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**Publication Date**

2015

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Reclaiming our Past: A Critical Race History of Chicana/o Education

In South Central Los Angeles, 1930-1949

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

by

Luliana Alonso

2016

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## **ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION**

Reclaiming our Past: A Critical Race History of Chicana/o Education

In South Central Los Angeles, 1930-1949

by

Lluliana Alonso

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Los Angeles 2016

Professor Daniel G. Solórzano, Chair

This dissertation explores the educational experiences of Chicana/os in the first half of the twentieth century using one of the most ethnically diverse communities in the state of California—South Central Los Angeles—as a case study. Driven by the following questions, my research explored: 1) What were the social and economic conditions of the Mexican community of South Central Los Angeles during 1930-1949? 2) What were the dominant discourses about this population during the period under study? 3) What influences did dominant discourses have in how Chicana/o students experienced schooling during 1930-1949? In answering these guiding research questions, this dissertation places Chicana/o youth at the center of educational policy-making and builds on previous historical scholarship documenting the pervasiveness of racism within and beyond schools. It contributes to our understanding of the link between local discourses of Mexican juvenile delinquency and school district policy and practice.

Drawing on a Critical Race Theory (CRT) in education, this dissertation discusses collective Mexican schooling experiences in South Central Los Angeles by exploring the connections between the social conditions of Mexican families, dominant juvenile delinquency rhetoric and educational policy. I utilize archival research methods, and hone in on quantitative

sources, such as U.S. Census Population Schedules from 1930 & 1940, to illuminate on the qualitative experiences of Mexican students. Pairing U.S. Census data with school district literature, correspondence, photographs, school yearbooks & student newspapers along with special collections such as the Carey McWilliams, Manuel Ruiz, Mexican Voice and LAUSD papers, add depth in understanding how the education of Chicana/o students was rationalized and designed.

This dissertation finds that discourses of deficiency framed youth as deficient in moral character and intelligence, which functioned to justify vocational training programs as a suitable option for Mexican students. Thus, vocational training programs were theorized as curricular examples of structures of deficiency, as they were anchored on the perceived low educational ability of Mexican students. Structures of deficiency also manifested themselves in the ways teachers taught Mexican students. In particular, I argue that the use of intimidation tactics and corporal punishment in the classroom, were manifestations of the structures of deficiency. These practices often used to teach Mexican students, were rooted in deficit notions of academic ability, which deemed these students educable only under the threat of physical violence.

This dissertation of Luliana Alonso is approved.

David G. García

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2016

## **DEDICATION**

*Para mis padres, Leonor y Rigoberto Alonso, mis más grandes maestros. Cada uno de sus sacrificios han sido una lección para mí. Gracias.*

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would not be possible without the support, love and mentorship of my family, friends and teachers.

Throughout this academic journey, I've been lucky to have the unyielding love and support of my parents, Rigoberto and Leonor. Even though at times they didn't understand the graduate school process, they always supported me and never once doubted my ability to succeed. Thank you mom and dad for teaching me about hard work, aspirations and resiliency. I'm lucky to be your daughter. Thank you to my brothers, Mario and Jesse, who have always been there for me, from countless rides to UCLA to archival research support, I appreciate all you do.

To my friend and husband, Miguel, thank you for nursing my academic wounds with your love and constant words of encouragement. You've been a source of light and motivation in the darkest of hours and have taught me to believe in my craft. Thank you for always listening and helping me throughout this process. This dissertation is also yours.

A very special thank you to my committee, that supported my development as a scholar and continue to push my research. In particular, I'm blessed to have Professor Daniel G. Solórzano as a mentor and dissertation advisor. I am thankful for all your patience, inspiration, and brilliance. You believed in me at every step of the way, and for that I am forever grateful. I know I would not be here today without your support. I am also extremely thankful to Professor David G. García for all of his support in the archival research and writing process. Thank you for always thinking of ways to make my dissertation and research stronger. Thank you to Professor Tyrone Howard, whose words of encouragement to press on, reminded me of the importance of my work. Finally, I am also very grateful to Professor Roberto C. Romero, for his guidance and

constant excitement for my dissertation research. You've all have been instrumental in developing my work in ways that I could have not imagined.

