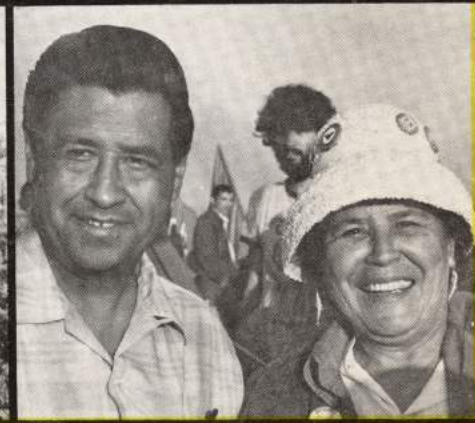
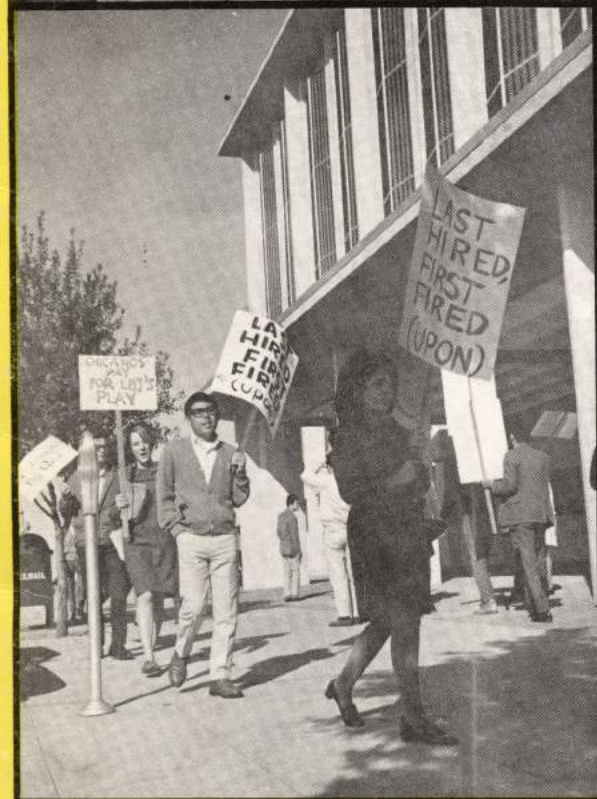




NUESTRAS RAÍCES: *The Mexican Community Of The Central San Joaquin Valley*



The Mexican Community In The Valley 1950-1960

As soldiers became civilians once again, they were joined by others in the quest for opportunity. The Mexican community was once again "replenished" by the arrival of new Mexican immigrants. Immigrants such as Juan Zavala, Anselmo Rodriguez, and Jesus Arvizu, who were looking for a better life. Mr. Arvizu remembers working for 85¢ an hour when he arrived and worked in Fowler packing houses. The Valley also witnessed the settlement of Mexicans from other states, particularly Texas and Arizona. Such was the case of Nieves Marcel, whose family wanted to escape the poverty in Texas, and Angel Castro who brought his family from Arizona. The political, social, and economic changes that swept the Valley held notable consequences for these new immigrants and for the rest of the Mexican population. Most of these developments had positive results, but not all was bright in the San Joaquin.

The growth of agriculture slowed after the war. Furthermore, the effects of mechanization cut deeply into work patterns of farmworkers. Newcomers, in particular from places like Texas, often farmworkers displaced by farm mechanization, came to California in search of improving their economic conditions. School age children continued to work every summer in the Valley's fields, or as in the case of Lupe Predez, to trek to San Jose to pick prunes and other crops.⁷³

But for certain families, the Valley offered disappointment as well as hope. Antonio Huerta of Reedley, recalled negative attitudes directed against Mexican children. As a youngster, he remembered the ridicule he underwent for eating his tacitos (or burritos as Americans call them), that forced him at times to hide during lunch, and his Spanish speaking abilities failed to impress his teachers. Years later, after returning from a lengthy stay in Mexico, Antonio Huerta returned to the Reedley area with his young wife only to witness his children suffer some of the same treatment. But his children persevered, including his son, Tony, who would become head engineer for a construction firm in Fresno.⁷⁴

Incidents continued to take place that left bitter memories. Hortencia Gonzales felt the sting of prejudice more than she would care to remember. Understandably, she would be among the many people of Mexican descent who would struggle

in later years to end the hurt and humiliation of prejudice.⁷⁵

On the other hand, if only gradually, change occurred in the school experiences of Mexican children. As Juan Diaz observed:

I think there are still some prejudices. Schooling, when I was going to school, if you could keep up and were fortunate enough to have some teachers who were interested in your learning, you were given direction. If not, you were sent to auto shop, wood shop, body shop, metal shop; you were sent to all the shop classes. I was one of the fortunate ones; my teachers tried to give me direction.⁷⁶

Thus, throughout the Valley, and most notably in its larger towns, Mexicans "crossed the tracks". Social and cultural patterns also changed as a result, particularly among the second and third generations. Mexican children, for example, increasingly attended schools that were more integrated, and childhood experiences often varied from the past.

The *barrios* were usually renewed by incoming newcomers. *Tejanos and Nortenos*, particularly, arrived in large numbers in the late '50s and early '60s (from Texas and northern Mexico). In this respect, the *recien llegados* tended to rejuvenate the old *barrios* socially and culturally.

Subtleties in culture were often reflected in the mass media, entertainment and social gatherings. If many Mexicans turned increasingly to American popular culture—from hula hoops to rock music—Mexican customs, music and dance persisted, sustained by the older generation and invigorated by the arrival of *Tejanos, Nortenos, and de los del otro lado*.

Some aspects of cultural and social life remained relatively unchanged. Hector Abeytia, for instance, learned from his older brothers and sisters the "rules" of dating - rules that continued to emphasize traditional ways. Few dates were made without parental permission.⁷⁷ Romance at times was served regardless of the location or situation. As Mrs. Mercedes Gonzalez recounted, "Since we used to pick cotton in rows, you could pick a row right next to the boy that you went with. . . You were working and talking at the same time."⁷⁸ Mexican workers found their days lightened somewhat by these sources of entertainment.



Luis and Carmen Moreno in 1944. By 1958, Luis Moreno had composed over 350 songs.

Juan Mercado announcing 16 de Septiembre activities at the Palomar Ballroom.

In 1949, KGST *La Mexicana*, began broadcasting in Fresno. Pioneered locally by Juan Mercado, Spanish Language radio derived most of its material from Mexico. Musical selections initially mirrored those popular in Mexico. *Musica ranchera*, *boleros*, *mariachis* dominated and its performers enjoyed a large audience: Trio Los Panchos, Jorge Negrete, Pedro Infante, El Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlan.

Fortunately for the Valley, Luis and Carmen Moreno arrived in 1952, and decided to stay. The composer of over 350 songs, Luis Moreno, along with his wife, were perhaps the most popular duet for nearly a decade in California. Internationally recognized, and longtime performers of the then famous Jardin Canales, Luis and Carmen Moreno forged a musical legacy that few will forget who enjoyed their singing throughout the '50s. Their daughter, Carmen Moreno, is now carrying on the family singing tradition.⁷⁹

Eventually, the diversity of the geographical origins of the Valley's Mexican population emerged in the selections of Mexican DJ's on KGST, KXEX, and on a host of Valley stations that featured Mexican radio programs. With the increase of *nortenos* and *tejanos*, "border music" surged in popularity—Los Alegres de Teran, Los Tigres del Norte, Ramon Ayala, Los Huracanes, and later, Little Joe y la Familia and Estevan Jordan. The diversity of the Mexican community was particularly evident at large social festivities where the range of differences was signified by the spectrum of musical styles that were frequently represented. Thus, movies, media and music acted as cultural barometers to

the social complexity of the Mexican community.

