peoples. By insisting that unlike their Spanish colonizers phenotype, they were esthetically brown and therefore this dominant trait signified that European attempts to dominate and eliminate their indigenous ancestry went unsuccessful. Joaquín D. Galván, a high school observer/participant in the founding of DQ-U,

²⁵ García, *Chicanismo*, 15.

²⁶ Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 187.

²⁷ Ian F. Haney López, *Racism on Trial: The Chicano Fight for Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003): 206.

explained in a recent oral interview that at that time Chicanos strongly identified with their indigenous ancestry. He explained,

After [1964] and 65 people started getting a consciousness of “Who am I?” They started going back to traditions. The Native people will go back to the reservation or they started talking to the elders. They were starting to rediscover their *Indianess*. The Mexicanos, the Chicanos, also were discovering their *Indianess* from Mexico. The information of Aztlán and the information of the Americas—it’s a continent it’s not a country. This was all an awakening time. That’s why DQ-U was able to happen because everybody realized we all had indigenous roots.²⁸

For Galván, then, *mexicano* was one and the same as being Indian. Thus, from his point of view it was a logical, and perhaps even necessary, step to organize alongside Native Americans because they were rightful descendents of the Americas and therefore one people. Galván’s reference to Aztlán had already been popularized by Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales of Denver’s Crusade for Justice in 1968. Historian Lorena Oropeza, in her work on Chicano Vietnam War protest, explains that there was a need to embrace the concept of Aztlán as their true homeland because it allowed Chicanos to connect and claim rights to the American Southwest.²⁹ The issue over the territorial boundaries of Aztlán and the conquests that took place within the confines of this region were conveniently ignored by Corky Gonzales and his followers because it is difficult to claim you are oppressed when your ancestry also links you to the oppressor. This is not to make less of the second-class status Chicanos faced in the United States, quite the contrary. The point here is to recognize that the history of Chicanos is quite muddled and rather than make sense of it at the time, many chose to

²⁸ Joaquín D. Galván, interview by author, 12 April 2010, Davis, California, audio recording.

²⁹ Oropeza, *Raza Si! Guerra No!*, 190.

overlook it—a strategy that obviously added to the difficulties in building Chicano and Native American coalitions.

The concept of Aztlán—which according to a legend invoked by young Chicano militants was the ancestral homeland of the Aztecs, a place these activist argued territory in the U.S. Southwest—further advanced the argument that Chicanos were indigenous people with deep ancestral ties to the land. Nevertheless, few people in the United States were familiar with the concept of Aztlán until the Chicano Movement. In the 1960s Chicano activists popularized the notion of Aztlán and proclaimed it a central symbol of Chicano nationalist ideology. According to Mario Barrera, “the rediscovery of Aztlán can be traced to a specific event, the Chicano National Liberation Youth Conference that took place in Denver in March 1969.” There, the political activist Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales announced his vision in El Plan De Aztlán which argued that nationalism was the key to organizing Chicanos against racism and exploitation. In many ways, the Plan called for Chicanos to be self-determined by gaining full social, economic, educational, and political control of their communities.³⁰ Barrera rightfully points out that the deliberate reference to indigenous roots indicates that the Chicano heritage symbolically constructed at the time of the Denver conference marked a striking departure from traditional Mexican American political thought of the previous generation.³¹

³⁰ Mario Barrera, *Beyond Aztlán: Ethnic Autonomy in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Praeger, 1988): 3.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 38.

Furthermore, the slogan commonly espoused during the Chicano Movement, “brown is beautiful,” drew upon the notion of *mestizaje*—the notion of a mixed Spanish and indigenous heritage—that had long been circulated in Mexico as the essence of Mexican national identity. Doubtless too, the slogan borrowed from or was influenced by the contemporary “black is beautiful” catchphrase but it also carried with it a specific ethnic identifier. Perhaps no other public Mexican figure was as successful in popularizing the idea of *mestizaje* as José Vasconcelos. In the first part on the twentieth century, he proposed that Mexicans view themselves as *la raza cósmica* (the cosmic race). In his work on the use of *mestizaje* in Chicano culture the cultural theorist Rafael Pérez-Torres notes that “the discourse of ‘*la raza cósmica*’ was an attempt in post-revolutionary Mexico to convey a pride in and a response to the *mestizo* heritage of a new national identity serving a new national government.”³² In the United States, the concept of *mestizaje* has varied significantly because the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was supposed to grant Mexicans the same rights as whites, yet de facto and de jure segregation provided an uneven process of discrimination over time and space. Thus, the *mestizo* body has always had an ambiguous and often conflicting role in U.S.-race relations.³³

To further complicate the evolution of Chicano identity politics, the term “Chicano” was seized upon by militants, especially the youth, during the late 1960s to express their disdain with their “hyphenated” status as Mexican-Americans and to

³² Rafael Pérez-Torres, *Mestizaje: Critical Uses of Race in Chicano Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006): 6. Also see for more information on *mestizaje*: José Vasconcelos, *La Raza Cósmica* (Mexico D.F.: Editorial Porrúa, 2001).

³³ *Ibid.*, 11.

emphasize their indigenous origins as mestizos. This notion was brought forth in a recent oral interview with Sacramento Chicano Movement activist, Senón M. Valádez, who rejected the “hyphenated” assignation and instead adopted a self-imposed identity as a *Chicano*. He explained,

Chicano took off as wildfire...Up until then we had always taken on names that somebody else was giving us or we were naming ourselves but in relationship or in context to something else. We were Americans of Mexican descent, Latinos, Spanish of Mexican descent, Spanish, or Mexican-American. Dash. Meaning, *no eres ni esto, ni lo otro eres* [you are neither this, nor that]. Somehow you are in the center. To be a Mexican-American says you are something in-between—you are part Mexican and part American. What kind of identity is that?...Chicano is what we call ourselves it's not what somebody else calls us. Regardless of whether people like it or not, who you are is who you define yourself to be.³⁴

In Valádez's view, choosing one's identity was a powerful undertaking. The rejection of a Mexican-American identity was also, in part, a denunciation of the previous generation whom in the eyes of Chicano activists had conformed and assimilated to the status-quo. In many ways, then, a Chicano identity embraced a coming of political consciousness—an altogether new identity based on their own lived experiences. Although it is important to note that many in the Mexican-American community rejected the term and refused to be associated with it, its use quickly spread.³⁵

Adopting a new Chicano identity also meant, at the time, forging a new politics based on a rejection of Anglo culture and society. Political scientist Benjamín Márquez, in his work on Mexican American political identities, notes that “Mexican-

³⁴ Senón M. Valádez, interview by author, 15 June 2010, Sacramento, California, audio recording.

³⁵ Vigil, *From Indians to Chicanos*, 202.

American identity politics is driven by judgments made in three interlocking cultural and sociopolitical touchstones: racial discrimination, economic disadvantage, and cultural hegemony.³⁶ During the 1960s and 1970s, some Chicano Movement organizations came to reject the entire U.S. social and institutional premises that had relegated ethnic Mexicans to a subordinate status and instead called for complete separation.³⁷ Following the logic of some black militants who had come to similar conclusions by 1965, for some Chicana/o activists, the dominant society could no longer be trusted in assuring the common welfare of their community. If that meant that the community needed to strike out by separatist means to develop parallel institutions and practices, then so be it.

The Chicano Movement quickly escalated to militancy and physical confrontations after a series of organized radical protests began to surface across the Southwest in an effort to bring light to issues faced by different elements of the Chicana/o community in the Southwest and elsewhere in the country. For example, in 1969, Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales’s Crusade for Justice provided social services to Denver Chicanos. Much like the Black Panthers of the contemporary Black Power movement, members of the Crusade for Justice announced their willingness to defend, with force if necessary, the interest of the Chicano community against perceived

³⁶ Benjamín Márquez, *Constructing Identities in Mexican-American Political Organizations: Choosing Issues, Taking Sides* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003): 14.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

injustices perpetrated by Denver police and other authorities.³⁸ Likewise in New Mexico, Reies López Tijerina protested the loss of lands given to early Spanish and Mexican settlers by the Spain and later Mexican government and guaranteed by the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Tijerina led his followers on the Tierra Amarilla “Courthouse Raid” where they reclaimed rights to the land and took down the United States flag and replaced it with a Mexican one.³⁹ In 1970 in Los Angeles, organizers of the Chicano Moratorium led a protest against the Vietnam War, which resulted in confrontation with the Los Angeles Police Department, multiple arrests of peaceful demonstrators, and the death of The Los Angeles Times correspondent, Rubén Salazar, who was cut down by a Sheriff’s Department teargas projectile.⁴⁰ Also, in East Los Angeles during a single week in March 1968, ten thousand Chicana/o students took to the streets to protest poor educational conditions in their community in what was known as the “Blow Outs.” The demonstrations resulted in an increased police presence, patrol of the schools, and arrest of protesters.⁴¹ Chicanos, like Black Power activists, used direct action for social change.⁴²

³⁸ For information on Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales see: Ernesto B. Vigil, *The Crusade for Justice the Government’s War on Dissent* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1999).

³⁹ Reies López Tijerina founded the Alianza Federal de Mercedes, later known as the Alianza Federal de Pueblos Libres, in northern New Mexico in 1963. In its papers of incorporation, the Alianza declares its purpose: “To organize and acquaint the Heirs of all the Spanish Land Grants covered by the Guadalupe Hidalgo Treaty...[t]hus providing unity of purpose and securing for the Heirs of Spanish Land Grants the highest advantages as provided by the afore-said Treaty of Constitutions (of the United States and State of Mexico).” In the process of securing rights to land grants, the Alianza has formed land grant corporations, engaged in extended law-suits, and engaged in electoral politics. Information taken from: Mario Barrera, *Beyond Aztlan: Ethnic Autonomy in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Praeger, 1988): 35.

⁴⁰ De La Garza, Kruszewski, and Arciniega, *Chicanos and Native Americans*, 2.

⁴¹ Haney López, *Racism on Trial*, 1.

Mexican American college students helped create a significant branch of the Chicano Movement by demanding equality and access to education in a new way through more militant political action. David G. Gutiérrez explains that as more and more Chicano particularly high school and college students gained access to education, they “began to express increasing dissatisfaction with discrimination, inferior education, and what they perceived as severely limited life opportunities.”⁴³ Chicana/o students attempted to grapple with these issues under the primary slogan “of the Community, for the Community.” In essence, they expressed the movement’s concern with self determination in the community and larger society.⁴⁴ Building from this basic premise, they demanded power to hire Chicana/o faculty, staff, and administration and ultimately to create an educational safe space wherein being a politicized Chicana/o would be encouraged and not reprimanded.⁴⁵

⁴² Ernesto Chávez, “*Mi Raza Primero!*” *Nationalism, Identity, and Insurgency in the Chicano Movement in Los Angeles, 1966-1978* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002): 42.

⁴³ David G. Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995): 183-184.

⁴⁴ Teresa L. Amott and Julie A. Matthawel, *Race, Gender, and Work: A Multicultural Economic History of Women in the United States* (Boston: South End Press, 1991): 83.

⁴⁵ For information on the Chicano Movement see: Rodolfo Acuña, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers: 1988); *El Plan de Santa Bárbara: A Chicano Plan for Higher Education* (Santa Barbara, CA: La Causa Publications, 1970); Armando Navarro, *Mexican American Youth Organization: Avant-Garde of the Chicano Movement in Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995); Carlos Muñoz, *Youth, Identity, Power: The Chicano Movement* (New York: Verso, 1989); Ian F. Haney López, *Racism on Trial: The Chicano Fight For Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Ernesto Chávez, “*Mi Raza Primero!*”: *Nationalism, Identity and Insurgency in the Chicano Movement in Los Angeles, 1966-1978* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); and Ignacio M. García, *Chicanismo: The Forging of a Militant Ethos among Mexican Americans* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1997); Lorena Oropeza and Dionne Espinoza, Eds., *Enriqueta Vásquez and the Chicano Movement: Writings from El Grito del Norte* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 2006); Lorena Oropeza, *Raza Si! Guerra No!: Chicano Protest and Patriotism During the Viet Nam War Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

Few could deny that the Chicana/o student movement activists played a key role in opening access to schools, colleges, and universities and in the process, helped forge a new era of political activism by raising public and government awareness of the chronic educational problems facing the Mexican American community. Chicana/o college students challenged the educational practices employed at all levels of education. For instance, at the Chicano Coordinating Council on Higher Education Conference in Santa Barbara, California in April 1969 Chicano students grappled with this central question: “How can the university contribute to the liberation of the Chicano community?” It was believed that “the most fundamental contribution it [the university] will make will be by producing knowledge applicable to the Chicano movement.” This, they argued, will “aid significantly in politically educating the Chicano community. That is, it will help measurably in creating and giving impetus to that historical consciousness which Chicanos must possess in order to successfully struggle as a people toward a new vision of Aztlán.”⁴⁶ These young students believed that measurable positive change for their community could only come about through access and control of higher educational institutions.

INTERSECTING HISTORIES: CHICANA/O AND NATIVE AMERICAN FORGING COALITIONS

Inspired by Native Americans’ actions at Alcatraz as well their own sense of land loss, Chicana/o activists clung steadfast to the notion of reclaiming stolen lands and territories. Perhaps the key was when Reies López Tijerina and his followers took

⁴⁶ *El Plan de Santa Bárbara*, 70.

over the Tierra Amarilla in “Courthouse Raid” where they reclaimed Mexican American rights to the land. The Brown Berets, a youthful paramilitary troupe designed to protect the Chicana/o community, also organized “La Caravana del la Reconquista” (The Reconquest Caravan) between October 1971 and August 1972 in reference to the efforts to reclaim lands conquered by the Spanish. The Berets proclaimed themselves a conquered people on their own land and explained:

We the Chicano people of the Southwest hereby declare ourselves a nation, and as a nation that has been the subject of a profit-making invasion. We are a nation with a land that has been temporarily occupied. And we are a nation with the ability to survive. We are a nation with great natural culturability [sic]. We are a nation who came from different ways, combining ourselves in one nation.⁴⁷

By pronouncing themselves rightful descendants of the land, the Berets called for the reclaiming of the Southwest and on August 30, 1972 they “invaded” Santa Catalina Island off the southern California coast. This invasion lasted until September 22 of that year under the alleged reason that the island, along with the other Channel Islands off the California shore, were not included in the territories ceded at the end of the Mexican American War.⁴⁸ While a bold and symbolic attempt, it was perhaps futile given that it went nowhere and had no lasting effect. Instances like these helped, at the very least, bring attention to how the U.S. government mishandled land grants. As farfetched as the Berets’ demands may seem in hindsight, without these more radical

⁴⁷ Quoted in, Chávez, *Mi Raza Primero!*, 56.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

tendencies the Chicano Movement would have blended into political activism of previous generations.⁴⁹

Chicanos and Native Americans did not only undergo a loss of ancestral lands and betrayal of Treaty rights by the U.S. government, they also shared experiences of conquest, colonization, and marginalization. These commonalities were outlined at a workshop, “Southwest Ethnic Groups: Sociopolitical Environment and Education,” held at the University of Texas at El Paso in late July of 1972.⁵⁰ The vast majority of participants at the workshop agreed that Chicanos and Native Americans were characterized by distinct conditions, shared by no other ethnic or racial group—referring to themselves as “territorial minorities.” In essence, they claimed indigenous rights to the lands they inhabited. They were careful, however, not to imply that Chicanos and Native Americans were alike, much less identical, in all respects. Rather, they recognized their differences over language, religion, and customs and their political status vis-à-vis the United States government.⁵¹

It does not appear that the question over the legacy of Spanish colonialism on indigenous peoples or under Mexican rule was raised at the Conference. The colonization of the Kingdom of New Mexico (then encompassing roughly the current states of New Mexico and Arizona) was begun in 1598; while Texas’s first Spanish

⁴⁹ For information on the Brown Berets see: Ernesto Chávez, “Birth of a New Symbol”: The Brown Berets’ Gendered Chicano National Imaginary,” in Joe Austin and Michael Nevin Willard, Eds., *Generations of Youth: Youth Cultures and History in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

⁵⁰ De la Garza, Kruszewski, and Arciniega, *Chicanos and Native Americans*, vii.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

settlements date from 1691 and Alta California began with the founding of San Diego in 1791. These settlements were, for all intents and purposes, completely isolated, in remote northern regions, difficult to get to, which made it nearly impossible for frequent communication, and all too often surrounded by hostile Indians. According to historian Ramón A. Gutiérrez, in his work on Spanish and Mexican colonization in the American Southwest, notes that what developed over the centuries were “distinct regional subcultures that were Iberian in form, but thoroughly syncretic in content due to prolonged contact with local indigenous cultures.”⁵² The identity of these colonizers was shaped, first and foremost, by their Christianity. Second, R. Gutiérrez explains, that Spaniards tended to highly identify with the Spanish regions from which they came, but that changed when they found themselves in the Southwest a minority among the indigenous populations—under these circumstances they began to self-identify as Spaniards or *españoles*. By differentiating themselves from the Indians, they also set in motion a hierarchical racial-social order that placed them at the top and full-blooded, neophytes at the bottom.⁵³ Given this legacy, then, one would imagine that Chicanos would have had to explain or at least address the history of conquest at the conference. Yet, it appears that this issue was not addressed at the Southwest Ethics Conference probably because it was not considered a germane question at the time, but it would be a question that would disturb Chicano and Native American relations in the years to come.