Graduate school would have not been the same without my academic hustlas: Michaela J. López Mares-Tamayo and Ryan Santos. Thank you for your friendship and support at every stage of the dissertation process. I've learned so much from both of you and continue to be inspired by your approach to build community. I am forever grateful for your friendship and mentorship. Elvira Abrica, thank you for keeping me sane in this last stage of the process. It's been less daunting and intimidating as we go through it together. I admire your wit and intelligence, and I am honored to be your friend. Special thanks to my graduate school friends and colleagues. Ana Soltero, Iris Lucero, Johnny Ramirez, Yvonne Kwan, Maria C. Olivares, Lauren Ilano, Janet Rocha, Elexia McGovern, Wendy Perez, Mel Bertrand, Daniel D. Liou, Bert Cueva, Jaime L. Del Razo, Nickie Johnson-Ahorlu, Yen Ling Shek and María C. Malagón, each of you have mentored me in many different ways throughout this process and I am truly grateful for it.

Thank you to everyone in Dr. Solórzano's RAC, past and present. Your scholarship and presentations are academically inspiring and refreshing. My colleagues from Dr. García's writing RAC, Tanya Gaxiola, Alma Itzé Flores and Esthela Chavez, along with Ryan Santos and Johnny Ramirez, thank you for all your thoughtful feedback and insightful comments on the early drafts of my findings chapters.

I am also forever indebted to my friends who have kept me grounded and reminded me to smile throughout this process. My Santa Monica College (SMC) family, Rhu Ramirez, Lucy Garcia, Ida Smitiwitaya, Lissette Ramirez, and Steve Santamaria, where would I be without you all? You were instrumental in my academic and personal growth. Thank you for some of my most memorable moments at SMC. My Transfer Summer Program (TSP) friends, we meet 10 years

ago as newly admitted transfer students and have developed such a strong bond and support system. Cyndi Bendezu-Palomino, Isabel Cruz, Gloria Chan, Brenda Pulido, Nancy Gomez, Alex Galicia, Oscar Espino, and Jose Gabriel Noguez, thank you for being a source of motivation and encouragement. You all inspire me to continue to represent for transfer students. Finally, a special shout out to my Demo crew, my high school classmates who have become a symbol of hope and resiliency for the community of South Central Los Angeles. Each of you has kept me rooted to the neighborhood and continuously show me what community cultural wealth looks like. Analit Gatica, Yesenia Osuna, Joan Mendoza, Angel Bautista, Peter Romero, Bryan Villafranco, , Abraham Osuna, Longinos Aquino and Francisco Aquino, thank you for your love and support throughout this journey.

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## **CHAPTER 1 AN INTRODUCTION**

In the summer of 2000, as part of a documentary project for my 11<sup>th</sup> grade film class, a classmate and I set out to uncover the hidden history of South Central Los Angeles. With a camera on hand, we ventured into the obscure past of our very own neighborhood. Not really knowing what to expect, we were surprised when we heard for the very first time, stories about our neighborhood so different and far from the dominant narratives we were accustomed to. Through a series of historical photographs, video footage and interviews with local African American elders who were once jazz musicians of the 1930's, we uncovered the musical history of South Central Los Angeles. One by one, each story embodied the neighborhood's resiliency and resistance. This film project proved to be powerful and transformative in my development as a student and member of this neighborhood. The stories the community elders shared countered the negative stereotypes I had come to believe about South Central Los Angeles. The documentary film project that we created was in essence, the intellectual seed from where this study stems from. Years later and through a different medium, I've set out to explore the Chicana/o<sup>1</sup> roots of South Central Los Angeles, as it involves understanding, re[dis]covering and recreating our past in this same neighborhood. Hence, my quest is to document the educational experiences of Chicana/os in South Central Los Angeles in the first half of the twentieth century to further our understanding of their experiences, their families and community

In his foundational articles on the history of Chicana/o education in the United States, Guadalupe San Miguel (1986, 1987) offers a few suggestions on areas of research that could further develop the field. One of his main suggestions focused on the need for scholarship to address the varying range of experiences "that members of this minority group have had" with schools "in different cities and in different states" (San Miguel, 1987, p. 477). This dissertation research is an attempt to answer this call, by unearthing the educational experiences of

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<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this study, I use the term Chicana/o and Mexican interchangeably to refer to people of Mexican descent.

