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Publication Date

2018

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Judy Baca, SPARC and A Chicana Mural Movement:
Reconstructing U.S. History Through Public Art

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

by

Juan Pablo Mercado

2018

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2018

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Judy Baca, SPARC and A Chicana Mural Movement:
Reconstructing U.S. History Through Public Art

by

Juan Pablo Mercado

Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California, Los Angeles, 2018

Professor Juan Gómez-Quiñones, Chair

This dissertation is about the uses and function of public art and makes the argument that public art should be viewed as an historical project. When developed within the framework of a collaborative community project with a thoughtful consideration to the experiences, values, and aspirations of community members, these projects challenge neocolonial tenets of exploitative labor conditions, racism, homophobia and sexism. By imagining public art as an innovative process that crosses the boundaries of social justice, history, and collective memory, Judith F. Baca established, and the Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC) employed a form of remembering that served as an essential component to understanding how communities envisioned themselves, their struggles, and their ability to transform history. Reimagining certain flashpoints in U.S. history through the historical projects of public murals urges a more nuanced consideration of the past that dislodges narratives of de jure and de facto discrimination and

racial violence. What results from this reconsideration is a construction of multiple histories that challenge universally venerated, yet often distorted legacies of this nation. This dissertation also makes the claim that Baca has spent a lifetime developing a process that at its core is a voice of the people and that speaks for the community. It is a process that has been refined over decades and a process that this is still being shared with the future generations of artists and activists. Chronicling her work and understanding her artistic and political ethos also demonstrate how she broke with a long line of prolific and respected artists in an effort to build broader and more inclusive opportunities for her community.

The dissertation of Juan Pablo Mercado is approved.

Judith F. Baca

Lauren Derby

Robin Davis Gibran Kelley

Juan Gómez-Quñones, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2018

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Cecilia, Eli, Jake, Zack, Cruz, Marley, Abigail, Gabriella, Israel, Yolotli and Osvaldo—the next generation.

Para mi madre y padre, Paula y Pedro Mercado

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Of course, a project of this scope cannot be completed without the support, guidance, patience and understanding of whole host of people. And while there are too many people to thank, I will try my best to name a few who have played a critical role in this most formative period in my life.

First and foremost, my committee at UCLA. Even in the farthest reaches of my mind I could not have imagined a more formidable dissertation committee. My dissertation chair, Professor Juan Gómez-Quiñones who in addition to being a foundational historian in the field of Chicana and Chicano History, managed to train a cadre of historians in multiple generations and I am proud and honored to be part of the group. *Profe* was kind, supportive, critical, and meticulous when it came to the work, yet above all he was caring, and I can't remember one conversation when he didn't wish me and family all the best— ¡gracias *profe*! Professor Robin D.G. Kelley was a force and taking my first 20th century U.S. History seminar was the most daunting yet fulfilling experience I had my first year at UCLA. It was in fact Professor Kelley's suggestion to completely refigure the dissertation during the oral exams that made this dissertation what it became. Professor Robin Derby provided crucial insights when it came to oral history methodologies and I will always appreciate our heartfelt discussions about Luisa Passerini, Daniel James, and Alessandro Portelli. Lastly, but certainly not least is Professor Judy Baca. Judy opened her home, her lab, and her heart to me and I will forever be indebted to her. For all of the important insights in this dissertation I thank this committee, and for all the errors and omissions, I take full responsibility.

As a good Northern Californian, I came to UCLA despising all things Southern California including the *Dodgers*, yet my time in Westwood, Venice, Mar Vista, East Los, and

Long Beach quickly shifted my perspective (except for the *Dodgers* thing). At UCLA there were so many people that supported me during this period but specifically I wanted to acknowledge Teresa Barnett, Head of the UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research. Working with and learning from Teresa was an experience of a lifetime and I can't express just how much I appreciated my time at the COHR. While at UCLA I also served as the managing editor of *Regeneración Tlacuilolli: UCLA Raza Studies Journal*. It was here that I truly got to know a crew that shortly became more than just colleagues, they became *familia*. Jose Luis Serrano, Elizabeth Cardenas, and Alfredo Huante became co-conspirators and made life in SoCal feel like home.

Without question I would not have reached this professional and academic stage without the support and conviviality of my cohort, especially Amber Withers and Araceli Centanino. In a cohort of 28 students in the largest history graduate department in the country there we sat, one Black woman, one Chicana, and one Chicano. It was daunting to say the least, but we learned to support each other in the most important ways and proved to be as productive and as rigorous as any other student in that cohort. A special note to Araceli as we studied like no other after that first year in preparation for our comprehensive exams in the Fall. Without her support and work there is no way I pass those exams, gracias Araceli! I also had the pleasure and good fortune to meet Winter Schneider, coming from seemingly different worlds, we grew to form a very special bond that was activated by the love, labor, and dedication of raising two amazing (and energetic!) boys; Idris and Ozzie. Winter, words cannot express the amount of respect and admiration I have for you. *Mwen apresye ou*.

Before I got to UCLA I was fortunate enough to have been trained in the field of Chicana and Chicano Studies by an amazing set of scholar activists in San José. Kathryn Blackmer Reyes

was instrumental in guiding me through everything NACCS. Professor Gregoria Mora Torres served as my first historical advisor on research that would in fact become my master's project at San José State University. Professor Julia Curry Rodríguez has always demonstrated an incredible amount of caring and support for all of my work and has become an essential part of my life— *¡gracias Profa!*

In the final years of this project I was fortunate enough to find a professional home in the heart of the East Bay at Chabot College. I would like to thank all of my colleagues in the Social Sciences Division who supported me during this process. The Puente Team including Sandra, Linda, Dan, and Javier were also instrumental in providing encouragement. Once a Puentista always a Puentista! Pedro Reynoso was always supportive and constantly encouraging me to finish this thing up! Specifically, however Kay Fischer has served as model of what a scholar/activist should be, and I have appreciated all her support, guidance and willingness to support our students at all costs. Thank you for your work Kay!

At SPARC I wanted to thank Debra Padilla, Farhad Akhmetov for our spirited discussions on Soviet History, as well as Angélica Becerra for being a generous *colega*. In the East Bay I would like to thank Melinda McCrary, Executive Director at the Richmond Museum of History as well as Lincoln Cushing, Digital Assets Archivist for Kaiser Permanente Heritage Resources.

During the final stages of this process I was lucky enough to be invited to participate in The Sal Castro Memorial Conference on the Emerging Historiography of the Chicano Movement, held at UC Santa Barbara. Professor Mario Garcia gave me the opportunity to present part of the dissertation in a generative and welcoming space and for that I am grateful. At that conference I was also lucky enough to meet up with my “fifth Beatle,” the honorary member

of my committee Professor Tomás F. Summers Sandoval. Profe Summers Sandoval actually read and commented on several drafts of the dissertation as part of NACCS and PCB-AHA presentations and for that I am also very thankful. During the final stages of this work I was also lucky enough to reconnect with a former mentor and friend, Jordan Beltran Gonzales. Jordan brought a fresh perspective to a project several years in the making and was able to make significant improvements to this work in a very short time—thanks Jordan.

Finally, I wanted to thank my family, especially my mother, father, brothers and sister for understanding and being okay with the absences these past six years I really appreciate your support. Like it or not I will be around more often now! Lastly, I want to acknowledge my daughter and son, Yolotli and Osvaldo. All of the work that I do is for you and with the hope that you will live, learn, and love in a safer, and more just world.

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INTRODUCTION: THE POLITICAL ETHOS OF A CHICANA MURALIST

The incompatibility of art and politics is an insidious debilitating ploy which has been promulgated and uncritically accepted.¹

Nearly 40 years after the subject of art in relation to community was taken up by Chicanas in the movement generation, there still is much to be debated between cultural productions and their relation to history. This dissertation is about the uses and function of public art as an historical project. I examine the role that artists and art play in the process of understanding how communities envision themselves and their struggles within the larger social context. Moreover, when public art is developed within the framework of a collaborative community project with a thoughtful consideration of the experiences, values, and aspirations of community members, these projects have the ability to challenge neocolonial tenets of exploitative labor conditions, racism, and sexism.

The dissertation advances a broader movement seeking to use public memory as a way to critique institutionalized patriarchy and white supremacy.² History does not begin when you walk in the door and the type of incorporative art that Judy Baca utilizes includes a full range of *American* experiences in conjunction with the memory of the land. Moreover, essential the notion of public memory is a demand to be inclusive of an entire society and its varied experiences. People that might not consider themselves Americans are often at the center of these mural projects. In her artistic process Baca develops the notion of holding multiple

¹ Juan Gómez-Quiñones, "On Culture," *Revista Chicano-Riqueña* 5, no. 2 (1977), 44.

² I am referring to a growing number of scholar-activists that are realizing the multiple uses of art and especially public art in an effort to construct public memory and struggle against coercive and outmoded ideas of subjugation and exploitation. For further discussion please see: Karen Mary Davalos, *Chicana/o Remix: Art and Errata since the Sixties* (New York: New York University Press, 2007).

identities as an integral part of being an American and rejects the exclusivity of historical narratives that fail to accept a more nuanced and less Eurocentric lineage. The work of Judith F. Baca and her collaborators at the Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC) embody an ethos of a strong community that promotes cultural production as a means to progress, develop a critical awareness, and promote values of self-sacrifice for the common good. Art is at the center of this guiding philosophy.³

In his formative article, titled “On Culture,” historian Juan Gómez-Quiñones posits several critical questions in assessing the relationship between culture and history and makes an explicit “call to debate culture academically and politically.”⁴ Gómez-Quiñones goes on to note that culture is historically derived, but that it is also made up of both positive and negative aspects and can be fashioned by conscious action. These foundational insights on culture, cultural production, and the relationship that culture has with history, in part, inform this research project.⁵

Malaquias Montoya along with his wife Lezlie Salkowitz-Montoya co-authored a treatise in 1980 titled “A Critical Perspective on the State of Chicano Art.” Unlike Gómez-Quiñones’ “On Culture,” this was not a call for debate. This was more of an indictment on the larger Chicano community and the direction that Chicano art was heading. Among the many blistering accusations that the Montoya’s included were that the initial Chicano art of the 1960s was a protest art, an art of liberation, yet many “middle-class oriented Chicanos in the art realm . . . did

³ Gómez-Quiñones, “On Culture,” 44.

⁴ Ibid., 29.

⁵ JGQ goes onto posit among other ideas that culture needs to be linked with political thought and political action “culture requires critical consciousness and collective participation in politics. Culture must be joined to politics of liberation for it to be an act of resistance” (33).

not fully realize the implications of Chicano art . . . and so many started to emulate Anglo society and thus started to divert the movement and what was basic to it.”⁶ Malaquias Montoya describes himself as having an “objective to educate and be educated by those persons whom [he] comes in contact with daily.”⁷ Baca and SPARC also adhere to this seemingly basic, yet extremely profound ethic. By transforming public sites into spaces of knowledge production, collective reflection, and democratic advocacy the opportunity for Chicano art to liberate is limitless.



Figure 1. Judy Baca meeting with the mural makers at the Great Wall. Image courtesy of Judy Baca and SPARC Archives.

Assessing two of the major interpretive expositions on the role of culture and the trajectory of Chicano/a cultural production was essential in constructing this project. Both of

⁶ Malaquias Montoya and Lezlie Salkowitz-Montoya. “A Critical Perspective on the State of Chicano Art” *Metamorfosis: The Journal of Northwest Art and Culture* 3, no. 1 (1980).

⁷ Montoya and Salkowitz-Montoya, “Critical Perspective.”

these treatments are written within the formative years of SPARC when Baca was realizing her unparalleled collaborative public art project in the Tujunga Wash drainage canal of the San Fernando Valley—a most inclusive work—“The Largest Monument to Inter-Racial Harmony in America Today.”⁸ With the development of *The Great Wall of Los Angeles* and the refinement of an emerging community collaborative process, Baca and SPARC in one momentous stroke weighed in on the debate that Juan Gómez-Quiñones encouraged. At the same time, they left no doubt where their priorities and values lay when it came to elevating the consciousness of the community as the Montoya’s implored.

Scope of Project

Some of the major aspects of this research project are to ask critical questions regarding the lived experiences of Mexican and Mexican Americans in the United States and in Mexico. Specifically, it asks: What was the changing economic and social state of the Mexican American community, how did Mexican and Mexican Americans understand their struggles for civil rights? How do contemporary historians conceptualize those struggles? How are those experiences and contributions remembered and commemorated? What is at stake if we omit or distort this history, and what possibilities does public art offer in recovering the past and challenging pervasive yet often-distorted historical accounts? Part of what this dissertation demonstrates is that historical circumstances that Mexican and Mexican Americans experienced in the first half of the twentieth-century provided the political, social, and cultural floor for what would later be known as the Chicana and Chicano Movement. The argument suggests that the first half of the twentieth-century, was part of a much longer and much broader process of the

⁸ Social and Public Art Resource Center, *Great Wall of Los Angeles: Walking Tour Guide* (Venice, CA: SPARC, 2007), i.

civil rights struggle. Ultimately, the entire twentieth-century was significant to the social, cultural, political, and economic renaissance of Chicanas and Chicanos in the 1960s and 1970s.

The literature review for this dissertation is imbedded throughout the individual chapters. In this introduction I offer a brief survey of relevant literature and provide some theoretical insights with which I examine these topics. My examination serves to reveal gaps in the literature that this research aims to address. These brief appraisals assess some of the groundbreaking scholar/activists who are challenging conventional knowledge production and providing innovative methods by which to approach history—specifically through the use of public art and the contribution of one artist and her methods of work.

The scholarship of Daniel James provides a distinctive model for how to include public art as a significant component of storytelling.⁹ Imagining public art as the opportunity to cross multiple boundaries, and the opportunity to ask multiple, interdisciplinary questions about specific historical circumstances yields a deeper and wider interpretation of the past. In the East Bay of Northern California, the San Fernando Valley and in the Rocky Mountains public art, and particularly public mural projects, provide the potential to address the questions of historical amnesia and cultural distortion. By collaborating with the people of these distinct communities and by not imposing a *master narrative*, Judy Baca has implemented a strategy by which to re-envision U.S. history.¹⁰ Specifically, Baca was able to develop a nexus between historians, cultural informants, community residents and young artists that resulted in a refashioned

⁹ Daniel James, *Doña María's Story: Life, History, Memory, and Political Identity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000).

¹⁰ Ronald Takaki describes the master narrative as a “powerful and popular but inaccurate story, our country was settled by European immigrants, and Americans are white.” (4); See Ronald Takaki, *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America* (Boston, New York and London: Little: Back Bay Books, Little, Brown and Company, 2008).

narrative that includes multiple cultural realities.¹¹ Community cultural development as an artistic method embraces an open dialogue and democratic community participation as opposed to the exclusive spaces of conventional art galleries. The sometimes-elusive notion of art is demystified and results in a much more accessible relationship between the artist, SPARC, the project site, and community members.¹² The transformation of public sites into critical historical projects reflect the experiences, hopes, and needs of the people who live there. Moreover, it was precisely their stories, their labor, and the willingness of these communities to share their memories that resulted in a reclaiming of both space and history.

Methods and Research

Individual recollections and explanations are basic sources for history which goes beyond the empiricism of state documents. Oral sources reveal the limits of conventional textual empirical data and move us beyond the established record. Although we can determine a lot of valuable information from company records and corporate archives, how workers felt about changes, workplace policies, and personal relationships are far more difficult to deduce from corporate records alone.¹³ For example, while company records may show that in fact there was a large amount of interracial collaboration on the shop floor, oral testimony can go beyond that information and examine how polices were experienced, and also opens up the opportunity to discuss social conventions outside the workplace.

¹¹ Eva Sperling Cockcroft and Holly Barnet-Sánchez. *Signs from The Heart: California Chicano Murals* (Venice and Albuquerque: SPARC and UNM Press, 1990), 81.

¹² *Ibid*, 56.

¹³ Daniel James, *Doña María's Story*, 122.

Given the possibilities of voices to provide the human context a significant part of the research for this dissertation was conducted doing archival work with Oral history collections. During the 2015-2016 academic year I spent four months working with the Regional Oral History Office (ROHO) at the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.¹⁴ At the Bancroft I focused on the oral testimonies of Mexican and Mexican Americans living and working in wartime Northern California. The ROHO has over 50 transcribed interviews. While I mainly focused on Mexican and Mexican Americans, I also sought to pair those interviews with other oral histories of people from different ethnic backgrounds. I primarily concentrated on interviews that highlighted work experiences in the defense industry, specifically the Kaiser Richmond Shipyards, however I also paid close attention to important issues and experiences that arose outside of the workplace like familial relationships, educational experiences, and impending housing needs to name a few.

During the 2015–2016 academic year, I also spent four months at CSU Long Beach focusing on the Rosie The Riveter Revisited Project that includes 44 transcribed interviews. As the case with the Bancroft collection I focused on the oral histories of Mexican and Mexican Americans while also looking to include a significant sampling of women from various backgrounds. The major difference in this collection from the ROHO collection was that the defense work focused on the three major aircraft companies in Southern California as opposed to the shipbuilding industry in the north. Additionally, because Los Angeles had a higher concentration of Mexican and Mexican Americans, the experiences differed along the lines of migration experience and housing circumstances. I coupled this archival work with an extensive

¹⁴ Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, Rosie the Riveter World War II American Homefront Oral History Project; bancroft.berkeley.edu/ROHO/

examination of the Labor and Social Movements Collections at the Lawrence de Graaf Center for Oral and Public History at CSU Fullerton. Here I focused on the Colorado Coal Mining Project which was a collaboration between CSU Fullerton and Trinidad State College in Colorado. The archival collections demonstrated the precarious position of Mexican American and immigrant workers within the coal mining industry during the first two decades of the twentieth-century and the manner in which a largely absentee capitalist class sought to deter unionization.

I also consulted the Huntington Digital Library, The Richmond Museum of California, and the Kaiser Digital Archives in Oakland. As part of this research I also spent several years working with and reviewing the extensive public art archive at the Social and Public Art Resource Center in Venice, California.



Figure 2. *Uprising of the Mujeres*. Image courtesy of Judy Baca and SPARC Archives.

Summary of Chapters

Specific histories have their own historical backgrounds. The first chapter in this dissertation traces the roots of Chicana and Chicano muralism to the politically radical and then innovative artistic values of David Alfaro Siqueiros. The chapter begins by building on previous scholarship surrounding the legacy of The Mexican Revolution (TMR) and establishes the significant influence that TMR had on Mexican artists and activists challenging oppressive social and political structures through a variety of methods including public art. This section also examines the relationship between the art and activism of Siqueiros with the development of the Chicana and Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. The chapter concludes with an important look at the artistic and political emergence of Judith F. Baca and the formation of the Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC).



Figure 3. WWII Panel of Richmond Mural Project. Image courtesy of Judy Baca and SPARC Archives.

The second chapter begins the examination of the multiple public mural projects conceptualized by Judy Baca and developed at SPARC. This chapter specifically takes a closer look at the history of the East Bay region of Northern California and how home front circumstances during WWII refashioned a seemingly discreet Mexican American community in Richmond, California. This chapter examines the World War II panel of Baca's mural titled *The Extraordinary Ordinary People*, a visual representation of one of the most diverse cities in the United States. Specifically, the WWII panel highlights some of the most pressing wartime issues nationally and locally and their social change consequences. Richmond transformed into an archetypical boomtown during the mobilization efforts of WWII and issues of employment, housing, education, security, and discrimination soon became focal points for both longtime and

newly arriving residents of this city. The mural demonstrates not only the technological advancements that occurred at the Kaiser Shipyards in Richmond, it also demonstrates the significant challenges to outmoded gender and racial norms and how they unfolded on the shop floors of the greatest shipbuilding boom the world has ever experienced.



Figure 4. “Illusions of Prosperity,” segment of *The Great Wall*. Image courtesy of Judy Baca and SPARC Archives.

Chapter Three surveys Baca’s most well recognized public mural project, *The Great Wall of Los Angeles*. A project that first began in 1976 and is still in production today, reimagines the history of California and specifically the history of Los Angeles from the perspective of women and people of color. This chapter highlights several key segments of the *Great Wall* that serve to reconstruct a more nuanced account U.S. history and situates California and Los Angeles within the larger civil rights movements occurring in the twentieth-century. The mural underscores transformations in the American labor force, especially for women of color, that helped to

challenge some of the overtly racist practices of the New Deal era and that continued into the Second World War. Furthermore, the mural provides a thoughtful reconsideration of the postwar period and demonstrates how precarious patriotism can be within the context of cultural and civic resistance.



Figure 5. *La Memoria De Nuestra Tierra: Colorado*. Image courtesy of Judy Baca and SPARC Archives.

The fourth chapter of this dissertation focuses on *La Memoria de Nuestra Tierra* completed in 2001 at the Denver International Airport. It is unique in that it is one of the first attempts by Baca to uncover and share her own familial narrative within the mural project. In developing this narrative of transnational migration motivated by the Mexican Revolution, Baca is able to trace the migration history of millions of Mexicans into the United States. The mural also does a remarkable job of teasing out the violent struggles and challenges associated with the United States labor movement during the twentieth-century. Depicted in the mural are the travails of labor conflict, spanning the deadly Ludlow Strikes in 1914 all the way through the

grape and beer boycotts of the 1960s and 1970s. The mural underscores important moments in U.S. history that proved critical towards the achievement for civil and workers' rights.

The epilogue of this study critically emphasizes the formative role that Baca and SPARC played on the artistic and political role of the Chicana and Chicano Movement as a whole. Clearly making the argument that it was in fact Baca, while offering powerful imagery originated and refined a unique process of community collaborative public art that was essential in recovering an understudied narrative about the roots of community work amongst Chicanos and Chicanas. Chronicling her work and understanding her artistic and political ethos also demonstrate how she was breaking with a long line of prolific and respected artists in an effort to build broader and more inclusive opportunities for her community. Additionally, this closing section also points to where Baca and SPARC are heading in the future. Her art recovers the past, but more she applies that newly constructed knowledge about the past and linking that with an ability to dream about a more just and more democratic participatory future. Judy notes that “[b]eing able to see the manifestation of an idea in the visual realm is a very powerful tool because the distance between imagining and making real is not as far as you think.”¹⁵ Baca has created the social and institutional structures for her work to continue far beyond anyone’s imagination. The steadfast work of mural restoration and mural development at SPARC and the emerging cadre of young artists and scholars at the Judy Baca Arts Academy ensures a legacy of meaningful artwork rooted in social justice values.

¹⁵ Jessica Wolf. “A Legacy That Lives on the Walls” last modified on July 06, 2016. <http://newsroom.ucla.edu/stories/a-legacy-that-lives-on-the-walls>



Figure 6. Baca working on *Danza de la Tierra*. Image courtesy of Judy Baca and SPARC Archives.



Figure 7. Dolores Huerta and Judy Baca reviewing a portion of the Monument to César E. Chávez at San José State University. Image courtesy of Judy Baca and SPARC Archives.

CHAPTER ONE—FROM SIQUIEROS TO SPARC: HISTORICAL AND IDEOLOGICAL ROOTS OF A CHICANA MURALIST

We proclaim that this being a moment of social transition from a decrepit to a new order, the creators of beauty must invest their greatest efforts in the aim of materializing an art valuable to the people, and our supreme objective in art, which is today mere individualist masturbation, is to create something of beauty for all, beauty enlightens and stirs to struggle.¹⁶

I want to produce artwork that has meaning beyond simple decorative values. I hope to use public space to create public voice, and consciousness about the presence of people who are often the majority of the population but who may not be represented in any visual way. By telling their stories we are . . . visualizing the whole of the American story while creating sites of public memory.¹⁷

The Chicana and Chicano art movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s expressed the political, social, and economic struggles of Chicanos and Chicanas in the United States and was unquestionably guided by the muralistas of the era. This chapter argues that the work of Mexican activist and artist David Alfaro Siqueiros provided the foundations to that public artistic renaissance. Specifically, this chapter assesses the early mural projects of Siqueiros while he was in exile in Los Angeles in 1932, and traces back the historical and ideological origins of Chicana and Chicano muralism to the work of Siqueiros. And finally, I examine how the activism and art of Judith F. Baca has pushed the mural movement forward through her work at the Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC).

Often the origins of the Chicano/a mural movement have been bestowed equally among *Los Tres Grandes*. As it relates to this study, one question that must be asked is, why emphasize

¹⁶ Manifesto of the Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters and Sculptors. Written on December 9, 1923, and published in *El Machete* No. 7 (June 1924), Mexico City.

¹⁷ Judith F. Baca. Excerpt from *Richmond Mural Project Pamphlet, Richmond Identities: Extraordinary Lives | Ordinary People*. SPARC, Venice, CA (2012).

Siqueiros and not Orozco or Rivera, or why not all three? And while these are valid questions, and there is no doubt that the other two muralists produced extremely important art, neither Orozco nor Rivera were primarily involved in public art projects during this formative period in the early 1930s in California. Orozco painted in a dining hall at Pomona College while Rivera painted at the Pacific Stock Exchange in San Francisco; those were spaces almost entirely reserved for the political, economic, and racial elite. For a myriad of reasons, though, the projects of Orozco (*Prometheus*, 1930) and Rivera (*The Allegory of California*, 1931) during this foundational period became a singular expression of their ideology. Since their work was accessible only to a select few, neither artist could develop the public or populist connection or accessibility that their work warranted.

On the other hand, the development and application of *América Tropical* in 1932 was able to convey a significant message magnifying and disrupting a historical legacy of violence and imperialism in the most public of places, the Placita on Olvera Street. Siqueiros was responsible for the first major outdoor painting in Los Angeles created by a Mexican. Moreover, he would go on to invent an acrylic painting method that Chicanos/as would use in the future. Despite immediate efforts to destroy that public message, years later, almost in a moment of quixotic destiny, those images and that message revealed itself to an emerging generation of artists, activists, and radicals. For this reason, I argue that the roots of this artistic and political resurgence lay at the revolutionary ideals and actions of David Alfaro Siqueiros.

Influence of The Mexican Revolution

The Mexican Revolution was the defining experience of Mexican muralists in the early twentieth-century and beyond. This revolt was marked by violence and certainly resulted from a motivation to delegitimize the regime of Porfirio Díaz. The “gains” of the *Porfiriato* came at the

expense of most Mexican people, especially the poor and working-class. Human needs were being frustrated by poor working and living conditions, corrupt political and business interests, and a lack of self-determination.¹⁸ All of these factors led to a popular response, one that revealed many elements of a social revolutionary movement.¹⁹

While Mexican muralism certainly developed as a mode of advocacy and inspired political action in the period following the Mexican Revolution, at its essence, Mexican muralism was an educative project that sought to teach the histories of Mexico to its people. These revised accounts of Mexican history would not privilege Europeans and regularly highlighted the struggles and uprisings that Mexicans faced against foreign interlopers as well as domestic autocrats.²⁰ Among the most significant artists of Mexico that worked to revision the history of their country from a revolutionary perspective was David Alfaro Siqueiros.

Siqueiros was born in Santa Rosalía (today Ciudad Camargo), Chihuahua in 1896, and at a very young age was politicized by the mounting revolutionary fervor in Mexico. He attended the influential Academy of San Carlos, National Academy of The Fine Arts, and as a teenager had participated in the *Great Strike of 1911*, where students in the Academy protested archaic and despotic methods of instruction. Although according to Siqueiros himself, ". . . all I did then

¹⁸ Michael J. Gonzales. *The Mexican Revolution, 1920–1940* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002), 59.

¹⁹ Social revolutionary movements (SRM) are processes that use a variety of strategies to inspire social change and cannot simply be pegged as a singular discernable set of tactics or policies or phenomena; see Juan Gómez-Quiñones, *Toerizando sobre la Revolución Mexicana. Interpretaciones de sus historiadores y cronistas*, (INEHRM), 2015.

²⁰ Shifra M. Goldman, *Dimensions of The Americas: Art and Social Change in Latin America and The United States* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), 101–106.

was to throw a few stones at things or at people, and little else."²¹ After prolonged student protests, Rivas Mercado resigned his post as director of the Academy and Ramos Martinez was appointed new director. Shortly thereafter, Martinez developed a school at Santa Anita Ixtapalapa, one in a series of *escuelas al aire libre* (open air schools) in order to better appreciate the natural environment of Mexico. This was a crucial moment in the development of Siqueiros and his cohort of young artists because Martinez focused on Mexican art that would feature Mexican subject matter and did not privilege European themes; Siqueiros would later note that it marked the beginning of a “new aesthetic.”²² This new aesthetic was imbued in the natural environment and popular culture of Mexico, and especially in its pre-Hispanic culture. This fact cannot be understated; Siqueiros’ training at the Academy de San Carlos consciously rejected the philosophy that the subject matter and approach of true art was solely European in origin, an ideology that Siqueiros would later confirm during the Mexican Revolution.²³

To note, though, the pressures of revolution were too much to bear and Siqueiros, in part inspired by the tales of his grandfather as a soldier, decided to enlist in the *ejercito* and fight for his convictions. Siqueiros attributes part of his artistic development to his experiences as a *carrancista* in the Mexican Revolution: “. . . without that participation, it would not have been

²¹ Anthony White, *Siqueiros: A Biography* (Encino, CA: Floricanto Press, 1994), 41–44; Quoted in Jean Charlot, “Orozco and Siqueiros at the Academy of San Carlos,” *College Art Journal*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (1951): 362.

²² White, *Siqueiros: A Biography*, 44–46.