⁵² Ramón A. Gutiérrez, “Unraveling America’s Hispanic Past: Internal Stratification and Class Boundaries,” *Aztlán* Vo 17, No 1 (1987): 80.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 82.

One of the motives to claim indigenous ties to the land was for Chicanos to override the notion that they were recent or “illegal” immigrants.⁵⁴ Chicanos professed to be descendents of Aztlán and thus legitimized their indigenous connection to the land in spite of Euro-American attempts to make them think otherwise. Some Chicanos went as far as to have made claims to full indigenous ancestry, when this was may not have been the case, and by doing so completely denied their Spanish heritage. While a small number of Chicanos perhaps could make claims to full indigenous ancestry, at the time of the Chicano Movement, the vast majority of ethnic Mexicans were mestizos who came from central Mexico states such as Guanajuato, Jalisco, Mexico City, and Michoacan.⁵⁵ Although recent migration trends of Indigenous peoples from Oaxaca, Chiapas, and Puebla have made their way to the United States in significant number since the 1980s, for the most part, this remains a recent phenomenon linked to a global political economy of competitive markets, changing technology, and a managerial logic of labor control. These indigenous communities in the United States maintain their ancestral culture and language by forming a series of organizations across international borders.⁵⁶

To further complicate matters, as was explained in more detail in Chapter One, the issue of whether ethnics Mexicans constituted part of the “white” race added to

⁵⁴ Arturo J. Aldama, *Disrupting Savagism: Intersecting Chicana/o, Mexican Immigrant, and Native American Struggles of Self-Representation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001): 3.

⁵⁵ For sending migration from Mexico to the United States see: George J. Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1993): 38-43.

⁵⁶ Leon Fink, *The Maya of Morganton: Work and Community in the Nuevo New South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003): 3 and 76.

racial tensions between Native American and Chicanos; although again, this issue seemed to have been “overlooked” at the Southwest Ethics Conference. This charged issue had been a central theme in internal debates among Mexican and Mexican Americans ever since the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and was reflected in long-running disputes with various organs of the U.S. government over racial classification. As discussed previously, for example, Mexicans (both native and foreign born), for example, were included in the 1920 U.S. Federal manuscript census as white. However, in 1930, the U.S. Bureau of the Census differentiated them by setting up a Mexican race category. Since Mexicans have been officially classified both as white and nonwhite, their “race” category has been the most fluid especially in cases of anti-miscegenation. In practice however, historian Antonia I. Castañeda explains in her work on women of color in the American frontier, regardless of the official racial classification, intermarriage with Mexicans was socially frowned upon and in most cases the Anglo partner tended to be classified as “Mexican” by the American community regardless of their “actual” ethnic heritage.⁵⁷ To date, few theories about the social construction of race examine or account for these kinds of complexities. Nor does the issue of the *mestizaje* of the Mexican population form part

⁵⁷ For colonial and nineteenth-century California, including early studies in Chicano history see: Antonia I. Castañeda, “Gender, Race, and Culture: Spanish-Mexican Women in the Historiography of Frontier California,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women’s Studies* [a special issue on Chicanas] XI (1990), 8-20; Sarah Deutch, *No Separate Refuge: Culture, Class, and Gender on an Anglo-Hispanic Frontier in the American Southwest, 1880-1940* (New York: 1987); Miroslava Chávez-García, *Negotiating Conquest: Gender and Power in California, 1170s to 1880s* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2004).

of the larger literature on how “race” was constructed in nineteenth or twentieth century North American society.⁵⁸

Hence, the debate over the significance of *mestizaje* in Mexican American history has been in play for some time and it was not until the late 1960s that ethnic Mexicans were able to convince the U.S. federal government that they merited to be categorized as a distinct ethnic minority. The issue came to an early head in 1967 when President Johnson sent representatives of his administration to El Paso, Texas where the first-ever cabinet hearings on Mexican American affairs took place. One immediate result of the hearings was the establishment of the Southwest Council for Mexican Americans, “whose purpose was to pressure various federal agencies to include Mexican Americans and other Latinos in their minority-oriented initiatives.”⁵⁹ Thus, by the time of the founding of DQ-U, Chicanos had successfully begun to convince various agencies within the federal government that they merited consideration for assistance given to other ethnic “minorities,” like Blacks and Native Americans.

At the Southwest Ethics workshop, Chicano and Native American scholars delineated a series of shared experiences. They claimed that Chicanos were *mestizos*—of Spanish and indigenous descent—and therefore shared in the heritage and lineage of Native Americans. Second, both resisted Americanization efforts by sustaining and preserving their cultures. Both groups were highly critical of the role educational

⁵⁸ Antonia I. Castañeda, “Women of Color and the Rewriting of Western History: Discourse, Politics, and Decolonization of History” *Pacific Historical Review* (1992): 515.

⁵⁹ Hayes-Bautista, *La Nueva California*, 62.

institutions played in attempting to strip them of their “Mexican or Indian” identities, by sending Native American children to Indian boarding schools and Chicanos to remedial or Americanization programs. Another similarity between Chicanos and Native Americans was that both had “their lands and rights taken from them by Anglo-American conquerors, and suffered further humiliation of having this conquest justified on the basis of their own supposed cultural inferiority and decadence.”⁶⁰ This point was highlighted at the workshop:

The Chicano and Native American did not immigrate to this nation; on the contrary, they fought to protect their lands from Anglo invaders. They were defeated but they did not abandon their claims to the land nor did they forsake their cultural heritage. In effect, Anglo Americans imposed colonial rule upon the Native American and Chicano peoples.⁶¹

In essence, participants in the workshop had a sense of themselves as a colonized people and victims of attempted cultural genocide.⁶² Again, it appears that Chicanos and Native Americans overlooked the history of the Spanish and Mexican conquest at

⁶⁰ De la Garza, Kruszewski, and Arciniega, *Chicanos and Native Americans*, 7.

⁶¹ Cited in, *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶² The notion that Native Americans have been exposed to cultural genocide or cultural cleansing has been advanced by some scholars. For instance, Lindsay Glauner argues that “no longer can we remain indifferent and justify these acts of genocide by the United States government, its agencies, and its personnel against Native Americans as a result of colonization of the need to establish a prosperous union. Instead, the United States government, its agencies, and those involved with carrying out the measures designed to inflict genocidal acts against the Native American population must be held in violation of customary international law, well as conventional international law, as proscribed in the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.” Lindsay Glauner, “The Need for Accountability and Reparation: 1830-1970 the United States Government’s Role in the Promotion, Implementation, and Execution of the Crime of Genocide Against Native Americans,” *DePaul Law Review* 51 (Spring 2002). Also see: “Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide,” adopted by Resolution 260 (III) A of the United Nations General Assembly on 9 December 1948 and Anna Waters, “Indigenous Genocide: The United States of North America,” unpublished paper presented at the American Academy of Religion Conference at Atlanta, Georgia, 16 November 2003.

the Southwest Ethics Workshop, even though Spaniards took Native American lands and claimed “rights” to it by discovery.⁶³ For instance, in California, colonizers set relied on the enterprise of missions—built on Native American backs—to both solve the “Indian problem” and to guard the new Spanish crown territory from invading European powers. The main function of the mission was, of course, conversion of local Indian populations to Catholicism by force. When the missions were secularized in 1834, under Mexican rule, “the mission lands and cattle were distributed among the former Indian neophytes,” but titles were not guaranteed.⁶⁴ The last common denominator outlined at the workshop was that the United States had pledged, through a series of treaties, to protect the rights of Chicanos and Native Americans, though the government failed miserably in upholding them.

Additionally, left out of the political identity equation was the role of Mexican immigrants whose voices were not accounted for at the Southwest Ethics Conference. One is left to speculate about how Mexican immigrants would feel about being identified as indigenous. According to David E. Hayes-Bautista in his book on Latinos in California, immigrants rarely thought about what a “real” Latino would do and how to act. In his view, by and large, they “did not see themselves consciously as ‘Latinos,’

⁶³ For information on Spanish and Mexican conquest see: David Wyatt, *Five Fires: Race, Catastrophe, and the Shaping of California* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Robert F. Heizer and Alan F. Almquist, *The Other Californians: Prejudice and Discrimination Under Spain, Mexico, and the United States to 1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971); Douglas Monroy, *Thrown Among Strangers: The Making of Mexican Culture in Frontier California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Lisbeth Haas, *Conquest and Historical Identities in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1987).

⁶⁴ Heizer and Almquist, *The Other Californians*, 65.

much less a group with a political agenda.”⁶⁵ Hayes-Bautista’s sweeping claim is flawed, however. Certainly Mexican immigrants have always been aware of their identity as “Latinos” or “mexicanas/os,” but perhaps they did not ponder on it in the same way U.S.-born Chicanas/os did during the Movement. Mexican immigrants were keenly aware of their ethnic/racial positioning in the United States, but for them, taking time out of their already impacted day to ponder on their identity was by far not a priority. Their main concern was to provide for their families. Furthermore, they sought to replicate their sense of *querido México* in their barrios and extended communities, so their identity as Mexicans was all around them. This perceived difference between immigrants and their U.S.-born children provided impetus for generational conflict. Most Mexican immigrants, especially those who had spent a considerable part of their lives in Mexico, would be reluctant to adopt a Chicano identity, and perhaps an even fewer number would adopt an Indian one.

Nevertheless, by 1970, some Native Americans and Chicanos were convinced that a separate indigenous university was the only answer to meet the educational needs of their respective communities.⁶⁶ Native Americans were the first to establish

⁶⁵ David E. Bautista, *La Nueva California: Latinos in the Golden State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004): 53.

⁶⁶ Forbes, *Native American Higher Education*, 21. Thirty-five years after the founding of Native American colleges, there exists thirty-two colleges that traditionally or purposefully serve Native Americans. They include twenty-six tribally controlled colleges. Most of these are two-year institutions, and six offer bachelor degrees. They are Sinte Gleska University, Oglala Lakota College, Salish Kootenai College (all tribal), Haskell Indian Nations University (federal), Nazarene Indian Bible College, and American Indian College (both private). Virtually all of the Native American colleges and three-fourths of mainstream colleges with Native American programs are in the western half of the United States. Of the tribal colleges, two-thirds of them are in the northern plains states, mostly Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota. Cary Michael Carney, *Native American Higher Education in the United States* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1999): 145-146.

colleges for their own purpose. The Navajo Community College (1968) in Tsaile, Arizona, for example, modeled educational self-determination. The founding of other tribally controlled colleges began about a decade before the passage of the 1978 Tribally Controlled Community College Act, reflecting the interest generated by the Native Americans for such an institution.⁶⁷ The second tribally controlled college, Sinte Gleska University, in South Dakota, was founded in 1970, followed by D-Q University and Oglala Lakota College both in 1971. Cary Michael Carney in his work on Native American higher education notes that “this was the beginning of a surge of college openings.”⁶⁸

At the same time, Chicanos had also embarked in the founding of Mexican-oriented schools, most of which operated in the Southwest. For the most part, these schools were poorly funded and thus were set up to fail from the onset. For example, the Escuela Tlatelolco located in Denver, Colorado and Escuela Tonantzín in Santa Fe, Nuevo Mexico had short-lived existence. Both names emphasized an indigenous identity and thus a departure from Spanish ancestry as can be noted in the following passage, “The Escuela is named after Tonantzín, Our Mother, one of the main

⁶⁷ The Tribally Controlled Act established direct federal support to higher education institutions for Native Americans. The Act proceeded for the operation and improvement of tribally controlled community colleges to insure continued and expanded educational opportunities for Native American students. It provides direct support to the tribal colleges in the form of per-student operational funds. In order to qualify, tribal colleges needed to submit an operating philosophy and plan of operation designed that specifically attended to the needs of Indian students. Eligibility is determined based on a charter granted to the college by a recognized tribe, an Indian majority governing board, and an Indian majority student body. These factors would play a crucial role in the decades of DQ-U operation. Information taken from: Carney, *Native American Higher Education in the United States*, 108-109.

⁶⁸ Carney, *Native American Higher Education in the United States*, 109.

goddesses of the ancient Indians in Mexico.”⁶⁹ In the end, regardless of their efforts to eliminate or deny their Spanish heritage, most Chicanos could not fully deny it because the vast majority of the ethnic Mexican population continued to speak Spanish, practiced Catholicism, and enjoyed mariachi music and *corridos* played by European instruments.

Desperate to seek change to the poor education afforded to some Chicana/o students organizers believed, just as parents at the Washington Street School had, that founding their own schools to meet the needs of their students was the best way to assure educational success. Their needs, they argued, could be met through self-determination, preservation of their language, culture, and history. For instance, Escuela Tonanzín was founded, according to the organizers, for the following purposes:

It is for the benefit of the Chicano in Aztlán. La Escuela is being started as an alternative to the Gringo [white] schools, because Gringo schools are not made to educate Chicanos but only to educate and benefit the Gringo. This has been going on for too long—Basta ya [enough]! Now the Chicanos will educate their people, by the people and only by the Chicano.⁷⁰

Clearly, there existed a high level of distrust and frustration with mainstream educational institutions. Taking matters into their own hands, believed that at the Escuela Tonanzín Chicano children would not suffer educational neglect.

⁶⁹ “Escuela to Open in Santa Fe,” *El Grito Del Norte* (Las Vegas, New Mexico), June 1973. Jack Forbes Collection at Special Collections, University of California, Davis, Box F-25, Folder “*El Grito del Norte*.”

⁷⁰ “Escuela to Open in Santa Fe,” *El Grito Del Norte* (Las Vegas, New Mexico), June 1973.

Although the idea of creating a safe haven wherein Chicano children could learn in an environment in which they were not shamed or ridiculed was noble and ambitious, Chicano activists were not fully prepared to undertake such a challenging task of running a school. Frankly put, it is one thing to circulate theories about a utopian educational institution, and quite another to practice these ideals, let alone find the financial resources to sustain them. While it is critical for a student to learn about her/his history and to create a space wherein they could enrich their cultural heritage, these cannot replace core academic subjects such as literature, math, and science. The ideal educational curriculum would include methods of incorporating Chicano culture and history with core subjects. Few parents would sacrifice their child as a social experiment and undo or stall academic training at the expense of “culture.” Hence, culture should be used only as a tool to enrich and strengthen a positive self image and to empower students to further their education, not limit it.

Efforts to establish a Chicana/o community college were launched in March 10, 1971, when the Universidad de Aztlán in Del Rey, California was founded by a group of La Raza Studies professors from Fresno State University, students, and interested community organizations. The group sought more ambitious undertakings by forming El Colegio De La Tierra. El Colegio held candidate status with the Western Association of Schools and Colleges; the first graduating class eligible to receive the Associate of Arts Degree was in 1974. Its student population was relatively small, numbering 90 students all of whom are required to work at least 20 hours a

week in school-related programs such as tutoring and cultural art projects.⁷¹ Keeping with the goals outlined in El Plan de Santa Bárbara and El Plan de Aztlán, the school addressed the linguistic and cultural needs of Chicanos and was equally committed to outreach efforts directly in the Chicano community. The notion that the college and the community were one in the same is telling of the era in which these institutions came into existence because there was a real idealism that both could co-exist.