In 1947, a small group of people met in the basement of a church to discuss the formation of a club of military veterans of Mexican descent. The pride of that group was eventually translated into the establishment of VFW Post 8900. Though open to all veterans, the group remained essentially Mexican in composition. Using resources generated by the organization, the Post developed a scholarship program for students that helped scores of young Mexican people to achieve a higher education. Other organizations emulated the efforts of the VFW 8900 in providing aid to the community.⁸⁰

The "G.I. generation" therefore played a key role in the effort to lessen, if not erase, the barriers to mobility posed by prejudice, discrimination, and ignorance. "When alot of us returned from the service," Luis Segura noted, "this movement began."⁸¹ Though the efforts were not essentially political, "the thrust was organizing people to serve the community and, of course, to serve the community through participation." In Sanger, returning soldiers of Mexican descent formed the core of the Latin American Club "where we began to look into the future," as Zack Uribes noted, "and say, what do we need, where can we fit, what can we do as members of the community now."⁸² From that group and its efforts, Sanger elected its first Mexican-American city councilman, Luis Segura.

The 1950s provided people of Mexican descent, especially the wartime generation, the opportunity to work toward solving the problems facing their communities: the lingering prejudice, the persistence

of an attitude that denigrated those who were culturally different. Julia Balderas recalled the discrimination of the past, e.g., the nights that Mexicans could not attend certain movie theaters. But the acceptance of such practices lessened, what had been tolerated grudgingly became increasingly unacceptable.

Abundio Balderas cited several discriminatory incidents and one, in particular, where a returning Chicano war veteran refused to except discrimination and the use of segregated bathrooms on the job.

Habia mucha discriminacion. Una vez fui a tomarme un vaso de cerveza y me cobraron doble. Un muchacho dijo que habia preguntado por que y le dijeron que porque tenian que tirar el vaso donde tomabamos nosotros (los Mexicanos). Y los teatros tenian divididas las bancas, un lado para los blancos y el otro lado para los Mexicanos. Era una discriminacion muy clara. . . Tambien cuando comenze a trabajar en una compania aqui, tenian dos departamentos de escusados y tenian dos letreros—uno decia para Mexicanos y el otro para blancos. Hasta que un muchacho, era veterano de la guerra, vino y vio los anuncios alli y los quito y los tiro. Pero nadien dijo nada. Despues con el tiempo, un mayordomo dijo, pues, para que queremos dos departamentos de escusado cuando no necesitamos mas que uno. Despues, ya todos ibamos donde era para los blancos. Desde entonces, cambio toda la situacion.⁶³

Returning Mexican American war veterans could not accept inequality and injustice in their own country, when so many had fought and died to guarantee justice and democracy for other countries.

II

The pressures of Americanization increased. Yet, in spite of the pressures of "Americanization", Mexican families did not forsake their culture easily. Many have recounted the *barrio* teachers of Mexico's folkloric music and dances. Other customs also continued to be observed, from the parades on the 16 de Septiembre to the enactment of the story of the Virgen de Guadalupe.⁶⁴

Mexican Americans, however, especially during this time, were pressured to forget their Mexican culture. The rivalry between the U.S. and Russia sparked a wave of nativism that left many fearful, unsure, and concerned with who were "real" Americans. Thus, some politicians manipulated such attitudes to make allegations without evidence; allegations of "communist tendencies" that ruined careers and lives. Others focused their anxieties toward foreigners, e.g., Mexican immigrants, such as the Mexican "wetbacks".

Cold war politics were not unknown in Fresno's Mexican community. Many remember well the extre-

mism of the period, although much abuse of Mexicans went unreported. Thus, while McCarthyism and its hysteria caught the headlines, "Operation Wetback" generated fears in many Mexican neighborhoods throughout the Southwest, including Fresno.⁶⁵ Julia Balderas recalled the impact of the frustration of people, that turned at times on Mexicans.

I remember one night they (immigration officers) came and woke us up and tried to take my dad. . . they didn't bother to knock, they came in with the butt of their big rifles and they knocked down the door into our house. We felt like we had no rights. I remember, as a child, just getting under the table, just scared to death, because they'd come in with those great big guns and they'd point them at my father.⁶⁶

As it turned out, Mr. Balderas was an American citizen.

But the abuse of Mexican people would not go unchallenged. The winds of change appeared as awareness led more and more people to question practices of the past. Many Mexicanos in Fresno remember their own perceptions gradually beginning to be critical of the treatment of Mexicans in American society. The seeds of the Chicano movement had been sown.⁶⁷



The Chicano Community In The Valley 1960-1980

I

The period 1960-1980 constituted a very significant era in the history of the Mexican American community in the central San Joaquin Valley. During these crucial decades, the majority of today's leaders were educated and began their careers. The gains for the Mexican population in general were impressive. As Mexican Americans found steadier jobs, children stayed in school longer, graduated more often, and went on to accomplishments uncommon to earlier generations. By 1960, over 55% of the Mexican population of Fresno County, for example, worked in jobs outside of agriculture. Only 5% were in professional positions, but the seeds had been sown. In 1970, only 30% of the Mexican labor force remained tied to agriculture as the number of Mexican professionals more than doubled.⁸⁸

In two decades, the Mexican community had made important strides—despite immigration that tended to deflate figures on income, educational attainment and occupational advance. Nonetheless, in spite of the large influx of poor immigrants and migrants, the earnings of Mexican families increased nearly 100% between 1960 and 1970.⁸⁹

Many families faced socio-economic disadvantages when they first arrived in the Fresno area. However, despite these disadvantages, many were able to achieve success. One such family was the Garcia family of Clovis.

Octavio Garcia's first passion was, and remains, music. Musicians rarely find immediate success. Don Octavio toiled for years in southern Texas to make ends meet, often working all day, then playing music at night. After the war, the family began an annual trek to California to work in the fields of the San Joaquin Valley. In the 1950s, the Garcias finally settled down in the Clovis area. Octavio Garcia recounts with evident pride that he found time to teach music to his children—Eladio, Alonso, Beto, and Maria—despite the poverty the family initially suffered in the labor camps of Arvin, Lamont, Del Rey and Clovis.

The family formed a *conjunto* and began to play at labor camp gatherings where their knowledge of *tejano* (Texas) music proved popular with local and migrant farmworkers alike. For a man who had played in the best orchestras in southern Texas, practicing in a tent and performing in dusty camps may have been occasionally discouraging—but Don

Octavio and his children persevered. Their talent soon became known beyond the labor camps: clubs and organizations began to call: the *conjunto* expanded and added new members; and leadership of the band passed to son, Beto. By 1965, Don Octavio had climbed the ladder of musical success. In that year, Beto Garcia y los "GG's" were featured at the Valley's new center of Mexican music and dance—the Rainbow Ballroom of Fresno. The Garcia family's musical success was duplicated in other ways. Beto, a high school dropout, returned to school and ultimately earned a master's degree; and Maria futhered her education at the University of Texas at Austin.

Beto Garcia and the "GG's" continue to play throughout the Valley. With hands hardened with years of work, Octavio Garcia still plays his saxophone, flanked by Beto, and now his grandchild, Beto Jr. Sixty years of being a musician have left their mark, but Don Octavio also has left the Valley his own legacy.