²³ Robert H. Patterson, “An Art in Revolution: Antecedents of Mexican Mural Painting, 1900–1920,” *Journal of Inter-American Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 3, (1964), 387; However, this is not to say that many artists and their mentors were not still influenced by European styles, yet the encouragement to engage with Mexican subject matter, and an explicit focus on the Indigenismo of Mesoamerica resulted in a less Euro-centric perspective.

possible to have conceived or inspired much later. . . .”²⁴ Siqueiros went as far as to acknowledge that it was only after he had the opportunity to discover the extraordinary architecture and culture of his country, an opportunity that was widely unthinkable for many young Mexicans, that he realized that Mexico had in fact an “. . . amazing popular art—perhaps the most rich and varied of the whole world.”²⁵ What he experienced as a soldier, coupled with the venture of traveling throughout the Mexican countryside, profoundly shaped Siqueiros and in his mind put to rest any notion of becoming an “apolitical bohemian, parasitic artist.” Rather, what resulted was the formation of a citizen artist committed to a revolutionary state.²⁶ His art had to stand for something because it represented meaning far beyond one-dimensional aesthetic values—the art needed to support a national shift in political and historical consciousness.

Furthermore, his military service was not the only experience that shaped his ideas and artwork. Siqueiros was profoundly moved by the plight of working-class people throughout the globe, especially in the Western Hemisphere and sought to protest what he perceived to be growing imperialist sentiments that aggressively targeted the international labor movement. As an example, during the first part of the twentieth-century, some of the circumstances that Siqueiros was contending with included the emergence of the United States and its economy becoming more and more entangled with global markets as part an imperial project. This emergence gave rise to U.S. political and military intervention within the region. From Presidents Teddy Roosevelt through Woodrow Wilson, the United States constructed an idea of

²⁴ Quoted in White, *Siqueiros: A Biography*, 55.

²⁵ Quoted in Philip Stein, *Siqueiros: His Life and Works* (New York, NY: International Publishers Co., 1994), 35.

²⁶ Quoted in White, *Siqueiros: A Biography*, 55.

liberal internationalism that rested on the foundation of economic and political progress. To guarantee this political philosophy, the United States, and in particular Woodrow Wilson, explicitly went on the attack of both international and domestic threats to U.S. imperialism. Prior to and during the First World War, the U.S. engaged in a series of military interventions in the Western Hemisphere—Mexico in 1914, Haiti in 1915, and the Dominican Republic in 1916—all to promote “stability” in the region along with protection to U.S. investments.²⁷ When Siqueiros himself witnessed the takeover of Vera Cruz in 1914 by U.S. forces, this experience left an indelible mark on the psyche of the budding artist, activist, and soldier.

International Labor Solidarity

During this period in the United States, political agitators like Eugene V. Debs publicly campaigned for drastic political and labor transformation. In the period leading up to WWI, union membership rose rapidly by 5 million workers in the United States. Additionally, during this period many small rural farmers were experiencing deteriorating living and working conditions. These circumstances—popular labor support and declining rural conditions—made revolution in some way imaginable in the United States. Yet unlike Mexico and Russia, these working and living conditions were not enough to result in a “successful” Social Revolutionary Movement, at least not one by which revolutionaries succeed in a regime change in an effort to radically re-make their society. Within this context, we can make a connection between international violence and an emerging fear of socialist antiwar movements in the United States. In particular, the response to revolts in Mexico and Russia was severe repression in the United

²⁷ The United States sought to impose a sort of moral imperialism during this period that included military intervention along with fiscal control throughout the hemisphere. In 1915 The U.S. sent troops into Haiti, re-wrote the Haitian Constitution, and instituted financial supervision of the nation until 1941. Similarly in the Dominican Republic, the United States took control of the customs house in 1905, militarily occupied the nation in 1916, and instituted financial supervision until 1941.

States. In 1917, President Wilson signed the Espionage Act, followed by both the Sedition Act and the Immigration Act of 1918, resulting in the deportation of any alien who opposed organized government. These repressive political tactics, combined with progressive-era election reforms geared at appeasing political retractors, worked to limit the radical movements in the United States, especially those concentrated on labor.

By 1925, Siqueiros had moved to Guadalajara, Jalisco, and he was well-immersed in the international labor movement and had become directly involved in organizing textile workers and miners. In Mexico, the conditions for working-class folks in the post-revolutionary period was toxic at best. First, workers had to deal with a shattered infrastructure, a proscription of their labor rights, and destructive transnational fiscal agreements. Second, these dispossessed Mexicans that sought land reform had to deal with the violence that resulted from the religious trenches that were saturating segments of the nation in the form of *Cristeros*.²⁸ Siqueiros was committed to forming unions independent of company-affiliated syndicates and believed that if workers could organize independently, they would be in a much better position to challenge oppressive working and living conditions.

Furthermore, Siqueiros also opposed what he understood to be “Yankee imperialism” and deleterious U.S. foreign policy.²⁹ In the period just after WWI, the United States, and more specifically Woodrow Wilson, sought to deregulate many of the wartime regulations that were implemented as a means to secure labor peace. President Wilson also sought to dismantle agencies that controlled industrial production and the labor market after the war. This went hand-

²⁸ Stein, *Siqueiros: His Life and Works*, 54–65.

²⁹ *Yankee imperialism* can be thought of as the economic or military influence and coercive domestic and foreign policies developed by the United States to maintain power over subordinated countries and/or groups of people.

in-hand with widespread, officially sanctioned repression of political and social dissent. Massive labor strikes in the United States resulted in anxiety that in part stemmed from the Mexican and Russian Revolutions. In response, Siqueiros sought to challenge this sort of global repression. For example, in 1927, he encouraged the Workers' Confederation of Jalisco to implement a work stoppage in support of Sacco and Vanzetti and against their looming executions, but also to demonstrate union power and solidarity.³⁰ The looming deaths of anarchists Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti represented coercive U.S. domestic policy that sought to target immigrants, check a supposed global radical conspiracy, and simultaneously gutted civil liberties and labor rights. Siqueiros believed that direct action could go a long way in protesting growing imperialist attacks by the U.S., as well as onerous labor conditions in Mexico. In the years to come, many of these themes would resonate significantly throughout the artwork of David Alfaro Siqueiros in a process that ultimately sought to transform the visual into social justice.

A Move to Gringo Land

As a result of Siqueiros' effectiveness as a labor organizer coupled with his membership in the Mexican Communist Party (PCM), he was a prime target for police harassment and predictably found himself in prison for honoring his ideological views. By the early part of the 1930s, Siqueiros understood that if he wanted to continue to advocate his political and artistic visions outside the walls of a prison cell he would have to leave Mexico. With accounts of other major artists like José Clemente Orozco and Diego Rivera stoking the mural movement in the United States, Siqueiros decided that he too must head north to *gringo land* and begin a new period in his life.³¹

³⁰ White, *Siqueiros: A Biography*, 102–105.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 133.

Siqueiros arrived in the United States frayed from the political and financial stresses he endured in Mexico, yet those experiences would not deter him, and in fact only proved to strengthen his artistic resolve. In 1932, Siqueiros and his wife Blanca, along with her son, arrived in Los Angeles with no money and even fewer prospects for work. After connecting with fellow Mexican artist Luis Arenal, and with the backing of film director Joseph von Sternberg, Siqueiros was able to organize a few exhibits of his paintings and prints for the local art community of Southern California. These relationships generated interest in his art and resulted in Siqueiros securing some income. After a series of smaller shows, Siqueiros held his first major exhibition in Los Angeles, which was well-attended and proved very profitable. More importantly, however, it set the tone for his short-lived stay in the States. One evening during the exhibition, “. . . Siqueiros overheard [a] lady comment in a Southern accent that Mexicans must be sadistic to paint portraits of dead children.”³² While Siqueiros did concede that some of the content was very primitive, he also made it a point to underscore that it was “. . . much more savage and brutal to lynch living Negroes.”³³

This searing commentary was roundly criticized in the local papers, yet it also made clear that Siqueiros would not hold back his ideological convictions. The art Siqueiros displayed illustrated how the destructive nature of racial and class oppression had affected the lives of working-class peoples all across the Americas. While some scholars might contend differently, I argue that this is precisely when and where we see the Chicano/a mural movement emerging.

³² See Stein, *Siqueiros: His Life and Works*, 72; the painting, *Portrait of a dead child*, was based on a request that Siqueiros received from a mourning family in hopes that he could capture the memory of their deceased child; a very common custom in some parts of Mexico.

³³ Quoted in White, *Siqueiros: A Biography*, 136–138.

This is a moment when Siqueiros unabashedly called out the systemic racial oppression endemic with U.S. hegemony in the Americas, yet he also took it one step further by acknowledging the unfettered racial violence that concurrently plagued the United States. Indeed, the themes of labor rights, self-determination, and of course racial violence all figured prominently in the three murals Siqueiros created in Los Angeles in 1932.

In a remarkably prolific six-month period during 1932, Siqueiros completed three major projects in Los Angeles, including *Portrait of Mexico Today*, *Street Meeting*, and *América Tropical*. Siqueiros developed *Street Meeting* as his first mural in the United States when he was invited to teach fresco painting to a small group of artists at the Chouinard Art Academy. As Siqueiros experimented with different techniques, ultimately the advice of architects Richard Neutra and Summer Spaulding helped him settle on using white cement as the base for his painting on the exterior wall of the school. The choice of cement obliged Siqueiros to use a quicker process to apply paint on the wall since the cement dried at a quicker rate than traditional fresco. As Siqueiros was completely invested in developing and using modern techniques to paint, he viewed his experimentation as a necessary progression in his artistic evolution. New methods and techniques did not dissuade Siqueiros, and in fact they inspired him as he contended that “a new society must have new material solutions.”³⁴

³⁴ Ibid., 138–139.

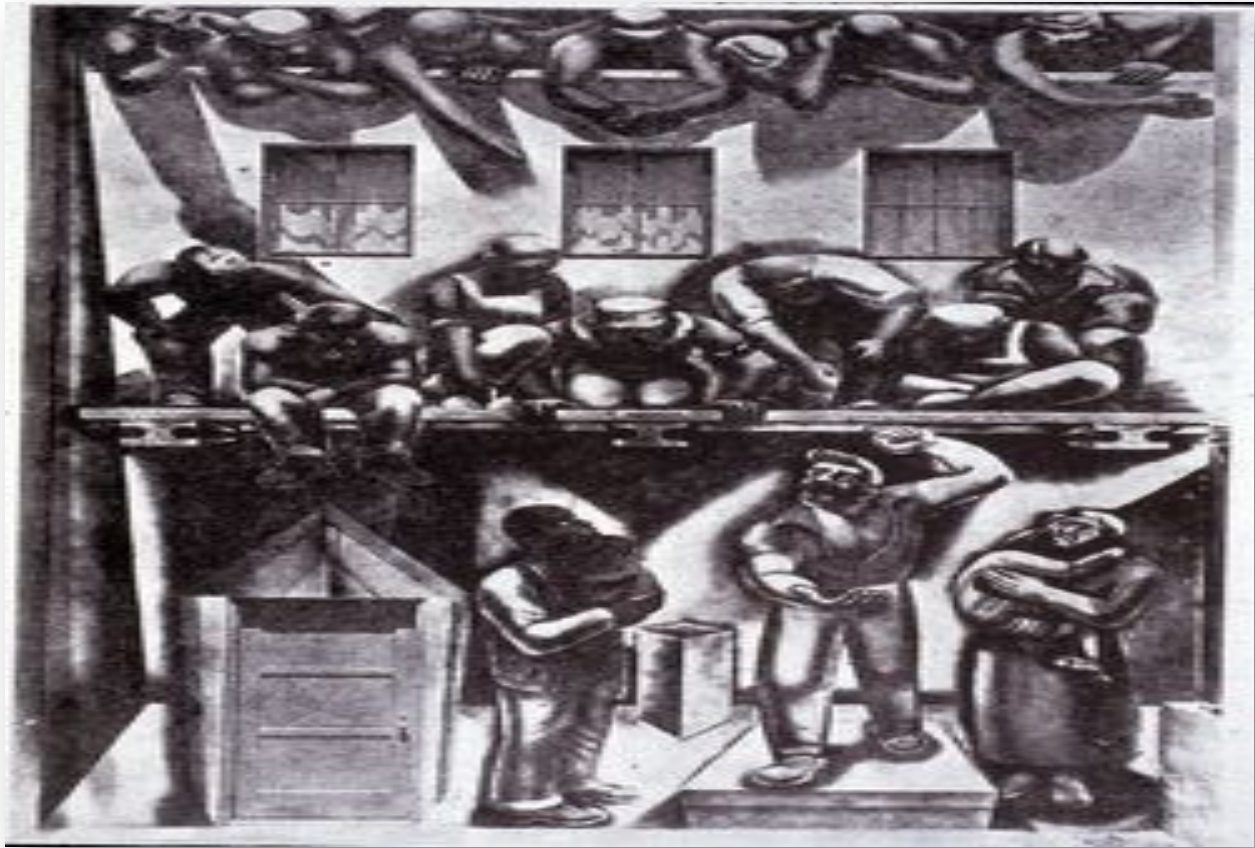


Figure 8. *Street Meeting* by David Alfaro Siqueiros.

The content for *Street Meeting* was consistent with the political and artistic sentiment Siqueiros pledged to advance. On the exterior wall of the Chouinard Art Academy, Siqueiros composed a mural depicting a labor organizer talking with workers—presumably about advocating for their rights—and next to the organizer Siqueiros also placed a black man and a white woman both holding children.³⁵ This image decisively underscored two of the most pressing problems facing working-class peoples in the United States during this period. First, it challenged an oppressive anti-labor regime that had taken hold throughout the Americas. In the wake of a massive and unfounded deportation scheme by the U.S. government, hundreds of

³⁵ Ibid., 142.

thousands of Mexican workers were being unfairly targeted. More broadly, these events occurred against the backdrop of a larger attack on labor rights throughout the United States as a result of the Great Depression.

Furthermore, the image also included an interracial couple listening to a pro-worker speech. According to Siqueiros, “. . . it occurred to me to paint black and whites together in Los Angeles . . . [And] the result was that all the racist Americans were tremendously upset by the mural.”³⁶ Part of what Siqueiros was referring to include this apparent intensification of racial violence perpetrated throughout the United States. The fiercest manifestation of this violence was a result of the rebirth of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) in the early 1920s and their belief that the United States represented opportunity and freedom only for those of a particular religious and ethnic stock. Moreover, as the KKK enjoyed a surge in membership during this period—it grew to more than 5 million members during the 1920s—its reach spread far beyond its Southern roots. The group now expanded to various parts of the country, including the North and the West, and also sought to expand its attacks traditionally reserved only for Black folks.

To note, this new version of the Klan targeted Jews and Catholics, but also other groups like feminists, union leaders, and queer men; these groups allegedly threatened the racial purity and moral fiber of the country. Within these conditions, it was clear that *Street Meeting* would make a powerful statement bound to cause controversy. In fact, the mural upset so many people that shortly after its debut, the school erected a wall to prevent viewing of the mural and eventually, *Street Meeting* was almost completely destroyed. Siqueiros viewed the backlash as a

³⁶ Jesús Salvador Treviño and KCET, Los Angeles, CA, 2006. *América Tropical*. DVD. New York: Cinema Guild (Siqueiros quoted in film).

“fascist reaction” to his work, yet this would not dissuade him from further advancing his critiques on *Yankee Imperialism*.³⁷

América Tropical

Partly because of the controversial nature of his themes, Siqueiros was commissioned by F.K. Ferenz, owner of the Plaza Arts Center, to paint a mural on the wall of the Old Italian Hall overlooking the Placita on Olvera Street. While Ferenz was absolutely looking to cash in on the publicity a Siqueiros mural might provide, he also attempted to hamstring Siqueiros a bit by giving him the theme of a tropical America. For Ferenz, a tropical America meant a continent of happy gentlemen, surrounded by palm trees, squawking parrots, and where fruits fell from the trees free for the masses—an exotic paradise. Rather, Siqueiros made a powerful and dramatic critique of Yankee imperialism when he painted “a man crucified, on a double cross and poised proudly over was the eagle of the U.S. currency.”³⁸ Since the mural depicted the struggles, harassment, and persecution of many men and women throughout the Americas, Siqueiros knew that he would face a violent attack for dealing with these themes in such a public manner. The mural also contained armed men of color, a public image that you still can’t paint in Los Angeles today. According to Siqueiros, “my mural was the mural of a Mexican painter who had fought in the Mexican revolution . . . who knew that his first duty before aesthetic concerns was to fulfill the expression of his ideology. . . .”³⁹

³⁷ For more on the “discovery” and restoration of Street Meeting see KCET Documentary on Chouinard-Siqueiros Mural Discovery: <https://youtu.be/pEdIwSXdyCM>; White, *Siqueiros: A Biography*, 142.

³⁸ Siqueiros quoted in film *América Tropical*.

³⁹ Ibid.



Figure 9. *América Tropical* by David Alfaro Siqueiros.

Although some critics found the themes insightful and politically salient, the highly anticipated mural was almost immediately whitewashed and widely criticized in the media. In a matter of weeks, the mural had caused so much political anxiety and tension that it would forever be altered. At the end of his six months stay, Siqueiros' visa was not renewed by the U.S. government. During his remarkably brief sojourn in the states in 1932, two of his murals, *Street Meeting* and *América Tropical*, were almost completely destroyed, yet the ideological and historical impression that Siqueiros left would not as easily be erased.

As a note on historical context, the late 1960s and early 1970s were a time of revolutionary change in the United States, as in many parts of the world. The Chicano/a Movement (CCM) was similar to many social movements of the era in that large groups of

historically marginalized folks sought to fundamentally reassess their relationship to white American society. They publicly rejected cycles of poverty and lack of educational opportunities and sought the creation of institutions that were more responsive to their particular cultural, political, and economic needs. Interestingly enough, it was within this generative context that the mural, which presumably had been completely whitewashed in 1932, had large chunks of the white wash actually chip off and partly expose the imagery of *América Tropical*. This serendipitous circumstance coincided with the swelling Chicana and Chicano Movement. The mural then came to represent, at least in the eyes of young Chicano and Chicana artists and activists, yet another glaring example of the inability of racist institutions to allow expressions of Chicano and Chicana experiences in the United States.⁴⁰ Accordingly, we should think about the Chicano/a Movement as a creative and revivalist surge that absolutely championed civil rights amidst a larger set of social movements that fought for political recognition, an end to racial violence, and legal respect. More to the point, however, the CCM was a confluence of many significant struggles all aimed at social justice. The public art of David Alfaro Siqueiros unequivocally helped to define and push that revivalist surge.

Clearly, *América Tropical* had a significant influence on the CCM and continues to influence contemporary Chicano/a artists and activists. Yet, it should also be noted that the mural did more than just establish a link between Chicanas/os in the United States and Mexicans; the CCM also had a profound effect on Siqueiros as well. From his earliest days, Siqueiros maintained a loyalty and affinity for people of Mexican descent working and living in the United States, as he proclaimed definitively, “I support the efforts of Mexicans living in the United

⁴⁰ Chicano artist Gilbert “Magu” Lujan quoted in film *América Tropical*.

States, it is great importance to our own struggle. . . ”⁴¹ The influence and commitment to solidarity is evident in the work of Siqueiros, who had been so moved by the efforts and action of Chicano/a activists that he composed a drawing of Ruben Salazar, an iconic figure of the CCM. As a prominent Mexican American journalist in Los Angeles, Salazar had been murdered during the Chicano Moratorium on August 29, 1970. He was shot in the head with a 10-inch tear gas projectile after he and a companion sought refuge from police violence in the Silver Dollar Café.



Figure 10. *Heroic Voice* by David Alfaro Siqueiros.

⁴¹ Siqueiros quoted in film *América Tropical*.

Here we can trace the historical and ideological footing of the artistic expression of *El Movimiento* to the work of David Alfaro Siqueiros. For Siqueiros, the art and the activism were much more than a one-way relationship. Although he clearly shaped *el movimiento*, both artistically and ideologically, he was also greatly influenced by the work of Chicano/a activists and artists. We can see throughout Siqueiros' murals that he infuses the themes of labor struggle, racial violence, and self-determination, all of which were central organizing principles to the civil rights struggles of Chicanas and Chicanos in the 1960s and 1970s. In short, Siqueiros and *el movimiento* had developed a reciprocal relationship. Through his art, moreover, Siqueiros was able to distinctly communicate the tensions, struggles, power, and strength of a people when those people were in tumult and experiencing acute social changes. And precisely during this period, a young and promising Chicana artist attended the Taller Siqueiros in Mexico to cultivate her mural abilities. Judith F. Baca would return from Mexico with a renewed sense of commitment and an indelible link to Siqueiros.

Mi Abuelita

Prominent art historians have noted that muralism was the most important, widespread, and publicized facet of the Chicano art movement during the 1970s, and *muralista* Judy Baca was unquestionably a fundamental part of that artistic renaissance.⁴² Baca was born in Huntington Park in 1946 and was initially raised by her mother and grandmother in a small one-bedroom home in Watts before moving to Pacoima in the San Fernando Valley. From a very

⁴² Eva Sperling Cockcroft & Holly Barnet-Sánchez, *Signs From The Heart: California Chicano Murals*. Venice and Albuquerque: SPARC and UNM Press, 1990, p. 23.

early age, Baca developed “. . . this affinity for [her] grandmother,”⁴³ and together they forged a relationship that would set the aesthetic and spiritual underpinnings for Baca’s life. Baca recalls having formative conversations with her grandmother where the focus would be Baca’s visions, “. . . she would say, ‘What did you dream?’ . . . There was an exchanging of discussions very early. . . she paid very close attention to my dreams.”⁴⁴ In turn, this creative and spiritual curiosity poignantly shaped Baca’s worldview.

Baca’s conception of the world was intimately tied to art. She would often accompany her grandmother to church and recalls “. . . sitting in the pew and studying the imagery within the church.”⁴⁵ She also remembers traveling to the central market with her grandmother where she would see Simon Rodia working on the Watts Towers. As a young child, these profound experiences with her grandmother subtly and implicitly embedded a uniquely artistic consciousness that Baca later realized and pursued. Baca reflected, “. . . the art was always the center of what I wanted to do and be.”⁴⁶

Yet pursuing a life as an artist was much more complex than Baca had anticipated. “. . . When I stepped out of the university,” she recalled, “. . . I was perfectly equipped to do absolutely nothing.”⁴⁷ In a moment of self-reflection, Baca recalled that her grandmother had

⁴³ Judy Baca, interview with Karen Mary Davalos, on January 29, March 16 and 26, May 10, June 3, September 29, October 13, 20, and 27, and November 3, 2010, Los Angeles, California. CSRC Oral Histories Series, no. 14, Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press, 2014, p.3-6.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴⁵ *Voces Vivas: Judy Baca*, HD Color. Directed by Pedro Pablo Celedón. Barefoot Productions, 2013.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Judy Baca, “Arte Intimo, Arte Publico: Spirit, Vision and Form, The Art of Judy Baca,” Latin American Canadian Projects: Latin American Speakers Series (LASS), March 14, 2014.

crossed the Rio Grande River to come to the United States during the height of the Mexican Revolution, and here she was stepping into the world as an artist and there was also a revolution going on.⁴⁸ Like the Mexican Revolution, this social movement would also be shaped and understood through the art that people generated in the era. During this formative period in her life, Baca struggled to conceptualize a way to work that also allowed her to fulfill her most valued responsibilities as a woman, as a Chicana, and as an artist.



Figure 11. Judy Baca next to Painting of her Grandmother, Francisca. Image courtesy of Judy Baca and SPARC Archives.

⁴⁸ Baca, “Arte Intimo, Arte Publico,” LASS 2014.

After becoming the first woman in her family to graduate college, Judy truly struggled to appreciate her role as an artist. In a story that Baca often recounts as one central to understanding her trajectory into *el movimiento*, she recalls a conversation with her grandmother regarding her artwork. “M’ija, what’s it for?” her grandmother asked. To herself, Baca thought, “. . . I don’t know what it’s for. I just spent all this time doing something, [and] I don’t even know what it’s for. . . [for my grandmother] everything had its place in her world, you know. Everything had meaning and purpose.” At this point, Baca realized that she had to use her particular skills as an artist to make connections with people that went far beyond her self-gratification. Baca knew that her art needed to have *meaning and purpose*, and to “. . . speak to the people [she] cared most about, [her] family and [her] community.”⁴⁹ Baca sought to transmit the energies and changes of her community through her artistic projects.

The late 1960s and early 1970s provided a fertile ground for movements of educational and artistic action. In 1970, Baca began teaching art in Boyle Heights through the Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks. Although Judy was not raised in East LA, she did see many significant parallels between Pacoima and the barrios on the Eastside. Here she began to develop new strategies to work with young gang members by utilizing art education that underscored the interests and demands of the local communities. Baca eventually formed a crew of local youth dubbed *Las Vistas Nuevas* that incorporated the graffiti and tattoo culture that many of the youth

⁴⁹ Judy Baca, interview with Karen Mary Davalos, CSRC Oral History Series p.40; Cockcroft & Barnet-Sánchez, *Signs from the Heart*, 78.

venerated.⁵⁰ *Las Vistas Nuevas* developed their first mural project, *Mi Abuelita*, in the Hollenbeck Park bandshell.



Figure 12. *Mi Abuelita*. Image courtesy of Judy Baca and SPARC Archives.

The mural depicted Baca's grandmother, and was a direct commentary on the role of women in Mexican families, as well as an historical affirmation to the indigenous ancestry of Chicanos and Chicanas in the United States.⁵¹ Moreover, because many of the young mural

⁵⁰ Kaelyn Danielle Rodriguez, "Authorship and Memory in Judy Baca's Murals" (master's thesis, University of California, Riverside, 2014), 16–17.

⁵¹ Judith F. Baca, "Birth of a Movement," in *Community, Culture and Globalization*, edited by Don Adams and Arlene Goldbard (New York: Rockefeller Foundation, Creativity & Culture Division, 2002), 112.

makers were from rival gangs, Baca had to coordinate a peaceful collaborative art project that reconciled many of the violent issues between these young adversaries. It is also worth noting the message this mural sent to people all across Los Angeles and around the United States as they struggled for social justice. By having Baca's *abuelita* as the central figure of the mural, demonstrating compassion, strength, and agency, this public canvas created by Baca and her team of mural makers disrupted deep-seated narratives of coloniality, including patriarchy and racial violence.

After leading the mural program on the Eastside of Los Angeles for three years, Baca directed a successful proposal to the Los Angeles City Council that would become the first city-wide mural program. Through the *Citywide Mural Program*, Baca and her team helped employ and train hundreds of young people all across Los Angeles, purchased materials for mural projects, and all together helped to organize over 400 mural projects in distinct communities bridging the city of Los Angeles. Despite the prodigious achievements of the program, more often than not complications stemming from an assertion of public space and public identity resulted in issues of censorship. These concerns in part led to the desire to form a different space of production that did not rely on a capitulation to city officials.⁵²

In 1973, Baca sought to develop a mural in Estrada Courts, across the street from her first mural project, and within this effort Baca began to recognize a profound contradiction within the Chicano Movement. The Estrada Court Murals, directed by Charles W. "Cat" Felix, promoted work that, according to Marcos Sanchez-Tranquilino, sought to "... enhance or affirm gang turfs and their boundaries as unique or nondependent on each other for survival in a larger social

⁵² For a complete history of the *Citywide Mural Program* please visit the SPARC webpage <http://sparcinla.org/brief-history/>

context.”⁵³ Baca had a close relationship with Felix and she even introduced him to some contacts in the mayor’s office, yet the mural that Baca envisioned—an explicit critique of the destructive and often-violent territorial claims by many Chicano youth—featured sharp criticism of some of the other Estrada court murals.⁵⁴ Moreover, Baca’s proposal for a mural centered on the experiences of women—often those experiences were fashioned by a myriad of practices of male militarism.⁵⁵



Figure 13. Maquette for Estrada Court Murals (Untitled). Image courtesy of Judy Baca and SPARC Archives.

⁵³ Marcos Sanchez-Tranquilino, “Space Power, and Youth Culture: Mexican American Graffiti and Chicano Murals in East Los Angeles, 1972–1978,” in Brenda Jo Bright and Liza Bakewell, ed., *Looking High and Low: Art and Cultural Identity* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1995), 71.

⁵⁴ Oral history interviews with Judith Baca, 1986 August 5–6, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

⁵⁵ Sanchez-Tranquilino, “Space Power, and Youth Culture,” 72.

At a moment when Chicanas still faced extremely sexist and traditional ideas within *el movimiento*, Baca recalls that for many women, it was still their place to “. . . get the coffee . . . the men were very powerful and very formidable.”⁵⁶ Baca strived to find a way to do her work in a manner that did not have to follow the traditional subordinated role of women. To complicate matters further, the mostly *veterano* muralist crew in Estrada Courts had initially pledged to avoid overtly political themes in exchange for resources and support from local politicians, merchants, and police.⁵⁷ Although Baca’s mural proposal was rejected, this proposal should be viewed as a failed opportunity to open up the ranks of Chicano muralism to women. We can also think about this moment as a critical example of the internal contradiction to the claims of radical equality *El Movimiento* sought to achieve. Undoubtedly one of the fractures that helped to divide the most important organizations and diffused some of the momentum of the movement were in fact notions of patriarchy and sexism. While this was not confined to the Chicano movement, nevertheless it resulted in many people articulating a new vision of this United States that included a more feminist ideal.