Chicana/os in South Central Los Angeles, a place not often thought of as a Mexican neighborhood. Furthermore, this same history can provide critical context to understand how Chicana/o students experience schooling today in this same community.

### **Framing Chicana/os in South Central Los Angeles**

Most contemporary history of South Central Los Angeles has largely focused on the African American experience. This has been largely due to the recognition that South Central Los Angeles has been the largest black community in California since the 1900's and was one of only two substantial African American centers in the West (De Graaf, 1970). Yet, the presence of Chicana/os in South Central LA has been rendered invisible in historical accounts. Gloria Miranda (2006) has argued that Chicana/os settled in different parts of Los Angeles and adjacent communities since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, moving eastward across the Los Angeles River, while others followed the railroad tracks southward towards Watts and beyond. The influx of immigrants into downtown Los Angeles created overcrowded quarters at the turn of the century, leading to the movement of people and creations of new barrios (Miranda, 2006). Yet, not much is known about the various neighborhoods Mexicans settled in or their respective population size due to the inaccuracies of the U.S. Census.

According to Michael E. Engh (2001), census enumerators were notoriously inaccurate in tallying the Chicana/o population, but by the 1920's census reported 21,598 Mexicans within the city limits. By 1930's, the total of Mexicans was 97,000 in the city of Los Angeles and 100,000 elsewhere in the county. The federal government's historical classification of Chicana/os as white have further obscured their presence in Los Angeles in general and South Central specifically. The size of this population is more difficult to determine since the Census has not been consistent with defining "Mexican" as a race. For example, the 1930 Census used "Mexican" as a racial category but by the 1940 Census, they did not. Instead, people of Mexican descent were labeled "white" and tallied as such in population counts. Some historians have suggested that the U.S. Census Bureau seriously undercounted the number of Chicana/os in the



Los Angeles area (Leonard, 1964). In a Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) report of 1939, the deception of Census figures are highlighted as they state, “a major racial problem existing in Los Angeles, and one which is not revealed by the census data, is that created by the large number of Mexicans, who are classed as whites by the Census Bureau” (HOLC Report, 1939, p. 7). We can see how the HOLC was aware of the ways Census data did not reveal the true size of the Mexican population.

A 1940 report commissioned by the Los Angeles Urban League reported that approximately twenty-two thousand Chicana/os lived in the “black neighborhood” of Central Ave (as cited in Sides, 2003). The Chicana/o population was possibly larger than official records indicate due to Census classification practices, which classified Chicana/os as white. Recognizing the existence of the historical Chicana/o community in South Central Los Angeles generally, and understanding how their social and economic conditions during 1930-1949 impacted the educational opportunity of Chicana/o students specifically, is crucial to fully understand contemporary issues in this same neighborhood. Understanding the larger social conditions in which students and their families experienced schooling provide richer connections to the historical continuities. For instance, during the period understudy, South Central Los Angeles was a segregated neighborhood. The 1939 HOLC Security Maps for this neighborhood indicate African Americans, Mexicans and “low-class Italians” lived the area. These three ethnic groups did not fit the dominant standards of whiteness, and thus were confined spatially to their ‘otherness.’ According to Flamming (2005), the neighborhood of South Central Los Angeles was racially diverse “because Westside whites barred African Americans and other ethnic minorities from living elsewhere”(pg. 93). It must be noted that during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the South Central Los Angeles area was known as the “Eastside.” This meant a social and economic divide was constructed spatially, through the use of a color line, where as Flamming explains, “ ‘Westside’ meant wealthier and whiter; “Eastside” meant poorer and ethnically diverse” (pg. 93).