DQ-U IS BORN OUT OF PROTEST

The driving forces behind the founding of DQ-U stemmed from what local Native American and Chicano activists argued was a long history of poor educational services and cultural genocide.⁷² However, had it not been for the early efforts and planning of some Native American faculty the establishment of DQ-U would not have been possible. Indeed, Jack D. Forbes (of Powhatan/Delaware descent), while still a professor at San Fernando Valley State College, began to share his vision for a Pan-Indian university with others of similar political orientation. In November 21, 1960, he wrote a letter to then presidential nominee, John F. Kennedy, outlining plans for a “radical change in Indian policy.” Among them was a proposal for the creation of junior colleges “in Indian areas.” Forbes had been actively engaged with both Chicano and Native American activists in Southern California. He acknowledged, “Although I

⁷¹ “New School at Del Rey,” *Community Scene, Sanger Herald* Second Edition, February 14, 1974. Jack Forbes Collection at Special Collections, University of California, Davis, Box F-23, Folder “Chicano Materials General Files.”

⁷² Carney, *Native American Higher Education in the United States*, 111. For Native American education experiences see: David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928* (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1995); Robert A. Trennert, Jr., *The Phoenix Indian School: Forced Assimilation in Arizona, 1891-1935* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988); Michael C. Coleman, *American Indian Children at School, 1850-1930* (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1993).

drafted the proposal, it reflected a great deal of discussions with other people.”⁷³ These discussions helped shape the dream for a Chicano/Native American educational institution.

Hence, from early on, Forbes had the foresight to foment a Chicano/Native American coalition based on a common Indian heritage. Although there exists limited documentation of Chicana/o participation in the early planning of the college, in a recent oral interview Forbes spoke extensively of a joint Chicano/Native American effort to establish such an institution. In and around 1961, Forbes, in coalition with mainly two Chicano comrades in the San Fernando Valley, Antonio Del Buono and Henry Orozco, organized the Native American Movement (NAM), also known as the *Movimiento Nativo Americano*—whose purpose was to help “bring Chicanos to the realization of their indigenous heritage” and to unite Indians and Chicanos into a single Movement.⁷⁴ According to Forbes, NAM held meetings to promote the idea of a pan-Indian movement wherein they formally produced a proposal for an indigenous university, which they then distributed widely across the San Fernando, Santa Paula, Semi Valley, and Ventura, and Oxnard regions through both meetings and brochures. For the most part, Forbes recalls, the proposal was well received by both Chicano and Native Americans. These efforts demonstrate, then, that at least a decade before the actual founding of DQ-U Forbes had floated this idea with a number of constituencies and after its good reception, had followed up with tangible networking and planning.

⁷³ Jack D. Forbes, *Native American Higher Education: The Struggle for the Creation of D-Q University, 1960-1970* (Davis, California: D-Q University Press, 1985): 2. Copy located at the Peter J. Shields Library, University of California, Davis.

⁷⁴ Jack D. Forbes, interview with author, 29 June 2010, Davis, California, audio recording.

The idea for a Native American college continued to gain support among Chicano and Native Americans, but—as could have been expected—there were a series of set-backs from the U.S. government.⁷⁵ For example, John A. Carver Jr., Assistant Secretary of the Interior and advisor to Vice-President Lyndon B. Johnson, wrote in a letter on February 1963 that:

In view of the growing activities of state colleges and universities in the field of Indian affairs and the beneficial results that are accruing from their efforts, we believe it would not be in the best interest of the Indian people at this time to establish a separate Institution at the college level.⁷⁶

Forbes and his supporters grew increasingly frustrated and disagreed with Carver's assessment that a separate Indian university would not be in their best interest. Forbes did not let this deter him from his dream and he continued to push onward and upward.

By the late 1960s Native California Indians began to formally come together to address the educational needs of their communities and these efforts proved instrumental in facilitating formal discussions of an Indian university. For instance, in 1967 an Ad Hoc Committee for California Indian Education at the state level was developed and a landmark statewide all-Indian education conference was held at North Fork where the California Indian Education Association (CIEA) was established.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Forbes, *Native American Higher Education*, 5.

⁷⁶ Quoted in, *Ibid.*, 7.

⁷⁷ The California Indian Education Association was also involved in: the foundation of the United Native Americans (UNA); the founding of the California Indian Legal Service; defeating laws considered unfavorable in Indian education such as the Indian Education Act Bill; developing and implementing various teacher education programs holding educational conferences in 1970 at Princeton and a Convocation at Aspen, Colorado; and direct involvement in the occupation of Alcatraz.

According to Forbes, “CIEA served a crucial role in the establishment of D-QU because it provided a democratic power-base for Indians.”⁷⁸ So when Forbes accepted a faculty position at UCD in 1969 he had already been in communication with other Native American colleagues interested in the formation of a pan-Indian university.

Although Forbes was the principal advocate of a joint Native American-Chicano University, other Native American scholars came on board in support of the proposal. For example, when David Risling, Jr. (of Hupa, Karuk, and Yurok ancestry from the Hoopa Valley Indian Reservation) joined the Native American Studies Program in 1970 at the University of California at Davis (UCD), he worked with Forbes in the development of several proposals which included the establishment of a Native American College, an Institute of Native American Research and Development, and an Indian-Chicano library.⁷⁹ Risling, Jr., explained how and why the idea for a Chicano/Native American university came about,

Chicanos were brought in mainly to increase the Indians political effectiveness although, as Dr. Forbes pointed out, the Mexican people are part Indians and also “possess cultures and values quite different from the dominant [white] society.” In addition, some Chicano educators were also thinking of their own university, and

Information taken from: Hartmut Lutz, *D-Q University: Native American Self-Determination in Higher Education* (Davis, California: Department of Applied Behavioral Sciences/Native American Studies, Summer 1980): 15. Copy located at the Peter J. Shields Library, University of California, Davis.

⁷⁸ Forbes, *Native American Higher Education*, 18.

⁷⁹ Indian heritage background information taken from Hartmut Lutz, *D-Q University: Native American Self-Determination in Higher Education*. In the late 1960s and early 1970s it was commonplace to add the Indigenous ancestry next to the names of Native Americans. This custom was used by Native Americans themselves and also local news media. See for example, Jack Forbes in *Native American Higher Education: The Struggle for the Creation of D-Q University, 1960-1971*. For these aforementioned reasons, this chapter follows these norms.

everyone agreed there was a better chance to get one [if they came together].⁸⁰

Hence, according to Risling, Chicanos were asked to join in on the quest of DQ-U for strategic reasons, especially given that Chicanos were a sizable population in California. However, during the planning stages, both groups would ultimately benefit from the establishment of DQ-U since through the school they could address their needs and desires. The decision to build this coalition was consciously made both because they viewed one another as colonized peoples and indigenous descendents of the land and because both groups saw the politically strategic advantages of working together.

Furthermore, Risling noted that all the “white” colleges and universities, including the University of California at Davis (UCD), began forming Native American and Chicano Studies Programs to appease student protests that had emerged on their respective campuses by this time. He added,

No white university is committed to helping Indians and Chicanos. They’re only interested because of civil rights and confrontations. They’ve put in a few courses but it’s only tokenism.⁸¹

From his standpoint, in the face of civil unrest, universities and other institutions had only recently shown interest in providing Native American and Chicano Studies not because they wanted to, but because they were forced to. For Risling and others, this “forced” initiative was part of the reason the programs were structurally unable to achieve their full potential. In Risling’s view, Native American and Chicano studies

⁸⁰ Quoted in “University for Indians and Chicanos Faces Problems,” *The New York Times*, 9 March 1971.

⁸¹ Quoted in, *Ibid.*

programs could flourish only if they were designed by and for Native Americans and Chicanos respectively—and then given the same level of resources that other, more established programs regularly received from university administrators.

It is important to note, however, that Chicanos already had been actively involved in the establishment of Chicano Studies programs for some time, the first being established in 1968 at California State University, Los Angeles.⁸² Thus, when the Council of Chicanos in Higher Education (CCHE) organized a conference in Santa Barbara, California in 1969, one of its goals was to deal with the conflicts between Chicanos and institutions of higher learning in the establishment of Chicano Studies Programs. In a follow-up meeting, CCHE decided that “a Consortium-type approach might provide a mechanism which will help Chicanos relate more fruitfully to their own institutions and to what might develop state-wide and nationally in the coming decade.”⁸³ The goal was to establish a network wherein those interested in establishing Chicano Studies Programs could look at other successful models for guidance. Reflecting on these efforts the participants noted “maybe all this is utopia, but we will never know unless we try it.”⁸⁴ It was this mindset which carried forward a successful agenda and established Chicano Studies Programs nationwide:

What is important is that in the end of the sixties and the beginning of the seventies has signaled a new start of a major thrust in the process of self-definition and self-determination by the Chicano.⁸⁵

⁸² Muñoz, *Youth, Identity, Power*, 134.

⁸³ Author unknown, “Why A Consortium?”, date unknown, 5. Paper found in Jack Forbes Collection at Special Collections, University of California, Davis, Box F-18.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

The aims set forth by CCHE were also known to DQ-U proponents and it appeared a logical move to combine both Native American and Chicano Studies programs into the one college, especially given that UCD was in the process of establishing separate Chicano and Native American Studies programs in 1969.⁸⁶

Although Forbes and Risling were the principles in the preliminary planning stages and had seen the creation of a university as a long-term goal, things quickly changed when in June 1969, a 640 acre parcel near the University of California at Davis (UCD) became available.⁸⁷ Forbes, would later admit that “If it hadn’t been for that turning up we probably would have waited a while. We just didn’t have the ability to pull all that off at once. We thought [chuckles].”⁸⁸ After visiting the abandoned army depot site, proponents of DQ-U thought it would be an ideal site for the college and moved on it. Forbes immediately began working on the application for the site and at that moment, the name “Deganawidah-Quetzalcoatl” was selected for the college.⁸⁹ Forbes believed the name was fitting because

It symbolizes peace and wisdom (Deganawidah, the Peace Maker and Quetzalcoatl, spirit-power of wisdom). It also represented my dream of a unity of North American and South American indigenous people.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ “Indians, Chicanos Get their University,” *The Tribune* (unspecified location), February 14 1971. Jack Forbes Collection at Special Collections, University of California, Davis, Box F-18, No. 4.

⁸⁷ Forbes, *Native American Higher Education*, 20.

⁸⁸ Jack D. Forbes, interview with author, 29 June 2010, Davis, California, audio recording.

⁸⁹ Forbes, *Native American Higher Education*, 20.

⁹⁰ Jack D. Forbes, “An Open Letter to the D-QU Community,” 21 December 1994.

Out of courtesy and respect to the Iroquois peoples, Forbes recalled,

We had to get permission from the Six Nations, from the traditional people, finally to use Deganawidah. They asked us to use “D” instead of always saying the name because of the idea that saying the name over and over again takes away some of its spiritual power and that’s when we shifted from Deganawidah Quetzalcoatl University to DQ-U. The University was incorporated as DQ-U.⁹¹

Luckily for the organizers, the Six Nations authorized the use of their spiritual leader’s name for the founding of the first Chicano/Native American university.

No matter the fervor by both Chicano and Native American scholars to get DQ-U off the ground, UCD did not respond enthusiastically to any of the proposals made by its proponents. Given the University of California’s disinterest in the projects and their hesitation to collaborate with an Indian institution, DQ-U proponents had to establish their own independent plan for a Chicano-Native American college.⁹² It just so happened this juncture, the Office of Surplus Property Utilization (OSPU) of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare declared the former Army Communication Center, seven miles west of Davis, surplus property (in early 1970)—the same property flagged by DQ-U proponents the year before. The greatest attraction for DQ-U proponents was that it already had dormitories, offices, classrooms, and lecture halls on site making it ideal for running a college. Shortly after receiving word that the site was available, the provisional DQ-U board of directors—which was composed of Jack Forbes, Carl Gorman, Ken Martin, and David Risling Jr. (all UCD Native American Studies professors)—seized the opportunity and applied for the

⁹¹ Jack D. Forbes, interview with author, 2 July 2010, Davis, California, audio recording.

⁹² Forbes, *Native American Higher Education*, 20.

site.⁹³ As it turned out, however, UCD was also interested in the communications depot. University officials planned to use the site as an experimental station to conduct animal research with monkeys or convert it into a rice farm.⁹⁴ Lutz in his work on DQ-U noted that “for a while, it was literally ‘Monkeys or Indians?’” UCD had the political and institutional clout that DQ-U organizers lacked, and the University of California administrators flexed their political power by working closely with the OSPU to secure the location. Lutz noted, however, that “the ‘powerless’ in this case simply would not entertain the possibility of defeat.”⁹⁵

⁹³ Lutz, *D-Q University*, 22.

⁹⁴ *Deganawidah-Quetzalcoatl University, a non-profit California Corporation, and Barbara Ramirez, individually and on behalf of all others similarly situated, vs. Elliot Richardson, Secretary of the United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare; Charles Fuller, Surplus Property Administrator, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare; and Mel R. Summers, Regional Representative, San Francisco Regional Office of Surplus Property Utilization, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare* (Hereinafter: *D-Q University vs. U.S. Department of Health*), 5 November 1970, 3.

⁹⁵ Lutz, *D-Q University*, 22.



Image 22: “Indians Before Monkeys,” along with “Still Indian” sign displayed at former Army Communications Depot during the takeover, 11-7-1970. (Courtesy of Arturo J. Apodaca personal collection.)

When OSPU granted the site to UCD, in spite of the fact that UCD had failed to provide a complete application, the DQ-U group quickly organized to contest what it considered to be the wrongful award. Then, on October 29, 1970, U.S. Senator George Murphy’s office, in a desperate move to seek reelection, announced in a press release that UCD had been granted the site. The announcement was made a day short of the application deadline, which was later found to be unlawful.⁹⁶ David Risling, DQ-U trustee and coordinator of the Native American Studies Program at UC Davis, was upset by the way the application process was handled. He asked,

⁹⁶ *D-Q University vs. U.S. Department of Health*, 5 November 1970, 6.

How can we trust these (white) people? This is the story of our lives.
How can we teach Indians law and order when the law is only on the
side of the white man?⁹⁷

By calling attention to the historical trajectory of Indian/United States relations, Risling was also questioning the true motives of Senator Murphy.

UCD, Sacramento State, and local community college Chicano and Native American students—angered by the University of California system and its political supporters’ move to undercut yet another Native American/Chicano effort for self-determination—made the decision to occupy the land. Risling explained that Native American and Chicano Studies in California were “emasculated by prohibitively small financial support” and that prospects for the future looked dim despite the success and demand from the programs. According to Risling, this was the leading “reason Native American and Chicanos studies had to set themselves up independently [meaning the establishment of the college].”⁹⁸ DQ-U activists put forth a plan that addressed specific roles for Native American and Chicano students as well as supportive faculty and staff. For instance, Indian students would be involved in the takeover and occupancy of the former Army Communication Center, while Chicano students supplied logistical support from the outside.⁹⁹ However, this would later be disputed as some Chicanos, who had been active in the initial planning of DQ-U, would claim to have participated in the “original” occupation. On November 2, 1970, the night

⁹⁷ “Indians Seek Arrest: Davis Encampment Pushes University Cause,” *The Sacramento Bee*, 4 November 1970.

⁹⁸ “Funding Key Issues in DQ-U and HEW Fight: Arrest may be Imminent for Indian Occupation,” *The Davis Enterprise*, 4 November 1970.