There were many other families, who started from very poor and very humble beginnings, but who sacrificed a great deal so that their children could become better educated and thus be able to obtain better jobs. For example, the Manuel and Virginia Lopez family, whose daughters Irene and RoseMarie became college graduates and professionals and whose son Stephen became a businessman. The Tanis and Ofelia Ybarra and the Gregorio and Gregoria Saragoza families, whose children also went on to obtain university degrees. Many of these children have fulfilled the dreams of their parents, parents who only had, at the most, elementary school educations. The permanent settlement of migrant workers, such as the Garcia's, the Lopez's, the Ybarra's and the Saragoza's, signified important shifts within the Mexican community.

II

Perhaps one of the most important aspects of the '60s was a resurgence of Chicano organizations, and the creation of many new ones, formed to deal with the problems which had confronted Mexican Americans for years. Some of these problems were in areas such as employment, housing, and education.

In housing, certain residential areas were inaccessible to Mexicans. For example, in 1925, a Fresno

newspaper carried an advertisement that read:

. . . Normal Villa, Fresno's choicest suburban property will be sold under rigid restrictions- this is a point we cannot emphasize too strongly. Those who buy in Normal Villa will be fully protected from resale of property to undesirables.

Twenty years later, property agreements continued to include provisions which would keep certain ethnic groups and races out of subdivisions, such as the Fig Garden area.⁹²

In the past, educational experiences for Chicanos have also been negative and the remnants of past attitudes have sometimes affected the present attitude towards Chicano students. Julie Velasquez, for example, noted that these attitudes are reflected in the type of counseling students receive.

I think, sometimes, some teachers and counselors have a preconceived idea of how a student is going to be. And, if a student is not given any type of counseling to really show them the right direction, then they can lose interest in school. I think that is one of the reasons we have so many drop-outs. If kids aren't put in the right classes, where they can use their potential, they can lose interest in school.⁹³

III

The progress of the community inevitably stimulated political repercussions. After fighting in World War II and Korea, Mexicans were much less tolerant of bias. Understandably, Chicanos responded to the challenges posed by persistent prejudice. Throughout the Southwest, Mexicanos organized to augment their political recognition and to exercise their civil rights. In fact, the 1954 Brown decision (disallowing the segregation of children in public schools by race), was based in part on the Mendez case of 1947, that found that the segregation of Mexican children in California schools was unconstitutional. The 1950s forged an activism that precipitated new organizations, a sense of collective purpose, and a determination to end discrimination against Mexican people.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the 60s was that Chicanos began to develop a philosophy of nationalism. Mexican Americans were now proud of being Chicanos/Mexicanos. It was a response to centuries of oppression and discrimination. Not knowing their history and their culture, Chicanos now asserted their spirit and took pride in their Raza.

There was a resurgence of national organizations, such as the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), which had been founded in 1928, and the G.I. Forum which had started in the 1940's. These organizations were dedicated to fighting against the discrimination directed at Chicanos/

Mexicanos. Many new organizations were also created to deal with the diverse problems confronting Mexicanos. An example of some of these organizations and the areas they worked in, include the following:

Politics-The Mexican Political Association (MAPA) and La Raza Unida Party.

Education-Association of Mexican American Educators, Asociacion Educativa de Padres, and the National Association for Bilingual Education, La Raza Studies at California State University, Fresno and at Fresno City College, Universidad de Aztlan, and Universidad de Campesinos Libres.

Students-Mexican American Student Confederation, United Mexican American Students, Mexican American Youth Organization, and Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan (MECHA).

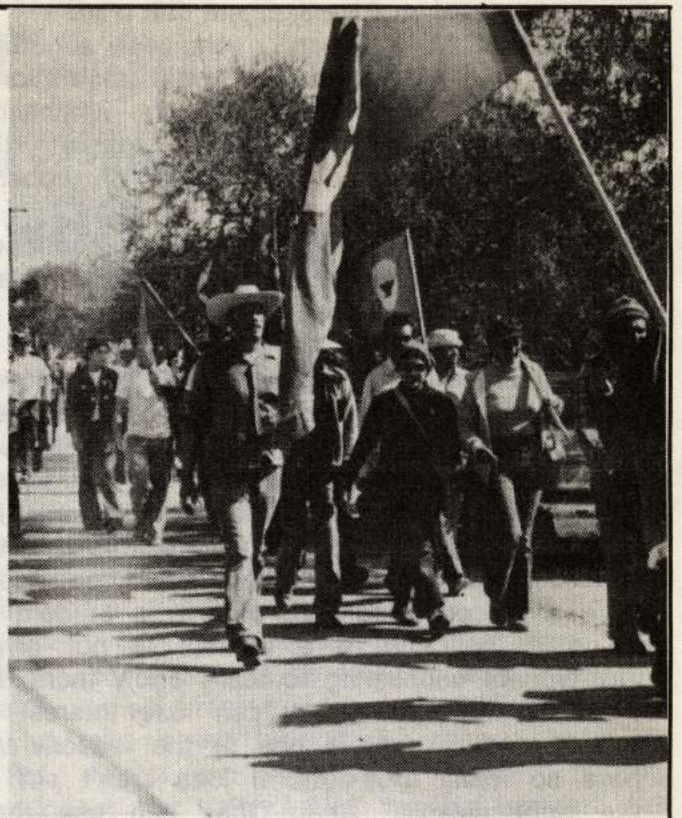
Workers-The United Farmworkers of America and many workers unions established in other industries.

Women-League of Mexican American Women, Las Adelitas, and Comision Femenil Mexicana Nacional.

Civil Rights-Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF), and the National Council of La Raza.

Emergence Of Chicano Leaders

We have many great and courageous people who have fought for the rights of Chicanos. In addition to the thousands of individuals who have worked tirelessly in many organizations, there have been several individuals who obtained national recognition in their attempts to achieve justice and equality. They will be mentioned since their efforts had an impact on the growing awareness among Chicanos in Fresno as well. In the state of New Mexico, Reis Lopez Tijerina championed the rights of Chicanos and their claims to the land grants. In Colorado, Rodolfo Corky Gonzales fought for the civil rights of Chicanos and founded an organization known as the Crusade for Justice. Jose Angel Gutierrez, in the state of Texas, challenged the political system and founded the La Raza Unida Party. Under this banner, many Chicanos won election in their local city and county governments. Two of the most successful and highly recognized leaders are Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta, who have championed the rights of the campesino. Chavez, Huerta, and the United Farmworkers organization have fought for better living conditions, higher wages, and dignity and hope for the farmworker.



HUELGA and SI SE PUEDE became well-recognized terms as many Chicanos participated in the movement for economic and educational equality.

Creation of similar organizations and the development of leadership also occurred in Fresno in the 60's, and has continued to the present. With the 1960 national election, Chicanos were in a position to exercise much greater political clout than in the past. The active participation of Chicanos in the campaign yielded the formation of political organizations, with the Mexican American Political Association perhaps the most prominent in the Valley. It was not long before the Mexican community produced its own political candidates.

As the 1960s unfolded, Spanish-surnamed persons increasingly appeared in many areas of endeavor—law, education, medicine, business. Not surprisingly, the financial resources of the Mexican community swelled in the wake of its advance. Initially, "ethnic" businesses dominated the enterprises founded by Mexicans. However, as the 1970s approached, Mexican businesses went beyond tortilla factories, Mexican restaurants and panaderias (bakeries). The number of businessmen ultimately stimulated the formation of Fresno's Latin American Businessmen's Club. Its roster clearly demonstrated the wide-ranging economic interests held by Mexican businesses.