Baca, SPARC and *The Great Wall of Los Angeles*

Partly because of these rifts, Judy decided to operate fulltime on the west side of Los Angeles, which also presented its own issues. Baca lived in Venice, California, and even though she had been welcomed by the burgeoning feminist artistic scene there, she could not wholly reconcile with a movement that for the most part focused on the desires and frustrations of

⁵⁶ !Women Art Revolution: Interview with Judith Baca ; Interviewed by Lynn Hershman Leeson; October 2, 1992; Catalina Island, California; 3.

⁵⁷ Sanchez-Tranquilino, “Space Power, and Youth Culture,” 71.

middle-class white women.⁵⁸ In contrast, on the west side, Baca participated in consciousness-raising circles, and her participation in these meetings had a formative effect in shaping her ideology. For the first time in her life, Baca found a space to meet and share with professional women all concerned with advancing a feminist agenda. However, Baca never fully felt like she belonged among most of these women, partly because she felt forced to contend with certain ideas that were at odds with her own positionality. Baca describes this outsider feeling as stemming from a fundamental lack of awareness regarding the experiences of women of color. This lack of recognition, or Achilles heel as Baca puts it, essentially held back the movement: “. . . the racial issue. . . that feminist adopted—which were primarily white feminists—that the central issues should be defined by this single group,” would not allow for a truly inclusive perspective.⁵⁹

In particular, Baca’s struggles embodied a much broader national struggle over women’s rights, reproductive rights, feminism, and movements for liberation, all of which caused multiple strategies to develop to confront these myriad issues. For example, the Combahee River Collective had formed in part to struggle against major forms of oppression that were interlocking. It was impossible for these women to disaggregate their racial position from their class position and their sexuality. In turn, these struggles catalyzed the formation of a politics

⁵⁸ See Chapter 5, “L.A. Happenings and Performance Art,” in Cécile Whiting, *Pop L.A.: Art and the City in the 1960s* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008).

⁵⁹ !Women Art Revolution: Interview with Judith Baca and Suzanne Lacy; Interviewed by Lynn Hershman July 7, 2004; Los Angeles, CA, 1.

that was at its core antiracist and antisexist and that underscored the inherent value of women of color.⁶⁰

This was a critical juncture in Baca's personal and professional life and it seemed to have no clear resolution. She recalls, "I began a very long period of time of straddling two lives—the feminist information and life that supported my growth as a woman, and my community life which was in the Latino community as I worked intently in the neighborhoods. And they never really met. They were constantly separated."⁶¹ This straddling of both worlds was strenuous on Baca, but also proved to be a major impetus for the creation of the Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC).

SPARC was not the author or originator of mural projects, it was however the fiscal receiver where Baca could formalize community programs and her artist innovations. Baca applied her methods and techniques to a wider artistic community and encouraged broader public participation. SPARC became a space where Baca could develop both artwork that spoke to her sensibilities as well as a new model of feminist identity that did not have to sever a link with significant cultural experiences. *The Great Wall of Los Angeles* was conceived by Baca and brought to SPARC, and as she remembers, it was ". . . an opportunity over a half a mile-long

⁶⁰ See Combahee River Collective Statement (1977); Kimberlé Crenshaw. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color." In Martha Albertson Fineman, Rixanne Mykitiuk, Eds. *The Public Nature of Private Violence*. (New York: Routledge, 1994), 93–118; Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Table Kitchen Press, 1981).

⁶¹ !Women Art Revolution: Interview with Judith Baca ; Interviewed by Lynn Hershman Leeson; October 2, 1992; Catalina Island, California, 3.

span of a piece of a mural to define the relationships between ethnic groups and feminism and feminist issues. . .”⁶²



Figure 14. Spanish Arrival, *The Great Wall*. Image courtesy of Judy Baca and SPARC Archives.

Conceptualized and negotiated with the Army corps of engineers by Baca, *The Great Wall of Los Angeles* is the most prominent mural project that SPARC has worked on. The expansive mural pays historical tribute to interracial harmony. Baca envisioned “. . . another history of California; one which included the ethnic peoples, women, and minorities who were all so invisible in conventional textbook accounts.”⁶³ *The Great Wall of Los Angeles* was the very first project that SPARC worked on and is a monument not only to the Los Angeles River, where this brilliant composition of public art is embedded, but also a chronicle of the much

⁶² Ibid., 15–16.

⁶³ SPARC, *Great Wall of Los Angeles: Walking Tour Guide*. Venice: Social and Public Art Resource Center, 2007, 5; Baca quoted in *Great Wall of Los Angeles: Walking Tour Guide*, 2007, 9.

maligned and often erased histories of many of California's underrepresented ethnic groups as well as a rejection of homophobia. It is a half-mile long work of art developed during the civil rights revolution and activism of the 1970s and was realized during California's Chicana/o mural art renaissance.⁶⁴ The groundbreaking and collaborative methods developed by Baca and adopted by SPARC resulted in the capacity to provide a significant, and more importantly, more democratic history. This was more democratic in the sense that the knowledge and art that was produced was not merely an extraction of experiences to be redistributed to a larger audience; rather, these innovative methods encouraged a broader participation in contemporary historical debates by incorporating a more representative set of experiences and values.⁶⁵

Baca developed a collaborative process of innovation that moved far beyond the artist(s) and those who had commissioned the piece. The process brought together the artists, historians, community activists, social workers, and young people from distinct communities to promote an exchange of experiences. Often these experiences revealed the memories embedded in the land beneath a "public site." Through this process and within these murals, generations of people have been able to rethink "official" histories.⁶⁶ For instance, there is a section depicting the circumstances of the Great Depression. In that section, Baca and the mural makers re-think those circumstances and provide nuances to a seemingly static historical narrative. Hundreds of thousands of Mexican and American citizens were rounded up as part of a massive deportation scheme by the state and forced to start their lives anew, all while being branded as scapegoats for

⁶⁴ SPARC, proposal to the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, (revised, May 2006), 4.

⁶⁵ Michael Frisch. *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), xxii.

⁶⁶ Judith F. Baca. "Whose Monument Where? Public Art in a Many-Cultured Society," in *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*, Suzanne Lacy, ed., Seattle: Bay Press, 1995, 131.

destructive economic conditions. Baca and SPARC succeed in restoring the often omitted histories of our communities, while at the same time disrupting a powerful, persuasive, and exclusionary narrative of U.S. history.



Figure 15. Mexican Deportation, *The Great Wall*. Image courtesy of Judy Baca and SPARC Archives.

The Great Wall of Los Angeles was developed through a process called the *Imaging of Content*.⁶⁷ Inspired by community members and realized through murals, this *Imaging of Content* process was developed over decades and includes a whole host of elements geared towards a collaborative transformational outcome. The first portion of this process focused on a wide range of ways to develop knowledge. In employing a strategy of “multiple ways of knowing,” Baca

⁶⁷ In November of 2004, Baca delivered the 17th Lawrence Kohlberg Memorial Lecture, at the 30th annual conference of the *Association for Moral Education* in Dana Point, California. In her Speech Baca gave a clear and concise description of the ‘Imaging of Content’ process a “...method developed, honed, and systematized at SPARC to create hundreds of murals over the last thirty years.” Full text of the speech published in the *Journal of Moral Education* Vol. 34, No.2 (June 2005), 153–169. DOI: 10.1080/03057240500137029.

and her team of mural makers combined methods of conventional academic research that included reading and reporting on relevant historical monographs with an assemblage of popular culture iconography.



Figure 16. SPARC volunteers and student muralists at *The Great Wall*. Image courtesy of Judy Baca and SPARC Archives.

To these strategies, Baca also coordinated visits to the mural site by poets, writers, and other cultural informants that ultimately complemented conventional methods of inquiry. A compilation of all of these sources and materials resulted in the construction of a timeline that included many of the major and “not so major” political, cultural, social, musical and artistic histories of the period.

In general, the next step of the *Imaging of Content* process typically includes an in-depth analysis of the knowledge and histories harvested. Based on these multiple forms of knowledge amassed, the team initiates an assessment of the main issue(s) of a particular community and

articulates those problematics. From there, the process of *Imaging of Content* involves the formation of an alternative way of understanding the social issues essential to the subject matter of the mural.



Figure 17. Visual Talk Through of *The Great Wall*. Image courtesy of Judy Baca and SPARC Archives.

This action is taken in the form of thinking through alternatives to the problems and envisioning innovative solutions to these questions. From this action, a defining metaphor is generated that embodies the variant perspectives of the community; a counter narrative to *official* history is conceived. The culmination of all of these steps and ideas ultimately come together and are visually articulated in thumbnail sketches. From the sketches a very critical process of vetting occurs where Baca along with other artists and community members carefully talk through the sketches from the prisms of age, gender, immigration status, and sexuality. This vetting process provides another important opportunity for Baca to adjust her visual representation.

Painting on *The Great Wall*, which spanned five separate summers, began in 1976 and resulted in an historical re-vision of ethnic peoples in California. The visual survey developed in this mural spans Los Angeles history from its prehistoric roots up to a 1950s post-war metropolis. The wide-ranging themes depicted on the Great Wall reveal the settlement of Chumash Indian peoples around 10,000 B.C. to the 1781 founding of “. . . El Pueblo de la Reina de Los Angeles. . . by 46 *pobladores* from Mexico. . . the majority [of which] were Indian, Mestizo, Mulatto and Black.”⁶⁸ The mural also charts the tumultuous and often distorted histories of nineteenth-century California, including an homage to a new wave of immigrants. The mural goes on to provide new insights and unearth perspectives of California history regarding the First World War, the Great Depression, the Double-V Campaign, the dislocation of Chavez Ravine, and the founding of the Mattachine Society in 1950.⁶⁹ In particular, this mural offers the capacity to create an imagery of forgotten people in public spaces and encourages new ways of thinking about the past.

⁶⁸ SPARC, *Great Wall of Los Angeles: Walking Tour Guide*, 2007, 20.

⁶⁹ This is only a brief sketch of some of the major historical circumstances depicted in *The Great Wall*, please see chapter 3 in this dissertation for an interpretative treatment of the 1940s segment or for a complete history and description of *The Great Wall*, please see <http://sparcinla.org/the-great-wall-part-2/>



Figure 18. Judy Baca reviewing drawings at *The Great Wall*. Image courtesy of Judy Baca and SPARC Archives.

Concluding Thoughts – The River

An important aspect to this history is the connection between the Los Angeles River and the *Great Wall of Los Angeles*. After all, Baca does note that the river forms the guiding metaphor for this public monument. As early as the 1920s, city planners began a systematic plan for concreting the river; Baca viewed that project as a symbol of the hardening of the arteries of the land because it created both disease as well as dis-ease.⁷⁰ Since the concreting of the river constituted a scar on the city, Baca unquestionably wrestled with the relationship: "...between

⁷⁰ SPARC, *The Great Wall of Los Angeles: Walking Tour Guide*. Venice: Social and Public Art Resource Center, 2007, p. 1.

the scars on a human body and those on the land [that] took shape in [her] mind.”⁷¹ From the earliest moments of the project, Baca recalled looking out onto the river’s edge and imagining how the mural might take form. Baca envisioned the public marker as a great “...tattoo on the scar where the river once ran.”⁷² Therefore, the work of the Great Wall was an attempt to reimagine a history of pain, exclusion, and dislocation; it was a way to tattoo over that scar.



Figure 19. SPARC volunteers and muralists preparing *The Great Wall*. Image courtesy of Judy Baca and SPARC Archives.

⁷¹ Judith F. Baca, “Birth of a Movement,” in *Community, Culture and Globalization*, edited by Don Adams and Arlene Goldbard. New York: Rockefeller Foundation, Creativity & Culture Division, 2002, 116.

⁷² Judith F. Baca, “The Human Story at the Intersection of Ethics, Aesthetics and Social Justice” (speech, 17th Lawrence Kohlberg Memorial Lecture, delivered at the 30th annual conference of the Association for Moral Education, Dana Point, CA, USA on 11 November 2004). Text published in *Journal of Moral Education* Vol. 34, No.2 (June 2005), 153–169.

Part of the way that Baca and the mural makers at SPARC went about tattooing the scar, or reconstructing these histories, was by centering the history of the river. Baca enlisted the help of oral historians, ethnologists, and troves of community members to tease out the hidden history of the river and of Los Angeles.⁷³ In the early part of the century, Mexican memories were overtly used to disrupt and re-route the river and ultimately used to segregate many of the Mexicans in Los Angeles, as highlighted in the innovative work of historian Bill Deverell.

In 1914, city planners conducted a series of “oral histories” or interviews with several Mexican residents of Los Angeles mainly regarding the history of the river. These histories influenced municipal decisions about how to tangibly manipulate the geography of the river and how to physically move Mexican bodies from the land.⁷⁴ On the one hand, a collection of capitalists and city officials used personal memories to manipulate and dislocate a river and its people. On the other hand, a wide collaboration of artists, historians, and community members also relied on personal memories to reconnect to the past. In what amounts to a remarkable example of symmetry, Baca and the mural makers at SPARC relied on Mexican memories—in addition to indigenous memories, African American memories, Chinese memories, Japanese memories, and more— but in this case, to re-locate and reconnect these communities with the region, to the river, and to the history of Los Angeles.

It is also important to realize the struggle and effort that has resulted from reimagining the river. The river’s history has often been reduced to incomplete fragments of the past; Allison

⁷³ SPARC, *Great Wall of Los Angeles: Walking Tour Guide*, 5.

⁷⁴ Bill Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of its Mexican Past* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: The University of California Press), 121; Chapter 3, “Remembering a River,” provides an in-depth look at the history of the Los Angeles River, its many incarnations, and its indelible relationship to regional attitudes about race, ethnicity, and culture.

Carruth astutely notes that for many Angelenos, the L.A. River invokes very little and often includes only the imaginary of films that draw on dystopian stories about the river as a space of crime and alienation. More often than not, the river is unseen and unremembered.⁷⁵ Precisely for these reasons, the intervention that Baca and the mural makers at SPARC introduced provides a space for public imagery that challenges notions of disaffection and corruption by providing an historical account of ostensibly distorted or often-forgotten peoples of Los Angeles and the United States. In essence, this public art project accomplishes the transformation of a public space that rejects the coercive components of cultural amnesia and encourages a different form of remembering. Consequently, this different form of remembering inspires its viewers—as well as its makers—to cross the boundaries of art, social justice, history, and collective memory, and offers a critical lens into how particular communities envision themselves, their struggles, and their ability to transform history.

⁷⁵ Allison Carruth, “A Brief History of Public Art and the L.A. River,” Los Angeles: March 20, 2014, KCET Cultural Journalism.

CHAPTER TWO—THE RICHMOND MURAL PROJECT: ART AND MEMORY IN THE EAST BAY

Since the Census Bureau did not list Hispanics in a separate category in this period (most Mexican-Americans identified themselves as "white"), we have no accurate measure of Hispanic defense migration within the United States... police arrest records in Oakland suggest that Hispanic newcomers were less likely to come directly from Mexico than from the interior southwestern states... The records also indicate that these migrants found work in East Bay shipyards, canneries, and railroad operations.⁷⁶

General treatments of World War II, of the Great Depression, and of the postwar years in America generally exclude stories of U.S. Latinos and Latinas. There is in fact even today a lingering and curious dismissal of U.S. Latinos, as if Latinos had not lived here, had not served the country, had not, as a matter of fact, made the ultimate sacrifice for inclusion.⁷⁷

The United States' effort to become the great *Arsenal of Democracy* significantly affected the lives of Mexican Americans in Richmond, California.⁷⁸ In 1940, Henry J. Kaiser was awarded a government contract to begin a shipbuilding business in Richmond. During the war years that followed, production of prefabricated *Liberty* ships continued in four separate shipyards for 24 hours a day as Kaiser built the world's largest shipbuilding center. The Kaiser shipyards produced a total of 747 ships during the war, including the *Peary*, which set a world record when it launched just four days after its construction began. Combined with the Ford Motor Company and Standard Oil, the Kaiser shipbuilding effort exemplified how wartime exigencies intensified the recruitment of workers. Richmond's population grew from

⁷⁶ Marilyn S. Johnson, *The Second Gold Rush: Oakland and the East Bay in World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 56–57.

⁷⁷ Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez, *Mexican Americans & World War II* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), xvii.

⁷⁸ *Arsenal of Democracy* President Franklin D. Roosevelt's term to refer to America as the industrial machine and primary military supplier for the Allied forces during WWII.

approximately 23,000 at the start of the war to well over 100,000 people by 1945.⁷⁹ The population growth also transformed the ethnic make-up of the city, increasing the number of African American and Mexican American residents drastically. Throughout the city and East Bay region, moreover, housing options could not keep up with the overflow of people arriving daily for work. Segregated housing policies emerged and resulted in new social and cultural dynamics.⁸⁰



Figure 20. WWII Panel, Richmond Mural. Image courtesy of Judy Baca and SPARC Archives.

⁷⁹ Charles Wollenberg, *Golden Gate Metropolis: Perspectives on Bay Area History* (Berkeley: Institute of Governmental Studies, University of California, 1985), 244–245; Donald Bastin, *Richmond* (San Francisco: Arcadia Publishing, 2003), 78; *Berkeley Daily Planet*, 25 September 2007.

⁸⁰ East Bay refers to the eastern part of the San Francisco Bay Area (Alameda and Contra Costa Counties) and includes cities such as Hayward, Oakland, Berkeley, Emeryville, San Pablo, and Richmond.

The World War II panel of the Richmond mural project provides an opportunity to drastically rethink the circumstances surrounding the Second World War and more carefully examine some of the critical contributions and changes that resulted during this period. The mural panel primarily focuses on the most significant issues surrounding the East Bay during the mobilization effort. Specifically, the various facets of the wartime labor force include labor recruitment, migration, and the incorporation of new and cutting-edge, large-scale assembly techniques, and more precisely the social and economic transformations that resulted from this epic labor effort.

Furthermore, while it might seem obvious to anticipate some of the major changes that resulted in the East Bay, in reality this collaborative public art project allows us to recover and interrogate the often muted and distorted experiences that commonly get passed off as the history of World War II in California. Specifically, this mural gives us the opportunity to examine how Mexicans and Mexican Americans resourcefully used the historical circumstances during the war years to radically transform their position socially, economically, and geographically; while simultaneously developing modes of resistance to outmoded structures of patriarchy very much embedded within the Mexican and Mexican American community.

Examining this mural project allows us to move beyond existing scholarship regarding the East Bay region and the economic, social, and political transformations that resulted from World War II imperatives. Ostensibly, existing histories seek to inform us on the social changes in the United States; however, little attention has been paid to the opportunities, expectations, and experiences of Mexican Americans. In fact, a close interrogation of the Richmond mural project reveals that the expansion caused by wartime mobilization resulted in significant transformations in the individual lives of Mexican Americans in Richmond. Since Richmond

played a critical role in restructuring the country's economy during World War II, exploring these changes broadens our historical understanding of this era and underscores the ways in which Mexicans and Mexican Americans contributed to the war effort and how their cultures and communities were remarkably reconfigured by it.⁸¹ Although a small Mexican community existed in Richmond, what resulted in the wake of the Second World War was the formation of a new community. In particular, gains in employment and wages, a refashioned vision of women, transformations to housing and educational conditions, and shifts in traditional social conventions all combined to produce the elements of a renewed Mexican community.

Additionally, by moving beyond the analysis of historically Mexican communities, this research analyzes the recently formed Mexican community of Richmond. Unlike cities such as Los Angeles, California or San Antonio, Texas that featured Mexican communities with deep roots, Richmond had only a very small Mexican population prior to the Second World War. In 1940, Mexicans comprised less than two percent of Richmond's populace, and lived largely in isolation from the Anglo majority. But as a result of war mobilization, Richmond developed a redesigned Mexican community. The war brought new migrants from across the Western parts of the United States, provided economic opportunities once unavailable to Mexicans, restructured a once isolated community, and provided the impetus for social change within this recently formed community. A significant aspect of the Richmond mural project is that not only does it allow for a recovery of this history, but it also establishes a mode of resistance through the visual material. A mural project largely informed by individual histories and personal ephemera contributes to

⁸¹ When I discuss the Mexican community of Richmond in this study, I am including both Mexicans and Mexican Americans. While I understand the importance of addressing the specificity of each term and acknowledging distinctions between the two—namely place of birth—for the purposes of this examination I will focus on the Mexican community of Richmond as a collection of the two.

the construction of knowledge that supersedes previously incomplete research by evaluating how the mobilization effort during WWII transformed both 1) the lives of people living and working in Richmond, as well as 2) how the war effort created a transformed Mexican community in the East Bay.

Significant publications regarding Richmond underscore the need for a more inclusive social history and nuanced interpretation of the region. Typical of the neglect of Mexicans and Mexican Americans is *The Second Gold Rush*, Marilynn Johnson's otherwise valuable interpretation of the East Bay during World War II. Johnson's local history of the East Bay draws out parallels between cities in the greater San Francisco Bay Area, but also offers a deeper understanding of other regions along the West Coast affected by wartime mobilization. The experiences and contributions of Mexican Americans, however, are strikingly absent. Johnson alludes to insufficient census data as a possible reason why it is difficult to examine this group of people. Similarly, Gretchen Lemke-Santangelo presents a groundbreaking study of women migrating into the East Bay but focuses entirely on African American Women.⁸² Although Mexican American migrant women did not follow the exact trajectory of African American women, they did have parallel migration experiences moving from the South to the West; Lemke-Santangelo omits a discussion of these parallels. The works of both Johnson and Lemke-Santangelo reinforce a black–white paradigm in their consideration of the region and consequently distort the history of this period.⁸³

⁸² Marilynn S. Johnson, *The Second Gold Rush: Oakland and the East Bay in World War II* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 56; Gretchen Lemke-Santangelo, *Abiding Courage: African American Migrant Women and the East Bay Community* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1996).

⁸³ The Black–White binary paradigm is a concept that merits much more scholarly attention. The paradigm is defined as the idea that race in America consists, exclusively or primarily, of only two racialized groups, the black and the white. Scholars often reproduce this paradigm when they write as

The trajectory of Mexican Americans follows a different yet parallel path as African Americans during this period. Parallel in the sense that although both groups did realize important social and economic opportunities, especially in the form of industrial employment as part of the wartime mobilization effort, both groups did experience significant racial discrimination leading up to and extending through the war period. Yet Mexican Americans followed a different historical arc in that they were legally classified as white citizens, but they were routinely treated as an ethnic underclass by Anglo Americans that sought to limit social and economic mobility.⁸⁴ Thus it is critical to unpack the nuances of the Mexican community in Richmond to broaden our historical understanding. Historicizing the cultural production of an undertaking like the Richmond mural project precisely promotes the unpacking of these histories.

Oral history research expands our view to include the routinely marginalized histories of particular communities, which helps us then regard communities of color as sites of knowledge. This more expansive view allows us to reframe our existing knowledge about the history of the Second World War. Moreover, the work of oral history helps to amplify the stages of personal memory that are often muffled in traditional sources and can benefit historians seeking to build upon existing interpretations of the past. Along with Carlos Rogel, Baca coordinated a series of community workshops and conducted several oral histories with distinct members of the

though only blacks and whites matter for the purposes of discussing the racializing process. For further discussion see Juan F. Perea, "The Black/White Binary Paradigm of Race: The "Normal Science" of American Racial Thought," *California Law Review* Vol. 85, No. 5, "LatCrit: Latinas/os and the Law: A Joint Symposium" by *California Law Review* and *La Raza Law Journal* (Oct., 1997), 1213–1258.

⁸⁴ For a deeper discussion of A Class Apart Theory see Michal Olivas, *Colored Men and Hombres Aquí: Hernandez V. Texas and the Emergence of Mexican American Lawyering* (Houston: Arte Publico Press, 2006), and Ian Hanley Lopez, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race in America* (New York: NYU Press, 1996).

Richmond community. These efforts informed the mural team and helped to shape the guiding images that would eventually figure prominent on the mural panels. By seeking to understand what was thought, felt, and experienced, historians and mural makers can look beyond demographic and economic data. In this case, what did the World War II era mean for a generation of Mexican and Mexican American people living and migrating to the East Bay? By relying on oral histories as a methodology, this research seeks to uncover what individual experience means in historical terms as well as acknowledging the prominent role that oral histories played in constructing these multiple perspectives of Richmond, its people, and its varied histories. It is important to note, however, that oral histories should not be used as disconnected fragments of information. Rather, within the proper historical context and coupled with other primary and secondary sources, oral histories can provide a useful, more complete, and more expansive interpretation of the past.⁸⁵

By examining the experiences of Mexican Americans in the East Bay, we can complicate and deepen our understanding of the region during this period. In this context, this examination of the Richmond mural project looks to build upon the work of historians and scholars such as Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez, Emilio Zamora, and Richard Griswold Del Castillo.⁸⁶ Their work puts

⁸⁵ Teresa Barnett and Chon A. Noriega, eds., *Oral History and Communities of Color* (Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press, 2013), 10; Devra A. Weber, "Raiz Fuerte: Oral History and Mexicana Farmworkers," in *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women's History*, eds. Vicki L. Ruiz and Ellen C. DuBois. (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), 403; Samuel J. Redmond, "Finding Rosie: Documenting the World War II Home Front Experience of the American West through Oral History," *Western Historical Quarterly* 43 (Summer 2012): 205–211.

⁸⁶ Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez, ed., *Mexican Americans and World War II* (2005); Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez, ed., *A Legacy Greater Than Words* (2006); Emilio Zamora, *Claiming Rights and Righting Wrongs in Texas* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2009); Richard Griswold del Castillo, *World War II and Mexican American Civil Rights* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008).

forth a charge for emerging scholars to highlight the importance of World War II and analyze the impact that it had on Mexican and Mexican American communities in the United States.

Griswold del Castillo implores: “Despite the seeming importance of World War II and its impact on Mexican Americans, little attention has been devoted to these years and how they shaped a new cultural and political environment for Mexican Americans.”⁸⁷

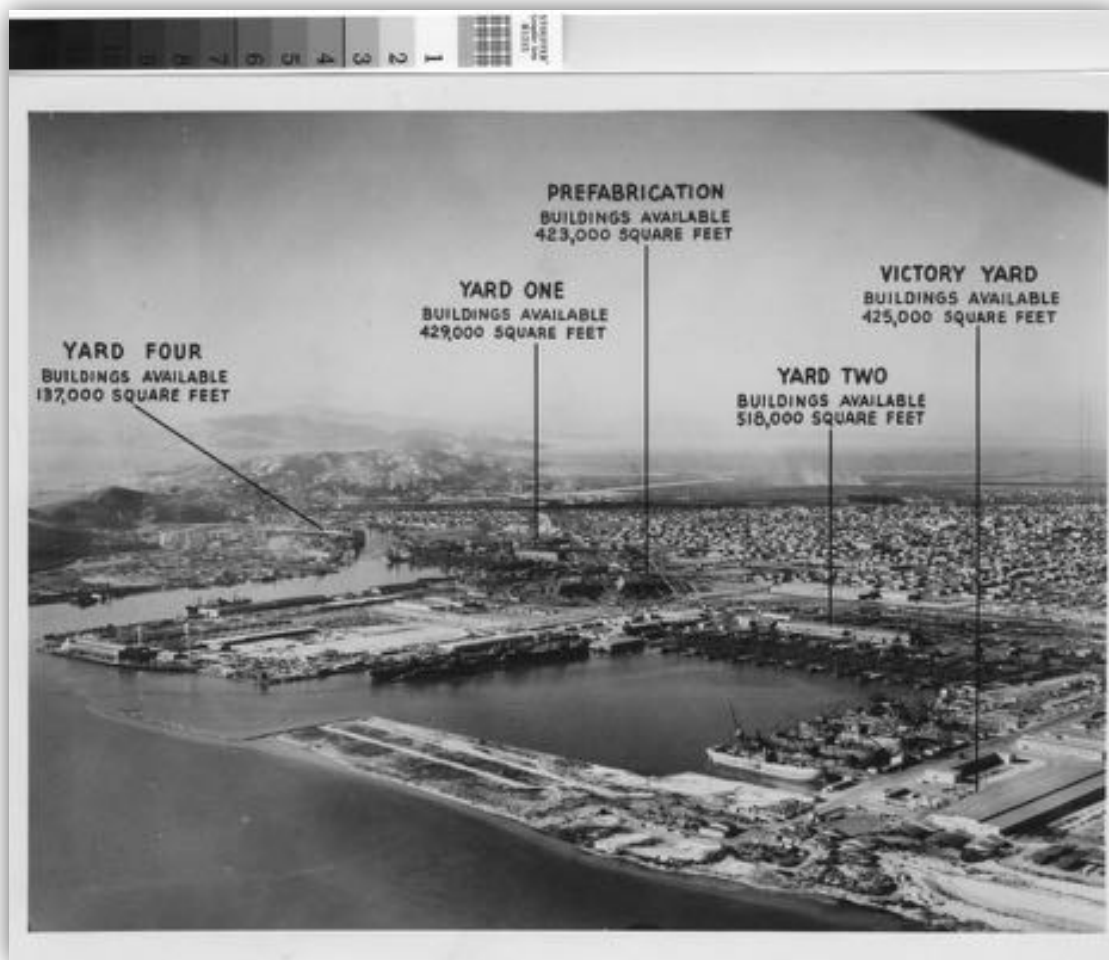


Figure 21. Richmond Marina, 1944. Image courtesy of Richmond Museum of History.