⁹⁹ Lutz, *D-Q University*, 23.

before the takeover, a faculty member pretended to have car trouble as an excuse to count the number of soldiers on guard. This faculty member later related the count to the DQ-U contingency.¹⁰⁰

The occupiers, with information in hand, made their way over to the depot before dawn where the dense fog shielded their appearance from the guardsmen. They then climbed the fence, pitched tents and tipis, and “made themselves at home” well before they were discovered by the guards on duty.¹⁰¹ According to a Chicano participant in the takeover of the abandoned army depot, Arturo José Apodaca—then a thirty-one year old UCD undergraduate student and Viet Nam War veteran—once they had settled they waited until being found out by those patrolling the grounds. Apodaca recalled approaching the commander,

We’re Indians and we’re taking over the fort. Get a hold of your base commander and tell him that we’ve taken over the fort. That it’s all a friendly thing...I swear on my life that no one is going to bother you...We are not hostile, but we are persistent.¹⁰²

Although there is no second source to back Apodaca’s front-and-center role in the confrontation with the military officer, the presence of Chicanos in the initial takeover seems accurate, especially because Apodaca’s name appeared with frequency in newspaper accounts. However, Forbes would later cast doubt on the presence of Chicanos in the takeover in a recent interview,

¹⁰⁰ The names of the faculty members involved in the “takeover” of the communications depot were omitted to legally protect those involved and also to prevent loss of employment.

¹⁰¹ Quoted in, Lutz, *D-Q University*, 23.

¹⁰² Arturo José Apodaca, interview by author, 27 April 2010, El Dorado, California, audio recording.

Only the U.S. Indians went over the fence....Afterwards there are some other people who have claimed to have gone over the fence, like Chicanos/Mexicans. Whether they did or not, I am not able to say. My impression is no, but since I was returning from San Diego at the time and was not an observer in the beginning I can't say for sure.¹⁰³

The question over whether Chicanos were part of the initial takeover brings to light tensions that emerged in the years following the takeover. By making claims to the initial takeover, Chicanos could then assert their role in the founding and possibility of DQ-U. Again, this remains a much disputed occurrence, but whether or not this was the case is beside the point given that Chicanos had and continued to serve a central position in the origin of DQ-U.

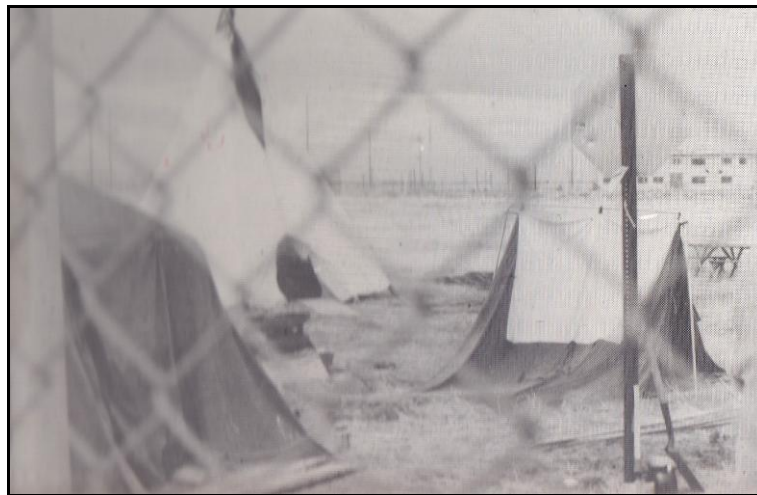


Image 23: Tents at former Army Communications Depot where participants of takeover settled in the first days of occupation, 11-3-1970. (Courtesy of Arturo J. Apodaca personal collection.)

Chaos ensued when, hours later, the occupiers were discovered by an army officer who approached them on a bike, but turned back to the base and announced to

¹⁰³ Jack D. Forbes, interview with author, 2 July 2010, Davis, California, audio recording.

the rest of the patrolling officers that they were “surrounded by hundreds of Indians.”¹⁰⁴ The army officers, evidently caught off guard, did not know how to appropriately deal with the situation or what enforcement agency should take charge given that the site was a federally owned Army base (FBI or Military Police), situated in Yolo County (which was under the jurisdiction of the Yolo County Sheriff), near the city of Davis (the responsibility of the Davis municipal police department), occupied by at least some UCD students (which might make it a case for the UCD campus police). It took them a while to figure out what agency should take charge.¹⁰⁵ In the end, federal marshals stepped in to handle the situation. Apodaca recalled enthusiastically,

They [police agencies] didn’t beat us up, we didn’t get shot, the cops weren’t coming over the fence, and we are on DQ-U property—sort of speak—in possession. Within hours people were coming over the fence to join us.¹⁰⁶

Indeed, no persons were reported injured or hurt. The takeover went better than they themselves had anticipated. By all measures, it was a success.

¹⁰⁴ Quoted in Lutz, *D-Q University*, 23.

¹⁰⁵ Lutz, *D-Q University*, 23.

¹⁰⁶ Arturo José Apodaca, interview by author, 27 April 2010, El Dorado, California, audio recording.

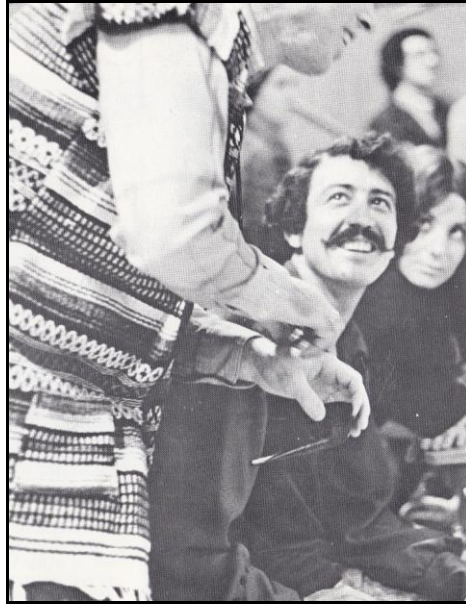


Image 24: Arturo J. Apodaca (center), D-Q University Catalog, 1973-1974 (April 14, 1973), page 24. (Courtesy of Arturo J. Apodaca personal collection.)

But this victorious moment was challenged when on November 4, 1970, the federal marshals issued a warning to the DQ-U occupants that those still on site would be arrested at 3:00 p.m. The Native Americans students did not plan on resisting arrest, but were unclear as to what charges would be brought against them.¹⁰⁷ In the end, no arrests were made and students remained on site. Native American students made use of the base buildings that were unlocked giving them access to bathrooms, a full kitchen, and dormitories. However, they had to count on Chicano students to deliver food, water and other supplies.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ “Funding Key Issue in D-Q U and HEW Fight,” *Davis Enterprise*, 4 November 1970.

¹⁰⁸ “Indians Seize Land in Protest: Indians, UCD Bid for Army Base,” *UC Davis Spectator*, December 1970.

All the while, the mostly Native American faculty and staff elders contacted the California Indian Legal Services, Inc. and initiated a court action to halt the projected transfer of the site to UCD. The founders also moved to organize public support through press release, lobbying, and public meetings. On November 5, 1970, D-Q U with its joint legal consul, the California Indian Legal Services and the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF), filed suit against the Secretary of the United States Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) and the Surplus Property Administration for the surplus land in question. The coming together of these Chicano and Native American organizations signified a joint effort to overcome oppression and colonization. The case was filed under plaintiff, Bárbara Ramírez, a Northern Paiute-Shoshone Indian, and a UC Davis student majoring in history and education at the time. The lawsuit read:

Plaintiff sues on her own behalf and on behalf of all American Indians and Chicanos who, because of their poverty or prejudice, cannot or do not wish to attend other junior colleges, four year colleges and universities and wish to attend plaintiff University.¹⁰⁹

Ramírez sued on the grounds that she and others like her did not have accessibility to higher education. Furthermore, she charged that higher education accessibility was limited for Chicanos and Native Americans and that those institutions of higher learning that accepted them were hostile to their presence.

¹⁰⁹ *D-Q University vs. U.S. Department of Health*, 5 November 1970, 2.



Image 25: Bárbara Ramírez (right), The California Aggie, University of California, Davis, 11-6-1970. (Courtesy of Arturo J. Apodaca personal collection.)

DQ-U proponents further argued that the University of California discriminated in its employment practices against American Indians, Chicanos, and Blacks, claiming that these three ethnic groups combined made up only three percent of all employees at the university and that when broken down even further, these employees worked in predominantly low paying jobs. The California Legal Services and MALDEF lawyers representing DQ-U further pointed to the 1960s United States Census, comparing the UC Davis figures to California's population to its employment records. According to the Census, "Spanish surnames" 9.12%, Blacks 5.6%, and 2% were American Indian. "Thus Indians, Blacks and Chicanos are at least 500% underemployed at UC Davis."¹¹⁰ The DQ-U legal counsel also charged that the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare was in violation of the Fifth

¹¹⁰ *D-Q University vs. U.S. Department of Health*, 5 November 1970, 6.

Amendment which “prohibits the defendants from supporting institutions that practice racial discrimination. Defendants would therefore violate the Fifth Amendment by deeding the property in question to UC Davis.”¹¹¹ It also “declar[ed] that the University of California at Davis discriminated against the employment of American Indians, Chicanos and Blacks and that it would be unconstitutional by granting it funds or property.”¹¹² While bold, and perhaps even outrageous, this allegation was a means to alert the court to the university’s shortcomings regarding equal representation of American Indians, Chicanos, and Blacks. In essence, by investigating the public university’s own track record in hiring, the DQ-U counsel challenged the university to address its obvious shortcomings in promoting diversity.

On November 8, 1970, DQ-U proponents organized a march to show support for the establishment of the college and to persuade U.S. District Court Judge Philip C. Wilkins to decide in their favor. Judge Wilkins was scheduled to consider the legal complaint filed by DQ-U against HEW on the day of the march.¹¹³ The march began

¹¹¹ *D-Q University vs. U.S. Department of Health*, 5 November 1970, 6. It is unclear why the lawsuit cited violation to the Fifth Amendment as opposed to the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. When Congress passed the Indian Civil Rights Act (1968) it allowed for the courts to make individual determinations to assess whether a given law applies to a tribe. According to the Indian Civil Rights Act, Congress has the power to abrogate Indian treaty rights, but when it does so it is liable to pay the tribe compensation under the Fifth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Before a court will find a Fifth Amendment violation to have occurred it will investigate Congress’ intent. Perhaps, then, Ramírez was making a claim to a violation of treaty rights under the U.S. Constitution. For information on Native Americans law see: William C. Canby, Jr., *American Indian Law in a Nutshell* (St. Paul, Minnesota: West Group, 1998); Felix S. Cohen, Ed., *Handbook of Federal Indian Law* (Charlottesville, Virginia: Lexis Law, 1982); Frank Pommersheim, *Braid of Feathers: American Indian Law and Modern Tribal Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Robert Clinton, *American Indian Law: Cases and Materials* (Charlottesville, Virginia: Michie Co., 1991); Charles F. Wilkinson, *American Indians, Time and the Law: Native Societies in a Modern Constitutional Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

¹¹² *D-Q University vs. U.S. Department of Health*, 5 November 1970, 7.

at 10:00 a.m. at the UCD campus quad and it ended at the communications depot, a nine mile distance.¹¹⁴ An estimated 50 marchers arrived and were joined by another 100 onlookers who met them at the DQ-U site. The Yolo county sheriff's office assured the marchers and supporters that no arrests would take place at the event. The day's events included speeches by Jack Forbes who addressed the crowd from behind the DQ-U property fence because he did not want to jeopardize the lawsuit by "technically violating the law."¹¹⁵ Adam Nordall, Jr., 15 years old, performed the hoop dance while his father, Adam Nordall (of Chippewa ancestry), chairman of the United Bay Area Council of American Indians and professor at California State College at Hayward, passed the peace pipe through the crowd in honor of the DQ-U Movement.¹¹⁶ After the ceremonial passage of the peace pipe, participants exchanged the "*abrazo de paz*" (the embrace of peace) that was meant to be "the [Chicano] equivalent of the peace pipe."¹¹⁷

¹¹³ "Marching for Land," *The Sacramento Bee*, 9 November 1970.

¹¹⁴ "Demonstration March: Indians Still Hold Site Near Davis," *The Sacramento Bee*, 8 November 1970.

¹¹⁵ "Indians march, smoke peace pipe for D-QU," *The Davis Enterprise*, 9 November 1970.

¹¹⁶ "Indians march, smoke peace pipe for D-QU," *The Davis Enterprise*, 9 November 1970; "DQU Sympathizers March Nine Miles," *Third World News*, 9 November 1970; and, "Site is Dedicated to use as DQU" *The Daily Democrat*, 9 November 1970.

¹¹⁷ "DQU Sympathizers March Nine Miles," *Third World News*, 9 November 1970.



Image 26: “March,” DQ-U supporters march from University of California, Davis campus to future DQ-U site. 11-8-1970. (Courtesy of Arturo J. Apodaca personal collection.)

One of the most symbolic gestures of unity at the march among Chicano and Native Americans was the flag ceremony wherein Chicanos waved the Mexican flag and Native Americans raised a flag with “D” on it standing for Deganawidah.¹¹⁸ MEChA chapter representatives from Sacramento State, Sacramento City College, and UC Davis as well as and La Raza Unida Party of Stockton, California held their own chapter banners along with the Mexican and UFW flags.¹¹⁹ Although each ethnic-group held their own respective flags, the event demonstrated that they respected one another while at the same time remained loyal to their own identity. At the ceremony Chicanos and Native Americans appeared to be in harmony—united in a common cause.

¹¹⁸ “Site Dedicated to use as DQU,” *The Daily Democrat*, 9 November 1970.

¹¹⁹ “DQU Sympathizers March Nine Miles,” *Third World News*, 9 November 1970.



Image 27: Adam Nordwall, Chairman of the Bay Area Council of American Indians, lights the peace pipe to give thanks for the Native American/Chicano movement and for the establishment of DQ-U, The Davis Enterprise, Davis, California, 11-9-1970. (Courtesy of Arturo J. Apodaca personal collection.)

Both Chicanos and Native Americans called for educational self-determination. David Risling charged that Native Americans were the poorest and most alienated of all “minority” groups adding “no one will do anything about it unless Indians themselves do something about it.”¹²⁰ These sentiments were echoed by Nordwall who stated:

[DQU is] an opportunity for our people [Native Americans] to receive an education relevant to our needs. My grievance in part, is that the highly structured educational system in this country systematically excludes the Indian. It strips our people of who they are. I’d like to see the Indian and Chicano people have a place of their own so they can take the best of both worlds and produce a better student.¹²¹

¹²⁰ “Indians march, smoke peace pipe for D-QU,” *The Davis Enterprise*, 9 November 1970.

¹²¹ “Site Dedicated to use as DQU,” *The Daily Democrat*, 9 November 1970.

Nordwall and Risling, both UCD professors, believed that only through self-determination could Chicanos and Native Americans achieve quality education.

Lorena Oropeza, in her work on the Chicanos and the anti-Viet Nam War, notes that after 1970 Chicanos began to push for self-determination and local community control after experiencing a sense of frustration and disillusionment with the status quo. These activists sought new answers to old challenges.¹²²

While in the beginning mostly UCD students occupied the communications depot, soon Native American non-students from Alcatraz and other places arrived to show their support for the establishment of DQU—and they soon came to outnumber the original group. The student-community activists’ ratio was further imbalanced by the fact that UC Davis students resumed classes on November 9, 1970, and could only continue the “sit-ins” in shifts, leaving the majority of the tasks to the newcomers.¹²³ However, UCD students continued to play a dominant role in the establishment of the university. For instance, Apodaca, the “designated spokesman” for the on-site group, issued a statement to a local newspaper in support of DQ-U:

We, as citizens, favor use of the Army Communications Center Site, Davis, Calif., as the proposed Deganawidah-Quetzalcoatl University. There is a great need for this institution. Indians and Chicanos have suffered from extreme discrimination and occupy the bottom position in all indexes relative to education, employment, income, life expectancy, etcetera. These Americans are attempting ‘self-help,’ by legal means in the DQU proposal. Through

¹²² Lorena Oropeza, *Raza Sí! Guerra No!: Chicano Protest and Patriotism during the Viet Nam War Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005): 188.

¹²³ “US Judge Denies Indian Bid, Slaters College Site Rehearsing for Jan. 13,” *The Sacramento Bee*, 10 November 1970.

specialized education and job training at the college level, minority groups can go beyond the welfare rolls.¹²⁴

This statement was signed by twenty-two local DQ-U occupiers. Chicanas/os and Native Americans believed that DQ-U would help solve the socio-economic problems their communities faced and thus were committed to seeing DQ-U through, “by any means necessary.”