In May 1973, Pacifica Federal Savings and Loan received its charter. Primarily organized by Mexican Americans, the financial institution provided a key symbol of the progress of the Mexican community. Eventually, Pacifica attracted the interest of San Diego Federal Savings and Loan, and became a part of that Association, whose larger assets and resources could better serve the Valley in general, and the Mexican community in particular. Still, the significance of Pacifica remained: the Mexican community had come a long way.

The election of Al Villa to the Fresno City Council (1971), and Armando Rodriguez to the Fresno County Board of Supervisors (1972), served only to confirm the ascent of the Mexican American community. By the '80s, the Valley contained over 50 Spanish-surnamed elected officials, virtually all of them of Mexican descent. These officials included Leonel Alvarado, Fresno City Councilman, Mayor Victor Lopez of Orange Cove, Mayor Raul Martinez of Parlier, Mayor Tanis Ybarra of Sanger, and Mayor Alex Valdez of Mendota. Women were also elected into office, as exemplified by Councilwoman Socorro Davila of Sanger.

IV

How have the '60s and the ensuing years been perceived by the Chicanos in Fresno, and what do they think of the changes that have occurred? In terms of an individual who has done a great deal on behalf of Chicanos, Cesar Chavez is most often mentioned. Sra. Isabel Hernandez stated that "when we started hearing about Chavez, I thought

it was a very good thing. I had worked in the fields. . . I can remember working for long hours and for very low wages, there were no bathrooms in the fields, just nothing. So I thought it was about time that somebody came up with different ideas and got people to stick together, because if you don't stick together, it's just not going to work."⁹⁴ Mrs. Obdulia Huerta also felt Cesar Chavez and his union was very beneficial for the Mexicano workers. As she states, "Yo si consideraba muy importante una union porque asi el trabajador del campo podia tener voz. Porque en muchas ocasiones yo miraba que habia mucha discriminacion. Cuando menos el Mexicano debe ser, mas bien un trabajador, debe de ser tratado como persona humana."⁹⁵ Many individuals from the Fresno area, such as Jessie De La Cruz and Higinio Sanchez participated in the Farmworkers' Union movement. Mrs. De La Cruz and Mr. Sanchez both worked as organizers for the Union, and as Mr. Sanchez states, he traveled from Fresno to Delano and to many towns in between during the days of organizing.⁹⁶

Raul Sanchez and Angel Castro, like many Mexicanos in the Fresno area, are grateful to Cesar Chavez for giving them hope for a better future. As Mr. Sanchez stated, "Yo le agradezco el que haigamos tenido una ventana por donde asomarnos ha mejores horisontes."⁹⁷

In general, many Fresno area Chicanos believe that the Chicano movement, which started in the 60's, was very beneficial to themselves as individuals and to the Chicano community as a whole. As Joe Trejo commented, "I think the Chicano movement was way overdue. It makes me proud to see the end result, which is people getting ahead, getting an education. Look at California State University, you have alot of Chicanos working out there now."⁹⁸ To Jessie DeLa Cruz, the Chicano movement was the "turning point" in her life.

It was the turning point in my life because I became involved. I wanted to know what the news were, what they were saying, what was being done, what I could do, and so I became involved. First, by becoming the first woman organizer for the United Farmworkers and being in charge of the first hiring hall, then in 1967, I registered for the first time to vote. Then I became a registrar because I felt a need to go out and talk to people about voting. We'd go out in groups, way out to where nobody ever went, to talk to people about registering to vote and I got alot of people registered and they voted. The '60s were great years for us. We learned how to defend ourselves and even though we've made great strides, we still have a long way to go."⁹⁹



SENTIMENTOS Magazine

City Councilman Leonel Alvarado, UFW President Cesar Chavez, Assemblyman Art Torres, and Secretary of the California Department of Health and Welfare, Mario Obledo, at a Testimonial Dinner for Mr. Obledo in Fresno.



SENTIMENTOS Magazine

Supporters and newly elected Sanger City Council members celebrating on the eve of their election victory. Left to right, Attorney Robert Perez, Mayor Pro Tem Jess Marquez, Councilwoman Socorro Davila, Mayor Tanis Ybarra, and Mayor Victor Lopez of Orange Cove.

According to Hortencia Gonzales, the Chicano movement made very positive contributions. "I think people that are against it, it is only because they don't understand it. It's like taking a language and not really comprehending the culture. You learn words but you don't know what the people are really about. If you don't know what Chicanos are all about, you're not going to understand it."¹⁰⁰ Mr. Antonio Huerta felt "que el movimiento era bueno, era bueno que los muchachos se defendieran en esa forma." Mrs. Obdulia Huerta also felt "que era justo y bueno porque en años anteriores el Mexicano no tenia ninguna voz."¹⁰¹ Dr. Theresa Perez probably summarizes what a lot of people have gone through as a result of the Chicano movement.

The '60s had a profound effect on my life. I grew up as a Mexican in a very conservative community. We didn't interact with a lot of people. We were very marginal to the society. Even when I went through school I hung around with Mexican kids, I never dated an American boy. Well, we used to call them that, we were the Mexicans and they were the Americans. I never realized that I was an American, too. During the '60s there was an awareness that we really were part of this society, because up until then we had felt very marginal in this society. During the '50s, we sort of strayed from being Chicano or Mexican and we were moving into the middle class. The '60s halted this sort of straying into the middle class. It made us aware of ourselves as having something really positive to offer, that those differences had really something profound to offer society, and it changed all of us. All my friends. I think a philosophy was beginning to emerge about a sense of justice, but not in a collective sense of who we were. That's what the '60s gave us. It gave us direction and a sense of unity and collectiveness.¹⁰²

V

Chicana Women in the Movement

Strong women have always been a part of Mexican culture. Not only were they an integral part of the Chicano movement that intensified in the '60s, but they have, from the beginning, participated in the struggles of Mexicanos/Chicanos. Chicanas have had leadership roles in many mining and farmworker strikes, and in organizing activities in our communities and on university campuses. From Doña Josefa, who fought for Mexican liberation against the Spanish in the 1820's, to Dolores Huerta who fights for the right of farmworkers today, Mexican and Chicana women have a long history of fighting for equality and justice.

Mexicanas in Fresno, like those in other parts of the country have participated in the political, educational, and economic spheres, and have also been a major source of strength in many of our families. While Mexicana/Chicana women have always been portrayed in books and films as passive, weak women, they have, in fact, been very strong individuals, both within the family and outside the home as well.