⁸⁷ Griswold del Castillo, *World War II and Mexican American Civil Rights*, 4.

Richmond and the Wartime Economic Context

Many cities along the Pacific coast of the United States experienced significant economic and social changes during the Second World War. Appropriately Richmond can provide a useful vantage point by which to examine these changes while paying particular attention to the economy, labor practices, and migration.

The Western United States played a critical role in reorganizing the economy during the World War II era. Historian Gerald Nash explains that in 1940 the economy of the Western United States principally functioned to export raw materials to the industrialized Northeast and Midwest. By 1945, though, the region boasted a burgeoning manufacturing sector, led by an array of aerospace, electronics, and science-oriented industries all buoyed by federal expenditures for the military. California in general and Richmond in particular played a significant role in this transformation.⁸⁸

The reshaping of the economy was complex to be sure; the two main forces driving this change were the federal government and private enterprise. The federal government invested approximately \$40 billion dollars into the West between 1940 and 1945. Federal expenditures during the mobilization effort provided the investment that had been absent in the years leading up to the war. While investments supported many government contracts for a variety of goods, the bulk of the money was concentrated on shipbuilding and plane manufacturing. In particular, federal spending in California jumped from \$1.3 billion in 1940 to \$8.5 billion in by 1945. Government and business were intertwined and both impacted people's lives. Willie Mae

⁸⁸ Gerald D. Nash, *World War II and the West: Reshaping the Economy* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), xii.

Cotright migrated to California from the South precisely because of the economic groundswell taking shape in Richmond: "...We came out thinking... we could be able to make a good living for the family... we weren't able, back at home. We wouldn't be able to accomplish the things back there that we do out here."⁸⁹ Indeed, California represented the apotheosis of military-driven economic development in the West. And Richmond rode this wave.⁹⁰



Figure 22. WWII Panel, Richmond Mural. Image courtesy of Judy Baca and SPARC Archives.

The upper left-hand corner of the WWII panel underscores the significance of not only the cutting-edge techniques developed at the Richmond shipyards, but also how the geography in the form of natural waterways helped to construct the greatest shipbuilding boom in history.

Central to this epic labor effort was the consistent and coordinated practices of the workers. The

⁸⁹ "An Oral History with Willie Mae Cotright," conducted by Judith Dunning, 2002, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2007, 46.

⁹⁰ Gerald D. Nash, *World War II and the West*, 4.

Kaiser-Richmond shipyards proved both economically lucrative and industrially groundbreaking during the Second World War. Of the United States' largest one hundred corporations during the war years, two were located in Richmond, with Kaiser rated at No. 20.⁹¹ Henry J. Kaiser, along with federal officials in the U.S. Maritime Commission (USMC), revolutionized the shipbuilding industry.

Efficiency and Consistency in Shipbuilding

In terms of technology, the U.S. Merchant Marine Act of 1936 called for the development of an efficient and coordinated merchant marine in conjunction with promoting commerce in the United States. With the support of the USMC, ship production at Kaiser-Richmond rejected almost every facet of prewar shipbuilding practices. Instead, Kaiser's leaders looked to develop more advanced industrial techniques. To that end, they relied on methods derived from heavy construction and increased the use of two fairly new techniques: electric arc welding and prefabrication or section building. Electric arc welding presented the ability to more quickly and efficiently join metal than riveting, which had been the customary shipyard technique. While prefabrication took advantage of the large waterfront, workers would fabricate assorted components of the ships and transport them along *shipways* where crews would assemble those components into complete vessels. These methods produced an effective and most importantly a consistent labor process—which was the most significant element of the total shipbuilding industry in Richmond. These labor practices led to the development of redesigned

⁹¹ Standard Oil was rated No. 75; Gerald D. Nash, *World War II and the West*, 3–8.

communities and revealed Kaiser-Richmond and the shipyards of the East Bay as some of the most innovative and productive industrial sites in the country during the World War II era.⁹²

Richmond quickly became the archetypal boomtown city during the war era. Before World War II Richmond was a small city centered on a Ford assembly plant, a Standard Oil refinery, and a Santa Fe railway shop. Henry Kaiser and the USMC selected Richmond as the location of a new shipyard because of its accessible waterfront, proximity to the Pacific Ocean, industrial capacity, existing railroads and neighboring population from which to draw a labor force. Richmond local Sal Chavez recalls the expansion quite succinctly: "...When they started to build the shipyards, people were coming from all over... Boomtown."⁹³ Because of these factors, Richmond experienced swift and sudden population and economic growth and became the largest concentrated production of shipbuilding accompanied by one of the largest concentrations of blue-collar workers in the history of the world.⁹⁴

The Kaiser shipyards at Richmond are historically significant for several key reasons. The shipyards at Richmond, during World War II, were the most productive shipbuilding operation in the United States during the greatest shipbuilding boom in American history. Kaiser-Richmond launched thirteen percent of all ships built by Maritime Commission and three-quarters of the ships were produced in the Bay Area. The eleven shipyards in the greater Bay Area, including the four in Richmond, produced almost one hundred more ships than the

⁹² Christopher James Tassava, "Rosie the Riveter National Historical Park, Kaiser Shipyards," Written Historical and Descriptive Data. HAER No. CA-326-L report prepared for the Rosie the Riveter/World War II Home Front National Historical Park, Richmond, CA 2004, (4–8).

⁹³ "An Oral History with Sal Chavez," conducted by David Washburn, 2002, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2007, 68.

⁹⁴ Wayne Bonnett, *Build Ships! Wartime Shipbuilding Photographs, San Francisco Bay: 1940–1945* (Sausalito, CA: Windgate Press, 1999).

nineteen USMC yards on the Gulf of Mexico.⁹⁵ Kaiser-Richmond also proved to be a major influence on the development of contemporary shipbuilding methods globally after World War II. Prefabrication and welding techniques were imported to Japan after the war by American shipbuilders. Moreover, techniques developed at Kaiser-Richmond proved significant to the global shipbuilding industry after the war.⁹⁶

Most significantly the shipyards at Richmond were a foremost part of the United States military economy. Kaiser-Richmond had been producing ships for the British before the attacks on Pearl Harbor at the end of 1941. Although the aircraft industry is remembered as the most prominent of wartime industries, Kaiser-Richmond shipyards actually produced more military supplies at the early stages of the mobilization effort. With shipbuilding methods in place before total mobilization, Kaiser-Richmond was considerably out-producing all other shipyards in the country at the onset of the war. Additionally, during its peak moment of production, the Kaiser-Richmond shipyards employed close to fifteen percent of the country's estimated 650,900 shipyard workers.

⁹⁵ Shipyards No.1 and No.2 in Richmond produced 135 more Liberty Ships than Bethlehem Steel's facility at Fairfield, Maryland, which was the second-most productive producer of Liberty ships in the country.

⁹⁶ Ironically, these methods combined with the local Japanese shipbuilding practices resulted in a productive and cost-efficient process that would become Japan's largest grossing export only one decade after the war; Tassava, HAER No. CA-326-L., 5.



Figure 23. Richmond Shipyard Number Two. Image courtesy of Richmond Museum of History.

Race, Gender, and the Shipyards

Notably, the shipyards in Richmond more than most shipyards on the Pacific Coast set the tone for hiring practices, actively recruiting workers for jobs that carried higher wages and a more diverse labor force including white Americans, Chinese Americans, African Americans, Mexican Americans, and across all of these groups, women.⁹⁷ Willie Mae Cotright remembers leaving Louisiana specifically for opportunities not available to African Americans or women back home. “The opportunity. That’s what it was, just the opportunity. That we had, at least the blacks had, coming out. Be able to do things we had never been used to. Having more.”⁹⁸ Ned Duran was a Mexican American veteran recruited from Colorado to work for the Kaiser shipyards; his experience combined with the memories of Cotright highlight the manner in which

⁹⁷ Tassava, HAER No. CA-326-L., 5.

⁹⁸ “An Oral History with Willie Mae Cotright,” 22.

Kaiser looked to fill labor demands while building an inclusive workforce. “Kaiser was looking for people to work: they used to send people out to look for people to come to work in the shipyards.”⁹⁹ The prospects of a higher-wage blue-collar job, coupled with more inclusive hiring practices, resulted in a substantial employment spike in the shipbuilding industry. Moreover, the federal government sought to explicitly support wide-ranging employment opportunities.

In terms of hiring policy, the recruitment of a diverse workforce and hiring practices of Kaiser-Richmond was the key impetus for the creation of a reorganized community. In June 1941, President Roosevelt issued Executive Order No. 8802 barring racial discrimination on the part of wartime contractors working for United States agencies. Subsequently, the USMC included a clause in each of its contracts which read, "*Fair Employment Practice*: The Contractor agrees that in the performance of the work under this contract, it will not discriminate against any worker because of race, creed, color or national origin." The federal government also established the FEPC to inspect job sites as a means of enforcing the executive order. Kaiser acted as soon as possible to prevent segregation once the shipyards began hiring large numbers of nonwhites in 1942.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ “An Oral History with Ned and Emma Duran,” conducted by David Washburn, 2002, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2007, 24.

¹⁰⁰ Fredric L. Quivik, “*Kaiser’s Richmond Shipyards with an Emphasis on Richmond Shipyard No. 3*” HAER No. CA-326 report prepared for the Rosie the Riveter/World War II Home Front National Historical Park, Richmond, CA 2004, 183.



Figure 24. Reliance Steel Co. at Yard 3 Richmond. Image courtesy of Richmond Museum of History.

Richmond and the Mexican Community As it Was and What it Became

By focusing on some of the more critical economic and social circumstances during this period, the Richmond mural project pushes its observers to evaluate the many significant transformations experienced in the East Bay. The mural provides the impetus for a closer examination of the discreet Mexican community of Richmond prior to the 1940s, as well as a focus on how a distinctly remade Mexican community formed because of the wartime mobilization effort. Furthermore, this examination reveals the ways that individuals experienced employment opportunities, hiring practices, discrimination, changes in traditional gender norms, housing limitations, and transforming social and cultural conventions. Collectively these elements form the basis of the restructured Mexican community in Richmond. Moreover, the mural project serves as the vehicle to amplify these histories and address the void in traditional

interpretations of the World War II narrative, as well as highlight the significance of communities of color as sites of knowledge.

Barrios and Institutional Racism

Before World War II, Richmond had a relatively small nonwhite community that was predominately linked to the railroad industry. In 1940, its modest Mexican community counted perhaps a few hundred people in a city of nearly 23,000.¹⁰¹ By the 1920s, the Santa Fe Railroad had moved its depot and repair station to Richmond and subsequently employed most of the Mexican community in the city. Sal Chavez was born in Richmond in 1921 in section housing provided by the Santa Fe Railroad. Like his father before him, Chavez worked on a section gang for the Santa Fe—all he had to do was ask for a job and he received it, however, the work was not easy: “Fixing rails if they gotta be straightened out, or some of the railroad ties were old, we gotta take them out and put new ones in there. Hard work.”¹⁰² In the years leading up to the war, most members of the Mexican community arrived in Richmond in large part because of their employment with the railroad company, which is to say they were wage and industry-related workers.

Social mobility was limited for many of the residents in this community for a variety of reasons. Mexican workers were both discreet residents and consumers. The workers of the Santa Fe lived in free housing in the area next to the rail yard, the community known as *La Sección*. Since most residents of this Mexican community were employed by the Santa Fe, as consumers

¹⁰¹ Shirley Ann Wilson Moore, “Traditions from Home: African Americans in Wartime Richmond, California” in Lewis A. Erenberg and Susan E. Hirsch, eds., *The War in American Culture: Society and Consciousness During World War II* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 263.

¹⁰² “An Oral History with Sal Chavez,” 49.

they were caught in an *enganche* system of credit with the local Home Supply Company.¹⁰³ The memories of Sal Chavez emphasize the economic challenges associated with relying principally on this system of credit. "...You go there, they'd charge you double... the Holmes Supply really got you, because when you went... you were desperate..." Residents of *La Sección* would often buy food and household goods on credit at marked-up prices, which routinely resulted in a cycle of indebtedness.¹⁰⁴

Furthermore, restrictive covenants regarding home ownership or home rentals meant that Mexican Americans were often unable to purchase homes in different sections of the city due to what amounted to a racially problematic status. When moving out of the free housing provided by the Santa Fe became possible, many residents either rented or bought homes just east of the rail yard at the end of town. Although Mexican Americans were categorized white in the census, there was *de facto* exclusion by the larger Anglo population. Despite their status as United States citizens, most were designated as "Mexican" by the U.S. government and by local public opinion. Sal Chavez, who was raised in the section housing of the Santa Fe Railroad, recalled that before the war "...you didn't see no mixing with American[s]. You didn't see them. It was always Mexican-Mexican... It was because you felt that they didn't like you." Social separation was a marker of the Mexican community in Richmond in the years leading up to the war. This seclusion would be contested as mobilization efforts intensified.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Spanish word for hook.

¹⁰⁴ "An Oral History with Sal Chavez," 45; David Washburn, *The End of Town: Richmond's Mexican Colonia and the World War II Migration* (Berkeley, CA: 2003), 1–14.

¹⁰⁵ Griswold del Castillo, *World War II and Mexican American Civil Rights*, 57; Washburn, "The End of Town," 1–14; "An Oral History with Sal Chavez," 20.

Historian Albert Camarillo characterizes the development of culturally, socially, and economically discrete Mexican neighborhoods at the turn of the century as “barrioization.”¹⁰⁶ While segregated neighborhood residence is part of the history, many residents in the community embraced the intimacy. Barrios fostered the use of the Spanish language; residents joined together for social and religious gatherings and sought to reinforce cultural practices. In particular, they sought to join and participate in *mutualistas* or mutual aid societies. *The Sociedad Guadalupana de San Pablo* was founded in 1924 and opened branches in Richmond, Berkeley, Crocket, and Oakland. The Catholic group served to promote community service, religious education and community celebrations and resulted in a communal sense of cohesion.¹⁰⁷ However, as my research suggests, barrios did not remain static, single ethnic group enclaves and the development of changing neighborhoods was only one part of the remarkable transformation for Mexican Americans during this era.

Employment Challenges and Opportunities

World War II was truly a watershed for Mexican Americans for many reasons. Throughout large tracts of the Western United States Mexican Americans faced economic and social discrimination. Segregation and discrimination had been challenged by civic and legal means, but many of these policies remained. With the rise of the mobilization effort and labor shortages the federal government began to focus particular attention on the problems of Mexican

¹⁰⁶ Anglos commonly viewed these barrios as foreign and backward, more because of cultural practices rather than citizenship status.

¹⁰⁷ Albert Camarillo, "Historical Patterns in the Development of Chicano Urban Society: Southern California, 1848–1930" UCLA, Clark Memorial Library Publications, 1979; 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); Washburn, “The End of Town,” 1–14.

Americans. Deliberate efforts by the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) and the War Manpower Commission resulted in an effort to overcome discriminatory labor practices, which generated the possibilities for a more inclusive national economy.¹⁰⁸ Many Mexican Americans believed their increased roles within the war effort foreshadowed the possibility of a better future—new jobs indeed meant new possibilities.¹⁰⁹

Prior to the war, Mexican residents of Richmond faced consistent discrimination based on attitudes of race-based biases. It was almost impossible for these residents to find employment outside of the Santa Fe. Employment problems resulted because of the way Anglos employers viewed Mexican Americans as part of an underclass and routinely discriminated against them.¹¹⁰ Sal Chavez remembers his failed attempts to find work at Standard Oil before the war because his ethnicity: “Guys went to work out there my age, you know, at that time. I used to go out there and try to get a job at Standard Oil and they wouldn’t look at you... We’re talking about the Standard Oil. They didn’t hire—. The only time they hired was when the war broke out, then they hired everybody.” Chavez’s experience with discrimination before the war suggests how profound the employment opportunities became during the war years. The knowledge inherent in his story is critical to understanding the home front narrative. Chavez goes on to suggest that when the mobilization effort intensified and labor needs mounted, only then did increased employment opportunities occur for Mexicans: “Like when the war broke out, a lot of them went to work for Standard Oil. They quit the Santa Fe and went to work for the

¹⁰⁸ Gerald D. Nash. *The American West Transformed: The Impact of the Second World War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 107–115.

¹⁰⁹ Naomi Quiñonez, “Rosita the Riveter: Welding Tradition with Wartime Transformations” in Rivas-Rodriguez, ed., *Mexican Americans and World War II*, 249.

¹¹⁰ Griswold del Castillo, *World War II and Mexican American Civil Rights*, 11.

Standard Oil, which paid them more money.” The pressure of wartime mobilization was enough to challenge depressed labor wages and discriminatory hiring practices in Richmond.¹¹¹

Significant employment opportunities for Mexican Americans contributed mightily to a transforming community.

Kaiser-Richmond was at the forefront of new, more inclusive hiring practices and made a significant impact on the employment opportunities for groups of people once shut out of blue-collar jobs. Ned Duran moved from Colorado to Richmond in 1945 for the increased chances of employment. Duran recalled the remarkable impact that Kaiser had not only on employment opportunities but also for the development of the city. “Kaiser made Richmond. He was hiring everybody. The shipyards were hiring everybody. Kaiser hired all of them guys from Oklahoma and everything that came here and worked. Blacks, everybody. Women.” Duran’s wife Emma reaffirmed the sentiments of her husband adding, “People from all over the country came to work here.” Kaiser was building the foundation for a refashioned community; moreover, this community would be decidedly different from its existing incarnation. The thoughts of the Duran’s help point to critical elements of a developing community, “Texans, Okies, blacks, and everything coming here. It was really a lot of people.” The all-out mobilization effort made it increasingly clear that the war being fought to eliminate racism abroad also suggested that discrimination on the home front was wrong and could be contested.¹¹² Furthermore, the employment opportunities for women were just as significant if not more so than for men during this period.

¹¹¹ “An Oral history with Sal Chavez,” 72.

¹¹² “An Oral history with Sal Chavez,” 77; An Oral History with Ned and Emma Duran 29; Griswold del Castillo, *World War II and Mexican American Civil Rights*, 49.



Figure 25. WWII Panel, Richmond Mural. Image courtesy of Judy Baca and SPARC Archives.

An Expanding Role for Women

The central image of the WWII panel considers two main ideas: 1) the impact that women workers had on the shipping industry in the East Bay, and 2) the new opportunities to contribute to an evolving war effort that depended intimately on the labor of women—all women. During this period, women began to move into previously all male occupations because their labor was needed and notably Mexican American women wageworkers experienced new employment opportunities as a result. Rosa Silvas moved to Richmond in 1943 from Phoenix, Arizona and worked tacking steel then as a welder in a plate shop in yard one at Kaiser-Richmond. Rosa journeyed to Richmond as part of a chain migration pattern and remembers, “The one that really made us come to Richmond was Frank, my brother, because he’s the one

that came first. Then we followed right after. On account of the shipyard.”¹¹³ Her brother Frank had moved in 1941 and eventually her entire family relocated over the next few years primarily because of the employment opportunities in the East Bay. In total, nine siblings worked in the four different shipyards during the war years.

Shipyard occupations that previously been the exclusive domain of men quickly opened up their ranks to include women. In the plate shop, Rosa would tack individual plates of steel before welders would come and join the sections together. She helped to construct the large rails on the bottom of the Liberty ships. As part of the prefabrication process, Silvas was skilled in the cutting-edge technology and labor process that was instrumental in the economic transformation of the region. Rosa recalled that her introduction to the shipyards was rather quick because of the significant demand for workers. “I went to school. I was supposed to be in school for a whole week, but they needed welders so bad that I was in school only two days and they put me in yard one... They kept me there. We were about six girls and two men—our crew.” Women’s participation was unique because women comprised a greater number of the workforce in shipyards, and because they entered many more facets of production than they had in any previous time.¹¹⁴

The war was unquestionably an important moment of change with respect to the permanent increase in the number of women in industrial occupations. In a unique moment in American employment history, women were being actively recruited in unprecedented numbers

¹¹³ “An Oral History with Evelyn Duran and Rosa Silvas,” conducted by David Washburn, 2002, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2007, 21.

¹¹⁴ HAER No. CA-326, 179; “An Oral History with Duran and Silvas,” 25; Rivas-Rodriguez, ed., *Mexican Americans and World War II*, xxiii.

to be part of the economic engine driving the war effort. By figuring women at the center of the WWII panel, the mural is underscoring this very critical moment in U.S. labor history. Not only were women moving into previously inaccessible sectors of the labor market, now women of color—especially Black and Mexican American women—were realizing these once exclusive opportunities and taking full advantage of the break in convention.

One of these women was Angelina Alexandre, a native of Northern California who moved to Richmond to work at the Ford Motor plant. Angelina vividly recounted being swept up by the enthusiasm of the recruitment effort. “And you’d hear on the radio when they’d say, “the old and the young should go out to work.” I had two brothers in the service at that time... I was very proud so I went to work. That’s how I started at Ford Motor.”¹¹⁵ By 1943, the government was issuing guidelines to help employers guarantee that familiarizing women to the workplace would not slow down production or result in unnecessary problems for women workers. Some of the guidelines sought to assure that women were treated equally with men with regards to wages and promotion.¹¹⁶ Angelina suggests that although at times the work might have been difficult, the wages were better than she had been accustomed to in the past. “...I worked there... I stuck it out. And I thought that was good pay at \$1.28.”¹¹⁷ The war significantly increased the economic status of women and provided an opportunity to earn higher wages than ever before. This opportunity not only solidified the importance of women within a transforming economic system, it also resulted in significant cultural changes.

¹¹⁵ “An Oral History with Angelina Alexandre,” conducted by Jess Rigelhaupt, 2005, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2007, 8.

¹¹⁶ Quivik, HAER No. CA-326 179.

¹¹⁷ “An Oral History with Angelina Alexandre,” 19.



Figure 26. Welder Crew at the Kaiser Richmond Shipyards. Image courtesy of Richmond Museum of History.

The war provided working women the opportunity to experience a new kind of social freedom, one that had been markedly absent in Mexican communities before the war. These opportunities also helped shape the consciousness of women in the increasingly revamped community of Richmond.¹¹⁸ While the war created a different understanding of women’s capabilities outside the family home, their experiences resulted in a new self-confidence and freedom overall. Richmond’s Mexican community was not exempt to these changes and the experience of Rosa’s sister Evelyn Duran suggest as much. Evelyn remembered being fifteen years old when she moved to Richmond and acquired a forged certificate stating she was sixteen so she could work at the shipyards. Women working in the shipyards provided a unique sense of

¹¹⁸ “An Oral History with Duran and Silvas,” 23–25; Griswold del Castillo, *World War II and Mexican American Civil Rights*, 60–67.

independence; Evelyn recalled that she felt very proud to be the only woman worker in a crew of six men. She was eventually trained to operate a torch and became a burner at the shipyards. She also recalled that everybody worked together and that unless you saw through the welding outfit you could not distinguish her from the men in her crew.

Challenging Patriarchy at Home and at Work

Employment experiences during the war resulted in more self-confident and ambitious women. Women wartime workers developed new expectations of work and social standards. Old social structures regarding women's work were being challenged by new ideas that reflected the places women had traveled and the work they were doing.¹¹⁹ However, as women ventured into new social roles, at times they still faced traditional "obligations." The stark recollections of Angelina Alexandre indicate that in Richmond even as women gained higher wages and were charged with new employment responsibilities they still had to contend with the traditional ideas of *women's work*. Angelina recounted that she was "...too busy cooking and washing and ironing and going to work and back and forth... [She] didn't have time to visit anybody."¹²⁰ As a married woman, even though Angelina worked a full shift at the Ford Motor Company, she was still expected to take care of the daily chores at home including preparing the meals, washing the clothes, and making sure the home was clean. Although her work experience, and the experience of millions of other women during this era, provided the momentum to challenge traditional concepts of women's work, Angelina's account suggests that the transformations were complicated. Examining individual lives provides a more nuanced understanding of this process

¹¹⁹ Quivik, HAER No. CA-326, 179; Duran and Silvas, 25; Rivas-Rodriguez, ed., *Mexican Americans and World War II*, xxiii.

¹²⁰ "An Oral History with Angelina Alexandre," 20.

and reflects the paradoxes that surfaced during this ever-shifting period. Furthermore, considering the changes that occurred in this period through the lived experiences of women like Evelyn and Angelina helps to unpack the history of Richmond, a history that was fraught with complexities.

The wartime labor shortages in Richmond also created a window of opportunity for women and nonwhite workers who had been traditionally excluded from blue-collar, higher wage possibilities. Jobs generated by the mobilization effort initially went to Anglo workers and routine discrimination practices excluded women and nonwhite workers. Both sisters Rosa and Evelyn recalled that their experiences with discrimination were negligible. They did, however, see it with African Americans, but they did not share any personal experience with discrimination. Angelina Alexandre more emphatically proclaimed that she would not put up with any sort of discrimination because she was a woman. “Oh no. No. No. Uh-uh. I never let that get by, all the time that I worked. There was no discrimination because I told them right from the beginning, what I was and what I didn’t expect.” Union membership historically had been restricted for Mexicans, especially in skilled jobs. Alexandre did not experience any difficulties with her membership in the United Auto Workers union, and similarly, Rosa and Evelyn did not respond that they had any issue with their membership in the Boilermakers union.¹²¹

¹²¹ “An Oral History with Duran and Silvas,” 2–57; “An Oral History with Angelina Alexandre,” 23–28.

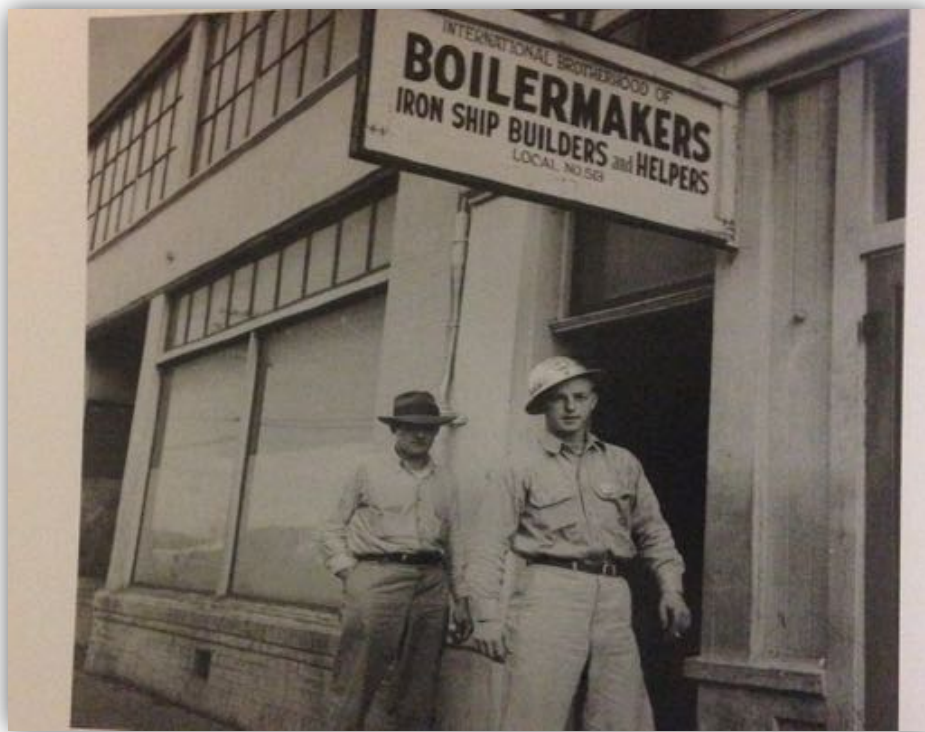


Figure 27. Boilermakers Union Local 513. Image courtesy of Richmond Museum of History.

The Boilermakers union represented most West Coast shipyard workers and they were known for incorporating undemocratic and racist policies within their ranks. Specifically, Boilermakers did not allow women or blacks to join their locals. Instead, they set up auxiliary unions and worked to limit the higher-paying employment opportunities to its white male membership. Although Mexican American workers were classified white by employers, they too faced discrimination and were often overlooked and excluded from promotional opportunities. Evelyn and Rosa did join the auxiliary union in order to become employed. Because they were earning much more than they had ever made, though, they did not have a problem with paying union dues. In Phoenix, they both had worked in a laundry with mostly women where they earned about a quarter an hour. At the shipyards, however, they started at one dollar an hour and they both viewed that as a very high wage. Comparably, Alexandre viewed the union as

important and believed in their efforts.¹²² Despite the consistent union membership challenges that women and nonwhite workers had faced prior to the war, what resulted in this period was a more inclusive opportunity for employment and union protections. And although the FEPC did create an official federal investigation unit to ensure more equitable hiring practices and better working conditions, discrimination did not completely disappear from the shop floor in any of the wartime industries.¹²³

Although many Mexican American women were working at the onset of war, the mobilization effort allowed them access to better-paying jobs and their experience generally resulted in a sense of control over their lives that laid the foundations for a more independent outlook within an emerging community.¹²⁴ This was a significant change from the traditional role of women prior to the war, working in the home or relegated to subordinate or gendered labor. And as this study suggests, these changes were more complicated and reveal fragments within the Mexican community. Not only did the military economy provide economic opportunities, it also produced a turn in social dynamics. For the first time, many Mexican American men and women came into extended contact with African Americans and Anglos. This new and sustained mingling of different groups was a key component in the development of a distinct community.