The “newcomers,” as the fresh supporters to occupy the depot would later be called, were from UC Santa Cruz, Wilton, Red Lake, Alcatraz, and Pit River. A group of twenty to thirty stayed at the center full time.¹²⁵ Since the newcomers had not been briefed as to the overall goals and objectives of the takeover and both groups were meeting one another for the first time, a series of disagreements soon ensued over how to litigate duties on and off site. Roger Neadeau, an Ojibway of Red Lake Reservation, Minnesota, was one of the occupiers of Alcatraz who later made his way to support the DQ-U and Pit River cause. He noted that that a major dispute at DQ-U was over the lack of basic essentials like food and water being delivered to the DQ-U site. In an interview with Lutz in 1980, Neadeau recalled,

They had different people coming out there, but they weren't regular. I guess they more or less went out whenever they felt like it or when somebody called too many times and said, “Hey, we don't have any water, we don't have any food.”¹²⁶

¹²⁴ “Fast Emphasizes fight for D-QU,” *The Daily Democrat*, 27 November 1970.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Roger Neadeau, Interview conducted by Hartmut Lutz, Tecumseh Center, 10 April 1980: 90. (Full interview included in Lutz, *D-Q University*, 89-104.)

Neadeau's frustration over lack of delivery of essentials points to an overall lack of organization and funding for the DQ-U group. Since the occupiers were left on site and were an instrumental part of the establishment of the university, they felt abandoned when there was a slowdown in supplies. This raises the question of the commitment of activists in the first place and whether they had engaged in the occupation for purely symbolic reasons. In other words, the "by any means necessary" approach was waning as the takeover went from days to weeks and eventually months.

As disputes grew more heated between the original occupiers, Native American elders eventually felt compelled to step in to settle the disputes. In January 1971, things came to a head when the Alcatraz group prevented DQ-U organizers from entering the site over the abovementioned incident and other internal disputes that were not immediately disclosed. Forbes later recounted, "After much heated discussion at the locked gates it was agreed to hold an all-Indian meeting to try to settle the differences existing between the 'occupiers' and 'outsiders.'"¹²⁷ To make matters worse, Forbes recalled in a recent interview, "We had some of our own students here at UCD who became very sympathetic to the occupiers and took the occupier's side and so we had little confrontations here and there over why weren't we doing a better job supporting the occupiers."¹²⁸ As Forbes elucidates there were clear divisions both at the site and off site regarding who was accountable for what to assure the success of the occupation. A few of the elders grew concerned that these

¹²⁷ Jack D. Forbes, Kenneth R. Martin, and David Risling, Jr., "Internal Problems faced by the D-Q Movement," in Lutz, *D-Q University*, 97.

¹²⁸ Jack D. Forbes, interview with author, 2 July 2010, Davis, California, audio recording.

“confrontations” could ultimately endanger all plans for the establishment of DQ-U, especially if word reached the press. According to Lutz, “the internal struggle was eventually solved by the Indian people themselves without involvement of outside help.”¹²⁹ In other words, the elders were able to solve the internal issues—temporarily at least—among Native American youth without having these disputes leak out to the press.

A slew of community and legislative representatives publicly supported the founding of DQ-U. For example, California Senator Mervyn M. Dymally (D-LA) sent letters to the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare Secretary Elliot Richardson and Undersecretary John Veneman strongly supporting the funding of DQ-U. He stated,

“Why don’t you go back where you came from[?]” [This] may seem to be an easy answer to those who would rather destroy America than build it, but one group that cannot be said to our Native-Americans, Indian, and Chicano.¹³⁰

In Dymally’s view, if any group had “rightful” claims to the DQ-U site, it was Chicanos and Native Americans given that they were indigenous to the Western Hemisphere. Likewise, Abby Abinanti, (a member of the Yurok people who lived in Arcata) spokesperson for the local area United Methodist Church and law student at UCD, pointed out: “I don’t think it should be considered revolutionary in 1970 to want

¹²⁹ Lutz, *D-Q University*, 24.

¹³⁰ “Dymally Supports Chicano School,” *Pasadena Eagle* (Altadena, California), 28 January 1971.

a university.”¹³¹ Abinanti naively could not comprehend why building an institution of higher learning would create such controversy. Clearly, it was not the institution of higher learning that stimulated opposition, but rather the Native American and Chicano population it planned to target and serve. Perhaps this was also due to the fact that Californians were not exposed or accustomed to the idea of “race”-specific colleges as were commonplace in the American South with the establishment of black colleges.

As could be expected, not everyone was in agreement that DQ-U be granted the site. For instance, Janet J. Johnston, a nearby resident, opposed the forming of “separatist” university for Chicanos and Native Americans. In an editorial to The Daily Democrat she wrote:

I question Dr. Forbes ultimate motive in drawing special attention to the Indian. Other cultures have suffered within our system with similar ideological separations. In spite of all the emphasis on “integration” we have heard in the past decade, through Federal intervention, monetary and legislative, our Nation is becoming more and more segregated.

Cultural differences are emphasized and individual Americans are becoming aware of characteristics which separate them from their neighbors. We should instead be seeking common bonds and goals to bind all of us together.¹³²

In Johnston’s view, the proposed Native American and Chicano university was an insult to the efforts brought forth to desegregate and integrate these very communities into mainstream society. She did not comprehend why a “separatist” university would be a progressive move; from her standpoint, it was regressive.

¹³¹ “Indians March, Smoke Peace Pipe for D-QU,” *The Davis Enterprise*, 9 November 1970.

¹³² “D-QU Presents VISTA Request,” *The Daily Democrat*, 30 January 1971.

Chicanos and Native American activists involved with the issues, however, saw a clear need for the establishment of a separate institution given their historical experience in the educational system in the United States. Chicanos in particular wanted a say in their educational future. In an article focused on the status of Chicanos in education that appeared in the Third World News on February 1, 1971 the undisclosed author outlined:

If any University, Institute, Center, or Chicano Studies program is to succeed there must be equal input from the three main groups of people who must make that educational entity a success: 1) the Chicano community at large; 2) the Chicano students, and 3) the faculty and staff of the educational institution.¹³³

In other words, the Chicano community encompassed persons from within and outside the university setting. This same position was outlined in El Plan de Santa Bárbara (1969) as a means to provide a great measure of accountability and to minimize the possibility that “elite” individuals would not misspeak on behalf of the barrios they left behind. These sentiments were echoed by Apodaca who stated in February 1971, “The way to progress for us is [to] control our own destiny” and added that he hoped “the new school will educate Indian and Chicano children in ways other than the white man’s [way].”¹³⁴ Chicanos and Native Americans believed they were better equipped to meet the educational needs of their respective communities.

The concept of internal colonialism was also used to embark on the project of establishing a Chicano and Native American educational institution. According to the

¹³³ “D-QU Brief Proposal,” *Third World News*, 1 February 1971.

¹³⁴ “D-QU Wins Battle to get Former Army Site,” *The Daily Democrat*, 19 February 1971.

Omi and Winant study mentioned previously in this dissertation, the internal colonial model “appealed to nationalist forms of mobilization against a generalized system of oppression.”¹³⁵ Hartmut Lutz, one of only two published scholars to write about DQ-U, wrote in 1980:

In California both Native and Mexican Americans share similar educational and social experiences, despite a considerable amount of traditional antagonism between the two groups. Both are internal colonized people against Anglo oppression and exploitation.¹³⁶

For Native Americans and Chicanos attempting to build DQ-U, it became clear that they shared a history of expansion, conquest, and violence. It was these common experiences that bonded them in a struggle for justice. The notion of a shared oppression was further expressed by Joaquín D. Galván in a recent interview when he noted that, “In the 60s people became proud of being indigenous again because part of colonialism is the dehumanization of darker skinned people and it continues today.”¹³⁷ Thus, a specific ethnic-oriented Chicano and Native American school drew the interest of activists because it offered an alternative to mainstream education that had so often shortchanged their respective communities.

Despite centuries of conquest and colonization and forced assimilation in the schools, Chicanos and Native Americans who founded DQ-U were compelled by a desire to preserve their respective cultures. This was noted early on in their quest to establish a university:

¹³⁵ Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States from the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994): 44.

¹³⁶ Lutz, *D-Q University*, 20.

¹³⁷ Joaquín D. Galván, interview by author, 12 April 2010, Davis, California, audio recording.

The Indian and Chicano peoples possess a great deal in common...they both have little desire to “assimilate” and instead seek to retain their unique identities, languages and customs.¹³⁸

Chicanos and Native Americans at DQ-U were keenly aware of the United States’ efforts to erase their respective cultures and “civilize” them. The first Chicano and Native American DQ-U student body expressed these sentiments in the initial school newspaper, published in both English and Spanish. Skip Willits (of the Round Valley Reservation, California) wrote:

Our Indian and Chicano people possess a great deal in common racial heritage, our cultural traditions, life values from the dominant society. Perhaps most important—both Indian and Chicano people want to keep our culture and language and we have little desire to lose them and become Anglo.¹³⁹

Willits clearly resented assimilation efforts forced on him and his people by the dominant Anglo society. For him and others at DQ-U the mere establishment of the university was a form of resistance against the status-quo. Together they forged a new educational institution that worked for and with them.

The multiple strategies of occupation, court action, and public hearings eventually paid off, forcing the University of California to repudiate its own defective application on December 4, 1970. Thus, DQ-U was the only legitimate applicant for the site and DHEW was forced to consider it.¹⁴⁰ On January 12, 1971 the occupation of the Communications Army Depot ended and two days later the San Francisco

¹³⁸ “Indian-Chicano U hoped for in Davis,” *The Davis Enterprise*, 26 October 1970.

¹³⁹ “Indian-Chicano: Land of Two” (Deganawidah-Quetzalcoatl University), *Associated Students*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (no date cited).

¹⁴⁰ Lutz, *D-Q University*, 23.

regional office of the Department of Health Education and Welfare granted the Indians “care custody, protection and maintenance of the 640-acre former communications station.”¹⁴¹ The DQ-U board members, with the consent of the occupiers, sent out letters nationwide to Indian and Chicano organizations and individuals, inviting them to partake in an election for the first joint Indian-Chicano Board of Directors of the new university. The invitation read:

We realize it will be hard for many people to come from far away. We realize that not all areas will be equally represented. But we hope that you will see the importance of Indian and Chicano people democratically controlling the university and that you will come if you can.¹⁴²

Each group met separately to elect the Indian-Chicano Board of Directors consisting of 32 members, holding 16 seats per each group. Finally, in April 2, 1971, the site was legally transferred to the newly elected Board of Trustees. There were term limits stipulating that DQ-U would have “fee simple absolute” for a thirty-year period until 2001, provided that the site was used for educational purposes only.¹⁴³

Chicanos and Native Americans communities shared in the excitement and victory of the founding of DQ-U. Grace Thorpe, daughter of famed Indian athlete Jim Thorpe, and the first information officer for DQ-U, stated that “DQ-U shows we can do something for ourselves, entirely ourselves.”¹⁴⁴ This sense of achievement spread

¹⁴¹ Quoted in “Indian Group Awarded Army Site Near Davis,” *The Daily Democrat*, 15 January 1971.

¹⁴² Quoted in “Nationwide meet to called by D-QU,” *The Daily Democrat*, 15 February 1971.

¹⁴³ Lutz, *D-Q University*, 24.

¹⁴⁴ Quoted in “D-QU Wins Battle to get Former Army Site,” *The Daily Democrat*, 19 February 1971.

quickly among the Chicano and Native American peoples, but it also allowed for self-reflection of what could be accomplished through legal recourses. Thorpe, who had given up a real estate business in Phoenix, Arizona in 1970 to join in the occupation of Alcatraz, later moving onto Indian efforts to regain wilderness land in northeast California, lamented that “those ventures might have turned out differently if, like the DQU’s well-organized sponsors, they had confronted the government with legal documents and concrete plans.”¹⁴⁵

The founders and student organizers, both Native Americans and Chicanos, were able to achieve a long held dream of forming a college that resembled their perceived needs and desires—or at least the needs and desires certain segments of these populations perceived for themselves in the early 1970s. This was evident when on September 25, 1971, these two constituencies came together to formally dedicate the old army communications depot site to the two indigenous spirits that led them to victory—Deganawidah and Quetzalcoatl. On that date, a flag designed by Frank Lee (a Mono Indian from the Fresno area)—with an image of a black bird which was a combined design from the Indian Thunderbird and Aztec eagle in black—was presented to the founders. The flag was blessed by Jim Racine (of Blackfoot descent from Montana), DQ-U site development director, whom said in prayer,

I present this flag to you, remember your children. Through the knowledge we gain here, we will grow strong.¹⁴⁶

David Risling, newly elected chairman for the trustees at DQ-U, followed,

¹⁴⁵ “D-QU Wins Battle to get Former Army Site,” *The Daily Democrat*, 19 February 1971.

¹⁴⁶ Quoted in “Dedication of Two Flags is Highlight of Indian Day Fete at DQ University,” *The Sacramento Bee*, 25 September 1971.

What you see flying here today is the first day of a new era for Indian and Chicano people. We welcome you here, not only in DQU, but to other colleges like this will open in other parts of the country.¹⁴⁷

Risling and others in the DQ-U community believed to be involved in a Movement where other Chicanos and Native Americans could join forces to establish a similar institution of higher learning. This is yet to come to pass, however. To date, DQ-U has remained the only Chicano/Native American college established in the United States.

On July 1972, DQ-U was officially recognized as a candidate for accreditation by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, an official academic body responsible for the accreditation of public and private colleges and university. Finally, in 1977, it became a fully-accredited two-year college, granting both associates of arts and associates of science degrees. DQ-U offered a wide range of courses that fell within the rubric of Chicano and Native American Studies, keeping with its original mission to have ethnic studies as its base. Some of the original courses offered were Lakota language, Native American religion, Indian law, California tribes and reservations, Latin American literature, and Latin American history.¹⁴⁸ By the 1973-74 academic school year the course offerings grew to include Native American Music and Dance, Introduction to Anisshinabe Linguistics, Introduction to Chicano Sociology, and Chicano Political Thought.¹⁴⁹ They also provided special needs services to students who required remedial assistance in areas of math and reading,

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Lutz, *D-Q University*, 27.

¹⁴⁹ *D-Q University Catalog, 1973-1974* (Davis, CA: D-Q University, April 14, 1973): 64 and 66.

noting that such courses were designed for “those who perhaps dropped out of the colonizer’s public school system or never even had a chance to attend any kind of school regularly, as in the case of Mexican farm workers from poor areas south of the border.”¹⁵⁰ In this sense, DQ-U proponents were sensitive to the migratory needs of farm workers. In 1974, DQ-U celebrated its first graduate, Victor Gabriel.

One of the major obstacles faced by DQ-U proponents was securing financing to sustain and maintain the university. Truth be told, getting DQ-U up and running was not an easy endeavor whatsoever. For one, professors were asked to teach courses without monetary compensation. Furthermore, not all professors held doctorate degrees; the faculty with Ph.D.s at this time also included community and tribal leaders with “practical expertise, to artisans and craftsman with unique skills,” but had had little experience in a classroom setting. Most courses were offered in evenings and weekends to accommodate the full-time work schedules and local Indian and Chicano commuters from the larger Sacramento Valley. In its first year of operation DQ-U counted on only a \$20,000 grant from the Donner Foundation that Forbes had previously secured. However, most of its revenue was expected to be collected through student fees.¹⁵¹ Additionally, \$50,000 was eventually secured from the Office of Economic Opportunity.¹⁵² This seed money helped to get DQ-U up and running, but it was hardly enough to comfortably sustain the new university over the long haul.

¹⁵⁰ Lutz, *D-Q University*, 27.

¹⁵¹ Forbes, *Native American Higher Education*, 136-137.