Sra. Isabel Hernandez recalled that her mother "was ahead of her time." She was very outspoken and she would take care of all the family finances. She did a really good job, too. In a lot of families, the mother would take care of the finances," and this was back in the thirties and forties."¹⁰³

In addition to their many duties at home, many women have always been employed outside the home. As Venancio Gaona stated,

Women have always worked, they just didn't have the jobs that they have now. I know women who worked in the fields, they worked in the packing sheds. Maybe they only worked during the so-called fruit season, but they certainly used to pick cotton, they certainly used to pick potatoes, they used to pick peaches, plums, you name it. They did it alongside with the men and some of them were better than the men. I remember picking cotton out in Arvin, Delano, Pixley, and some of them could pick up to 700 or 800 pounds within a day's time. So women really did work.¹⁰⁴

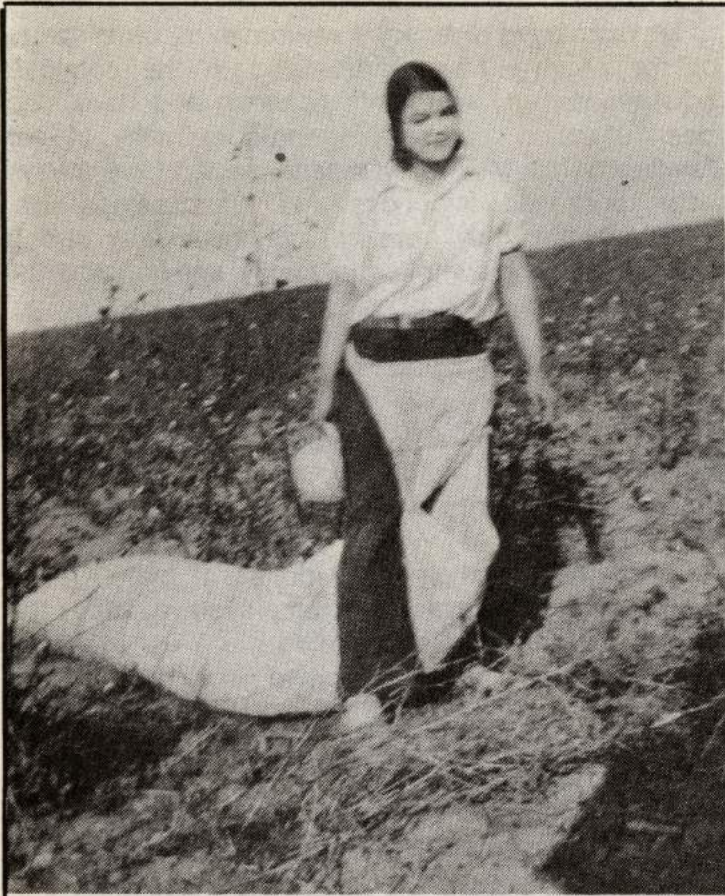
Nina Bautista also recalled that as far back as she can remember, women have worked. "They had to work to make money during the fruit season, because the man alone could not make enough. In those days, even the children worked. They would put them to work, especially in grapes, so they could help their parents make money for school." Mrs. Bautista noted that on several occasions, she drove a tractor while men picked up the raisins.

Many times Mexicanas had to deal with the problems of discrimination in the area of employment. As Andrea Perez recalled:

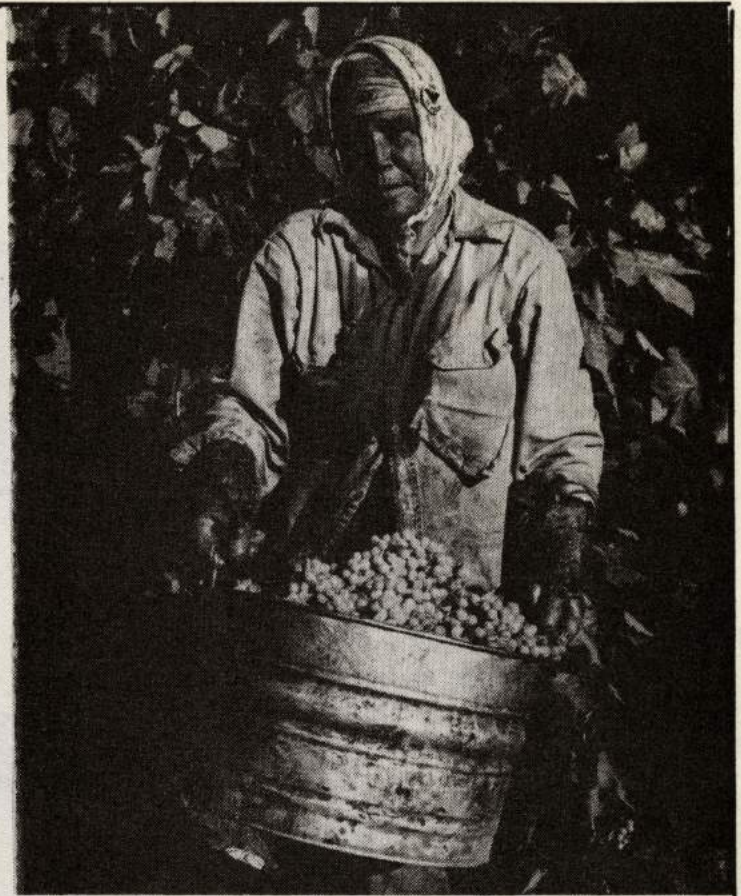
Mexican women did housework as maids, they babysat, they worked out in the fields, they worked in packing houses, and of course, there were some who were very lucky to get department store jobs as cashiers or sales ladies. But, there was a little discrimination during that time. You'd go put an application in for a job, and if you had a Spanish surname, they'd sort of brush you off and say, we don't need any help today.

Beatrice Chavez remembered such an incident:

I went to look for a job and Montgomery Wards had just moved into Fresno. I went to apply for a job as a clerk and there were two persons



A Mexicana picking cotton in the 1920's.



Sixty years later and many women are still enduring the hardships of farm labor.

ahead of me. When my turn came, the girl taking the applications looked at me and seemed as if she was looking me over. Finally, she came out and asked me what nationality I was. I told her I was a Mexican. She hesitated a few minutes and then said, "Well, I'm sorry, we're not taking any more applications." Of course, it was obvious to me she didn't want any Mexicans. So I just told her, "Well, I don't need the job that bad, you can keep it. But I knew at the time that they were being prejudiced and they just didn't want to hire Mexicans. That was the first time that I had ever had the opportunity to find out what it feels like to be discriminated against, and it's not a good feeling."¹⁰⁶

Despite all the problems encountered by Chicanas in the labor market, they have always contributed a great deal to the economic survival of their families. Fidencio Villegas states that his mother and wife, and the other women in their family, have always worked hard and are the basis of their successful business. "Trabajaron mucho y a ellas les debemos mucho del negocio."¹⁰⁷

Mothers are seen as a "mainstay" of family life, and as great motivators of their children. As Juan Diaz states:

My mother's constant drive was for us to always complete our education, not to have to live and

have our children live the type of life we were living. And that was something that was put into us day after day. My mother was a very proud woman. . . There were certain things that would disappoint my mother; one was not graduating from school, two was getting involved with drugs, and three, was you never got a tatoo. If you got a tatoo, she would scrape it off with a razor blade. So, my mother was always very fair with us, but she had her ideas and we better live by them. When I was growing up, mother was the mainstay of our family, she directed how things happened.¹⁰⁸

La mujer Mexicana/Chicana has indeed played a very important role in both family and community life.