¹²² “An Oral History with Duran and Silvas,” 8; “An Oral History with Angelina Alexandre,” 28.

¹²³ See Charles Wollenberg, *Marinship at War: Shipbuilding and Social Change in Wartime Sausalito* (Berkeley: Western Heritage Press, 1990).

¹²⁴ “An Oral History with Duran and Silvas,” 2–57; Charles Wollenberg, *Photographing the Second Gold Rush: Dorthea Lange and the Bay Area at War, 1941–1945* (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 1995). Griswold del Castillo, *World War II and Mexican American Civil Rights*, 70.



Figure 28. WWII Panel, Richmond Mural. Image courtesy of Judy Baca and SPARC Archives.

Shifts in Housing and Educational Experiences

The journey of Mary Lou Cordova is emblematic of the pattern of internal migration that many Mexican families followed and the limited housing options they confronted in California. The upper-right portion of the mural draws us to the racially motivated housing policies constructed in Richmond as a result of the massive influx of newcomers to the East Bay. Cordova's family had lived in Las Cruces, New Mexico for many generations and felt the economic pressures of the depression of the previous decade. Yet when the mobilization effort took hold, her family migrated to California where her father got a union job as a pipe fitter at Standard Oil. There, they found housing in the temporary projects on the south side of the city.

¹²⁵ The limits of their choices can be contextualized to company and city decisions made not to expand the stock of more permanent housing.

Restrictive covenants and *de facto* segregation sought to isolate and limit the opportunity for social mobility of nonwhite people. The Richmond Housing Authority was appointed in 1941 to manage the federal defense housing projects, one of the largest defense housing programs of the WWII era. Because Kaiser-Richmond had been producing ships for the British before the onset of American military intervention, the need for housing was especially pressing in the region even before the total mobilization effort took hold nationally. The Authority built and administered over 25,000 units of housing within four years. But within Richmond, a concerted opposition grew against construction of permanent housing projects. The recollections of Bay Area resident David Dibble who worked at Standard Oil during the war highlight the outlook of many longtime Anglo residents during this period. “There was somewhat of a distinction between the established Californians, and the newcomers... Okies and whatever were kind of looked on as sort of hillbillies kind of things. And there was, of course, again, a distinction between the Spanish speaking.”¹²⁶ Many longtime mostly Anglo residents were quick to highlight differences along cultural and racial lines and not surprisingly many assumed that defense migrants would return to their home states when the war ended. Notably, however, racial differences seemed to dominate the experience for many of the migrants looking to secure housing upon their arrival to Richmond.

¹²⁵ “An Oral History with Mary Lou Cordova,” conducted by David Washburn, 2002, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2007, 1–22.

¹²⁶ “An Oral History with David Dibble,” conducted by Jess Rigelhaupt, 2008, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2009, 20.



Figure 29. U.S. Housing Project, Richmond, California. Image courtesy of Richmond Museum of History.

Of the fifteen housing projects funded by the RHA, only three were designated as permanent low-income housing. These were also the projects farthest away from the Shipyards and open only to white residents through restrictive housing covenants.¹²⁷ The more densely populated housing projects, located closer to the shipyards along the city's shoreline, offered housing to African American and Mexican American residents. However, the rising number of migrants resulted in overcrowding in what was Richmond's Mexican neighborhood. The influx of migrants put a severe strain on housing options and propelled a once ethnically isolated neighborhood into the center of a rising multiracial district. Due in large part to discriminatory

¹²⁷ "An Oral History with Mary Lou Cordova," 12-22; Donna Graves. *Mapping Richmond's World War II Home Front*. 2004 report for National Park Service, 42-52.

housing policies and financial restraints, different ethnic groups found themselves occupying multiethnic neighborhoods. Cordova notably remembered the first time she went to school and saw a black person; she was “so impressed, because [she] had never seen a black person. Never.” Sal Chavez and Ned Duran echoed similar sentiments to Cordova’s, remembering that what had once been a just a “quiet little town” now “all of a sudden, it became a metropolis.”¹²⁸ Richmond was rapidly swelling at unprecedented rates and the effect on its residents was palpable.



Figure 30. Segregated Housing in Richmond. Image courtesy of Richmond Museum of History.

Intra-ethnic Relationships

These sudden and drastic developments gave rise to a totally transformed community. Racial and spatial isolation was being contested through various manners in Richmond. The memories of Cordova, Chavez and Duran reveal how these changes played out in the lives of community members. The isolation that was a fundamental characteristic of the Mexican

¹²⁸ “An Oral History with Cordova,” 23; “An Oral History with Duran,” 105.

community in Richmond before the war had given way to a new intra-ethnic mode of living. Part of this new mode encompassed the educational experiences of these new community members.

Richmond's population of children rose from about 6,300 in 1940 to more than 20,000 in 1944. At the onset of war most Mexican American children in California commonly attended separate schools from Anglo and black children. Historically California had sorted children of different cultures into separate and substandard school districts, reflecting the subordinated status of nonwhite peoples in the state's educational system. Subsequently, Mexican American children in many towns attended "Mexican schools."¹²⁹ In spite of the educational legacy of the state, overcrowding and spatial challenges that the Richmond school district faced in these years, the war marked an explicit effort by the community to provide adequate education for all of its residents.

Clifford Metz worked for the Richmond School District during the war years and suggests the importance of adequate schools during this immense period of growth, commenting, "These people who were coming in, they had to find schools. We didn't have them..."¹³⁰ Expanded educational opportunities became available in Richmond and resulted in Mexican children regularly attending schools. Although the increased population put enormous pressure on school administrators, they managed to find a workable solution to a lack of classrooms. The memories of Metz iterated as much: "We would have a morning session for school and we would

¹²⁹ Schools that were racially segregated and set up to teach exclusively Mexican children, often times lacking the resources of Anglo schools.

¹³⁰ *On the Waterfront: An Oral History of Richmond, California*; "An Oral History with Clifford Metz," conducted by Judith K. Dunning, 1986, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1992, 43.

have an afternoon session for schools, primarily because there were insufficient schools. It was quite a while before we were able to really take care of all the influx and get back to what we would call a normal school's day."¹³¹ While new schools were eventually constructed to deal with the overcrowding, the school district had children attend school in shifts to try to keep class sizes as manageable as possible.¹³²

Mary Lou Cordova fondly remembered that school dances offered the opportunity to engage in more socially significant ways with children from different groups: "Everybody was asking everybody to dance, so there was no prejudice... as a matter of fact, all the black people that I can remember at the time were real nice people, very nice, so we all just blended in." Cordova's experience reveals significant insight into how somewhat minor events like a school dance could create the opportunity for cross-cultural connections and understanding.

Similarly, Angelina Alexandre experienced very sanguine cross-cultural relations as she hired Martha Robinson, an African American woman, to help her with her young children. Angelina recalled glowingly, "...She weaned my son from a bottle. She was a very, very good woman. I was lucky in that way. I could work and not worry about my children." Moreover, the interactions of neighbors confirm that new understandings and new relationships were being formed. "Every kid in the neighborhood liked her. They'd say, 'Martha! Here comes Martha!' And they'd all run to meet her like Peter Pan."¹³³

¹³¹ "An Oral History with Clifford Metz," 60.

¹³² Quivik, HAER No. CA-326 208; Griswold del Castillo, *World War II and Mexican American Civil Rights*, 12–13.

¹³³ "An Oral History with Alexandre," 21–22.

Overcrowding due to increased migration and federal housing policies resulted in refashioned neighborhoods and sanctioned new forms of racial segregation.¹³⁴ It would be optimistic to think that everybody got along and that government-sanctioned integration on the job and segregation in housing resulted in idyllic possibilities of interethnic relationships. Still, the memories of Mary Lou and Angelina Alexandre highlight the fluidity of ethnic boundaries and the construction of new cross-cultural possibilities.

Permeable Cultural Conventions

Cultural practices and values remained but these were in transition. Central to the migration process was the ability for Mexican Americans to engage in mutual aid. The city of Richmond had a long history of religious activity. At the forefront, St. Marks Catholic Church played a central role in the history of the Mexican community predating the war effort. Richmond native Sal Chavez explained: "...As you grew up then you went to St. Mark's that was the Catholic Church."¹³⁵ However as the population increased St. Marks was not the only church that looked to accommodate the spiritual and social needs of recent arrivals. The First Mexican Baptist Church was established in 1944 reflecting the recent but increasing phenomenon of Mexican Protestants. Baptists worked to help locate housing and provide other resources to newly arriving Mexican American immigrants. Protestant church leadership even participated in the Richmond Defense Council—a citywide organization of civil defense activities. Revered John Garcia was listed among several community leaders appointed by the

¹³⁴ "An Oral History with Cordova," 23; Quivik, HAER No. CA-326 208; Johnson, *The Second Gold Rush*, 109.

¹³⁵ "An Oral History with Sal Chavez," 41.

Mayor to serve on a Home Front Unity Committee; a clear indication of the influence of the Baptist Church in Richmond.¹³⁶

Overcrowding was a pressing issue in Richmond as many migrants exhausted the limited housing options in the region; the First Mexican Baptist Church played a critical role in helping many Mexican migrants deal with these difficulties. The recollections of Angelina Alexandre emphasize the overwhelming nature of the housing emergency: "...There wasn't a place hardly for them to stay because the hotels that they had... was all full. You'd be surprised, you'd see a lot of girls sleeping in the benches in the park... It was hard."¹³⁷ Frank Gonzalez remembered parking his car under a large tree when he first moved to Richmond and slept there for two weeks until he could find other accommodations. The housing shortage was so severe that even though he could afford to rent a home there were no apartments available.¹³⁸ Josephina Ramirez specifically recounted the impact that the First Mexican Baptist Church had on her transition into Richmond. She vividly remembered that many people were living in their cars because of the housing shortage, however, through the church Ramirez and her family were able to locate housing: "When I came to church and the church family were friends... they said, 'Stay with us, just stay with us.'" For many community members, the First Mexican Baptist Church provided some stability in an environment of uncertainty and disorder.

The experiences of Alexandre, Gonzalez, and Ramirez underscore the importance of the First Mexican Baptist Church assisting migrants to acclimate to an often times chaotic

¹³⁶ Washburn, "*The End of Town*, 29; Graves, *Mapping Richmond*, 32–33.

¹³⁷ "An Oral History with Angelina Alexandre," 14.

¹³⁸ "An Oral History with Frank Gonzalez," conducted by David Washburn, 2002, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2007, 8.

environment. “The churches were very kind, because everybody was having trouble.” The opportunity for different and emerging community resources to aid individuals during this period was another critical marker in the development of a newly fashioned Mexican community. Typical of the housing shortages during this period, people often lived in overcrowded homes if available, bought movie tickets to sleep in theaters, and resorted to whatever means possible to find accommodations. The Baptist Church in Richmond sought to ease the transition for many families relocating and made a significant impact on the lives of many Mexican Americans in Richmond. While historically the Catholic Church had served a primary role in community service, the development of a reconfigured community in Richmond resulted in the opportunity for different community organizations, such as the Baptist Church, to join in the mutual aid effort.

Sisters Evelyn Duran and Rosa Silvas also discussed their experiences of belonging to the Baptist Church. They both recalled that they gained a lot from the church including how to read and write in Spanish. The Protestant missionaries that taught them were Anglo but spoke Spanish while at church. They both felt very fortunate that they were able to grow up as Baptist because they learned to be bilingual through the church. In Richmond their congregation was small with anywhere between fifty and sixty people and services were held in Spanish.¹³⁹ As a result of the transformative nature of Richmond during this period, the Baptist Church was but one element that added to the development of a changed community.

¹³⁹ “An Oral History with Josephina Ramirez,” conducted by David Washburn, 2002, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2007, 16-17; “An Oral History with Duran and Silvas,” 2–44.

Transformations brought about by social and religious discourses were important catalysts for change. Southern Baptists officially began recruiting members in California in 1941 as more and more migrants moved west during the 1930s and 1940s. Baptists groups from the Southwest furthered the idea of going to California to build churches. The result was the Southern Baptists churches sprang up everywhere in the state including the Bay Area.¹⁴⁰ Frank Gonzales, older brother of Evelyn and Rosa was a Baptist minister who migrated to Richmond in 1941 from Arizona. Like many Southern Baptists, Gonzales felt that he would be able to sustain a healthy religious life because of the massive migration of people to the region. Although the Catholic Church had a historical precedent in the region the Catholic Church presence did not deter Baptists from providing support to incoming residents.

Concluding Thoughts – What’s at Stake

The collaborative art projects of Judy Baca and SPARC blend iconic and commonly reproduced imagery with not so common memories of a time, of a region, and of varied peoples. This work not only advances a project of recovery but also develops a vehicle by which to understand and advocate for much more complex and wide-ranging narratives of the history of WWII. A fitting example of the work that this project advances is putting the mural in dialogue with perhaps one of the most prominent public memory project constructed by the National Park Service, located at the Richmond Marina in the form a Rosie The Riveter public walking tour.

On the path for the walking tour there are several informative cement sidewalk etchings that relate some sort of interesting or “important” fact or memory about the WWII period in the

¹⁴⁰ Gregory, James N., *American Exodus: The Dust Bowl Migration and Okie Culture in California* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 206–207.

East Bay. There is one particular etching that underscores the challenges with the seemingly commonly produced and exclusive constructions of public memory. The etching reads:

Bracero program imports workers from Mexico on short-term contracts to work in agriculture; Executive order 9066 transfers 120,000 people of Japanese descent to internment camps, 70,000 are U.S. citizens; and Hitler implements final solution.

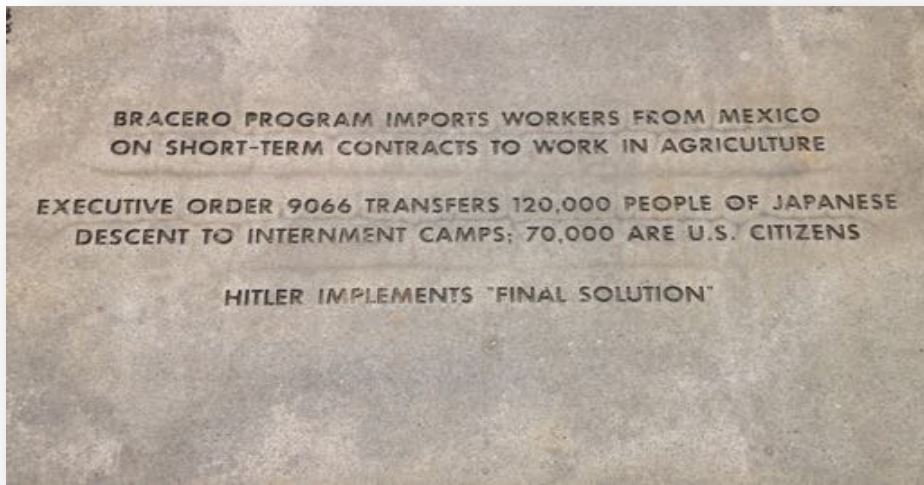


Figure 31. Cement etching, Rosie the Riveter walking tour. Image taken by author.

If we examine the history of this period just a bit closer, we realize that the Bracero program was not just a “short-term” labor contract and not just workers in the agricultural sector. In fact, the bracero program established a fluid network of people and jobs throughout the Southwest as a result of wartime labor needs. It resulted in a guest worker program encompassing nearly four and a half million workers lasting some twenty years and led directly to experiences fraught with racism and discrimination stemming mostly from foolish politicians, unethical farmers, and corporate interests.¹⁴¹ As far as EO 9066, Japanese Americans were not

¹⁴¹ Juan Pablo Mercado, "Guest Worker Programs," in *People of Color in the United States: Contemporary Issues in Education, Work, Communities, Health, and Immigration*, ed. Alvaro Huerta (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Press, 2016), 156–161.

“transferred” at all; rather they were illegally seized from their homes, stripped of their property, corralled into American concentrations camps, and unjustly denied their lawful citizenship rights.

Moreover, a series of legal decisions regarding Japanese internment in U.S. federal court sanctioned the official segregation and displacement of citizens on a racial basis.¹⁴² Last, by suggesting that it was Hitler alone who implemented the “Final Solution,” this constructed memory erases a whole history that actually reveals that it was not a single mad man, or “Hitler’s Cliques” as some historians have suggested. Rather this memory allows a whole nation of collaborators to detach themselves from these circumstances and it removes the whole host of non-German, non-Nazi perpetrators that in fact helped to institute the final solution and the murder of some six million Jews.

My point in highlighting this seemingly benign sidewalk plate is to suggest that sites of public memory have significant influence on how we understand and often misunderstand this country, its history, and our place within that history. It is important to note the argument that the plate conflates two very different processes of population transfer with genocide. Yet the work of Baca and SPARC offer an intervention to this crisis. What’s at stake is our historical consciousness—it’s our ability not only to contest a distorted history but to also to reimagine histories. The experiences of the Mexican community in Richmond illustrate how it transformed in relation to new economic opportunities as well as changes in social and cultural customs. The community shifted from being a small and isolated enclave to an overcrowded multiracial neighborhood resulting from the mass national migration of Anglos, Blacks, and Mexicans from

¹⁴² See for instance *Korematsu v. United States*, 323 U.S. 214 (1944).

principally the Southern United States. Mexicans adopted different religious and cultural practices that sought to help newcomers adjust to the hectic and demanding challenges that relocating to new communities often present. In turn, Mexican American women wageworkers in Richmond helped propel the military economy and were a significant part of the regional transformation.

The memories of the Mexican American community in Richmond offer a broader historical understanding of the refashioned community that resulted as part of the mobilization effort during the Second World War. Collectively the voices put forth in this chapter and the experiences highlighted within the work of Baca and SPARC seek to emphasize the significant changes that resulted during this period. As such, this form of community cultural development presents a unique historical resource that can be used as knowledge when seeking to reimagine a complex historical period.

CHAPTER THREE—*THE GREAT WALL OF LOS ANGELES*

Perhaps most overwhelming to me about the Great Wall experience has been learning of the Courage of individuals in history who endured, spoke out, and overcame seemingly insurmountable obstacles. It was true both of the people we painted about and of ourselves, the Mural Makers.¹⁴³

There is little doubt that Los Angeles was part of a broader set of changes that affected the United States during the World War II era and into the postwar period. It is also clear that the transformations in Los Angeles serve to expand conventional notions of the Civil Rights Movement in this country. While it is important to reconsider spatial and temporal aspects of the movement, it is just as important to reconsider what those struggles pursued. Historian Mark Brilliant describes California as America's civil rights frontier; along those lines, this chapter situates Los Angeles within that struggle for civil rights and explicitly highlights how economic opportunity, coupled with civic and cultural resistance, was part of a broader process that sought racial and political equality.¹⁴⁴ Millions of women workers during the Second World War challenged outmoded notions of gender and citizenship through their work in the defense industry. Hundreds of thousands of Mexican Americans also sought to resist the destructive social and cultural politics of the era as well by asserting their unique brand of citizenship. Examining how these experiences and these struggles transpired in Los Angeles serves as a

¹⁴³ Baca quoted in SPARC, *Great Wall of Los Angeles: Walking Tour Guide* (Venice, CA: Social and Public Art Resource Center, 2007), 6.

¹⁴⁴ Mark Brilliant, *The Color of America Has Changed: How Racial Diversity Shaped Civil Rights Reform in California 1941–1978* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

critical example of resistance, and it also serves as an important vantage point in which to reimagine Los Angeles during this period.

Perhaps the most seminal work of public art conceived during the Chicana and Chicano Movement is *The Great Wall of Los Angeles*, conceptualized by Judy Baca and realized with her team of mural makers at the Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC). Embedded within that half-mile of public art are the 1940s and 1950s segments of this epic narrative. These segments highlight the watershed circumstances of the Second World War and continue through the postwar period. The mural focuses on the critical components of this period including Japanese interment, the rise of fascism abroad and on the home front, the all-out mobilization effort, genocide, and the precarious nature of American Democracy in the wake of the United States' ascent to world superpower. Reimagining these circumstances through the historical project of *The Great Wall* urges a more nuanced consideration of the past that dislodges narratives of both “The Last Good War” and “The Greatest Generation.” What results from this reconsideration is a construction of multiple histories that challenge the universally venerated, yet often distorted legacy of these years.

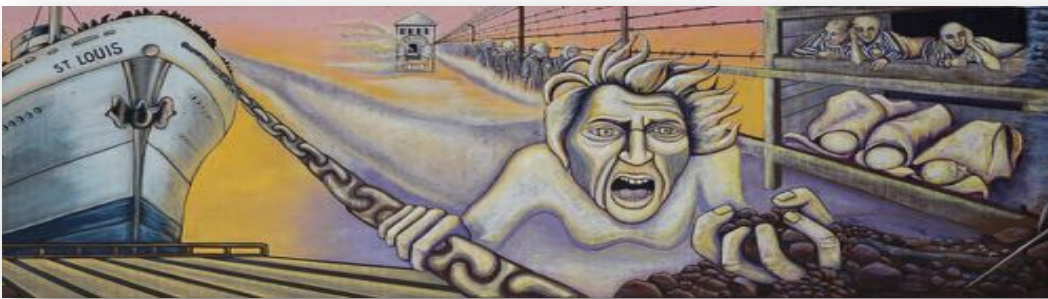


Figure 32. Jewish Refugees, *Great Wall*. Image courtesy of Judy Baca and SPARC Archives.

For Mexican Americans, the wartime economy resulted in significant opportunities for increased employment and higher wages. This economic surge sharply contrasted the low-wage,

unskilled jobs that had been previously available before the labor shortage of the war period. Mexican Americans came to understand and experience a dramatic growth in employment opportunity that was in part supported by (1) emerging federal policies to curb discrimination, (2) shifts in longstanding hiring practices, and (3) most significant, the massive demand for labor in war-related industries.¹⁴⁵ Yet for many Mexican Americans, these opportunities were not merely ways to earn more money and get a higher-status job, many Mexican Americans envisioned their labor as part of a broader national effort to challenge injustices abroad. Wartime exigencies also created an opportunity for many groups, and in particular Mexican Americans, to assert their claims for full citizenship at home.

It is evident that even in moments when people are deemed legal citizens by every level of the law, social and political factors can still construct certain peoples as non-citizens. During World War II, close to 900,000 African Americans enlisted in the armed forces yet could not use the same toilet as white soldiers—they served in a Jim Crow army. Many Mexican Americans who had served courageously and died for their country were denied proper burials at home because it could have “offended” white patrons. Japanese Americans were “evacuated” from their homes, forced into internment camps and unjustly denied their lawful citizenship rights.¹⁴⁶ During a time when citizenship was being challenged and contracted, wartime labor directives simultaneously increased opportunities for women to assert claims to citizenship. As an integral

¹⁴⁵ Emilio Zamora, “The Failed Promise of Wartime Opportunity for Mexicans in the Texas Oil Industry,” *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 95, no. 3 (January 1992): 323.

¹⁴⁶ Ronald Takaki, *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America* (Boston, New York and London: Little, Back Bay Books, Little, Brown and Company, 2008); Carlos Sandoval, *American Experience: A Class Apart* [DVD] (PBS, 2009); Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

part of the all-out-mobilization effort women had the opportunity for inclusion through their work in the defense sector. The aircraft industry of Los Angeles during the Second World War offered women the opportunity to expand notions of citizenship. Although in the postwar period many of these opportunities would be reduced, this period still served as a critical point of reference for people looking to assert their political and social power.

The Great Wall segments push the public to rethink important historical circumstances that highlight the relationship between labor, culture, and citizenship. Specifically, how did Mexican American working-class peoples in Los Angeles understand their struggle for fair employment and civil rights during the Second World War? This chapter builds upon several important works that all underscore the role of Mexican American labor in wartime Los Angeles. For instance, Sherna Gluck has thoroughly demonstrated that the process of transformation for women workers, including Mexican American women, during this period was extraordinary. She implores us that if we listen carefully to the stories of these women we can better understand how they experienced this moment.¹⁴⁷ John H. M. Laslett's treatment of Los Angeles workers from the late nineteenth-century to contemporary times assesses the complexities of social, economic, and cultural relationships within the working class of the metropolis. In particular, he notes the racial conflicts that significantly affected the job prospects of many non-white groups in the defense industry during the Second World War.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ As part this study I examine oral histories of women workers in Southern California during the 1940s; VOAHA II: Virtual Oral/Aural History Archive: <http://symposia.library.csulb.edu/iii/cpro/CommunityViewPage.external?lang=eng&sp=1000026&suite=def> Accessed: February 3, 2014.

¹⁴⁸ Sherna Gluck, *Rosie the Riveter Revisited: Women, The War and Social Change* (New York: New American Library, 1987); John H.M. Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough: Los Angeles Workers, 1880–2010* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2012).

In comparison, Martha Escobedo firmly roots her study of wartime Los Angeles women workers as an examination of home front participation and rapidly shifting notions of self and community. While Zaragosa Vargas highlights the extent to which Mexican Americans were under a *racial assault* in Los Angeles during this period, how that affected employment opportunities in the defense industry, and how Mexican Americans challenged restrictions to their civil rights.¹⁴⁹ Set against a backdrop of a postwar, Red Scare-era Los Angeles, these works allow us to examine how and if Mexican Americans fit into competing ideas of citizenship, labor, and cultural and social order.¹⁵⁰

Interrogating sections of *The Great Wall of Los Angeles* does more than just underscore individual experience, it also serves to enlarge our notion of the national civil rights struggle, demonstrating that it was much more than just a sectional or regional problem. Considering *The Great Wall* in this manner reveals how many folks fashioned the wartime conditions to secure economic opportunity in the American West, while simultaneously helping us situate Los Angeles within a broader national movement. Many historians have suggested that the long civil rights period, which began well before the 1950s and 1960s and was a broad-based movement to secure racial equality along with economic opportunities and political rights.¹⁵¹ We can

¹⁴⁹ Martha Escobedo, *From Coveralls to Zoot Suits: The Lives of Mexican American Women on the World War II Home Front* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Zaragosa Vargas, *Labor Rights Are Civil Rights: Mexican American Workers in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

¹⁵⁰ Ron W. López II, "Community Resistance and Conditional Patriotism in Cold War Los Angeles: The Battle for Chavez Ravine," *Latino Studies* 7(2009): 457–479; and Thomas S. Hines, "Housing, Baseball, and Creeping Socialism: The Battle of Chavez Ravine, Los Angeles, 1949–1959," *Journal of Urban History* 8(February 1982): 123–143.

¹⁵¹ Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *The Journal of American History* 91, No. 4 (March 2005): 1233–1263; Robin D.G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communist During the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

explicitly see that the peoples of this region were struggling for equality; we can also point to the undeniable successes that these struggles resulted in. Demonstrating that the region was in fact a site of struggle against unemployment, underemployment, and discrimination in the workplace deepens our knowledge of the period and of the region. The WWII segments and postwar segments of *The Great Wall* not only highlight the important contributions during the mobilization effort, Baca and her mural team are also able to include subtle concepts and nuanced imagery that offer critique to the political and social conditions of the period. If we reimagine Los Angeles in this context, moreover, we begin to understand how examining Mexican American labor fundamentally shifts our way of thinking about Los Angeles during the Second World War.



Figure 33. Segment of The California Aqueduct, *Great Wall*. Image courtesy of Judy Baca and SPARC Archives.

The Defense Sector in WWII Los Angeles

Although by no means is this research an attempt to advance an idea of Los Angeles exceptionalism, it is important to engage with this question: To what extent is this a Los Angeles story? Several cities along the West Coast experienced a rise in population due to domestic migration, several cities experienced a dramatic shift in ethnic populations, and several cities benefited from an expansion in defense-related industries. In fact, Chapter Four of this dissertation dealt exclusively with the refashioned Mexican community of Richmond, California. The Federal government alone invested close to \$40 billion dollars on West Coast cities during the war period primarily to support shipbuilding and plane manufacturing. Yet we can point to two explicit reasons why Los Angeles offers a distinct insight into this era. First, although Los Angeles both played a critical role in the World War II shipbuilding industry and seemingly has an historical stronghold in the American public consciousness, it was actually Northern California and the Kaiser shipyards in the region's East Bay that were responsible for the most productive shipbuilding operation in U.S. history. Conversely, Los Angeles became the national hub for aircraft manufacturing during the all-out mobilization effort.

Second, the shipbuilding industry in Northern California experienced a precipitous decline in the years following the war, whereas the aircraft industry encountered longevity and sustained economic growth throughout the postwar period.¹⁵² These important distinctions help us to position Los Angeles within the larger processes of change that were radically transforming the United States during this period. However, it is important to note that the transformations Los

¹⁵² See for instance Marilynn S. Johnson, *The Second Gold Rush*, 1993; Gretchen Lemke-Santangelo, *Abiding Courage*, 1996; and Gerald D. Nash, *World War II and the West*, 1990.