¹⁵² Jack D. Forbes, interview with author, 2 July 2010, Davis, California, audio recording. The Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) was an agency responsible for administering most of the War

Recruiting Chicano and Native American students to DQ-U was also challenging endeavor because of its isolated location and also its new accreditation, no academic acclaim or reputation, and a small student base from which to draw. For example, Laura Llano recalled in a recent interview being persuaded to take courses at DQ-U while she was enrolled at Sacramento State University and active in Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA) there. She explained,

Everybody talked about how great it [DQ-U] was. How this was going to be the Chicano and Native American school that focused on the Native American and Chicano culture, language, and all that. It was going to be like Spellman, like these Black colleges. And wow that was a heady idea! We needed that because we were being ignored here. That was the motivation for me to go and check it [DQ-U] out.¹⁵³

Llano, convinced that this was an opportunity she could not pass up, decided to enroll in a Native American Anthropology course at DQ-U in either fall 1971 or spring 1972 (she does not recall instructor's name or course title), but was disappointed when she discovered that not all students in the class were as "serious" in learning as she was. She noted, "They were there to party. They took the class because they thought it would be an easy 'A.'"¹⁵⁴ Llano complained that about half the class did not come prepared and had not read the assignments. "In those days," she explained, they called class a "rap session," which meant that rather than learn from the professor through lecture, students were allocated time to vent about different issues like "how they had

on Poverty Programs created as part of the Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society Legislative agenda. Robert Weisbrot, *Freedom Bound: A History of America's Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Plume Printing, 1991): 164.

¹⁵³ Laura Llano, interview by author, 14 June 2010, Sacramento, California, audio recording.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

been discriminated [against].”¹⁵⁵ In the end, Llano ruled out taking another course at DQ-U because of the way class was structured and also due to distance. She noted, “It was way in the heck out there. It was past Davis, take this lonely road.”¹⁵⁶ Although this is but one account by an obviously dissatisfied student, Llano’s experience points to a lack in academic structure and also the inaccessibility to most students who did not live near or around the Davis/Woodland area. These factors would deter many Chicano and Native American students from matriculating at DQ-U in the years to come.

In the first decade, DQ-U’s student population remained small, with little more than 200 students enrolled in a given year. The student population reflected the community in its immediate surroundings. Lutz noted,

There is a large percentage of part-time students since many of them, particularly the migrant farm workers from Mexico, can only attend D-QU classes on Saturdays. Therefore, today more so than ever, D-QU is ‘busiest’ on Saturdays when you can meet students of all age groups and backgrounds trying to make up the deficits in their school education or seeking specialized instruction in Native American and Chicano Studies.¹⁵⁷

As is noted above, DQ-U administrators were sensitive to the needs of its Chicano and Native American student populations and attempted to accommodate them as best as possible. Forbes put it best when he stated to the press “that DQ will be for both Indians [and] Chicanos.”¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Lutz, *D-Q University*, 28.

Chicanos and Native American students formed student organizations to foster mutual respect and understanding. For instance, in 1971 “El Concilio de Los Indios y Chicanos” (The Council of Indians and Chicanos) was founded at DQ-U. Originally its membership numbered 25 and its goals were clearly outlined in its Statement of Purpose: “[To] create an understanding and appreciation for Native American and Chicano heritage;...urge that Native Americans and Chicano culture and history be incorporated into all American history courses immediately;...[and] take an active role in community problems and projects, particularly those affecting Indian and Chicano people.”¹⁵⁹ The founding of El Concilio revealed that at this point Native Americans and Chicanos respected each other’s cultures and were still striving for similar goals within their respective communities.

FRACTURING OF IDENTITY POLITICS

By the early 1980s, a decade after the founding of DQ-U, some Chicanas/os in the American Southwest and especially at DQ-U continued to subscribe to a strong indigenous identity. Like the founders of DQ-U, these Chicanas/os emphasized their mestizo heritage and colonized status in the U.S. For example, on June 7, 1982, Andrea Carmen, representative of La Raza Unida Party, delivered a presentation at the 8th Annual International Indian Treaty Conference where she declared that:

We recognize ourselves as indigenous people of this hemisphere....The Chicano nation loves the Southwest as our Motherland. We look forward to ongoing discussions with the Indian nations of the Southwest in order to protect our Mother Earth

¹⁵⁸ “Indian Group Awarded Army Site Near Davis,” *The Daily Democrat*, 15 January 1971.

¹⁵⁹ “El Concilio Unites Chicanos & Indians,” *The Coyote*, (DQ-U school newspaper), Spring 1971.

from destruction and to insure the survival of our peoples.... We recognize our unity with all indigenous nations in the spirit of "One Continent, One People."¹⁶⁰

From the standpoint of La Raza Unida Party and the Chicano Caucus at the national level, Chicanos and Native Americans shared a common ancestry and history of colonization.

In fact, at the International Indian Conference, many of the sentiments expressed earlier by Chicanos and Native Americans at the first annual Southwest Ethnic Groups workshop held at the University of Texas at El Paso on July 27-29, 1972, were reiterated. For instance, the commonalities between Chicanos and Indians that were outlined at the Conference included: the shared lived experience of colonization; violation of treaties by the United States—citing both the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848; desire to preserve one's language and culture; and indigenous ties to the western hemisphere.¹⁶¹ Hence, the sentiments expressed the previous decade with the establishment of DQ-U and others of that era still rang true and at least some Chicanas/os continue to subscribe to this general philosophy or outlook to the present day. Indeed, this is clearly noted in Arturo J. Aldama's recent work on Chicano and Native American struggles for self-determination where he challenges us to recognize the "contradictions of negotiating

¹⁶⁰ "One Continent, One People," Position adopted by the Chicano Caucus at the 8th Annual International Indian Treaty Council, June 3-13, 1982, Presented to the General Assembly June 7, 1982 by Andrea Carmen, representative from La Raza Unida Party. Jack Forbes Collection at Special Collections, University of California, Davis, Box F-23, Folder Title: "Chicano Materials General Files."

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

mestizaje...in a transnational context” which drive the politics of identity.¹⁶² Most certainly, in order to come to terms with the mass migration of persons from North and South American continents, one must understand the complexities of identity politics and how they have been shaped over time through colonization and oppression.

While DQ-U stood as a possibility of hope and educational success for the Chicano and Native American communities, as noted earlier, from the very beginning it was plagued with the insurmountable task of securing funds to sustain its operation. For most of its time in its existence, DQ-U received federal funds through the Tribal Community Act. By the mid 1990s, however, the DQ-U board of trustees had to reach a compromise in order to ensure funding for its survival. Although the original board of trustees was comprised of 16 Native Americans and 16 Chicanos, eventually Chicano board members were compelled to resign to allow DQ-U to qualify as an Indian-controlled college for purposes of funding under the Tribal Community Act. This drastic action was necessary because the bulk of DQ-U’s budget was based on federal funding received under terms of the act. At the time, most Chicanos recognized that Native Americans were bringing in the majority of financial support for the college and therefore “understood” the decision to remove them from the board. This change did not preclude indigenous persons from Meso-America or South America

¹⁶² Aldama, *Disrupting Savagism*, xix.

from running or serving on the DQ-U board of directors as long as they abided with U.S. federal government regulations.¹⁶³

All the while, reliance on the federal government rather undercut arguments about internal colonialism and the paternalism and control of “the feds” over Indian and Chicano affairs. While the rhetoric surrounding the founding of the school focused on efforts of self-reliance and self-determination, when DQ-U supporters and administrators found themselves hard-pressed for financial support they seemed to have set aside these ideals. The DQ-U management had to reach such compromises, whether willingly or by force, in order to keep the school up-and-running. Given this set of circumstances and dependence on federal government funds, then, establishing a self-sufficient university by and for Chicano and Native Americans appeared to be not only a contradiction, but perhaps even impracticable. Indeed, in the heyday of the DQ-U movement this underpinning hypocrisy was never addressed openly, at least in available primary sources. Years later, Gerald Gipp, executive director of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium—a group established in 1972 to address common challenges such as fund-raising and attracting qualified faculty to tribal colleges—admitted to overall financial woes in the tribal college system. When questioned, “What does it take to develop a viable institution?” He responded, “We haven’t really answered that question at this point.”¹⁶⁴ Given the on-going economic

¹⁶³ Jack D. Forbes, Letter To: DQ-U Community, “An Open Letter to the D-QU Community,” 21 December 1994.

¹⁶⁴ Robin Hindery, “D-QU close to collapse: Hard times continue for California’s only tribal college,” *The Davis Enterprise*, 13 August 2006.

hardships of some tribally controlled colleges, some DQ-U proponents had to come to the realization that federal dependency and ideals of self-determination could not fully co-exist.

But not all Chicanos in the region agreed with the shift from a Chicano/Native-American board to an all Native-American leadership. Indeed, some Chicanos believed that their efforts and role in the formation of the university were overridden by these developments. Chicanas/os charged that the now all-Indian board of trustees monopolized DQ-U and that the needs of the Chicano community would no longer be taken into account. For example, Arturo Apodaca had ill feelings towards the move to an all Native American Board and claimed that this was a pretext to finally do away with the Chicano contingency. He explained,

That's when they had that big *bronca* (brawl) between the Native Americans and Chicanos. ...That's when they took over. That's when the Native American half of DQ-U talked the Chicano half into letting them have the majority of board members because if they had the majority and it was under Native American control they could get all the funds they needed from the BIA [Bureau of Indian Affairs]. But they couldn't do that unless it was 51/49 percent. Seems to make sense, then, but wait a second...it was kind of slick. They made the whole university Deganawidah...All the original stuff [meaning the purpose and orientation of the university] just disappeared and they ran all the Mexicans out. They had a big fight.¹⁶⁵

In Apodaca's view, Chicanos were deceived into believing that sacrificing their place on the board without having to yield their power or voice, when in reality this was not

¹⁶⁵ Arturo José Apodaca, interview by author, 27 April 2010, El Dorado, California, audio recording.

the case. This move caused a tremendous rift between Chicanos and Native Americans—a divide that would could not be easily mended.

Some would later argue that relations between Native Americans and Chicanos were always plagued with internal discord. For example, Kenny Risling, son of late David Risling Jr. (the former UCD Native American Studies chair and co-founder of DQ-U along with Jack Forbes), remembered his father and Forbes discussing their vision for an Indian university over the kitchen table in Risling's house. In those early meetings, Kenny Risling recalled, they envisioned a pan-Indian, multi-cultural, four-year university that would serve all indigenous peoples of North American, including Spanish-speaking Indians from Mexico. Almost immediately, according to Kenny Risling, the alliance between Chicano and Indians “fell completely apart.” He recalled,

They just couldn't make it work. In the end, they had to sever the relationship. It was a dream and the idealism that brought them to try and do it [found DQ-U], but there were some practical things that could not be overcome.¹⁶⁶

One of the most serious of these, according to Kenny Risling, was outright sabotage by the administration of then-California Governor Ronald Reagan who allegedly infiltrated DQ-U's leadership. He explained,

A Chicano man finally confessed that he was being paid as a staff member of Reagan. He was one of the people who were organizing the Mexican students against Indian students, and it worked.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ Quoted in, Patricia Valdata, “The Rebirth of D-Q University: Determined to keep the dream alive, interim president Arthur Apodaca seeks to re-energize California's only two-year tribal college,” *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education* 23/5 (April 20, 1996): 19.

¹⁶⁷ Quoted in, Valdata, “The Rebirth of DQ-U,” 19.

Although these allegations have not been proven, the idea that among the Chicanos was a possible informant deepened Native Americans' suspicions. Clearly Risling offers a second hand account, but claims that among Chicanos was an informant only fueled suspicion and further divided the groups. In fact, to present day, whenever DQ-U supporters gather on the site for spiritual purposes, gossip of conspiracy theories are often commonplace.¹⁶⁸ In the end, issues of distrust and identity politics could not sustain solidarity among Chicanos and Native Americans, but this was not always the case. There were many instances wherein they formed alliances and co-existed on DQ-U grounds in harmony. This is not, however, to diminish or dismiss the incidents of heated debate and outright fighting between the groups that occurred from the beginning.

Indeed, the mistrust between the two groups grew to greater heights and the stress to keep DQ-U in operation eventually hindered Chicano and Native American solidarity and unity. To this claim Forbes explained his own point of view:

I want to conclude by saying that all my adult life I have worked towards the unity of all indigenous people, including those Mexicans and Chicanos of Native race and/or identity. This I am saddened to see misunderstandings develop at DQU over the use of these terms.¹⁶⁹

Forbes defended his position and tried to clarify the bogus assaults on his character and activist trajectory. He put his best effort forward to ease the transition from an evenly split Chicano/Native American board to a solely Native American one by

¹⁶⁸ S. Howard Bransford, "Sweating it out: Searching for hope at California's only tribal college," *SN&R* (Sacramento News and Review), 19 June 2008: 11 and 13.

¹⁶⁹ Jack D. Forbes, Letter To: DQ-U Community, "An Open Letter to the D-QU Community," 21 December 1994.

making known that although the board was reflective of one group, DQ-U would continue with its original mission to serve all indigenous descendents of the Western hemisphere.

The DQ-U community grew further divided when Chicano students charged Native American board members as racist. MEChA de DQ-U was one of the factions that claimed that the board of trustees used their power to strip Chicanas/os of their rights on campus. In a letter to the campus community they wrote:

The Board of Trustees and President have been informed by students, faculty, and administrative staff of racial discrimination and sexual harassment. The Board has failed consistently to address this issue. The Ex President was fired after presenting the allegations to a Board Meeting.

A Chicano student who was elected by the student body to serve as the student representative to the Board of Trustees was refused because she is a “Chicano” of Mexican American heritage.¹⁷⁰

The details surrounding both the race discrimination/sexual harassment claims and the rejection of the Chicana incident remain unclear. Nonetheless, what was clear was that tensions among faculty and students and the board of trustees were high. Accusations of sexism and racism were not light accusations, how the board responded to these, if at all, is also uncertain. Clearly, then, the move to an all Native American board raised suspicion and distrust on behalf of Chicano students and faculty.

In an effort to ease these tensions, Forbes felt compelled to explain why Chicanos/Mexicanos were viewed as indigenous descendents after witnessing hostility between Chicano and Native Americans on the campus:

¹⁷⁰ “The Crisis at D-Q University,” by Native American and Chicano Studies at D-Q University, 9 December 1994.

In ancient times and up to about 1810-1821 the word Mexicano (derived from Meshica) referred to Nahuatl-speaking Indians primarily. But since the United Mexican States (Estados Unidos Mexicanos) came into existence all citizens of the entire country have come to be known as Mexicans...About 10% (or perhaps more) of the Mexican people still speak American languages. Thus the term Mexican is not racial. It refers essentially to citizenship or derivation from the territory of the Mexican state (including the Southwestern U.S.). ...DQU was designed to be under the control of the indigenous people whether derived from the US, Canada, or elsewhere, but they must be indigenous [emphasis in the original].¹⁷¹

As noted above, the confusion over whether Chicanos/Mexicanos were white or Indian and the ambiguity of their politics allowed for some Native Americans at DQ-U to distrust Chicanas/os as well. But for Forbes, this was never an issue; he wholeheartedly believed that Chicanos were legitimately Indian and that the inability to see them as such created unnecessary in-fighting.¹⁷²

The racial positioning of Chicanos in the U.S. was complicated from the onset of the Mexican American War and its aftermath in the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848. In her work of the making of the Mexican American race, legal scholar Laura E. Gómez argues that during this period there was a broad consensus among Euro-Americans that Mexicans were non-white because they were considered to be racially mixed. This issue became entangled, though, when the Treaty stipulated that Mexicans residing in the ceded territories were to be collectively naturalized U.S. citizens. Thus, technically Mexicans had become “white” because at

¹⁷¹ Jack D. Forbes, Letter To: DQ-U Community, “An Open Letter to the D-QU Community,” 21 December 1994.

¹⁷² Jack D. Forbes, interview with author, 29 June 2010 and 2 July 2010, Davis, California, audio recording.

the time, naturalization in the United States was limited to white persons only. Gómez notes that “tension around Mexican Americans’ racial status arose because this legal whiteness contradicted the *social* definition and dealings with Mexicans as non-white.”¹⁷³ To further complicate matters, as noted earlier, the muddled history of Spanish imperialism and Mexican repression of Indians allowed for some confusion and questioning as to whether ethnic Mexicans ultimately were to be considered the oppressed or the oppressor—and who was to make that determination.