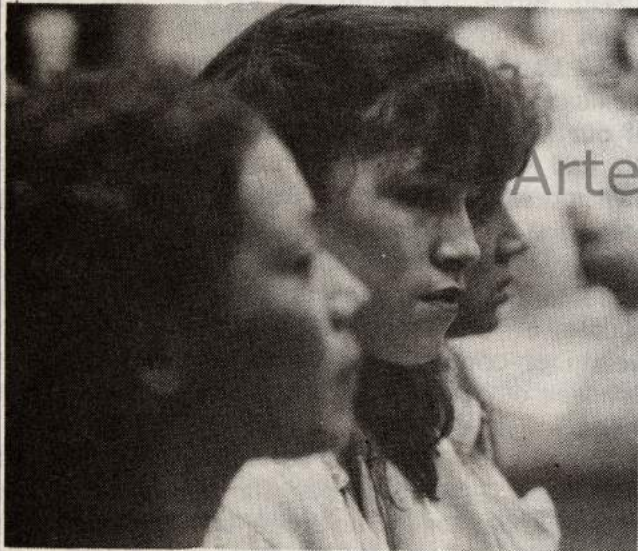
As Marta Cotera has stated in her book, *Diosa Y Hembra*:

. . . the Mexicana has achieved a great deal against terrible odds. The tragedy of a socioeconomic condition as poor as the Chicana's should certainly be compared to the strength, drive, and intelligence which has motivated her involvement in efforts to improve her life and the lives of others.

. . . Every day in every community in the U.S., the Chicana is out there with her family, or on campus, or in the fifth grade, discovering, building and restructuring her life as the need arises.¹⁰⁹



Despite economic hardship, the strength, beauty, and spirit of Mexican and Chicana women has been maintained through the generations.



The Decade of the Eighties

I

Chicanos in this country represent a very diverse group, but we also have many commonalities. We are a bilingual, bicultural people. Most of us speak Spanish. We continue to celebrate the same celebrations given to us by Mexico; the 16th of September, Cinco de Mayo, the Appearance of the Virgen de Guadalupe on December 12th, and Dia de las Madres on May 10th. However, since we are also influenced by the United States, we speak English and we celebrate, as well, the Fourth of July. As Chicanos we are a mixture of people with a diverse history and culture.

We are a proud people who have worked hard and have made many contributions to this society. One of these contributions, Mrs. Huerta believes, is that "la riqueza de este Valle en general, son riquezas que son por el sudor del Mexicano."¹¹⁰ They have worked to make this Valley rich, and not only by their labor in the fields. As Irene Aparicio stated, "Mexicanos have made many contributions to the U.S., ranging from our knowledge of plants and herbs that are important in medicine, to the building of this country."¹¹¹

Larry Luna, a principal in one of the local schools, feels Mexicanos continue to make contributions because "they are now in the medical profession, in the building trades, they are engineers, lawyers, dentists. We continue to make every effort to break into different professions."¹¹² Balvina Padilla Grinstead agrees with this idea. She states, "I think our parents have contributed a lot of hard work, physical work out in the fields. They wanted to provide their children with a better education than they had and through that education we have been able to contribute fine doctors, fine teachers and lawyers. It's very common now to see a doctor's name that is a Spanish surname, where before that was unheard of."¹¹³ Joe Trejo, Deputy Chief of Police, also felt that Mexicanos had contributed in the political arena, with our judges, councilmen, and other elected officials.¹¹⁴ Mercedes Gonzalez agrees with this and stated that one of the biggest contributions made by elected officials, such as Al Villa and Armando Rodriguez, is that they serve as role models for young Chicanos. "The kids can look up to them and feel there is something to strive for. These people started out like most of us, picking cotton, working out in the fields, and yet they went on and got an education and became something."

Al Villa, a Fresno attorney, recalled the times when he, in fact, did have to pick cotton before he went to school in the morning, and then again

after school. He enjoys speaking with young people and wants to provide them with many of the opportunities he never had. He stated:

When we're born, none of us determine who our parents are going to be, whether we are going to live in Huron or Parlier or Beverly Hills. Why should a child be penalized because of his ethnic background or where he was born. We should give them the opportunity to develop as human beings as much as possible and not put blocks or impediments in their paths.¹¹⁵

Dr. Theresa Perez added that the contributions which have been made by Mexicanos need to be recounted to the young so they can develop self-pride and motivation. It is a story of accomplishment that should not be lost or remain untold.

I think we have helped to make the Valley what it is today, one of the richest agricultural areas in the world and I think our contribution has been in labor. We have contributed all our labor for very little pay and we have gotten no benefits from it. Our story in Fresno and in the San Joaquin Valley has not been told and it needs to be told. . . I look back and there's always been outstanding Mexicanos. They added so much to the richness of our lives. There were people who were poets. We had musicians who composed and sang their own music. Mr. Lozano, he always had a printing press and a newspaper. Doña Maria Rivas, who year after year took the children and gave them dancing lessons and never got paid for it. We've had people in our community that have given a wealth of contributions that have gone into the richness of our background. No one knows about them.

That's why I think it's so important to get out this story. I want to see the richness of our background placed in its proper perspective. I want to see our history, our literature, our poetry, our culture displayed somewhere for our children to see. I took our children to Mexico when they were quite young. I wanted them to see that they just didn't spring up from the ground. My grandmother used to tell me, no nacistes de la tierra, tu tienes una historia and they envied us with that idea. So they always made us feel as if we had a very rich heritage, but I never saw it displayed anywhere. I would love to see it in a museum. We've always achieved. We've had a richness of culture that has always been there. We wouldn't be the people we are now if we didn't have that. We have a history. I'm part of a long history, so what we need to know is what went on way back there. We need to do that more because children that are dropping out to school, that feel like failures, they think they just sprung up from the ground. They don't know that they've got this

rich heritage, that the Mexican people have made contributions.¹¹⁶

Hortencia Gonzales reemphasizes Dr. Perez's idea as well. "I know we have made alot of progress and I know that we have contributed tremendously to the growth of this state. I would like to see it in the books, I would like to see It acknowledged. But I think it's going to take writers from our own people to do it, because it's not going to come about by itself."¹¹⁷ It is essential to document our history-our roots-for future generations.

II

Chicanos continue to strive for the betterment of their families, their people and society in general. More and more Chicanos have begun entering colleges and universities, but many more need to attend. Every Chicano parent must encourage his child to obtain a higher education. As Mr. Manuel Lopez states, "Siempre eduque a mis hijas igual que a mis hijos. Mis hijas son las que necesitan la educacion tambien porque ellas son las que van a criar a sus criaturas. Tenemos que salir del fango de ignorancia, es como un fango, es como un quicksand. Se mete uno alli y das vuelta y das vuelta. You may never get out of it but si subes el escalon, pues sus criaturas, they get out, and in turn their children will improve the quality of their lives."¹¹⁸

Alberto Ramirez agrees we can improve our lives on every level, political as well as educational. "There's no reason why we can't have a mayor that's Mexicano. There's no reason why we can't have a senator that's Mexicano. There's no reason why we can't have a city councilman, supervisor, sheriff, or anything else. We can do it if we vote and we unify."¹¹⁹ Politically, Chicanos are becoming stronger than ever before. There are politicians such as Assemblymen Art Torres, Peter Chacon, Richard Alatorre and Senator Jose Montoya, who are strong advocates of Chicano's rights.