Angeles experienced included comprehensive development plans that dramatically reorganized the region based on employment and housing connected to the aircraft industry that had emerged.¹⁵³

Furthermore, when discussing the presence of the defense industry in Los Angeles, it is difficult to understate its ubiquitous nature. Specifically, at its peak the aircraft industry employed over a quarter of a million workers while Douglas, Lockheed, and North American, the three major firms in the Southern California, accounted for over a third of the nation's total aircraft production. One major reason why the aircraft industry was such a presence in the Los Angeles area was that it heavily relied on "feeder" plants. These smaller-scale plants were established in different parts of the city and in nearby towns and specialized in smaller production jobs that would allow the bigger plants to tap into the outlying labor market. Although the large plants housed several hundreds of thousands of Angelenos, these feeder plants represented a distinct transformation within the city and its outlying region. Lockheed alone used close to 250 different buildings, including furniture shops and distilleries in Los Angeles to support the larger plants. While issues of adequate and fair housing as well as access to reliable public transportation were a real concern for workers during this period, feeder plants in part relieved some of this tension by providing employment in a multiplicity of locations.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ Greg Hise, *Magnetic Los Angeles: Planning the Twentieth-Century Metropolis* (Annapolis: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

¹⁵⁴ James Richard Wilburn, "Social and Economic Aspects of the Aircraft Industry in Metropolitan Los Angeles during World War II" (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles 1971), 2, 44-48; Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough*, 182.

Labor Rights Revisited

In October of 1941, a presidential committee heard testimony regarding racial discrimination in defense sector jobs in Los Angeles. The aircraft industry in Southern California came under scrutiny relating to longstanding workplace conditions and hiring practices that encouraged racial and gender discrimination. Douglas Aircraft Co. representatives maintained that they did not discriminate and based their hiring practices on “employment background and training.” What the representatives failed to mention, however, were that these practices were entrenched in a historical pattern of exclusion from vocational training and prejudicial promotional opportunities.¹⁵⁵

The National Defense Act of 1940 specifically called for stricter regulations of hiring practices to combat any potential espionage or alien sedition in the war defense industry. What resulted from this act was a heightened racism that discriminated against the foreign-born, excluded them from defense jobs, and encouraged racial discrimination in general. Defense employers often went above suspicion in their hiring practices and regularly excluded citizens who did not “look” American. Specifically, the aircraft manufacturers in Southern California in the early stages of the war preferred recruiting white workers from the South that “looked American.” These hiring practices, encouraged by federal regulations, resulted in limited employment opportunities not only for foreign-born workers, but also severely limited job prospects in the budding defense sector for U.S.-born citizens as well.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ “Racial Prejudice Charged in Plants,” *Los Angeles Times*, Oct 21, 1941, 18; Richard Steele, “‘No Racial’: Discrimination Against Ethnic in American Defense Industry, 1940–1942,” *Labor History* 32, no. 1(Winter 1991).

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

Yet there were instances of resistance and activism by a variety of groups regarding this form of exclusion. In June of 1942, the Archdiocese of Los Angeles took a public stance against racial discrimination in defense sector jobs. The Catholic Industrial Conference produced a resolution that explicitly condemned employment discrimination against “. . . Mexicans, Negroes, Filipinos or members of any other race . . .” The resolution went on to state that the theory of racial superiority was a key feature of Nazism and at its very essence was anti-Catholic. Similarly, at a Town Hall luncheon held at the Biltmore hotel In July of 1943, the chairman of the Southern California Council of Inter-American Affairs publicly admonished the city for its seemingly widespread racial inequality. W.S. Rosecrans advocated for a change in how the approximately 250,000 Mexican Americans living throughout Los Angeles were being unfairly treated.¹⁵⁷ The fact that high-profile institutions were taking a public stand against discrimination marked a significant moment in the struggle for equal rights. In several seemingly subtle segments of *The Great Wall*, we see that Baca and the mural makers are offering some compelling insight into the struggles over oppressive political, social, and economic control within the boundaries of the United States. This imagery suggests the broader contours of the national fight for democracy.

Yet after three full years of total war mobilization in the United States, adequate healthcare, housing and particularly employment opportunities for Mexican Americans were still issues that people were publicly campaigning for. At a two-day conference held at the University of Southern California, both Carey McWilliams and Ernesto Galarza advocated for the rights of

¹⁵⁷ “Prejudices at Plants Hit: Racial Discrimination in War Industries Here Assailed by Catholics,” *Los Angeles Times*, Jun 12, 1942, 28; “Speaker Urges Good Neighbor Policy Practice,” *Los Angeles Times*, Jul 20, 1943, A8.

Mexican Americans, with Galarza giving a speech specifically focusing on citizenship, entitled “Are Minorities Un-American?”¹⁵⁸ The public battle regarding notions of citizenship reveals the extent by which ideas of race inform concepts of national identity, and how these debates were being contested by political and social struggles.

Public activism played an important part in the campaign to address inequality during the war period. Yet it was the massive deployment of American soldiers into the battlefields—and out of the shop floors—that propelled women into the workforce at unprecedented numbers and dramatically shifted traditional notions of citizenship. Women workers responded exceptionally to the severe labor crisis in Los Angeles during World War II. In particular, Mexican American women, along with other groups of women workers in the aircraft industry, were able to broaden notions of citizenship through expanded occupational prospects, increased job training, reshaped hiring practices, and economic mobility. Along with economic opportunities came expanded social horizons in the form of interracial exchanges; these interactions also emphasized the lingering limitations of racialized notions of citizenship. In an era where white male soldiers symbolized citizenship, labor in the aircraft industry allowed women workers to claim citizenship by evoking a patriotic identity.

¹⁵⁸ Carey McWilliams was a lawyer and activist, as well as Chief of the California Division of Immigration and Housing from 1938 to 1942. Ernesto Galarza is an important exemplar of a scholar-activist and demonstrated an unwavering commitment for the civil rights of Mexican and Mexican Americans in the United States; “Minorities Security Topic for Parley,” *Los Angeles Times*, Jun 25, 1944, 7.



Figure 34. Farewell to Rosie the Riveter, *Great Wall*. Image courtesy of Judy Baca and SPARC Archives.

Women Workers in Aircraft Production

Seeking to offset the shortage of male workers sustained by the military draft, Los Angeles engaged in inventive recruiting techniques. In 1942 Municipal Judge Edwin L. Jefferson directed a convict labor program aimed at making use of an “overlooked” population in Los Angeles’ Skid Row. Jefferson suggested that war jobs for these men served the dual purpose of filling a labor shortage and rehabilitation. The program offered “drunks” an opportunity to “. . . remake their lives.” In 1944, the State Farm Production Council sought to utilize 16,000 Nazi prisoners of war for food production. A labor official noted that with the proper discipline these prisoners could be close to “. . . 80 percent as efficient . . .” as American laborers and possibly halt the importation of Mexican labor. There was even a recommendation by State Senator Kenny of Los Angeles that approximately 150,000 of California’s old-age pensioners volunteer

as laborers. Coupled with the importance of the defense industry in Southern California, the labor crisis pushed the War Manpower Commission to classify Los Angeles County as having a critical labor shortage. This resulted in a considerable opportunity for people traditionally tracked into low-wage, semi-skilled, and un-skilled jobs or who were regularly overlooked within the job market altogether.¹⁵⁹

Maria Fierro was born in Chino, California and was one of thousands of women who entered the defense industry during WWII. Typical of many Mexican Americans during the period, Fierro had worked in various seasonal agricultural jobs picking and packing fruit before the war. She wanted to learn mechanical skills in order to get a better-paying job and so she sought the recommendation of a job placement office. Anticipating the need for an expanded labor force, aircraft industry recruiters suggested that she take vocational classes to learn skills for production work at Douglas Aircraft. Prior to the all-out mobilization effort, job training in the aircraft industry was strictly limited to men. Yet because of wartime demands, Fierro was able to work as a seasonal agricultural worker during the day, while in the evenings she attended a five-hundred-hour course to learn how to read blueprints, become familiar with welding materials and how to rivet. After successfully passing her vocational training, she was hired at Douglas aircraft.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ “Derelicts Get Chance to Aid War Production,” *Los Angeles Times*, Oct 9, 1942, p. A1; “Smaller War Plants May Relieve Manpower,” *Los Angeles Times*, Jul 29, 1943, 5; “State to Get 16,000 Nazis as Farm Laborers,” *Los Angeles Times*, Sep 26, 1944, 1; *San Jose Mercury Herald*, April 23, 1942.

¹⁶⁰ Maria Fierro, audio interview #1 of 3: Rosie the Riveter Revisited Project, VOAHA II.



Figure 35. Segment of Rosie the Riveter, *Great Wall*. Image courtesy of Judy Baca and SPARC Archives.

Fascism at Home

The Rosie the Riveter segment of *The Great Wall* pointedly underscores Fierro's employment at Douglas Aircraft and directly speaks to the advancement that many Mexican Americans experienced during the war period. For the first time, many Mexican American workers felt properly prepared for the mechanical tasks required because they had access to adequate job training. They were productive and performed efficiently and some, including Fierro, were promoted to lead positions and given raises. Although Fierro was let go during the latter stages of the war, she was rehired in 1950 and worked a total of 30 years at Douglas.¹⁶¹

¹⁶¹ Fierro, audio interview #2 of 3.

Fierro's parents were retired farm workers that had been excluded from social security benefits. In fact, Fierro's wages and her expanded claims to citizenship primarily helped support her family.

The Social Security Act of 1935 comprised a comprehensive understanding of public assistance and social insurance. Blatant discrimination revealed that federal policies often included racialized and gendered hierarchies. The federal government sought to protect a cheap labor force and a traditional racial order. Explicitly the initial iteration of the act resulted in the exclusion of agricultural workers and domestic workers as beneficiaries. Considering that most Mexican Americans, African Americans, and women were relegated to these jobs underscores a formal denial of citizenship.¹⁶² Historian Ira Katznelson notes how federal policies developed in the 1930s and 1940s resulted in the exclusion and discrimination of many U.S. citizens. New Deal and Fair Deal programs privileged white Americans over nonwhite Americans; they directly led to a growing inequality between the two groups. Programs that were considered radical for their time, including Social Security, all restricted access to nonwhites and proved far less available for certain groups of citizens. By excluding the jobs that Mexican Americans, African Americans, and women traditionally worked and by establishing discriminatory patterns of management, federal policies limited the participation of particular groups. What resulted was the creation of positive economic opportunities accessible for a significant number of white Americans.¹⁶³ The ability for Fierro to have access to permanent employment, a livable wage and

¹⁶² Fierro, *ibid.*; Michael B. Katz, *The Price of Citizenship: Redefining the American Welfare State* (New York: Owl Book, 2001), 3–12.

¹⁶³ Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), 29.

benefits is evidence that she indeed was part of a broader labor movement that sought to expand civil rights.

Embedded throughout the 1940s segment of *The Great Wall*, we also see how Baca and her team take aim at the home front conditions during the war period. The imagery used demonstrates the violent and destructive environment that the Southern Democrats constructed during this era. Social Security would not have been passed without the consent from the presumably one-party ruling system. In addition to making the benefits of this act ostensibly an entitlement for white American men, FDR also had to pledge not to introduce any anti-lynching legislation. The fascist regimes that the Allies were supposedly committed to stopping abroad were also maneuvering on the U.S. home front.



Figure 36. Segment of Dr. Charles and Mrs. Laws, *Great Wall*. Image courtesy of Judy Baca and SPARC Archives.

Mary Luna was a Mexican American woman from Hawthorne, California who started working at Douglas Aircraft in El Segundo in September of 1942. As high school graduation

approached, Luna's English teacher mentioned that many boys would probably be enlisting in the armed forces and that many of the girls could probably find work in the defense plants around Los Angeles. Luna desperately wanted a job in the defense industry because she was unsure of her plans after high school. She saw listings for defense industry training and enrolled in a vocational course but never told anybody because she felt the job was too good to be true and that she probably would not get hired. Employment in the aircraft industry represented an unprecedented opportunity for Luna: “. . . it really changed my life . . . it gave me confidence . . . and it made me grow up . . .” Her employment marked her transition from young high school girl to a woman in the work force.¹⁶⁴

After being hired, Luna recalls how difficult it was because initially at the plant it was mostly men and the job was new “. . . the first night I wanted to quit . . . it was hard the first few weeks,” yet she stuck it out and received encouragement from her family, especially her father. Like many families coming out of the Depression Era where jobs were tenuous at best, her employment at Douglas represented a significant economic prospect not just for her but also for her entire family. Luna and her family clearly understood the importance of this opportunity and put aside fears and hesitations because they knew what was at stake, “. . . I was very shy and insecure . . .” Yet Luna impassionedly recalls that her job “. . . showed me I was worth something . . .” Her employment represented a significant opportunity for economic mobility, an opportunity that had been extremely limited in the decade before the war—with her wages, the family was able to get off of public assistance.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ Mary Luna, audio interview #2 of 3 and #3 of 3: Rosie the Riveter Revisited Project, VOAHA II.

¹⁶⁵ Luna, audio interview #2 of 3 and #3 of 3; Zamora, “The Failed Promise of Wartime Opportunity for Mexicans in the Texas Oil Industry,” 323.

In addition to expanded economic mobility, aircraft employment also resulted in the opportunity for interracial relationships to be reconsidered. The exchanges that developed between women workers reveal just how much racial notions were being re-made on the shop floor. Luna had been working at Douglas and managed to save close to \$1500 in a bank account, something she could not have imagined prior to her employment in the aircraft industry. As her marriage was approaching, she was unsure whether to tell her husband about the savings, implying that she was very insecure at the time. Luna confided in a black co-worker and asked for very intimate relationship advice. Luna states that her co-worker was very thoughtful and provided her sage advice, suggesting that Luna trust her instincts and be honest with her partner. This shared experience highlights that although Luna had very limited experience with black people before the war, she was willing to confide in a woman, a co-worker, a friend about very important and personal life situations. “I used to go to her, she was like a mother . . . and I would listen to her problems . . . It shows you that you make a lot of good relationships with people at work.” Experiences like these shed light not only on the transformations that occurred during this period but also on the process of those changes. Not only were Luna’s economic opportunities expanded, but also it enhanced her social world and resulted in very positive intra-ethnic relationships.¹⁶⁶ Yet for all of the positive experiences that occurred during the war, it would be naive to understand the war period as a time of full equality and multiracial harmony; many examples mark the racial complexities that persisted in the region.

Mexican Americans shared many experiences with African Americans and developed similar opportunities for expanded social and economic mobility, yet there were some very stark

¹⁶⁶ Luna, audio interview #2 of 3.

differences. Luna points out that although she was able to confide in her African American co-workers she mainly associated with Mexican girls outside of work. One reason Luna points to was the presence of the “sunset curfew for blacks in Inglewood...” These were forms of extra-legal segregation and discrimination that were experienced by blacks that were not always experienced by Mexican Americans. Luna recalls how it was unsafe for blacks to be out in public in Inglewood after sunset. Although there was an expansion of particular rights during this period for many groups, there was simultaneously a contraction of privileges that blurred notions of citizenship.¹⁶⁷ Consequently, the important successes that many groups struggled for and attained during this watershed period often mute the significant instances of deliberate discrimination and segregation that lingered throughout the war period.

¹⁶⁷ Luna, *ibid.*



Figure 37. Segment of Rosie the Riveter, *Great Wall*. Image courtesy of Judy Baca and SPARC Archives.

The memories of Mildred Eusebio offer yet another perspective on the wartime experience for workers in the aircraft industry. Mildred was an Anglo woman who had been part of the mobilization effort in the Midwest in 1942 and a year later had moved to Southern California to work at Douglas Aircraft. Because of Mildred's prior experience at the Willow Run plant in Michigan, Douglas hired her easily.¹⁶⁸ Mildred's memories are significant for many reasons, but particularly because they reveal experiences that offer different insights to the war

¹⁶⁸ Mildred Eusebio, audio interview #2 of 3: Rosie the Riveter Revisited Project, VOAHA II.

defense industry in Southern California. For instance, Mildred recalls that she learned of the job opening in the Long Beach plant from her father, who was an employee. After she was hired—at a salary that was higher than her father—he demanded a raise and eventually quit because his daughter was earning more. This experience—when compared to Maria Fierro being able to take care of her parents because they were tracked into low-wage agricultural jobs, or with the memories of Mary Luna who had sought emotional support from her father in difficult times at her job—highlights different meanings of employment, as well as the numerous challenges that Mildred faced. Mildred was not straddled with the burden of providing the sole income for her family; moreover, Mildred’s father understood her employment and her higher wages as a degradation of his labor.

Mildred’s experiences are also important because they reveal some of the enduring forms of racial antagonism during this period. Specifically, Mildred recalls the ease at which she learned her craft at Douglas, just how much confidence she had on the job, and she claimed that she “. . . should have been a boy because [she] really did like working.” Conversely, she notes that there were really no racial problems to speak of during this period because there were very few minorities hired at the defense plant. Furthermore, Mildred prefaced her comments by saying that maybe she “. . . shouldn’t generalize . . .,” a statement that suggests that a possible reason for this was because “. . . Hispanics didn’t appear to be mechanically inclined.” Her memories are quite revealing in that in an era where aircraft production jobs marked one of the central employment opportunities for Mexican Americans in Los Angeles County, and that by 1944 Douglas alone had hired over 12,000 Mexican American workers, that Mildred would remember “. . . very few minorities.”¹⁶⁹ It would be safe to assume, moreover, that Mildred was

¹⁶⁹ Eusebio, *ibid.*; Escobedo, *from Coveralls to Zoot Suits*, 75.

not the only person that harbored these sentiments. The historical pattern of occupational discrimination, limited advancement opportunities, and inadequate job training reinforced common stereotypes of certain workers.

Patriotism Deconstructed

Lupe Purdy's perspective emphasizes how she understood her employment experience in the aircraft industry during this period. Like many Americans who felt the persistent effects of the Depression, Lupe and her husband had moved from Texas to California in 1936 with expectations for better working conditions. Although her husband had worked in the railroad industry in the Southwest, they felt that Los Angeles presented better prospects for employment. Lupe was a homemaker and firmly believed that a women's role was to raise children and provide ". . . the right environment for [her] husband." Yet when the war began, and mobilization efforts intensified in Los Angeles, Lupe remembers, ". . . The war years changed so many things." Many women such as Lupe began to reimagine conventional gender roles and the prospects for an expanded labor market not only represented an economic opportunity for some, but also signified an opportunity to demonstrate their patriotism. Lupe was hired on at Douglas Aircraft during the war and worked assembling planes.¹⁷⁰ Lupe recalls, ". . . Some folks never made so much money in their lives," yet she ". . . didn't go to work to make money [she] went to work for [her] country."

Women working in the aircraft industry, like Lupe, embodied notions of patriotism and national loyalty by resolutely wanting to work as part of broader national effort to defend the

¹⁷⁰ Lupe Purdy, audio interview #1 of 1: Rosie the Riveter Revisited Project, VOAHA II.

country. These experiences reveal yet another component to citizenship that had been largely inaccessible to many Americans. World War II was an era when the American soldier served as a model of citizenship that reinforced traditional ideas about gender, patriotism, and race. In particular, white male veterans were able to realize the fullest benefits of citizenship during this period.¹⁷¹ However, by actively being recruited and working as part of a massive labor effort to secure the United States, women workers and in particular women of color served to expand traditional notions of citizenship.

If it is true that women expanded notions of citizenship during the war period, what exactly did it mean to be a good citizen? In the wake of the Sleepy Lagoon murder, the War Manpower Commission outlined a plan for Mayor Bowron and the Los Angeles Board of Supervisors that called for expanded vocational training for youth in the East Side to potentially thwart the unemployment of Mexican Americans. Furthermore, the public discourse during this period made explicit links between economic opportunities, housing conditions, and good citizenship. The argument that the federal government advanced was that the more opportunities Mexican Americans had for increased “earning power,” the better their prospects would be for renting and buying homes, which would in turn lead them to become “. . . better citizens.” Although, it should be noted that a likely incentive to support civil rights, racial equality, and in particular fair employment stemmed from anxieties of potential Fifth Column activities exacerbated by Axis propaganda that highlighted U.S. inequality.¹⁷²

¹⁷¹ James T. Sparrow, *Warfare State: World War II Americans and the Age of Big Government* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

¹⁷² “Trial of Mexican Youths Used as Axis Propaganda: Foes Call it Example of Mistreatment; O.W.I. Sends official to Make Inquiry Here,” *Los Angeles Times*, Nov 24, 1.

Emblematic of this tension between citizenship, good citizenship, and patriotism was the circumstances of the so-called Zoot Suit Riots, which is a major theme that Baca and *The Great Wall* contributors sought to take on.¹⁷³ In this segment, the muralists captured the harsh and often violent experiences that many young Mexican Americans experienced as part of their assertion of citizenship. During the Second World War, the American soldier served as a model of citizenship that reinforced traditional ideas about masculinity. White male veterans were able to realize the fullest benefits of citizenship including complete access to the GI Bill. In contrast, during the 1940s, the zoot suit directly challenged a central aspect of wartime political culture and the nature of American citizenship. White male servicemen were the embodiment of what it meant to be American and came to represent sacrifice, rigid work ethic, and patriotism, the consummate citizen-soldier. Black and Mexican American youth consciously wore zoot suits and embraced the culture of the zoot—e.g., hairstyle, language, and dancing—and thus asserted their rights in a public manner. Dancing was seen as a social act of resistance because it was a manifestation of pleasure and leisure in the face of a rigid work ethic that many youths of color rejected.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ I write the “so-called Zoot Suit Riots,” because of the emerging trend by many Chicana and Chicano historians to reimagine these set of circumstances as the *Sailor Riots*, thereby shifting the responsibility of the violence and disorder onto the white American soldiers.

¹⁷⁴ See Luis Alvarez, *The Power of the Zoot: Youth, Culture, and Resistance During World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).



Figure 38. Zoot Suit Riots, *Great Wall*. Image courtesy of Judy Baca and SPARC Archives.

The zoot suit provided a cultural mode of resistance to the political problems facing young Black and Brown working-class folks. Furthermore, wearing extravagant suits during an era of fabric rationing represented a challenge to American patriotism and a sense of national sacrifice. Although the WWII era provided significant economic advancement for many people of color, they still faced rampant discrimination and were regularly tracked into low-wage, menial jobs. Additionally, as Americans came to embrace the rhetoric of freedom and equal opportunity during the war years, the domestic reality for many Mexican Americans was far from the optimistic goals of Americanism.¹⁷⁵

Another aspect of the narrative that Baca and her team underscore is the significant violence, both physical and symbolic, that white soldiers enacted on the bodies of youth embracing the culture of the zoot. As nonwhite soldiers were increasingly enlisting or being

¹⁷⁵ See for example “The Riddle of the Zoot: Malcolm Little and Black Cultural Politics During World War II,” in Robin D.G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York, The Free Press, 1996).

drafted into service and started to make assertions about citizenship based on traditional ideas about masculinity, what resulted was white servicemen reacting aggressively to protect their coveted status. In 1943, throughout the country and including Los Angeles, white soldiers engaged in a series of riots aimed at de-zooting young black, Filipino and Mexican American youth. Using physical violence, soldiers would harass, beat and forcefully strip youth wearing zoot suits. Frustrated white servicemen sought to emasculate and shame zoot suiters in an effort to suppress challenges to the rules of wartime society.



Figure 39. Segment of Zoot Suit Riots, *Great Wall*. Image courtesy of Judy Baca and SPARC Archives.

The social branding of rebellious youth, particularly nonwhite young men and women, as non-citizens encouraged a unified attack on cultural nonconformists. In an exceptionally

astonishing account, James Sparrow highlights how local newspapers in Los Angeles outlined techniques for how to de-zoot young agitators.¹⁷⁶ In turn, *The Great Wall* also highlights this strategy by emphasizing how the local newspapers were part of a broader public effort to “teach zoot suiters [a] lesson” of how to conform to wartime society.

The memories of Lupe Purdy reinforce conventional ideas of good citizenship. Because of the opportunities that Purdy and her husband experienced during the war years, they were able to buy a home in South Los Angeles. They eventually moved to a bigger home and Purdy suggests that it was because they had a stable home and a steady economic outlook that they were able to send their children to private school.¹⁷⁷ The war years did prove dynamic for many people and in many cases, it resulted in a more expansive notion of American citizenship. Yet the postwar period reflects a time where many of the gains that were realized during the all-out mobilization effort came under attack and resulted in restricted notions of citizenship. Further examining the struggle for fair housing during the postwar period can serve to deepen our understanding of the struggles for citizenship and highlight the significance of economic opportunities within the context of a broader Civil Rights Movement.

¹⁷⁶ James T. Sparrow, *Warfare State*, 2011.

¹⁷⁷ Lupe Purdy, audio interview #1 of 1.



Figure 40. Division of The Barrios & Chavez Ravine, *Great Wall*. Image courtesy of Judy Baca and SPARC Archives.

The Battle of Chavez Ravine

In the 1950s segment of *The Great Wall* Baca designed a section of *The Great Wall* to represent the resistance to forced eviction by members of the Chavez Ravine neighborhood. *Chavez Ravine and the Division of Community* portrays the forcible uprooting of the Chicano community in exchange for the construction of Dodger Stadium. The Stadium is envisioned as a UFO that is plunging downward onto the Ravine. A bulldozer is also included to reveal the destructive force of the never-realized housing program.¹⁷⁸ In the book *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight*, Eric Avila builds on ideas that Baca originated about how science fiction was used to reveal the “. . . perception that Los Angeles was under attack by alien invaders.”¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ The Great Wall of Los Angeles: The History and Art of the Great Wall; *Chavez Ravine and the Division of the Chicano Community*. www.judybaca.com

¹⁷⁹ Eric Avila, *Suburbanizing the City Center: The Dodgers Move West in Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

Baca skillfully employs this imagery but with one very important distinction— in this case, the aliens actually invaded Chavez Ravine.

The *Battle of Chavez Ravine* included the designation of three neighborhoods near downtown Los Angeles—Palo Verde, Bishop Canyon, and La Loma, collectively known as Chavez Ravine—as blighted and targeted for redevelopment. Approximately 1,100 families and close to 3,300 hundred people, mostly Mexican and Mexican American, were to be relocated and a public housing project was to be constructed to better serve the local residents and the City of Los Angeles. Since many residents of Chavez Ravine did not want to move, the public housing program was fiercely debated. McCarthyism took center stage during the post-war period and antisocialist and anticommunist sentiment linked public housing with the notion of a “creeping socialism” ready to consume the City of Angels. The housing program targeted for Chavez Ravine was cancelled, the land was sold back to the City, and 315 acres were sold to Walter O’Malley for the construction of Dodger Stadium.

According to historian Thomas Hise, the city of Los Angeles was looking to reimagine itself via the National Housing Act of 1949, and specifically grafted onto the visions of Richard Neutra and Robert Alexander in seeking a remade urban utopia. In response to housing shortages during WWII, Neutra had designed Channel Heights, which was built overlooking the Los Angeles harbor at San Pedro. City planners including Robert Alexander wanted to bring the spirit of Channel Heights to the center of Los Angeles.¹⁸⁰ While developing his plan for Chavez

¹⁸⁰ Thomas S. Hines, “Housing, Baseball, and Creeping Socialism: The Battle of Chavez Ravine, Los Angeles, 1949–1959,” *Journal of Urban History* 8 (February 1982): 123–143.

Ravine, Neutra would often visit the neighborhood, take notes, and regularly misrepresent the people of the community as quaint and charming Aztecs that lived in a veritable *slum*.¹⁸¹

In looking to address the deficiencies of the existing neighborhood while also keeping in mind the idea of urban density, planners sought to rationalize the project by creating more homes for more people, closer to downtown. Urban density also became the chief critique of the project early on as opponents suggested that increasing the availability of homes near downtown would change the demographics of the area. The final vision of the project imagined 24 thirteen story towers and 163 two-story towers that would house close to seventeen thousand people, a stark comparison to the 3m300 hundred current residents. Critical to this revision was the central idea pointing to the manner in which the power brokers of the city wanted to re-cast neighborhoods such as Chavez Ravine as blighted and demanded the eviction of Mexican American people and Mexican culture from the vicinity of downtown.¹⁸²

The rise of McCarthyism coupled with the defeat of incumbent Mayor Bowron, and the election of Mayor Poulson, led to a series of compromises that ultimately canceled the Chavez Ravine project and ended with the sale of Chavez Ravine to Walter O'Malley. These circumstances also suggest that the move from Brooklyn to Los Angeles had as much to do with Walter O'Malley wanting to secure economic gains as it was about Los Angeles looking to refashion itself and redevelop downtown in a modernist vision. It's hard to miss the explicit contradictions between the characterizations of public housing labeled as socialist, yet Dodger Stadium amounting to what can be considered a successful government subsidy.¹⁸³ O'Malley

¹⁸¹ Hines, 131.

¹⁸² Avila, *Popular Culture*, 159.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 163.

was given 315 acres plus a two-million-dollar pledge of land improvements in exchange for nine acres.



Figure 41. Red Scare & McCarthyism, *Great Wall*. Image courtesy of Judy Baca and SPARC Archives.

The political turmoil caused by the battle of Chavez Ravine highlights how several different mayors got caught in the wake of the debate over public housing and in an attempt to transform Chavez Ravine and Los Angeles into a modern marvel the economic and political goals of the city outweighed the needs of a discreet and underserved community.¹⁸⁴ Moreover, the explicit nature of “Red Scare” tactics made the circumstances of Chavez Ravine even more accepted, a historical moment that was not overlooked by Baca and her team of mural makers. The panel preceding the Chavez Ravine segment makes an obvious nod to the ubiquitous nature of McCarthyism and Red Scare discourse during this period.