For Mexicans, the not so clear racial categorization and the ambiguous standing to becoming full-fledged U.S. citizens facilitated a perverse racism. At the end of the Mexican American war and with the subsequent signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, the citizenship of Mexican Americans rested on a contradiction because while it guaranteed Mexicans in the now-U.S. territory the legal privileges of white citizen; at the same time, Anglo Americans refused to socially accept them as such. As the late Peggy Pascoe reminds us in her work on miscegenation law, that race scientists overwhelmingly “considered Mexicans such an irredeemably mixed-race population that they never produced a racial term for ‘Mexican’ that carried the same aura of scientific authority as terms like ‘Mongolian’ or ‘Malay.’”¹⁷⁴ In practice, then, ethnic Mexicans were relegated to non-white racial status and their racial categorization was often made by U.S. census officials’ perception of the each individual based on skin color and ethnic features. The racial

¹⁷³ Laura E. Gómez, *Manifest Destinies: The Making of the Mexican American Race* (New York: New York University Press, 2007): 83.

¹⁷⁴ Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009): 122.

classification of Mexican Americans was often heatedly debated in court hearings and over legislative bills well into the twentieth century. Indeed, Mexican Americans constituted the most fluid and complicated racial category.¹⁷⁵ It is under this scrutiny, then, that some Mexican and Mexican Americans navigated their own identity by sometimes making claims to whiteness in order to assure rights and privileges afforded to Anglos.

It is no wonder, then, that when given the option to choose a racial category, that large numbers of Mexicans and Mexican Americans both identified as White. In 1990, the U.S. Census showed that 56.2 percent of U.S.-born Mexicans reported that they were white, compared with 44.8 percent of immigrant Mexicans.¹⁷⁶ Forbes himself pointed this discrepancy out. However, he failed to complicate or historically situate the reasons for it. Clara E. Rodríguez in her study on Latinos in the U.S. Census notes that the “Hispanic” classification is perhaps the most complicated of all because it has varied over time, location, and individual circumstances. For instance, in 1930, Mexicans did not have their own specified *race* but were categorized as a race within other races. The U.S. census interviewer would “subjectively” determine their race based on his/her personal observation as to whether they were white, black, or Native American. To further complicate matters, “between 1940 and 1970, Mexicans and other Latinos were considered ‘white’ unless they clearly appeared to be Indian or Negro, and between 1980 and 2000, they could be ‘of any race’ they

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Clara E. Rodríguez, *Changing Race: Latinos, the Census, and the History of Ethnicity in the United States* (New York: New York University Press, 2000): footnote 20, pp. 218.

chose.”¹⁷⁷ Given the widespread racial categorization of Mexicans by the nation state, the mere act of “choosing” a racial category fluctuates. Hence, the issues brought forth by Native Americans at DQ-U over whether Mexicans were indeed indigenous was rooted in this messy and fluid historical relationship with U.S. policy and litigation over the racial categorization of Mexicans in the nation-state. Identity politics, for ethnic Mexicans, is messy not just because of the politics of citizenship but because they have their own heavy historical baggage on the issue. At no historical moment, though, are Mexicans passive or non-reflective of their “racial category” in the United States. Their choices largely reflected the social and economic conditions of the time and were not solely based on their legal status, but rather a personal decision made on their individual lives and collective experiences.

Despite this challenge, in the political moment in which DQ-U was founded, at least, Chicanos closely related to the Native American cause and found the structural similarities between them to outweigh the differences. Although it is difficult to know exactly how much of this was actually ultimately due to political expediency and opportunism, the fact that Forbes had the foresight and intuition to see DQ-U through and to build a coalition with Chicanos/as, who were espousing a similar needs and desires, deserves special mention. In a way, Forbes was able to convince not only Native Americans, but Chicanos that their similar historical experiences bonded them together to forge forward with an idea of a Chicano-Native American university. Of course, Forbes is not solely responsible for the establishment of DQ-U—as the early

¹⁷⁷ Rodríguez, *Changing Race*, 103.

parts of this chapter make clear—many Chicanas/os and Native Americans sacrificed energy, time, and money, and in some instances their education and employment. Indeed, few were able to accomplish a dream as “radical” as a college dedicated to the separate needs and desires of Chicanos and Native Americans. It is important to recognize their success, given that in the civil rights era, many more failed at their attempts to achieve radical and meaningful change.

CONCLUSION

In the end, the collective achievement of establishing DQ-U provided the impetus for continual struggle for self-determination. In 1980, Forbes reflected on the symbolic and important victory,

After eleven years [since 1960] of struggle the dream of a Native American University finally burst into full-blown reality...but something had happened which was far more important. We had learned something about community development strategy...we had managed to spread the idea of Indian-controlled education all across the country, but wherever it took root ultimately it was because of local commitment and local organizing [emphasis in original].¹⁷⁸

For Forbes, then, the establishment of DQ-U was very much centered on the strengths and powers of local community organizing efforts. Had it not been for the community’s resilience and their commitment and resolve for the dream of establishing such an institution, it would not have been possible.

By the mid 1990s, DQ-U reached its peak in enrollment, averaging about 500 students per year.¹⁷⁹ However, the college was all the while plagued with internal

¹⁷⁸ Forbes, *Native American Higher Education*, 22-23.

¹⁷⁹ “D-QU Close to Collapse,” *The Enterprise*, 13 August 2006.

administrative and economic strife that crippled further progress of the university. Animosity and hostilities reached a point where a restraining order was placed against former vice chancellor, John Rolfe Elliot, for making death threats against the DQ-U board of trustees and reportedly attempting to injure former school president, Annzell Loufas, with his car.¹⁸⁰ But perhaps DQ-U's greatest challenge was financial. In 1999, The Sacramento Bee reported, "College leaders are on a constant quest for funds, relying on short-term grants for basic services and periodically collecting food from the local food bank to save money."¹⁸¹ By turn of the twenty-first century, the situation worsened when federal funds could no longer keep up with the growing student enrollment at the 34 tribal colleges throughout the United States, which reached an estimated 30,000 in 2005. Tribal colleges received about \$4,400 per student from the federal government.¹⁸² Regardless, DQ-U continued to find itself in economic hardship, despite the fact that it leased 440 acres of the former U.S. Army site to a farmer for \$57,250 a year and an additional 90 acres to a cattle rancher (for an undisclosed amount).¹⁸³

By the end, in 2004, the Department of Education found that DQ-U administrators had withdrawn \$350,000 from the school's endowment to pay salaries and other expenses which was against federal policies. The Department also reported

¹⁸⁰ "Ex-DQU Administrator Barred from Campus: Elliot Accused of Making Death Threats Against Trustees," *The Davis Enterprise*, 24 August 1995 and "University Files for Restraining Order," *The Sacramento Bee*, 2 September 1995.

¹⁸¹ "Tribal College's Cultural Focus Eases Transition," *The Sacramento Bee*, 30 October 1999.

¹⁸² "D-QU Close to Collapse," *The Enterprise*, 13 August 2006.

¹⁸³ "Tribal College's Cultural Focus Eases Transition," *The Sacramento Bee*, 30 October 1999.

that the school had violated federal financial aid regulations by issuing Pell Grants to students who were either no longer enrolled or no longer eligible because they did not meet GPA requirements. Given these findings by the Department of Education, in June of that year, the Western Association of Schools and Colleges stipulated that DQ-U must immediately recruit more board members, manage its finances, and prove that its students were completing degrees. When DQ-U's board failed to meet those requirements, in January 2005, the Western Association of Schools and Colleges revoked DQ-U's accreditation, specifically citing its failure to prove sufficient progress, an action that stripped the school of its ability to grant degrees or offer courses. DQ-U supporters, mostly college students, refused to abandon the school, despite the "no trespassing" signs posted outside.¹⁸⁴

As a last effort, in August 2005, Arturo José Apodaca (one of the original Chicano founders and participant in the takeover of DQ-U) was hired as the university's interim president in hopes that he could solve the school's problems. At first, many saw Apodaca as the school's "long-awaited savior." But Apodaca did not meet these expectations and when he proposed to the DQ-U Board of Trustees to divide the school into two separate colleges—one for Native Americans and the other for Chicanos—he was met with backlash.¹⁸⁵ The board rejected his proposal at a meeting where tempers flared. Apodaca explained in a recent interview,

They also wanted to remove me because they said I was trying to split the school into Quetzalcoatl and Deganawidah, and separate the

¹⁸⁴ "D-QU Close to Collapse," *The Enterprise*, 13 August 2006.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

schools, and we've always been together. Yes, we've always been together. "D" was the Indian School. "Q" was the Chicano school. DQ-U is the umbrella....One of the guys [Native American students], cheeky little guy—not little physically but rather his mentality or attitude—was hollering at me..."*Cabrón* [punk] you want to throw *chingasos* [blows] right here? Lets go." By that time I had lost all sense of trying to be courteous...I refused to be removed and told them [to] take me to court.¹⁸⁶

Apodaca could not comprehend the controversy, given that he was merely restoring DQ-U to its original design and purpose. His critics argued, on the other hand, that he was "attempting to chip away at the school's tribal identity to create a Hispanic-dominated institution."¹⁸⁷ In Apodaca's defense, the structure of DQ-U was initially divided into four colleges which included Quetzalcoatl, Hehaka Sapa (the college of Anisshinabe People), Tiburcio Vásquez (the college of vocational and professional studies), and Carlos Montezuma (college of medicine).¹⁸⁸

The controversy over Apodaca's DQ-U presidency did not end there. Indeed, some Native Americans began to confront him by questioning his "authenticity" as an Indian. Apodaca, recalled in a recent interview that up until the loss of accreditation in 2005, some Native Americans refused to accept Chicanos as "Indians." According to him, Native Americans students would often disrupt DQ-U Board of Directors meetings (it remains unclear if it was the same one mentioned above) and attempt to intimidate Chicanos to leave. Apodaca recalled,

¹⁸⁶ Arturo José Apodaca, interview by author, 27 April 2010, El Dorado, California, audio recording. By 1973, however, the Quetzalcoatl College (the college of Chicano studies) and Hehaka Sapa College were still in the "planning stages."

¹⁸⁷ "D-QU Close to Collapse," *The Enterprise*, 13 August 2006.

¹⁸⁸ *D-Q University Catalog 1973-1974*, 73-83.

That beautiful dream. Destroyed, by this handful of folks [Native Americans] that allowed the racism to get between them and reason. So that when those kids [Native Americans] would do the protest thing, “We don’t want no Mexicans at DQ-U! DQ-U is for Indians! Mexicans get off!” They would do that.

Although this may have been an isolated or rare occurrence, it brings to light the internal divides and tensions over who has rights to an “Indian” identity and who encompasses the DQ-U community. From Apodaca’s perspective, Chicanos helped found DQ-U, had legitimate ties to the land as indigenous people, and therefore rightfully “belonged” there. The bickering inevitably led to fractionalization that turned Native Americans and Chicanos against each other—leading each to make claims as to who was more authentically “Indian.”

In June 2006, the board of trustees dismissed Apodaca for allegedly squandering most of the school’s remaining \$120,000 endowment—a claim that Apodaca would adamantly reject and instead argue that he inherited that debt.¹⁸⁹ He was escorted off the premises by the sheriffs on the grounds that he was trespassing—and that was the last time he set foot on DQ-U grounds.¹⁹⁰ By early August, the then six-member board made the painstaking decision to not hold classes for fall 2006. Instead, it hoped to rent the campus out for conferences and workshops in an effort to raise revenue. This undertaking was challenging given that the school was in need of major repairs and remodeling. DQ-U’s greatest threat, however, was the loss of its 640 acres to the U.S. federal government for violating the stipulation that the land must be

¹⁸⁹ Arturo José Apodaca, interview by author, 27 April 2010, El Dorado, California, audio recording.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

maintained as an educational institution.¹⁹¹ In the end, DQ-U could not keep the doors open, forcing the board to suspend all classes and relieve all students.

The closure of DQ-U was a heavy blow to the Chicano and Native American student movement. Yet, DQ-U stood as a symbol of hope. It was a testament of what could be accomplished with coalitions. In its final days, Native Americans and Chicanos united to fight to keep its doors open. They did not succeed, but perhaps the lessons learned, the sense of accomplishment, the reasons that brought them together in the first place bonded this group of activists together forever. The coalition should not be remembered in a romanticized manner as is so often depicted in this era of civil rights triumphant narrative, but rather in the possibilities and abilities to render a dream and make it a reality—something so few groups were able to attain. Darrell Standing Elk, a 73-year-old Sicangu Lakota elder recently shared in an interview that he will continue to hold sweats at DQ-U (something he has done since its founding in 1971). He summed it up best when he said, “We all want the same thing. We want to reestablish the school and make it a place of pride and dignity.”¹⁹²

¹⁹¹ “D-QU Close to Collapse,” *The Enterprise*, 13 August 2006.

¹⁹² Quoted in, “Sweating it Out: Searching for hope at California’s Only Tribal College,” *Sacramento News and Review*, 19 June 2008.

CONCLUSION

Over forty years since the Chicano Movement, Sacramento's ethnic Mexican community continues to thrive and grow. They come together to celebrate Mexican holidays and foster Mexican culture through festivals, commemorations, and exhibits. For instance, in the spring of 2010, approximately 25,000 people attended *El Festival de La Familia* (then in its nineteenth year in operation) which featured 20 Latino cultures.¹ They also showcased Chicano/mexicano art and music at local art galleries. For example, La Raza Galeria Posada in Sacramento held an exhibit featuring Latin Rock concert posters from the early 1970s. The contributions of Latinos were also observed on Memorial Day when Mexican American veterans gathered at the Mexican American Veterans Memorial at the California State Capitol to honor fallen Latino soldiers.² Ethnic Mexicans also come together to watch sports events such as the World Cup matchup between Mexico and France on June 17, 2010 at local restaurants like Zócalo or Vallejo's in midtown Sacramento.³ These are but a few examples of how Mexicans bring culture and vibrancy into Sacramento's city-life.

The Latino community of Sacramento not only comes together to celebrate, it also unites to protest racist legislation such as Arizona's Senate Bill 1070 (sponsored by Senator Russell Pearce) which was enacted on April 23, 2010 by the Legislature of

¹ Jennifer Garza, "Latino culture gets its Capital close-up," *The Sacramento Bee*, 26 April 2010.

² "Memorial Day weekend activities around the Sacramento region," *The Sacramento Bee*, 26 May 2010.

³ Gina Kim, "Local fans cheer for Mexico in World cup win over France," *The Sacramento Bee*, 18 June 2010.

the State of Arizona. In fact, when the City of Sacramento Council placed the Arizona boycott on its agenda, Sacramento area Latinos packed the meeting and testified in hopes that the council would adopt a boycott similar to those already enacted in other California cities like, Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Diego, and Oakland. Ralph Carmona, a former University of California regent and Sacramento Municipal Utility District (SMUD) lobbyist, noted excitedly,

I've never seen anything like this here. You had older people engaging a contemporary issue while trying to galvanize younger people and reaching out to the diversity of the city.⁴

Some of the “older people” Carmona was referring to were some Sacramento Chicano Movement activists whose commitment to ethnic Mexican civil rights has not wavered over the decades. The Sacramento City Council voted 6 to 1, on June 15, 2010, to place economic sanctions against Arizona companies, including forbidding travel to conferences in Arizona on city funds. This incident demonstrates, then, that at the most fundamental level Chicanos continue to make headway by actively engaging in campaigns to protect the interests of their community—regardless of citizenship status.

COMMUNITY IDEOLOGICAL LESSONS

The politics of community are motivated largely by the yearning of belonging.⁵ Whether it is a network in a neighborhood, organization, political or religious affinity, social, or cultural/ethnic group, people come together to form community in a variety

⁴ Quoted in, Marcos Breton, “Marcos Breton: How Sacramento came to boycott Arizona,” *The Sacramento Bee*, 23 June 2010.