However, much remains to be done. Economically, while many Chicanos own business and many more are professionals, a large number of Chicanos are still poor. We have made many gains, but we must not forget the many thousands of Chicanos who have fought, and continue to fight, for better social, economic, and political conditions for La Raza, for our families. In order to continue to do this, as Hector Abeytia notes:

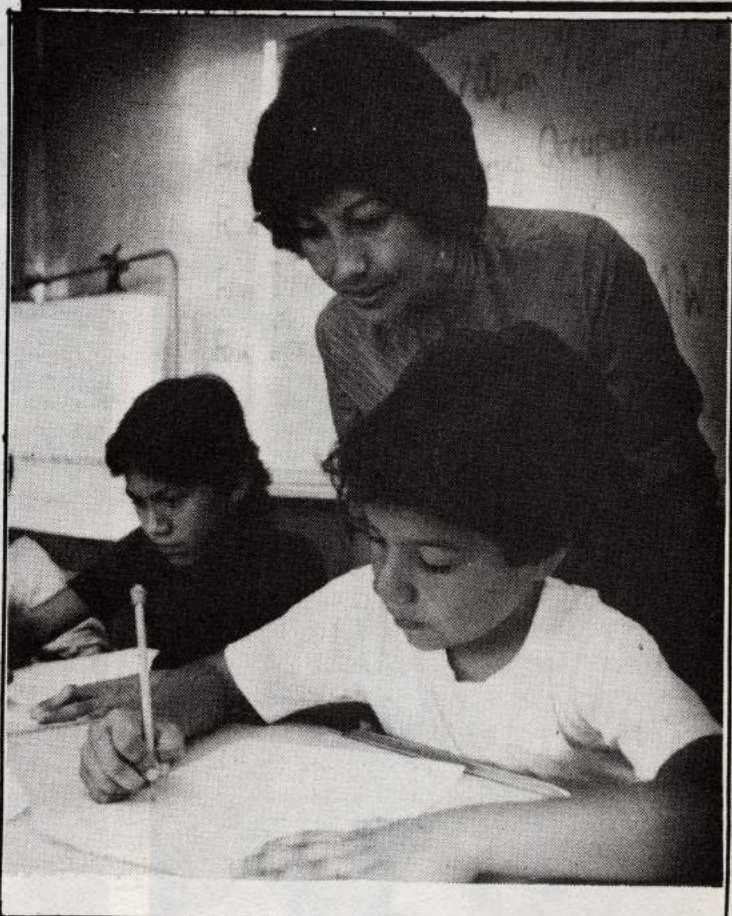
We as Chicanos, should be full time citizens fighting to make equal opportunity a reality. We should concern ourselves with those who do not have jobs and who lack education. We should make sure everyone gets their share of the good things in life. As we go along, we should also keep

in mind that education, economics, and politics play major roles in our communities and that we should be part of everything that is going on, at all times trying to enhance the advancement of Chicanos. Hopefully, we will see many more changes, but nothing will change unless the people themselves become directly involved and committed to bringing about social, economic, and political justice to great numbers of people.¹²⁰

Mexicano, Mexican American, Tejano, Chicano-regardless of the designation-the Mexican community of the Valley has traveled a long and arduous road. Some have achieved great success, others less so, still others have just begun the journey. For a few, the toll of the passage has been too great.

Problems remain. The struggle against poverty persists. Nevertheless, as the record indicates, a proud heritage points to the eventual success of the Mexican people of the Valley. As citizens, as human beings, we can take pride in the progress and perseverance of a people with historically few advantages. Through sacrifice and hard work, they have realized a hope long held by the Mexican ancestors of the people of the San Joaquin Valley.

Ours is a proud heritage. Our history, culture and accomplishments must be passed on to our children, so they may always be proud of who they are.



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Footnotes

1. For a general overview on the historiography of the Mexican in the U.S., see Juan Gomez-Quinones and Luis L. Arroyo, "On the State of Chicano History: Observations on its Development, Interpretations, and Theory, 1970-1974," Western Historical Quarterly 7 (April 1976): 155-185.
2. SEE John F. Bannon, The Spanish Borderlands Frontier, 1513-1821 (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1970).
3. Herbert I. Priestley, ed., A Historical, Political and Natural Description of California by Pedro Fages (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1937): 72.
4. For an overview of Spanish explorations of the Valley, see Donald C. Cutter, "Spanish Exploration of California's Central Valley" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, 1950).
5. On this problem, see Sherburne F. Cook, The Conflict between the California Indian and White Civilization (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976): 1-157.
6. S.F. Cook, "Colonial Expeditions," p. 271
7. On Moraga's exploits, and those of other explorers, see Genevieve K. Magruder, The Upper San Joaquin Valley, 1772-1870 (Bakersfield: Kern County Historical Society, 1950).
8. S.F. Cook, "Colonial Expeditions," p. 271.
9. Wallace D. Smith, Garden of the Sun: (A History of the San Joaquin Valley, 1772-1939) (Los Angeles: Lymanhouse, 1939). Much of this information derives from pp. 76-107.
10. Walton F. Bean, California (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1973): 123.
11. Other Spanish-speaking prospectors, joined Mexican in the search for gold, including Peruvians, and especially Chileans. As late as 1960, the census reported over fifty residents of Chilean ancestry in the Central San Joaquin Valley, 34 in Fresno County. See Carlos U. Lopez, Chilenos in California (San Francisco: R&E Research Associates, 1973): XIX.
12. Robert F. Heizer and Alan F. Almquist, The Other Californians (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971): 145.
13. Paul E. Vander, History of Fresno County (Los Angeles: Historic Record Co., 1919): 89.
14. Heizer and Almquist, The Other Californians, p. 151. For a further view, including the story of Coronel, see Leonard Pitt, The Decline of the Californios (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971).
15. Fresno County Assessment Book, 1856, Woodward Collection, CSU, Fresno.
16. Smith, Garden in the Sun, pp. 217-238.
17. Chester F. Cole, Rural Occupation Patterns in the Great Valley Portion of Fresno County, California (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Nebraska, 1950), p. 138.
18. From 1870 to 1890, Chinese men were the mainstay of the Valley's labor force. Chinese immigration virtually ended, however, in the aftermath of the Exclusion Act of 1882, by which Congress severely limited the entry of Chinese into the U.S. Japanese workers were then used. But again, nativism would ultimately lead to the curtailment of Japanese immigration in 1908. See Reports of the Immigration Commission, Immigrants in Industries, vol. 2, pt. 25 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1911): 568.
19. David J. Weber, ed., Foreigners in Their Native Land (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1973): 225.
20. U.S. Bureau of the Census. U.S. Census of Agriculture: 1909 and 1910, 2:160. Further references to Census data will note the title, year and page number.
21. Census of Agriculture, 1920, 6: 358.
22. As the source of labor diminished through immigration restrictions on the Chinese, and later the Japanese, farmers faced a shortage of cheap labor. In fact, for a time, Japanese composed over 50% of the Valley's farm labor force. See U.S. Census, 1920, 3:109.
23. Immigration Commission, Immigrants in Industries, p. 568. Varden Fuller, in U.S. Congress. Senate Committee on Education and Labor. Violations of Free Speech and Rights of Labor, Hearings, 76th Congress, 3rd Session, January, 1940, pt. 54, Washington, D.C., 1940, pp. 19850-19875.
24. Immigrants in Industries, p. 594.
25. Fuller, Violations of Free Speech, p. 19873.
26. Interview, Isabel Hernandez, Fresno, California, 3 July 1980.
27. Fuller, Violations of Free Speech, p. 19862.
28. Cited in Lamar B. Jones, "Labor and Management in California Agriculture, 1864-1964," Labor History 11 (Winter 1970): 34.
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31. Jones, "Labor and Management in California Agriculture," p. 35.
32. Immigrants in Industries, p. 597.
33. Jones, "Labor and Management in California Agriculture," pp. 35-36.
34. Interview, Fidencio Villegas, Fresno, California, 14 April 80.
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36. Interview, Ignacio Pina, Bakersfield, California, 8 February 80.
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39. Ibid., p. 91.
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41. Interview, Manuel Sierra Lopez, 22 August 1980. Francis Ramirez, 28 April 1980.
42. Interview, Isabel Hernandez.
43. Interview, Hilaria Villegas, Fresno, California, 9 April 1980.
44. Interview, Higinio Sanchez, 19 April 1980. Jose Cortez, 28 August 1980.
45. Interview with Felix Sierra, Fresno, California, 27 June 1979, Statistics on St. Alphonsus based on church records prepared by Yvonne Garcia with the cooperation of Father Lopez.
46. Immigrants in Industries, p. 659.
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54. Interview, Felix Sierra.
55. Interview, Antonia Pacheco Salazar, Selma, California, 23 July 1979.
56. Interview, Felix Sierra.
57. Interview, Antonia Pacheco Salazar, Selma, California, 23 July 1979.
58. Interview, Andrea Perez, Fresno, California, 15 July 1980.
59. Interview, Felix Sierra.
60. Fresno City and Fresno County Directory, 1920 (Sacramento: Polk-Husted Directory Co. 1920).
61. Interview, Antonia Pacheco Salazar.
62. Interview, Luis Segura. Sanger, California, 23 July 1980.
63. Interview, Ignacio Pina. Bakersfield, California, 8 February 1980.
64. Interview, Jose Ramirez, Fresno, California, 26 June 1979.
65. Interview, Emilio Canales.
66. Interview, Fidel Villegas, Fresno, California, 28 June 1979.
67. Interview, Francis Ramirez, Kerman, California, 28 April 1980.
68. Interview, Felicitas Jauregui, Clovis, California, 15 July 1980.
69. Interview, Robert Campos. Also Curtis Prendergast, "Foreigners in Fresno" 1938, Fresno County Library, Fresno, California.
70. Statistics based on agricultural census material for those years.
71. Raul Morin, Among the Valiant (Los Angeles: Borden Publishing Co., 1962).
72. Interview, Alberto Ramirez, Fresno, California, 25 March 1980.
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74. Morin, Among the Valiant, p. 102.
75. Interview, Carmen Uribe. Sanger, California, 27 April 1980.
76. Interview, Julia Baideras. Fresno, California, 20 August 1980.
77. Interview, Robert A. Campos.
78. Interview, Andy Guerrero.
79. Interview, Manuel Contreras.
80. Based on the following interviews:
 - Lupe Prendez, Porterville, California, 23 April 1980.
 - Jesus Arvizu, Finedale, California, 30 April 1980.
 - Nieves Marcel, Sanger, California, 1 May 1980.
 - Angel Castro, Fresno, California, 11 September 1980.
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 - Interview, Antonio Huerta. Reedley, California,