If we shift our focus back to the right side of the Chavez Ravine panel, we are directed to the forcible and violent removal of the residents of Chavez Ravine, an image that draws a

¹⁸⁴ Don Parson, *This Modern Marvel: Chavez Ravine and the Politics of Modernism in Making a Better World: Public Housing, the Red Scare, and the Direction of Modern Los Angeles* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 165.

significant parallel to the experiences of the Aréchigas family. Their circumstances have been iconically portrayed as a poor family taking a stand against big government and a hostile eviction. While the Aréchigas have been remembered as the last stand for the Chavez Ravine community, some historians suggest an alternative media representation of the family that paints them as trying to extract undeserved compensation from honest taxpayers.¹⁸⁵ The main contestation the family had was for fair compensation for their properties (they held multiple properties in the neighborhood). A major problem that many community members faced was that they were not receiving fair compensation for their homes. The CHC (City Housing Authority) was appraising their property values much lower than residents had anticipated and residents believed that they would not be able to afford homes in the newly redeveloped neighborhood. Depending on your politic affiliation, the iconic struggle of the Aréchigas came to represent everything that was wrong about the battle of Chavez Ravine.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, 178.



Figure 42. A segment of Division of The Barrios & Chavez Ravine, *Great Wall*. Image courtesy of Judy Baca and SPARC Archives.

The struggle for fair housing offers a way to extend the discussion of citizenship through a slightly different perspective, yet it also makes critical connections with the struggle for economic opportunity. Important studies of postwar Los Angeles reveal how the meaning and use of property was intimately connected to status as a homeowner; however humble that home was, it conferred some notion of citizenship. Furthermore, as the settlement into Southern California expanded during the postwar years with the promise of sustained employment and higher wages in defense sector jobs, in particular the aerospace industry, housing was deeply connected to this shift in migration and employment. Conventional perceptions of citizenship during this period were notably tied to homeownership. Good citizenship was associated with a

stable workforce and suggested that an improved social order would result from homeownership.¹⁸⁶

Specifically, Los Angeles provides an important case study for how the struggle for fair housing marked a denial of citizenship for particular residents. The cautionary tale over the battle of Chavez Ravine demonstrates the manner in which a Mexican American community resisted displacement and disenfranchisement. By employing various strategies including the idea of *conditional patriotism*, the people of Chavez Ravine sought to challenge the seizure of their homes and assert their rights. Historian Ron W. Lopez II underscores the idea that homeownership was a central marker in defining citizenship. Since people were willing to go to just about any length to maintain their status as homeowners, the thought that either the federal or local government could potentially turn a community of home owners into home renters would not go uncontested.¹⁸⁷ In spite of the destructive nature of these circumstances, Baca and her team were still able to skillfully capture the resistance that Chavez Ravine community members exhibited.

The Mexican American community of Chavez Ravine opposed many of the projects supported by liberal and labor factions that purported to help poor communities, especially Mexican Americans. This is significant because it illustrates the complexity of the Mexican

¹⁸⁶ Becky M. Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920–1965* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Hise, *Magnetic Los Angeles*.

¹⁸⁷ Lopez defines *conditional patriotism* as an ethos developed in the post-war era that sought to rely on a gendered discourse of resistance. Women made direct claims to men and sons that had fought and sometimes died defending the United States in WWII and Korea. This military service required great sacrifice, enabled many men to purchase homes and despite discrimination faced at home they still served the United States with honor. If the government attempted to take their homes (the foremost marker of citizenship) it would threaten the basis of their patriotism; Ron W. López II, “Community Resistance and Conditional Patriotism in Cold War Los Angeles: The battle for Chavez Ravine,” *Latino Studies* 7 (2009), 457–479.

American community in that the people of Chavez Ravine opposed a program that was supported by most of the Mexican American political establishment. In doing so the people of Chavez Ravine refused help from the “left” and would pursue their struggles within the broader existing legal and political structure of the country.¹⁸⁸ This strategy demonstrates that members of the Chavez Ravine community sought to align themselves with groups that would help further their cause; they were more concerned with keeping their homes than with promoting rigid political ideologies. This notion of pragmatic activism as a guiding principle suggests that community leaders embraced whatever seemed likely to work to help maintain better living standards in the seemingly half-free environment of Los Angeles.¹⁸⁹

Concluding Thoughts – Challenging Tradition

The Great Wall of Los Angeles is in fact one of the most influential public art projects in the United States.¹⁹⁰ Its massive scale and highly coordinated effort between artists, historians, cultural informants, and community members demonstrates a ground-breaking effort by Judy Baca and her team of collaborators at SPARC. In tandem with the aesthetically epic visual material that it creates, *The Great Wall* should also be understood as an effort to revision the traditional American historical narrative, while also challenging often-repeated, yet outmoded and simplistic renderings of this country’s past. By revealing the omitted and distorted histories of particular communities, *The Great Wall* reconstructs a more democratic historical consciousness; in this case, a set of histories that focus on the possibilities and limits of labor

¹⁸⁸ Lopez, 462–463.

¹⁸⁹ As an example of pragmatic activism Douglass Flamming points to Charlotta Bass acting simultaneously as the vice president of the Los Angeles NAACP while also helping to establish a local chapter of the Marcus Garvey led UNIA; Douglas Flamming, *Bound for Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 191–193.

¹⁹⁰ Barnet-Sanchez, Holly and Tim Drescher, *Give Me Life*, 2016, 266–267.

during a moment of global crisis, contested notions of citizenship and patriotism, as well as the significant and often destructive penalty paid for being considered a social or political dissenter.



Figure 43. Portion of 1940s Segment of *The Great Wall*. Image courtesy of Judy Baca and SPARC Archives.

CHAPTER FOUR—LA MEMORIA DE NUESTRA TIERRA

The Mexican Revolution marks the genesis of the story of my family in Colorado.¹⁹¹

My mural for the Denver International Airport . . . is of a personal nature. My grandparents came from Mexico to La Junta, Colorado during the Mexican Revolution. They followed the course traveled by thousands of other Mexican families, from Chihuahua to the United States through the historic northern territories of Mexico (Texas, New Mexico, Colorado) via the "Ellis Island" of the southwest, El Paso. It is a story that has been little chronicled and one for which I was anxious to create a visual record. Over the years through my work as a muralist I had told many stories of communities across the United States but never my own.¹⁹²

Chicano/a murals have been an important artistic medium that support and shape social movements aimed towards identity and justice that extend to a mass population. The formation of the Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC) in 1976 by artist Judith F. Baca focused on murals available to the broadest and most diverse viewers. The intention here was to animate public discourse and free expression of diverse communities without direct intervention or mediation by government or institutional officials.¹⁹³ By imagining public art as an innovative process that crosses the boundaries of social justice, history, and collective memory, Baca established and SPARC employed a form of remembering that served as an essential component to understanding how communities envisioned themselves, their struggles, and their ability to transform history.

¹⁹¹ Judith F. Baca, *Memoria de Nuestra Tierra* (2001), <http://www.judybaca.com/artist/portfolio/memoria-de-nuestra-tierra/>

¹⁹² Judith F. Baca, "La Memoria de Nuestra Tierra: Colorado," *Aztlan Journal* (November 2003).

¹⁹³ Don Adams & Arlene Golbard, *Community, Culture and Globalization* (New York: The Rockefeller Foundation, 2002); Eva Sperling Cockcroft and Holly Barnet-Sánchez, *Signs from the Heart: California Chicano Murals* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press in Association with SPARC, 1993).

This chapter examines *La Memoria de Nuestra Tierra*, a collaborative mural project Judith F. Baca developed for the Denver International Airport and completed in 2001 in Colorado. The mural has several historic references pertinent to survival and resistance that span labor rights, civil rights, and the politics of Colorado in the 1970s. The mural has several compelling scenes yet manages to focus on the fatal Ludlow Strikes of Colorado in 1914, the transnational migration of over a million Mexicans into the greater Southwestern United States during The Mexican Revolution, as well as fashioning an inspiring nod toward Chicano activism in Colorado during the period of *El Movimiento*. By highlighting these critical flash points in United States history, Baca and her team of mural makers underscore the significant conditions of the American labor movement and the racialized violence that often accompanied those struggles.



Figure 44. *La Memoria de Nuestra Tierra* (2001). Image Courtesy of Judy Baca and SPARC.

The themes of transnational migration along the Southern border in the early twentieth-century, and the deeper contours of the modern Civil Rights Movement in the American Southwest also heighten this mural project. The pioneering collaborative process developed by Baca and employed at SPARC sought to offer alternative narratives of Chicanos and Chicanas

through visual material. More importantly, the process also actively struggled against contemporary forms of neocolonialism by rejecting pervasive and normalized historical accounts of coercive working conditions, patriarchy, homophobia and racism.

Studying the aesthetic components of the mural project in tandem with a close examination of the historical circumstances can lead to an unearthing of multiple cultural perspectives. Specifically, Baca's utilization of public art has promoted community dialogue. For example, during the lead up to the mural project Baca in conjunction with the University of Southern Colorado was able to identify and interview several people of the region to understand the varied local histories of the region. She was also able to meet with local high schools and community members.¹⁹⁴ These conversations and learning sessions helped to advance community consciousness of often-distorted historical narratives. The personal and familial accounts helped to construct broader themes for herself and for other artists. These themes were then linked with archival and scholarly perspectives of the region. Reimagining certain flash points in U.S. history through the lens of public art encourages a broader participation in contemporary debates about the use of history. Such reflections worked to fundamentally dislodge long upheld narratives of neocolonialism. This is accomplished by creating an imaginary intimately rooted in the experiences of distinctly racialized and gendered groups of people.¹⁹⁵

The mural at the Denver International Airport should be understood as a very important recognition to Siqueiros, his public mural teams, and his willingness to embrace new and

¹⁹⁴ *Memoria de Nuestra Tierra* (2001), <http://sparcinla.org/memoria-de-nuestra-tierra-2001/>

¹⁹⁵ Erika Doss, "Raising Community Consciousness with Public Art: Contrasting Projects by Judy Baca and Andrew Leicester," *American Art* 6, no. 1 (Winter 1992): 62–81.

emerging artistic methods. Baca was able to transcend her own work by implementing developing technology and emerging methods to cultivate a thoughtful rendering of the Southwestern peoples and landscape.¹⁹⁶ In production work at the UCLA-SPARC digital mural lab in Venice, California, Baca cultivated a partnership between UCLA and SPARC. She envisioned how to couple familial images within a broader historical landscape and was able to layer historical images onto the hand-painted panorama. What emerged was a groundbreaking holographic-like surface of a metallic coated substrate that now resides in the Jeppeson Central Terminal of the Denver International Airport.



Figure 45. *La Memoria de Nuestra Tierra*, installation. Photograph provided courtesy of Denver International Airport.

This 10ft x 50ft aluminum digitally printed mural exists not only as an installation at the airport but also part of an interactive website with the ability to be reproduced in its entirety.¹⁹⁷ This means availability of the mural and its human content to many of its diverse viewers.

¹⁹⁶ Stein, *Siqueiros His Life and Works*, 75; Baca, “La Memoria de Nuestra Tierra,” *Aztlan Journal* (November 2003).

¹⁹⁷ Baca, “La Memoria de Nuestra Tierra,” *Aztlan Journal* (November, 2003).

Why They Left

Baca's familial history traces back to the Northern Mexican state of Chihuahua, a region particularly involved and impacted by the revolution in its early and dynamic stages. It was during the moments of massive disruption as a direct result of The Mexican Revolution (TMR) that Baca's grandparents Teodoro and Francisca Baca, along with hundreds of thousands of Mexicans decided to migrate to the United States. In 1910 the governor of Chihuahua, Abraham Gonzalez was part of a coalition that sought to put the Plan de San Luis Potosi into action. The result of this effort would lead to the capture of many cities in the state of Chihuahua by revolutionary forces.¹⁹⁸ It was during this period that Baca's grandparents began to face the harsh and violent realities of revolution. Both Teodoro and Francisca had been robbed.¹⁹⁹ They quickly understood that the prospects of seeing any meaningful social change, especially land redistribution, which was wholly unattended by El Pan de San Luis Potosi, would be difficult to realize. It is within this context that we must begin to examine the mural project. Their reason to migrate was so bound up in the circumstances of the TMR and that we must try to explore and understand those circumstances to better appreciate the mural.

The image in the mural that captures the experience of transnational migration draws explicitly from Baca's own familial history. She states that like for so many other Mexicans during the early twentieth-century, TMR marked the genesis of her ancestors' migration from Mexico to the United States. To understand the United States and Mexico borderlands and especially the experiences of Mexicans in the making the United States, you must have a working

¹⁹⁸ Martha Menchaca, *Naturalizing Mexican Immigrants: A Texas History* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 2011), 203.

¹⁹⁹ Judith F. Baca, "La Memoria de Nuestra Tierra: Colorado," *Aztlan Journal* (November, 2003).

knowledge the TMR. Reframing U.S. history through the lens of a Mexican diaspora allows for a broader transnational understanding of the past. Underscoring that the movement of people, ideas, and cultures and the resulting transformation that occurs is never a one directional process. Thus, utilizing a diaspora framework enlarges our historical perspective and allows for a more complete narrative.²⁰⁰



Figure 46. *Los Caminantes*. Photograph provided courtesy of Denver International Airport.

Although we don't explicitly see the Mexican Revolution in the mural image titled *Los Caminantes*, what we do get is an important opportunity to discuss broader historical circumstances. For example, it is important to understand that this movement of Mexican people

²⁰⁰ For an argument as to why it is important to consider a diaspora frame work when thinking about U.S. History please see Robin D.G. Kelley, "How the West Was One: The African Diaspora and the Re-Mapping of U.S. History" in *Rethinking American History in a Global Age* (University of California Press, 2002).

was in response to a destructive and violent movement of Anglo Americans into the Mexican mining town of Cananea, Sonora. This intrusion was part of an illegal scheme seeking to repress a mounting labor movement in Sonora and Arizona.²⁰¹ This initial flash point that featured the movement of Anglo American militant strike breakers into Mexico provided the immediate fuel that would eventually ignite a nation and a region into revolution. By creating such a massive geopolitical landscape, Baca has allowed the viewers of the mural to ask, “why are these people leaving their home regions in Mexico,” and “why are they coming to the United States?” This section of the mural provides a critical vehicle to rethink the history of the United States from a transnational perspective.

The Mexican Revolution can, in part, be characterized as a prolonged period of violence and national reconstruction resulting from the process of a popular uprising seeking to delegitimize the decades-old government of Porfirio Díaz. The *Porfiriato* saw Mexico make many significant gains with respect to its international economic standing as well as important domestic improvements. However, these improvements came at a perilous cost Mexico experienced a significant disparity in wealth among its inhabitants. The Díaz regime installed the most efficient and centralized government machine the country had ever experienced.²⁰² This Díaz political machine was not concerned with plight of the poor and working-class peoples of Mexico. Rather it sought to exploit natural resources and acquire huge properties concessions

²⁰¹ Menchaca, *Naturalizing Mexican Immigrants* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 2011), 199.

²⁰² Thomas E. Skidmore & Peter H. Smith, *Modern Latin America.*, Sixth Edition. (Oxford University Press, New York: 2005), 263.

and manipulate domestic labor while repressing any form of opposition. Mexican resources were sold off to foreigners at the direction of the Díaz administration. Concurrently political participation and local autonomy were violently crushed.²⁰³

Fundamental to the Díaz political scheme was a comprehensive land policy that sought to displace indigenous landholdings and replace them with corrupt land speculators and large-scale ranches with the incentive to encourage foreign investment.²⁰⁴ Issue of land and property routinely emerge as factors in revolutionary movements, and it is evident that in Mexico this was the case. The Mexican government was explicitly infringing on the livelihood of its people with the hopes of a greater economic position on the global stage. The feelings of imbalance animated frustrations of many Mexicans, especially the laboring and working class peoples of a nation that were being exploited for the gain of what seemed to be a handful of ultra-wealthy, detached elites. This level of encroachment compelled the Baca family and many other Mexicans to reevaluate their circumstances.

Human needs were being frustrated by underpaid work and poor living conditions, corrupt political and business interests and a lack of self-determination. All of these factors led to a popular response, one that revealed many elements of a Social Revolutionary Movement.²⁰⁵ Representing one current of discontent, The Partido Liberal Mexicano (PLM) led by Ricardo

²⁰³ Michael J. Gonzales. *The Mexican Revolution, 1920–1940* (University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque: 2002), 59.

²⁰⁴ Skidmore & Smith, *Modern Latin America*, 261.

²⁰⁵ According to historian Juan Gómez-Quiñones Social Revolutionary movements can be understood as significant multifaceted progressive political struggles or linked struggles, demanding full political responses and accesses, combined with social historical contents and the articulations of invigorated ideological consciousness, strategy(ies), democracy(ies), and addressed to society, institutions and the state with expectation of resolution, both nationally and internationally.

Flores Magón arose. They advocated for change as part of a group of Mexican radicals that struggled to end the Porfirio Díaz dictatorship in Mexico. The PLM was a transnational organization that operated both within and outside of Mexico. Its aim was to contribute in a worldwide effort to dismantle capitalism. The PLM used a two-pronged approach of propaganda and direct action. In 1906 the PLM issued the Program of the Liberal Party. This plan was crafted, in part with suggestions solicited from the Mexican public, to organize a broad base of support among Mexican workers and PLM supporters. The PLM sought to develop a coherent plan to consolidate not only the labor force and progressives, but also the mass Mexican population.

The multi-point 1906 PLM Plan addressed issues of working conditions and labor rights, government accountability, secularization, land (re)distribution, and indigenous rights. The Program made explicit demands on the state to be a critical component of regulation and actively seeking to maintain the wellbeing of the nation. This platform proved to be significant in coalescing progressives and served as a model for the conceptualization of a refashioned Mexican society; many of the points addressed in the PLM Program made their way into the Constitution of 1917. However, reform was not the ultimate goal of the PLM leadership and the Program of 1906 was understood as but one important step towards social revolution. Through the leadership of Ricardo Flores Magón the PLM became the ideological vanguard of the Mexican revolutionary process.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁶ Juan Gómez-Quiñones. "Ricardo Flores Magón" in *The American Radical* (Routledge Press, New York & London: 1994), 169.

One response to TMR was that of Ricardo Flores Magón and the PLM: to propagandize the issues of the Revolution in a way that would demonstrate their inherent repression of the Mexican people, and to construct the ideological ethos of a renewed Mexico. In this Mexico, state institutions could and would respond to issues of gender inequality, coercive working conditions, land and liberty.²⁰⁷ Another response—just as radical and just as significant—was to migrate to the United States. Estimated indicate that during TMR about ten percent of the Mexican population migrated north to the United States.



Figure 47. *Los Caminantes*. Image Courtesy of Judy Baca and SPARC.

²⁰⁷ Ricardo Flores Magón, “Land and Liberty,” in *The Mexico Reader: History Culture, Politics*, ed. Gilbert M. Joseph and Timothy J. Henderson (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002); for an interpretive examination of Ricardo Flores Magón please see Juan Gómez-Quiñones, *Sembradores Ricardo Flores Magón Y El Partido Liberal Mexicano: A Eulogy and Critique* (Los Angeles: Chicano Studies Center Publications, 1973).

This critical juncture in time marks only one point of a much deeper continuum of people of Mexican descent moving to and working and living in the United States. This continuum did not begin with TMR and certainly did not end with TMR. Hundreds of thousands of these migrants, including the Baca's, would eventually end up in American southwest. In Colorado many of these Mexican migrants would use their experience in the mining industry to build up an American market based on the extraction of natural resources from the land and the exploitation of workers.

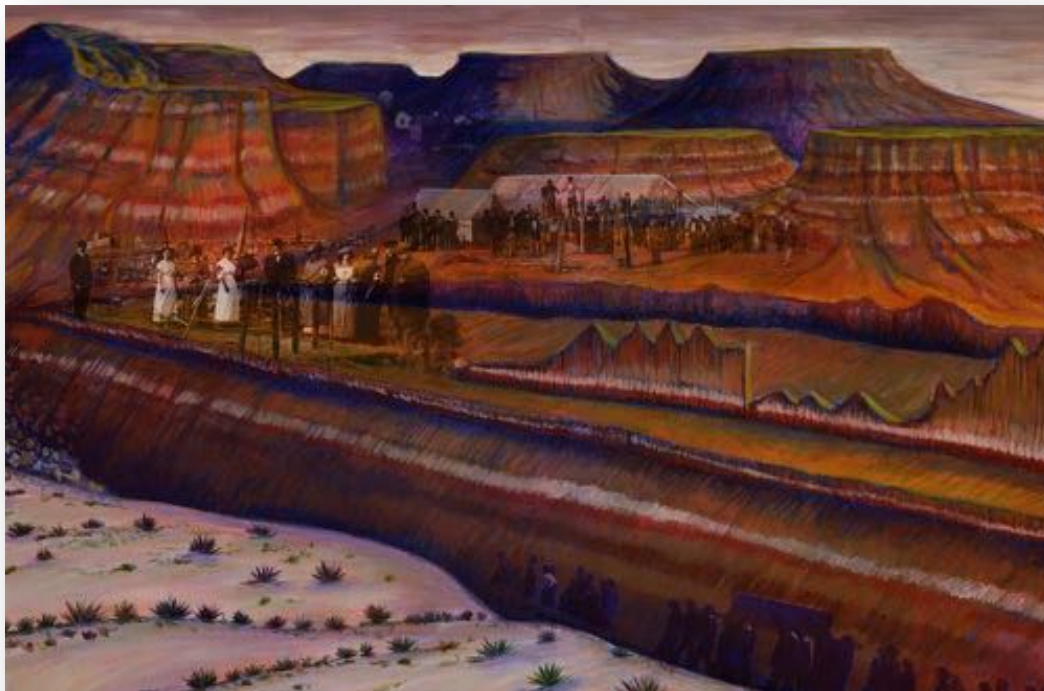


Figure 48. *The Ludlow Strike*. Hand-painted landscape with computer painted and photo images. Courtesy of Judy Baca and SPARC.

The Ludlow Strike

The second decade of the twentieth century was marked by onerous working conditions, paltry wages and massive wealth inequality in the United States, all of which resulted in severe labor unrest. In the vast regions encompassing Arizona, New Mexico, and Colorado, the mining

industry transformed rural cities and townships into what amounted to industrialized mini-police states. These communities were wholly reliant on the wealth generated by independent mining companies. These proved to be hostile to labor unions, residents, and workers consistently faced physical violence as a means for social and labor control. For the most part, the power of the local mining companies went unchecked by local, state, and federal authorities. When workers sought to challenge these conditions, they were often met with the threat of job security and most commonly experienced violence at the hands of for-hire company guards.²⁰⁸

At the heart of this labor unrest was the motivation for the workers to try to establish a collective form of negotiating their grievances with the mining companies. Better wages, safer working conditions, healthcare, and a regulated eight-hour working day was what many of these miners were seeking to obtain from their employers. However, a widespread acceptance of intimidation, violence, and coercive labor conditions in the mining industry confirmed that individual efforts to change working and living conditions in the mining towns were not effective and that unionization would need to be the key to attaining these goals.

The mounting pressures of an ever-expanding mining industry increasingly came to permeate almost all facets of daily life, including where one lived, where one bought clothes and groceries, and how one voted, all of which resulted in exacerbating the tension between miners, their families, and the mining companies. The pressure between labor and capital was the impetus for significant struggle and contributed to destructive violence in many sections of the Rocky Mountains.

²⁰⁸ See Howard Zinn, “The Colorado Coal Strike, 1913-1914,” in *Three Strikes: Miners, Musicians, Salesgirls and the Fighting Spirit of Labor’s Last Century*, ed. Howard Zinn, Dana Frank, and Robin D.G. Kelley (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 7–55; David Montgomery, *Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State and American Labor Activism, 1865–1925* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).



Figure 49. *The Ludlow Strike*. Photograph provided courtesy of Denver International Airport.

In part, this segment of the mural reveals the historically exploitative relationship between the miners and the mining companies. For instance, the type of control that mining companies had on the employees went far beyond the idyllic employee–employer relationship. Colorado Fuel and Iron (CF&I) was the largest private employer in Colorado, as well as the largest private landholder in the state and was owned by John D. Rockefeller, Jr. CF&I was the prototypical U.S. mining company in that it realized large profits from the work of American and immigrant men that were exploited on the jobsite but also outside of the workplace at the behest of the mining company through worker dependency on company housing and stores. These remarkably large and exceedingly corrupt mining corporations often treated their workers as disposable cogs in a larger process of generating wealth. Consequently, the company store located in the company town was an integral part of this process.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁹ A company town was inextricably tied to the private mining company, usually the town was unincorporated, and had neither elected officials nor an official police force. Commonly, company towns

Not only did the mining companies exploit the labor of their employees through dangerous working conditions, insufficient wages, and limited labor rights, they regularly would exploit them through a predatory credit scheme at company stores known as an *enganche* system.²¹⁰ Prices would be set very high on products that all workers and their families needed, often more expensive than their salary would permit. For company employees and their families, however, the company store would make these items available on credit. The mining company set the high prices and local store clerks did not have the right to adjust these prices. More importantly, since the company store was the only market within close proximity to the mines, workers and their families had but one true option for food, clothing, medicine, and other rations. This scheme would create the financial constraints that would make it nearly impossible for miners to save their wages, leave their job, and move out of the company town; this scheme would also ensure that a large percentage of the workers' hard-earned wages would funnel back to the company.²¹¹

If for whatever reason miners decided that prices were too high and wanted to shop at another store outside the company town, they were usually blacklisted, immediately fired from their job, and evicted from their home in the company town. Aladino Lopez, a miner for CF&I,

used company stores as another way to generate profits, and by extension to exploit their workers. Large mining companies commonly paid their workers in scrip which could only be used at the company store.

²¹⁰ Company stores had no competition and were free to markup prices as they saw fit and regularly extended lines of credit to workers as a means to keep them economically bound to the store and tied to the town. With no other option for food and essentials many of these workers and their families were forced into a form of economic bondage.

²¹¹ "An Oral History with Fernando F. Vigil," conducted by Gary L. Shumway, 1971, O.H. 531 Colorado Coal mining Project, Center for Oral and Public History, California State University Fullerton.

recalls that he was fired several times for not wanting to capitulate to this scheme.²¹² If miners wanted to continue to work, they had to do business at the company store. Vicente Cobo was a miner in Colorado during that period and recalled the precarious relationship that he and fellow miners had with the mining companies.

Si aquí todas estas tiendas eran de la compañía, en aquellos tiempos, los campos mineros, la ciudad . . . todos eran de la compañía. Tenia la tienda, tenia la estación de gasolina, tenia todo lo que se necesitara ahí. Y la única chanza que le daban, que tenia que tratar allí, o no tenia trabajo.”²¹³

With these oppressive financial restrictions placed upon the miners both on the jobsite and outside the mines, many of the miners collectively began to re-think their relationship with the company. The reconceptualization of the relationship between employee and employer in the mining industry in Colorado was not a spur of the moment idea, rather part of a longer trajectory of unjust wages, lack of legal labor recognition, and deadly working conditions that pushed the workers of the Ludlow mines to take a collective stand. Sacrifices also eventually led to unionization at some mining companies as a result of the New Deal in the 1930s.

Now the violent and seldom recounted circumstances of the Ludlow massacre, coupled with the visual representation of these circumstances, offer historians and the public alike an opportunity to truly interrogate the labor history of the United States. On April 20, 1914, National Guardsmen set fire to the Ludlow tent colony, including the residences of striking

²¹² Aladino Lopez states that different mining companies would call around to try to prevent him from getting another job at different mining sites saying “. . . this Aladino Lopez is a trouble maker, don’t hire him.” An Oral History with Aladino Lopez conducted by Gary L. Shumway, 1971, O.H. 582 Colorado Coal mining Project, Center for Oral and Public History, California State University Fullerton.

²¹³ An Oral History with Vicente Cobo, conducted by Gary L. Shumway, 1971, P.10. O.H. 683 Colorado Coal mining Project, Center for Oral and Public History, California State University Fullerton.

miners who had already been evicted from company-owned homes. In this makeshift colony that workers had set up near the local mines, more than a dozen people living in the tent city were shot and killed as they attempted to evacuate the burning camp, while several others died when they could not escape the flames. Tragically, the next morning, the bodies of two women and eleven children—who had been attempting to hide from the massacre—were found in a section of the colony that had been set up as a women’s infirmary.²¹⁴

The aftermath of the massacre revealed the massive and often unchecked power of American corporations, in this case the power and destructive force of the CF&I. In assessing the aftermath of the strike, *The New York Times* reported that the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company, controlled by John D. Rockefeller and his son, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., were accused of having “approved measures to coerce the State Government of Colorado and of having flouted the will of the President of the United States.”²¹⁵ Specifically, as it relates to the causes of the strike the article goes on to state that:

The Colorado strike was a revolt by whole communities against arbitrary, economic, political, and social domination by the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company . . . Economic domination was achieved by the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company and its followers through ruthless suppression of unionism . . .”

One remarkable feature of this *memoria* mural is that it not only highlights the tragedy of the tent colonies, but also underscores the longer struggle for workers to better their conditions through unionization. This was a struggle that had lasted for more than 14 months, was wrought with

²¹⁴ Ben Mauk, “The Ludlow Massacre Still Matters,” *New Yorker*, April 18, 2014; Juan Gómez-Quiñones, “Labor Conflict and Attempts at Organizing” in *Mexican American Labor, 1790-1990* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004), 65–96.