⁵ This idea of belonging is coined in: Nira Yuval-Davis, “Belonging and the politics of belonging,” *Patterns of Prejudice*, Vol. 40/3 (2006).

of ways and reasons and the Sacramento case is no exception. Perhaps, the drive to form and activate community is largely based on the desire to protect and promote the things people hold dear to them.⁶ As demonstrated in this dissertation, during the 1960s the ideals of community, although defined differently by different people, served as an organizing mechanism to recruit and promote political agendas. For instance, by espousing Chicano nationalist ideas and enmeshing them with the concept of community Chicano activists were able to reach and influence significant numbers of the ethnic Mexican community even if they never met them face to face. The various motivations that helped initiate such political drives helped foster a sense of belonging in a broad spectrum of people who lived in an otherwise hostile environment that had refused to incorporate ethnic Mexicans into its social fabric. In a sense, then, building on community issues and advocating on the community's behalf held large rewards for those attempting to rally others around their cause.

Although the invocation of "community" as an organizing mechanism is not altogether new, over time, groups have negotiated and constantly attempted to redefine the meaning of community. The clearest example to date is the evolution of on-line social networks that create different levels of community among people who may never meet one another in the flesh.⁷ Yet, even in this case it is clear that people continue to form community for the very same reasons of wanting to belong and participate in some form or fashion.

⁶ Patricia Hill Collins, "The New Politics of Community," *American Sociological Review* Vol. 75/5 (2010): 10.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

Yet, as was often true of the groups and individuals explored in this dissertation, the idea of community has also sparked a sort of makeshift gate-keeping mechanism wherein members of such networks attempt to keep out or guard against those they deem do not “fit-in” adequately. This is noted, for example, in ethnic groups who continue, now as then, to play the politics of identity by calling out those they deem do not meet certain cultural or ethnic criteria of authenticity. For instance, they may question if one “looks or acts the part.” Replaying social dynamics that have been practiced since the creation of the American republic, these attempts to police membership might achieve certain short term goals, but as Chicano-movement era activists discovered, only after fueling animosity, suspicion, and resentment among others who may well have felt affinity and investment that would have strengthened the group in question. In the cases studied in Sacramento, the idea of being able to detect a “Chicana/o” is nonsense because after over 500 years of colonization ethnic Mexicans came in all shades, shapes, and sizes. Nonetheless, the fact that such gate keeping was attempted during the heyday of the Chicano Movement, and yet continues in similar forms to present day, tells us a little something about the unstable dynamics surrounding identity politics and of the even more fraught project of trying to develop an idea of community with broad-based appeal and support.

During the era of the Chicano Movement, the importance of these dynamics in shaping the trajectory of various social intervention—whether the campaign against busing or the experiment of DQ-U—can be seen in stark outline. For some of the activists involved in these struggles, it was a privilege to be included and in the heat of

the moment, they sometimes made choices that privileged insiders and stressed the need for such exclusivity as the key to successful organizing. Perhaps, part of the reason some guarded the make-up of their community was because this was the only thing they had carved out for themselves without outside influence or the threat of harassment. Under the circumstances, there was tremendous value placed on the importance of clear boundaries and membership of communities and thus a deep desire and concern to protect and preserve it. Clearly, in the Washington Elementary battle all parties involved claimed to speak on behalf of the community, with little regard or understanding to opposing views or experiences. This brought to light the extreme heterogeneity of the Mexican-origin population and thus the realities and complexities of community politics. On the one hand, Mexican parents claimed to have the best interest of their children, while on the other hand, school board personnel and mainstream Mexican American leadership argued that they understood the intricacies of how racial oppression translated to educational neglect. Because it was a dear topic to both groups, none could see beyond its own views.

These types of debates existed in many neighborhoods across the United States and over different issues, with all parties involved believing that they represented their communities best. Whether it is in Sacramento or elsewhere, the concept of community is trivialized by inside and outside factors. It is never stagnant, always fluid, and forever evolving. Thus, defining it may be impossible or worst yet attempts to define it may be limiting and inaccurate. It is more purposeful to simply accept this as so. In fact, not only have scholars had a difficult time agreeing on a particular or

specific definition of community, but because individuals differ in their experience and belief system of community there may never be consensus.

RETROSPECTIVE THOUGHTS

Today, Sacramento is considered one of California's most ethnically diverse cities. It is home to a large Hmong population and to a number of other Southeast Asian and Russian refugees, has a well-established African American community, and of course is also home to many generations of ethnic Mexicans. This is best noted in Southside Sacramento where frequenting the new Super Walmart on the corner of Florin Road and Stockton Boulevard provides the most visible example of the Capitol city's multi-ethnic population. There, you can hear people speak in a variety of languages. Indeed, the staff at this Walmart is as diverse as its clientele. They seem to co-exist without giving much thought to this blend of cultures, experiences, histories, and languages. In fact, driving down Fruitridge Road, also in South Sacramento, there are Mexican, African American, and Asian business all on one strip. While this scenario is not representative of all of Sacramento County, or the city of Sacramento itself for that matter, it is difficult to ignore the racial/ethnic demographic changes in the last few decades. Indeed, the larger Sacramento Valley may best represent the problems of urban sites and perhaps even solutions to assure a prosperous California future. Californians must come together to forge a universal culture of acceptance and mutual respect that dignifies all persons irrespective of citizenship, race/ethnicity, gender, class, or religious affiliation.

Indeed, the activism of the late 1960s helped to shine light on the Sacramento Chicano community—before then, members of the local population remained largely in the shadows, an ignored and amorphous “minority” entity. Today, the situation seems quite the opposite as some politicians focus on the growing Latino immigrant influx and despite their efforts to limit this migration, there appears to be no sign that it will slow down any time soon. In fact, the U.S. Census has noted that all indicators point to continued growth in the Latino population in years to come—making it in some sense, the largest aggregate “minority” group in the United States. The ethnic Mexican population grew at least 60 percent between 1970 and 1980—from approximately 5.4 million to 8.8 million—and by 1990 the population had reached 14.5 million people.⁸ David G. Gutiérrez argues that the past four decades of the twentieth century has very much changed the dynamics of identity and social orientation among Latinos. Indeed, the 2000 U.S. Census revealed that despite countless immigration reforms more immigrants entered the United States from 1990 and 2000 than any other decade in the past.⁹ Gutiérrez notes, however, that the demographic flux of Latinos in the U.S. has in some ways “helped to increase multicultural awareness and appreciation” as is seen in the support of events such as Festival de Mi Familia. At the same time, Gutiérrez warns, there has also been a

⁸ David G. Gutiérrez, “Globalization, Labor Migration, and the Demographic Revolution: Ethnic Mexicans in the Late Twentieth Century,” in David G. Gutiérrez, Ed., *The Columbia History of Latinos in the United States since 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004): 62.

⁹ David G. Gutiérrez, “Demography and the Shifting Boundaries of ‘Community’: Reflection on ‘U.S. Latinos’ and the evolution of Latino Studies,” in Gutiérrez, *The Columbia History of Latinos*, 3.

“fierce and sometimes violent backlash against Mexicans, Latinos, and other immigrants.”¹⁰ At the surface Anglo-Americans seem to be discomfited or bothered by how Mexicans exert their ethnic pride through the use of Mexican flags and other paraphernalia, but below the surface lies bald racism. Clearly, for some, the debate over Arizona’s SB1070 has drawn out some racial tensions in the nation, which have ultimately trickled down to places like Sacramento.

The fact that demographers predict that the Latino population will continue to grow in disproportionate numbers especially in comparison to whites raises several questions as to how the Chicana/o community will form and transform themselves in light of the economic turmoil and political backlash. The Latino population in Sacramento County is also on the rise. In 2004, the Community Services Planning Council, Inc. published a report titled “A Regional View of Social Disparities” that examines the special distribution of the demographic, social, economic, and educational characteristics of the Greater Sacramento population.¹¹ The Council predicts that the Greater Sacramento region will grow from a 2000 population of 2.84 million, to 4.27 million by 2025 (a growth rate of approximately 50 percent)—and that the population of Sacramento County alone may increase by 1.7 million people by the year 2050.¹² The report also anticipates that as the population ages, the population

¹⁰ Gutiérrez, “Globalization, Labor Migration, and the Demographic Revolution,” 72.

¹¹ The Greater Sacramento Region was defined as El Dorado, Placer, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Solano, Sutter, Yolo, and Yuba Counties. The counties that comprise this Region cover nearly 9,000 square miles and include urban as well as remote rural areas.

¹² Nancy Findeisen, President/CEO, “A Regional View of Social Disparities: A Visual Examination of the Socio-Economic Status of the Greater Sacramento Region,” (Sacramento, CA: Community Services Planning Council, Inc., January 2004): 3 and 7.

growth from newborns will be outpaced by immigration growth. During the last decade the “Hispanic” population alone increased by 58 percent. The U.S. Census Bureau is projecting the “Hispanic” population will increase by an additional 35 percent during the current decade. Sacramento County exhibits a race and ethnicity distribution similar to the state as a whole. Table 4 shows the race/ethnicity breakdown according to the 1990 and 2000 U.S. Census.

Table 4: Race and Ethnicity in Sacramento County		
Ethnicity	Number	Percentage
White		
1990	727,447	69.3%
2000	706,655	57.8%
Black		
1990	95,034	9.1%
2000	118,073	9.7%
American Indian		
1990	9,976	0.9%
2000	9,070	0.7%
Latino		
1990	122,959	11.7%
2000	195,890	16%
Asian		
1990	93,594	9.1%
2000	132,601	10.8%
Total Population		
1990	1,049,010	
2000	1,223,499 ¹³	

¹³ Information for 1990: “State’s Whites to Lose Majority Status by ’01: Hispanics Show Biggest Gains, Experts Report,” *The Sacramento Bee*, 18 December 1998. Information for 2000: Findeisen, “A Regional View of Social Disparities,” 11.

Given the increase in the Latino population, it is important to comprehend the intricacies of its diverse members' needs and desires and, again, for that matter, the different senses of community that they bring to the changing social matrix of the nation. Emma Pérez urges us to rethink Chicano communities “beyond the limits of assimilation, beyond the hopes of cultural aspiration, and instead” to give agency to the oppositional and transformative. By this she means that both the oppositional and transformative identity allow for an understanding of how Chicanas/mexicanas weave through the power of cultures to “create and recreate newness.”¹⁴ It is critical that historians keep in mind the fluidity of identity, politics, gender, and community of the subjects we investigate. *Las Madres Mexicanas*, founded in 1946, whose story unfolds in Chapter One, taught us that the members of this organization considered themselves Mexican and proud Americans at once; that they exhibited the wherewithal to organize on behalf of their husbands and sons who served in the U.S. military; and that they selflessly devoted countless volunteer hours for the larger Sacramento community. It is examples like these that teach us the greatest lesson that identity, politics, community, and gender are far from fixed categories. *Las Madres Mexicanas* were proud of their sons' and husbands' commitment to serve their country, but this did not strip them of their Mexican heritage—in their eyes, both could co-exist without conflict or contradiction.

Furthermore, the concept of community self-determination was not only espoused by militant activists of the Chicano Movement, but also was a goal of barrio

¹⁴ Emma Pérez, *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999): 80-81.

residents who struggled to preserve the sanctity of what they considered to be their safe havens. This was evident in Chapter Two when Washington barrio residents fought to preserve their neighborhood school. Mexican parents cited a multitude of reasons to preserve their neighborhood schools where their children attended and enjoyed various Mexican cultural and bilingual education programs. Mexican parents resisted desegregation efforts by organizing petition drives, attending Sacramento City Unified School District Board meetings, and protesting the Board's ultimate decision to desegregate by staging a boycott. David Díaz, in his work on barrios in urban areas, argues that "the history of urban policy in barrios is also a history of racism within the planning profession."¹⁵ The fact that Washington Elementary was targeted for one-way-busing in its desegregation efforts did not solve the inherent racism in urban planning. Thus, Mexicans in Sacramento and elsewhere continued to live in high proportions of poverty and concentrated in barrios. SCUSD board members claimed to instinctively know what was best for barrio children and therefore Chicana/o community activists ultimately were deemed to be inconsequential.

The Chicano community has come together to organize on many fronts. Collectively, they have been far from passive in their efforts to assure labor rights as was shown in Chapter Three. By engaging in what Ignacio M. García calls "oppositional politics," Chicanas/os were able to set their own agenda and elect

¹⁵ David R. Díaz, *Barrio Urbanism: Chicanos, Planning, and American Cities* (New York: Routledge, 2005): 191.

representatives for their cause.¹⁶ It was through grassroots organizing that Rubén Reyes and the Cannery Workers Committee came to empower the cannery workforce and to create safe worker conditions. By creating their own cannery union, they championed oppositional politics rather than working within the already established cannery union they formed a completely separate entity. Although they experienced adversities due to lack of financial assets, union organizing experience, and knowledge of worker legal rights, they did not falter in their fight for justice. The CWC redefined politics for themselves and ultimately for others as they were victorious in the courts that changed the way cannery workers were hired, promoted, and received pension plans.

Sacramento Chicanas/os also created community through cross ethnic coalitions as was revealed in Chapter Four with the founding of DQ-U. Olga Rodríguez, in her work on Chicano liberation politics, maintains that Chicana/o control of the Chicano community is a central component of a self-determination agenda. The Chicano Movement called for a centralized, though ultimately “democratic means” of the control “of all institutions in the community.”¹⁷ This included control over educational institutions at all levels. Likewise, for perhaps even more obvious reasons, Native Americans were keenly aware and sensitive to the cause of self-determination. In an unlikely set of events in the Sacramento area, these two

¹⁶ Ignacio M. García, *Chicanismo: The Forging of a Militant Ethos among Mexican Americans* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1998): 12-13.

¹⁷ Olga Rodríguez, Ed., *The Politics of Chicano Liberation* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1977): 50-51.

groups came together in a moment wherein ethnic groups were organizing separately and managed to form a successful coalition by founding the first Native American and Chicano community college. In its time this was no small feat. Even if the school is no longer operating as a college it continues to unite Native Americans and Chicanos on its grounds through sweat lodges and other spiritual ceremonies. The eventual collapse of DQ-U demonstrated, however, that identity politics can be a detriment to organizing a bi-ethnic community.

The overall achievements of the Chicano and American Indian Movements provided a deep sense of hope and aspirations for a community largely marginalized. Smith and Warrior, in their work on the Indian Movement, argue that “If the movement’s success in bringing pride to Indian communities was undisputed, it was also evident that it achieved few tangible accomplishments.”¹⁸ The same can be said of the Chicano Movement. Ernesto Chávez agrees with the spirits of Smith and Warriors’ point by noting that “the Chicano movement also failed to achieve its goals because of its essentialist imaginings of community driven by an ideologically bankrupt cultural nationalism.”¹⁹ In his view, “only by redefining the boundaries of identity, community, and citizenship can true change occur.”²⁰ Furthermore, Smith and Warrior describe the Indian Movement as “edgy, unpredictable creature that challenged American power in a way not equaled this century before or since” and as

¹⁸ Paul Chaat Smith and Robert Allen Warrior, *Like a Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee* (New York: New Press, distributed by W.W. Norton, 1996): 278.

¹⁹ Ernesto Chávez, “*Mi Raza Primero!*”: *Nationalism, Identity, and Insurgency in the Chicano Movement in Los Angeles, 1966-1978* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002): 120.

²⁰ Chávez, “*Mi Raza Primero!*”, 120.

a cultural revival that swept Indian communities. It was also criticized by some as diluting tribal differences into a generic, pan-Indian culture almost as harmful as assimilation.²¹

Similarly, then, the Chicano community may not ever come to a consensus on the issue of adopting or promoting a singular collective identity, whether Mexican, Mexican-American, Chicano, Latino, or—dare I mention the “H” word—Hispanic. In the end that may not matter much, except, of course, for Minnesota college students who held a hunger strike until the “Hispanic” classification was deleted from university forms. Perhaps the emphasis on labels is not as significant as it was for militant activists during the Chicano Movement or even in contemporary times. However, the division over labels continues in important ways to the present day, particularly since so many Mexican and Central Americans have come to the United States with their own senses of indigenous ancestry, affiliations, and collective identities. It is estimated that in Mexico about sixty percent of the population is mestizo while about thirty percent is predominantly Indian. It is difficult to assess how widespread or significant the spotty resurgence of indigenous identities in Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America will impact the Chicano community, but by focusing so heavily on identity may be counterproductive. Ethnic Mexicans will continue to do what they have done for centuries, they will continue to strive to build a better tomorrow for themselves, their families, and their communities as best they can.

²¹ Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 279.

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