Arte Americas

75. Interview, Hortencia Gonzalez. Fresno, California, 14 July 1980.
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77. Interview, Hector Abeytia. Sanger, California, 14 March 1980.
78. Interview, Mercedes Gonzalez. Fresno, California, 3 April 1980.
79. Interview, Carmen Moreno.
80. Interview, Jose Ramirez.
81. Interview, Luis Segura.
82. Interview, Zack Uribe. Sanger, California, 27 April 1980.
83. Interview, Julia Balderas.
84. Interview, Abundio Balderas. Fresno, California, August 1980.
85. Interview, Andrea Perez. Fresno, California, 15 July 1980.
86. Interview, Theresa Perez. Fresno, California, 28 August 1980.
87. Interview, Theresa Perez.
88. Interview, Julia Balderas. Clovis, California, 22 August 1980.
89. Interview, Irene Aparicio. Fresno, California, 14 July 1980.
90. Interview, Hortencia Gonzales. Fresno, California, 30 September 1980.
91. Interview, Larry Luna. Fresno, California, 30 September 1980.
92. Interview, Larry Luna. Fresno, California, 30 September 1980.
93. Interview, Larry Luna. Fresno, California, 30 September 1980.
94. Interview, Larry Luna. Fresno, California, 30 September 1980.
95. Interview, Larry Luna. Fresno, California, 30 September 1980.
96. Interview, Larry Luna. Fresno, California, 30 September 1980.
97. Interview, Larry Luna. Fresno, California, 30 September 1980.
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99. Interview, Larry Luna. Fresno, California, 30 September 1980.
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101. Interview, Larry Luna. Fresno, California, 30 September 1980.
102. Interview, Larry Luna. Fresno, California, 30 September 1980.
103. Interview, Larry Luna. Fresno, California, 30 September 1980.
104. Interview, Larry Luna. Fresno, California, 30 September 1980.
105. Interview, Larry Luna. Fresno, California, 30 September 1980.
106. Interview, Larry Luna. Fresno, California, 30 September 1980.
107. Interview, Larry Luna. Fresno, California, 30 September 1980.
108. Interview, Larry Luna. Fresno, California, 30 September 1980.
109. Interview, Larry Luna. Fresno, California, 30 September 1980.
110. Interview, Larry Luna. Fresno, California, 30 September 1980.
111. Interview, Larry Luna. Fresno, California, 30 September 1980.
112. Interview, Larry Luna. Fresno, California, 30 September 1980.
113. Interview, Larry Luna. Fresno, California, 30 September 1980.
114. Interview, Larry Luna. Fresno, California, 30 September 1980.
115. Interview, Larry Luna. Fresno, California, 30 September 1980.
116. Interview, Larry Luna. Fresno, California, 30 September 1980.
117. Interview, Larry Luna. Fresno, California, 30 September 1980.
118. Interview, Larry Luna. Fresno, California, 30 September 1980.
119. Interview, Larry Luna. Fresno, California, 30 September 1980.
120. Interview, Larry Luna. Fresno, California, 30 September 1980.

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- Page 14 Taken in the 1920s. Isabel Hernandez.
- Page 16 Railroad worker. Ignacio Pina.
- Page 17 Taken in the 1920s: Clockwise, (a) courtesy of Irene Aparicio, (b) Isabel Hernandez, (c) Angel Castro, (d) Isabel Hernandez.
- Page 19 Fort Washington Elementary School, 1923, Isabel Hernandez.
- Page 21 Sixteenth of September celebrations. Courtesy of Andrea Perez.
- Page 23 Cotton strikers. From the Library of Congress. Courtesy of Jorge Corralejo.
- Page 24 From Raul Morin, Among The Valient.
- Page 25 Singer at Palomar Ballroom. Courtesy of Isabel Hernandez.
- Page 26 Manuel Contreras Orchestra. Courtesy of Manuel Contreras.
- Page 27 Sixteenth of September activities at Palomar Ballroom. Courtesy of Isabel Hernandez.
- Page 28 Demonstration: Courtesy of Sentimientos Magazine.
- Page 29 Cesar Chavez and supporters, Demonstration at CSUF. Courtesy of Sentimientos Magazine.
- Page 30 Elected officials. Courtesy of Sentimientos Magazine.
- Page 32 Cotton worker. Courtesy of Isabel Hernandez. Grape picker.
- Page 33 Courtesy of Jesse de la Cruz.
- Page 34 Clockwise: Courtesy of (a) Isabel Hernandez, (b) Andrea Perez, (c) Ofelia Ybarra, (d,e,f) Teach Project, (g) Jesse de la Cruz
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- Page 37 Courtesy of Sentimientos Magazine and the T.E.A.C.H Project.
- Page 38

Arte Americas



OURS IS A PROUD HERITAGE. OUR HISTORY, CULTURE AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS MUST BE PASSED ON TO OUR CHILDREN, SO THEY MAY ALWAYS BE PROUD OF WHO THEY ARE.