²¹⁵ "HOLD ROCKEFELLER AT FAULT IN STRIKE," *New York Times*, August 28, 1915, 8.

intimidation, deprivation, and violence, and ultimately ended tragically.²¹⁶ However, as historian Jonatan Rees reminds us, routinely how we define the massacre is too closely linked to the events of April 20, 1914.²¹⁷ If we remember the “massacre” as it has traditionally been constructed, that is to say to focus solely on the murder of the children and women at the camp, maybe we omit or distort the longer pattern of labor violence both before and after the coal field wars as part of U.S. history.



Figure 50. *The Ludlow Strike*. Photograph provided courtesy of Denver International Airport.

²¹⁶ <http://sparcinla.org/memoria-de-nuestra-tierra-2001/>. Judy’s site that need to be formatted correctly (accessed on August 13, 2017).

²¹⁷ Jonathan Rees. “Beyond Body Counts: A Centennial Rethinking of the Ludlow Massacre,” *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 11, no. 3 (2014): 107–115. Accessed June 22, 2016. doi: 10.1215/15476715-2687741; Rees also makes a highly interesting point in that union leaders crafted a narrative that focused solely on the death of the those on April 10, but did not mention the violent action that union members in turn committed against strikebreakers and mine guards. I disagree with how Rees frames this understanding; rather than omitting the violence the union merely highlighted what up to this point they felt was rampant, widespread, and unchecked violence and murder upon workers, their families, and union organizers. It was not to gloss over the violence that took place afterwards, rather it was a way of constructing a deeper collective memory of the circumstances that did not focus wholly on the big corporations; it was precisely a counter narrative.

La Memoria de Nuestra Tierra provides us an opportunity to take a broader look at the struggle and violence that transpired in the Colorado mines. The events and circumstances span a much longer period. If we imagine these circumstances through a broader lens we can start to see that ideas such as violence are but one note encompassed by a much more expanded ideological range. For instance, one of the major reasons these folks were striking was for better working conditions, the longer view lets us demonstrates a clear pattern of work place violence enacted upon the workers in the form of black lung disease, devastating mining accidents, and though a consistent and pervasive lack of workplace safety. So, in addition to the explicit murder of eleven people in the tent colonies, we also can see the subtler nature of violence that was enacted on these workers and their families.

Again, these conditions stem primarily from corporate greed and a level of neglect that was immeasurable, yet quite common for the period, as *The New York Times* noted the responsibility of the CF&I and explicitly the accountability of John D. Rockefeller, Jr.:

The perversion of and contempt for government, the disregard of public welfare, and the defiance of public opinion during the Colorado coal strike must be considered as only one manifestation of the autocratic and anti-social spirit of a man whose enormous wealth gives him infinite opportunity to act in similar fashions in broader fields."²¹⁸

In the face of violent repression and severe living conditions the workers in Colorado's coal fields were able to mount a significant campaign against worker oppression. The resistance that took place was based on a multi-ethnic solidarity movement. Although many coal companies sought to impede communication between immigrant workers by mixing crews with diverse workers such as Southern Europeans and Mexican immigrants, the miners were able to organize

²¹⁸ "HOLD ROCKEFELLER AT FAULT IN STRIKE," 8.

in small, socialist-based groups.²¹⁹ The organization and struggle that resulted in the Colorado coalfield wars would inspire miners in places like Clifton and Morenci, Arizona. What's at stake for historians and historiographers engaging with the memory of Ludlow and the massacre is how these circumstances will be remembered.

The instructive work of Baca reveals a more complex notion of memory. The mural marks the memory of tragedy in this region. However, it also points to the notion that those that were murdered in Colorado were killed because of their efforts to support unionization.²²⁰ The theme of unionization and worker solidarity also figure prominently in other, less explicit segments of the mural.

Chicano Activism in Colorado

Chicano and Chicana activism has had a lengthy and multifaceted history in the state of Colorado. An essential aim of this mural project was to reveal the nuances of that history by excavating the memories of the land. Baca chose not to use conjured notions of beauty to hide or cover up the true essence of the region. Rather, she was able to unearth the varied messages of Colorado and in this case was able to visually reconstruct an important, if often-forgotten meeting between two of the major figures of the Chicano and Chicana Movement. At first glance, in the barren landscape section of the mural, Baca was able to layer in a stunning image of Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzalez talking with a reflective Cesar E. Chavez into the plateaus of Northern Colorado, the joining of civil and workers' rights leadership. According to Baca, it

²¹⁹ Zaragosa Vargas, *Crucible of Struggle: A History of Mexican Americans from Colonial Times to the Present Era*, Second Edition (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 180–181.

²²⁰Rees, "Beyond Body Counts," 115.

seems that regularly “. . . we find examples of public art in the service of dominance,”²²¹ for example the seemingly unending tributes to Confederate leaders. She challenges that use of public space. What this section of the mural conveys is a thoughtful reconsideration of the history of this region that seeks to underscore the significance of the CMM while simultaneously leading viewers to re-think “official” histories.

“Official” histories can be difficult to construct and even more challenging to disrupt. Publicly focusing on the activism and work that someone like Corky Gonzalez accomplished can be understood as a rather bold action, even in his home state of Colorado. In the spring of 2013, the Denver Library Commission suggested that a new local library be named for the renowned poet and civil rights leader. However, this suggestion was met with severe push back, especially from some in the community who chose to remember Corky as a political dissenter and were “. . . very concerned about the activities of the Crusade for Justice that ultimately had police officers injured.”²²² It took until 2015, but the city of Denver and the State of Colorado went a long way in preserving the meaningful yet often marginalized history of Chicano and Chicana activism in the region. With the grand opening of the Rodolfo ‘Corky’ Gonzalez Branch Library the “official” history of Colorado embraced a wider narrative, much more inclusive of its Chicano and Chicana experiences.²²³ The critical artistic and historical nod that Baca and her team of mural makers developed in this project marks an important moment in connecting seemingly

²²¹ For a detailed discussion of the construction of public art and monuments please see Judith F. Baca, “Whose Monument Where,” in *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (Bay Press, 1994).

²²² “Call to Name Library for Chicano Activists Corky Gonzalez Sparks Ire,” *The Denver Post*, May 5, 2013.

²²³ “New Rodolfo ‘Corky’ Gonzalez Library in Denver Honors Chicano Activist,” *The Denver Post*, February 24, 2015.

disparate movements of civil rights and linking them in an inspiring fashion with far-reaching reverberations.

Concluding Thoughts – *Uvas y Cerveza*

Thinking about and making connections to the work of Chicano and Chicana activists in different states can be challenging. Many times, there can be a lack of knowledge about the work of local organizations and just how critical that work might be to broader movements for civil rights. In California, Cesar Chavez along with the entire group of organizers at the UFW established and grew one of the strongest Mexican American unions in the country, which was no small task considering the vast geographic stretch of the union coupled with the tenuous economic and social position of farm workers. In a remarkably short period of time the union was able to build a medical facility, create a loan program, develop a newspaper, create a cultural program and organize quite possibly the most iconic strike in the twentieth century, the grape boycott of 1966.²²⁴ And while Chavez led the UFW, it was in fact the training and vision that many young folks received in Delano that inspired and instructed subsequent cadres of young Chicano and Chicana activists.

Historian Albert Camarillo notes that the “United Farm Workers struggles helped to kindle the fire of Chicano resistance in major cities and urban areas.” This struggle was the most visible and the most vulnerable and many young folks, including students and community activist who decided to come to Delano were ultimately inspired by the efforts, strategies, and

²²⁴ See “Chapter 8: Labor Risings” in Juan Gómez-Quiñones and Irene Vásquez, *Making Aztlán: Ideology and Culture of the Chicana and Chicano Movement, 1966–1977* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2014).

resiliency of the Union.²²⁵ In fact, most of the folks that went to Delano to support the farm worker struggle went back to the city centers and college campuses where they used the strategies and philosophies of the UFW to help organize their local communities.

In Colorado, Corky Gonzales led the Crusade for Justice in Denver and sought to champion the fight against political and legal discrimination. In one of the most moving examples of Chicana and Chicano solidarity, the National Chicano Liberation Youth Conference in March of 1969 attracted supported from all over the country and especially from California. Activists met in an effort to build broader national networks and discuss and develop strategies to move the struggle forward. In part what was presented at that conference was the shared belief that it would take a massive, cohesive and well-organized mobilization to truly achieve democratic rights. A key strategic insight achieved by the UFW was the implementation of the grape boycott. The next escalation of efforts practiced in the greater southwest came in the form the of Coors boycott. This was an extension of labor rights beyond usual forms of labor activism. A consumer boycott invites average Americans to participate in supporting workers' rights and higher wages. It was a way to instigate direct democracy.

No less challenging of corporate labor discrimination of earlier times, the Coors boycotts that emerged in 1966 sought to challenge some of the major issues with the Adolph Coors Company. Specifically, they sought to challenge existing hiring practices that did not honor labor unions in a good faith manner but also sought to reject shop floor practices that systematically subjugated and excluded Black, Chicano, women, and gay and lesbian workers. The boycott which in part was led by the Crusade for Justice, connected to a deeper national movement of

²²⁵ Albert Camarillo, *Chicanos in California: A History of Mexican Americans in California* (San Francisco, CA: Boyd & Fraser Publishing Company, 1984).

economic boycotts—in particular with the national (and eventually international) grape boycott of the UFW and that Farah clothing company products.²²⁶ What Baca and the mural image communicate is a moment of solidarity and collaboration that went beyond individual personas and individual ideas. What the image represents is the broader and deeper connection between coalitions of people struggling for labor rights and civil rights and social equality. In sum social justice in the daily lives of working people. It was not only an important public gesture for these two iconic civil rights leaders to meet and discuss strategy it was a political imperative considering that the Coors family openly and brazenly supported grape growers during the years of the grape boycott.²²⁷



Figure 51. *Corky Gonzalez and Cesar Chavez*. Courtesy of Judy Baca and SPARC.

²²⁶B. Erin Cole and Allyson Brantley, “The Coors Boycott: When A Beer Can Signaled Your Politics,” Colorado Public Radio: News, October, 2014, Accessed on April 22, 2018, <http://www.cpr.org/news/story/coors-boycott-when-beer-can-signaled-your-politics>

²²⁷ For an extended discussion of the Coors boycott please see Allyson P. Brantley, “‘We’re Givin’ Up Our Beer for Sweeter Wine’: Boycotting Coors Beer, Coalition-Building, and the Politics of Non-Consumption, 1957–1987” (PhD diss., Yale University, 2016).

La Memoria de Nuestra Tierra is a visual representation of the significant transnational narratives of Northern Mexico and the American Southwest, narratives that are essential in order to understand the current geopolitical conditions of Chicanos and Chicanas in the United States. Imagining the broader contours of the American labor movement in the earliest stages of the twentieth century and meshing that with a critical reflection of the Chicana and Chicano movement and its broader national aims allows for a thoughtful reconsideration of these histories. And while these narratives speak to the experiences of generations of people migrating to, living and working in the United States, they also shed an important light into the personal familial history of the artist. Baca, in uncovering her story, was able to unearth that story of millions.

EPILOGUE—SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

The question of really working and finding the public voice with the community's voice included, I really think that I can claim the invention, I can claim the origination of these ideas and the refinement of these ideas in the *Great Wall*, and you can see it as it develops. So there is setting the record straight.²²⁸

Any serious examination of the artistic and cultural resurgence during the Chicano and Chicana Movement in the 1960s and 1970s must include Judith F. Baca. Yet most treatments of the mural movement during this period privilege Chicano male mural artists. The legacy of three males, *Los Tres Grandes* reinforces this historical distortion. The work of *Los Tres Grandes* and the mural movement was a collection of artistic efforts that never entirely broke with the tradition of a single male genius artist creating content not to be altered by anyone. There could be some assistance in the painting of the content but not to the extent where it would alter the vision. While these artists spoke for the people, it was not a mural movement by the people or from the people.

This is precisely where Baca breaks from tradition and creates a distinctively Chicana mural movement of unique imagination and artistry. Baca was inclined to listen to community members and willing to have her content shaped and transformed by suggestions from and experiences of community members. She was open enough to ask, “Did I get it wrong?” or “. . . How [can the mural] be better from your vision?”²²⁹ Baca broke with a tradition that stretched back all the way to the Renaissance. Although this was not exclusive to the Chicano community,

²²⁸ “An Oral history with Judy Baca,” conducted by Juan Pablo Mercado. Venice, CA. February 18, 2018.

²²⁹ Ibid.

this was a tradition that many of the male Chicano muralists from the movement replicated in both style and production.

For example, the first generation of Chicano male muralists, including Carlos Almaraz, would work with young artists, but the design was exclusively their own. Almaraz went on to paint some significant pieces including *No Compre Vino Gallo* (Boycott Gallo Wine) in 1974, which was a show of solidarity with the grape boycott started by the UFW in 1966. The mural was revered and the fact that Almaraz worked with community youth represented a deeper commitment to *el movimiento*. Before that mural was conceived, however, Baca was already developing her method of working with young community members and truly allowing them a collaborative role within the design of the mural content. Baca recalls that while “. . . he [Almaraz] was beginning to get interested, I had . . . you know, I think a number of years . . . under my belt, of working with people in the neighborhood, and he was discovering the whole concept of working in community.”²³⁰ This community process was initially castigated and viewed as “kiddie art”—not serious artistic production—let alone insightful political expression. The practice of working with community members did not get the recognition it merited until men started to embrace the process.²³¹

Many of the young men that Baca worked with were gang affiliated. Baca recalls that the heightened level of gang participation in East Los Angeles among young Chicanos was due in part to a generational rupture. There was a break in generations—many parents and children began to build up some very destructive resentment. The traditions that immigrant Mexican

²³⁰ Oral history interviews with Judith Baca, 1986 August 5–6. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 26.

²³¹ “An Oral history with Judy Baca,” conducted by Juan Pablo Mercado.

parents brought over from the old country were not resonating with either the first or second generation. There was a complete familial disjuncture and many of these young boys were creating family within this larger set of gang members from their neighborhoods.²³²

Specifically, what characterized the sort of process that Baca developed with these young men was a deep level of commitment and openness to share her love of art. The mural project titled *Mi Abuelita* is deeply reflective of this process and Baca's willingness to share her artistic platform. Many of the young men that she worked with were often targets of violence in their surrounding neighborhoods. Baca suggested that they construct a mural that represented a safe space that was welcoming for all of the community. As they considered this idea, the group agreed that the most welcoming and safest of images would be that of an *abuelita*. The mural was a perfect example of how she was able to infuse the perspective of the community into a public project.

In an illustrative example of how remembrance often leads to overlooking, Baca recalls conversations she had at the Burning Man Festival in 2014. Baca mentioned that over the course of the festival it was sort of interesting how so many artists were fascinated by the process of community collaboration she had developed and cultivated over the years. Yet as those conversation progressed many folks did not actually realize the significant and foundational role that Baca played in the origination of this process.²³³ Consistently that credit went to male muralists of the movement. It was another example of how pervasive and distorted the narrative had become. Baca was in fact the vanguard of movement. Although one could make the argument that the Organization of Black American Culture (OBAC) and the *Wall of Respect* in

²³² Ibid.

²³³ "An Oral history with Judy Baca," conducted by Juan Pablo Mercado.

Chicago in 1967 was one of the earliest examples of a community collaborative public art. What makes Baca and her circumstances unique was that she was a major artist working with gang-affiliated youth from East Los Angeles and collaboratively they designed the mural content and collaboratively they did the work. This process would later be refined in the *Great Wall of Los Angeles*. The OBAC, significant as it was, was made up by a collection of artists working in conjunction with Chicago's Black South Side.²³⁴ Baca began working with community members and had established herself as a willing collaborator since 1970, almost a full decade before this process became widespread amongst many Chicano artists.



Figure 52. Medusa Head. Wabash Recreational Center East Los Angeles, 1970. Image courtesy of Judy Baca and SPARC.

²³⁴ For an interpretive examination of *The Wall of Respect* see Abdul Alkalimat, Romi Crawford, and Rebecca Zorach, ed. *The Wall of Respect: Public Art and Black Liberation in 1960s Chicago* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2017).

What's Next for SPARC

The current work being developed centers on the historical mapping of the 1960s and 1970s. Henry Luce coined the term the American Century as a belief in the future of the United States as the global economic leader and moral champion of the world.²³⁵ As the publisher of both *Life* and *Time* magazine, Luce had a tremendous influence on the American popular imagination—the decades of the '60s and '70s put those ideals of the American century to the test. By the end of the 1970s, the economic and political structures that had brought wealth and power to the United States following World War II no longer could sustain economic progress, domestic harmony, or international dominance. The *Great Wall* works to reconstruct some of the most critical social and political conditions that challenged “domestic harmony” during these decades, and as a mode to understanding these changes the *Great Wall* also examines the trajectory of radical social movements alongside the rising tide of American Conservatism.

One of the most politically charged struggles in the history of this country was in fact the military conflict in Vietnam. This violent and destructive set of events seemed to culminate in the 1970s and is significant historical moment that the *Great Wall* focuses on. The War in Vietnam occurred at a moment of heightened political mobilization and social conflict over protracted issues of racial discrimination, economic inequality, and legal subordination, which all served to amplify the impact of the war.²³⁶ Young men of color, especially Black and Chicano youth, were being drafted at disproportionate rates and enduring the physical, emotional, and

²³⁵ See “Chapter 2: Cold War,” in Joshua B. Freeman, *American Empire: The Rise of a Global Power, the Democratic Revolution at Home, 1945–2000* (New York, NY: Viking, 2012).

²³⁶ Freeman, *American Empire*, 220.

psychological tolls of the war. In a speech given at Exposition Park in support of Vietnam veterans, Cesar Chavez reminded a society of the paradoxes of war: “In our case thousands and thousands of poor, brown, and black farm workers go off to war to kill other poor farm workers in Southeast Asia.”²³⁷ Moreover, what does it reveal about our society that the limited opportunities for young men of color to access education or realize economic opportunity are intimately bound up in military service, while at the same time promoting the subjugation and murder of other poor people of color around the world? In Los Angeles, you could see Latinos/as nearing 40% of the total population and fueling all facets of the economy of Southern California, yet having no real political representation or power. For these reasons, Latinos/as were referred to as the “sleeping giant” in the 1970s. All of this agitation was precipitated by the fact that Mexican Americans were losing more young men in Vietnam than most other ethnic groups. African Americans and Chicanos really provided the blood and flesh that fueled that war machine.²³⁸

While the 1960s are commonly known for movements of liberation and radical struggle, the 1970s also included very clear markers of civil unrest and public protests against a narrow definition of American democracy. One of the major themes that the 1970s segment of the *Great Wall* will look to underscore is American Indian resistance which sought to teach Indians about themselves and others. American Indian resistance was palpable during this decade in response to the lasting legacies of U.S. encroachment on their lands. This resistance was by young people

²³⁷ Speech Delivered by Cesar Chavez at a Vietnam Veterans Memorial Rally in Exposition Park, Los Angeles on May 2, 1971; a transcript of the speech can found online at: <http://www.marktribe.net/port-huron-project/we-are-also-responsible-cesar-chavez-1971-2008/>

²³⁸ “Women Art Revolution: Interview with Judith Baca,” Interviewed by Lynn Hershman Leeson, Digital collection presented by Stanford University Libraries, <http://lib.stanford.edu/women-art-revolution>. October 2, 1992, Catalina Island, California, 4.

who had been failed by the educational system. This transcended affirmative action, relevant course offerings, and increased faculty positions initially spurred the occupation of Alcatraz. The occupiers were looking to fundamentally reassess relationships between neocolonial institutions and Indians, reject current Indian policies, reject cycles of poverty, and create Indian institutions, both educational and cultural. It was not a move to liberate the island; rather it was a move to liberate Indians and also to liberate the country from its past. The images of the occupation of Alcatraz serve as a haunting symbol of American Indian history and struggle, "...a defiant isolated rock surrounded by foreboding seas, a reservation-like piece of real estate with stark conditions, and a prison that represented the incarcerated spirit of Indian people everywhere."²³⁹ Alcatraz coupled with the BIA takeover and the standoff at Second Wounded Knee reveal that in spite of seemingly insurmountable obstacles, American Indians during this period were still able to mobilize and put forth a new vision overcome their contemporary struggles.²⁴⁰

Mapping the Future

The Judith F. Baca Arts Academy (JBAA) is located in the South Los Angeles neighborhood of Watts. It began in 2010 and focuses on the mission "... that academic preparedness means placing art, creativity and self-exploration at the center of the scholastic journey."²⁴¹ In a collaboration between the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), the

²³⁹ Paul Chaat Smith and Robert Allen Warrior, *Like A Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee* (New York, NY: The New Press, 1996), 34.

²⁴⁰ In the Fall of 2014, I was enrolled in a graduate course at UCLA on Public Art taught at SPARC by Judy Baca. As part of that class I worked with other graduate students to help construct the historical research narrative for the 1970s segment of the *Great Wall*. For the complete narrative please see 1970s Research and Walkthrough <http://gwdvd.sparcinla.org/1970s-research-and-walkthrough/>

²⁴¹ "20 Portraits of Judy Baca Arts Academy Students Completed," *Judy Baca News*. Last modified June 18, 2015, <http://www.judybaca.com/artist/judy-baca-news/20-portraits-of-judy-baca-arts-academy-students-completed/>

UCLA@SPARC Digital Mural Lab and the JBAA, Baca and a her team of undergraduate and graduate students from UCLA are able to introduce this critical collaborative art process to the next generation of young artists living and learning within the Los Angeles Unified School District. Specifically, Baca has introduced an *Emancipation Project* where sixth graders from the school create aspirational portraits of themselves as a way to visually represent their dreams, while incorporating cutting edge art technology as way to map their future.



Figure 53. Judy Baca and students from the Baca Academy. Image Courtesy of Judy Baca and SPARC.

The portraits start off as photographs of the students, then with guidance from UCLA student mentors, the sixth graders hand paint the images and transform them into artistic depictions that reflect their experiences, expectations, identity and ultimately their hopes.²⁴² Each year anywhere from 20 to 40 students participate in this project. When the project portraits

²⁴² Ibid.

are combined, they meld into a magnificent mural that covers large sections of the campus walls and turns those walls into “a canvas for colorful stories of life and dreams,” the school in fact becomes a living museum.²⁴³



Figure 54. Student Portraits, Baca Academy. Image Courtesy of Judy Baca and SPARC.

The legacy of Judy Baca as an artist, activist, organizer and scholar is all bound by the idea that beauty truly comes from the love of people, the things they care about, and the things that move them. She has spent a lifetime developing a process that at its core is a voice for the people and that speaks for the community. It is a process that has been refined over decades and a process that this is still being shared with the future generations of artists and activists.

²⁴³ Jessica Wolf. “A Legacy That Lives on the Walls,” last modified on July 06, 2016, <http://newsroom.ucla.edu/stories/a-legacy-that-lives-on-the-walls>

Although at times her contributions are understated, there is no doubt that Baca has cemented her place among *Los Grandes* of her generation and of any generation. Her place and her influence on the Chicana and Chicano Art Movement is epic in scale and impossible to gauge. And for that, her commitment, willingness to share, and willingness to learn can never be overstated. Moreover, her works will serve as monuments to the manner in which she dedicated her life and art.



Figure 55. Baca as participant and artistic initiator. Image Courtesy of Judy Baca and SPARC.

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SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF ARTWORK: JUDITH F. BACA

Mi Abuelita 1970 MURAL

20 ft. x 35 ft. Acrylic on cement. Located in Hollenbeck Park band shell. Mural developed with a twenty youth team “Las Vistas Nueva” from four neighborhoods in conflict in East Los Angeles. Sponsored by the local community and Summer Programs for disadvantaged youth, City of Los Angeles.

Las Tres Marias 1976 MIXED MEDIA

Used originally as a performance piece in 1976, each of the three panels is 68”x16” and 2.5” deep, with a red velvet exterior “tuck and rolled” to resemble a low rider car. The center panel, a mirror, creates an optical illusion placing the viewer between two images; the 1940’s “pachuca” and the “chola” of the 1970’s. First exhibited in 1976 at the Women’s Building, then exhibited in the winter of 1990 at UCLA’s Wight Art Gallery, “CARA: Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation.” In 1998, “Las Tres Marias” was added to the permanent collection at the Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American Art. Currently it is being featured in the internationally traveling exhibit “Arte Latino: Treasures from the Smithsonian American Art Museum” 9/00 – 01/03.

The Great Wall of Los Angeles 1976-PRESENT MURAL

Located in the Tujunga Wash flood control channel of the LA County Flood Control District in the San Fernando Valley, the “Great Wall,” painted with acrylic paint on cast concrete, stretches 13 ft. high and 2,400 ft. long on the interior of the channel. This mural, already the longest in the world and still growing, is a narrative depicting California’s multicultural history from prehistoric times through the 1950’s, where it now ends. A participatory process directed by Judith F. Baca and involving over 400 youth, 100 scholars and 40 assisting artists on the long mural. Research and design for the 1960’s, 70’s, 80’s, and 90’s sections are in progress on a virtual internet site and UCLA’s ATS Visualization Portal. Proposed designs for the Great Wall extensions are in progress with scholars, UCLA students and community members, and are placed on the site for public review. Sponsored by the City, County, State and Federal Government, as well as the Jewish Community Foundation, California Council on Humanities, National Endowment for the Arts, Animating Democracy: The FORD Foundation Rockefeller PACT Fund and other individual and corporate donors.

Uprising of the Mujeres 1979 MURAL PANELS

8ft x 24ft. acrylic on wood. A portable mural exploring the empowerment and leadership of women. Exhibited at Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, the Hollywood Bowl, Nelson Fine Arts Center, Arizona, Montgomery Gallery Claremont and other sites. Currently on long term display at SPARC. Sponsored by the California Arts Council.

Hitting the Wall: Women in the Marathon 1984 MURAL

20ft x 100ft mural. Acrylic on cast concrete. Located at the 4th Street off-ramp of the Harbor Freeway in Los Angeles. Sponsored by the Olympic Organizing Committee for the 1984 Olympics.

World Wall: A Vision of the Future Without Fear, 1986 – 2003 MURAL PANELS

Internationally traveling installation mural, comprised of eight 10 ft. x 30 ft. portable mural panels on canvas. Four murals developed and painted by Professor Baca. Highlighted previous exhibition sites include the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C., Joensuu, Finland and Gorky Park in Moscow, Russia. The theme of this piece explores the material and spiritual transformation of a society toward peace. As the World Wall travels, a new panel is added by a native artist from each country the installation visits. The most recent additions to the World Wall include a panel completed by an Israeli-Palestinian team at California State University Monterey Bay in April of 1998 and a panel by the Mexican team in 2002.

Guadalupe Mural Project, 1990 MURAL PANELS

A four-panel mural 9ft x 9ft each on the history and future of Guadalupe, California. Commissioned by County of Santa Barbara Arts Commission and developed with local participants of the farm working town of Guadalupe, California. Located in Guadalupe City Hall.

La Memoria De Nuestra Tierra: Colorado 2001 DIGITAL MURAL

10ft x 55ft Hand painted and digitally generated mural on aluminum substrate. Situated in Denver International Airport's central terminal, "The Memory of Our Land" explores Chicano/Mexicano history of the southwest, in particular the passage through El Paso, the "Ellis Island" of the Southwest, of the artist's grandparents in the 1919-23 Mexican migration north to Colorado. Sponsored by Denver International Airport Public Art program.

Cesar E. Chavez Monument 2006-11 PUBLIC MONUMENT

"Arch of Dignity, Equality and Justice," Monument Unveiling and Dedication September 2008, San Jose State University. 25ft Arch containing six Byzantine Tile murals, plaza with mosaic tiles, and six 'metate' benches. Began production in 2005. Sponsored by San Jose State University Art Committee.

The Robert F. Kennedy Memorial, 2010 MURAL

The Ambassador Hotel, located on Wilshire Blvd at mid-city, Los Angeles, CA is the new RFK LEARNING CENTER for K-12. The school's media center, formerly the ballroom, is the sight

of Judy Baca's two-mural memorial to RFK, a Senator who is revered as a leader of the ideals of hope and compassion and an advocate for the equality of all people.

A. **“Tiny Ripples of Hope,”** the first of two murals in the media center of the new Robert F. Kennedy Learning Center. Golden hands of hope raise Kennedy into the night sky.

B. **“Seeing Through Others Eyes,”** In the second of the two murals, a lotus blossom determines the composition of the mural both formally and conceptually. Each petal represents the most important issues we, as a society, must face, as delineated by Robert F. Kennedy: Environment, Intolerance, Poverty, Education, Health, and War.

Miguel Contreras Learning Complex 2010- 12 DIGITAL MURAL

“La Gente del Maize” 18ft x 33ft Digital Mural sponsored by the Miguel Contreras Foundation, installed in a cafeteria centrally located on the Miguel Contreras Learning Complex grounds. Directed by Judy Baca and SPARC at the request of Maria Elena Durazo, of the AFL-CIO in collaboration with the UCLA Labor Center, Professors Kent Wong and Janna Shaddock Hernandez, the Miguel Contreras Learning Complex (MCLC) High School Students and participating UCLA students. Commemorating the legacy of labor leader Miguel Contreras while visually representing the issues affecting the students of the Center, who come from the local area. Funding from Miguel Contreras Foundation and Local 11.

“The Extraordinary Ordinary People” 2010-13 DIGITAL MURAL

“The Extraordinary Ordinary People” Working with local community to produce a 10x60ft work on the most diverse city in the country, installed in the Richmond Civic Center in Richmond, CA. Sponsored by the Richmond Public Art Program and the Richmond Fine Arts Center, installed September 2013.