The residential segregation along with racial hostility confined People of Color<sup>2</sup> to particular quarters of the city with clearly demarcated color lines. Carey McWilliams (1968) described this color line of fear as, “signs, prohibitions, taboos, restrictions. Learning of this ‘iron curtain’ is part of the education of every Mexican-American boy in Los Angeles” (pg. 159). Flamming (2005) has written about the color line in South Central Los Angeles at the western edge of San Pedro Street as he argues, “It lay only a few blocks west of Central, but it marked a rigid racial boundary, beyond which potential black residents were met with implacable resistance” (pg. 98). Solorzano and Velez (2011) have argued Alameda St. was the eastern color line up until the 1980s. These racial color lines did not work alone, as they were fueled by a racial ideology and restrictive covenants that made sure People of Color were spatially restricted.

Racially restrictive covenants were endemic across major cities in the U.S. and in South Central Los Angeles embodied those restrictive practices (Davis, 2006). These racially restrictive covenants allowed for individuals to enter voluntarily into an agreement with their neighbors to limit the purchase and sale of property in exclusive areas to particular racial groups, hence upholding the exclusion of People of Color from particular neighborhoods. It is these racially discriminatory conditions that can help understand how Chicana/os experienced life in South Central Los Angeles.

### **Rationale for Time Period**

I have chosen to focus this study on the period between 1930-1949 for a host of reasons. First, the prevalent anti-Mexican climate in Southern California during this time period provides a historical context ripe for a critical analysis of what it meant to be Chicana/o in South Central in general (Sanchez, 1993). The Great Depression of 1929 led to heightened nativist rhetoric against the Chicana/o community. According to David G. Gutierrez (1995), Chicana/o workers were singled out as scapegoats, and charged that they were disease ridden, committed

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<sup>2</sup> People of Color’ is intentionally capitalized, rejecting the grammatical norm, to empower and centralize their experiences. This rule will also apply to ‘Communities of Color’ and ‘Students of Color’ throughout this study.

crimes, displaced American workers, and were singularly un-American. The largest and most publicized of the repatriation campaigns in the U.S. occurred in Los Angeles, which had one of the largest concentrations of Mexican immigrants. George Sanchez (1993) described the collaboration between U.S. Department of Labor and Los Angeles city officials, to mount a campaign in 1930 and 1931, where tens of thousands of Mexican nationals and an unknown number of their American born children were pressured into returning to Mexico. Thus, the political climate, symbolically represented by the repatriation efforts and nativist rhetoric, placed intense pressure on the Chicana/o population in Los Angeles.

World War II brought wartime measures against the Japanese community that led to their containment in interment camps. According to McWilliams (1968), Mexicans would be substituted as the major scapegoat group once the Japanese were removed. The Chicana/o youth in particular bore the brunt of this scapegoating. The Sleepy Lagoon Case of 1942 proved to be a highly racialized case that epitomized the hostile environment for Chicana/o youth. In the summer of 1942 a young Chicano was found dead near Sleepy Lagoon, “a water-filled gravel pit in South Central Los Angeles traditionally used by local Mexican American children as a swimming hole” (Gutierrez, 1995, p. 124). On the basis of circumstantial evidence, the Los Angeles police arrested twenty-two local Chicano youth on charges of murder and conspiracy. After a sensational trial, seventeen of the defendants were found guilty. McWilliams (1968), describes, that for years “Mexicans had been pushed around by the Los Angeles police and given rough time in the courts”, but the Sleepy Lagoon prosecution embodied “community-wide prejudice” (p. 228). This trial in essence illustrated dominant sentiment about a whole community, and particularly about Mexican youth.

The following year, the Zoot Suit Riots in the summer of 1943 demonstrated the racial ideology that prevailed during wartime Los Angeles and made racism against Chicana/os youth violently visible. Soldiers and sailors swept through Chicana/o neighborhoods looking for young men wearing zoot suits and violently attacking them. According to Luis Alvarez (2008), the riots

underscored the denial of nonwhite youth, specifically Chicana/os, from full and equal belonging in the United States in that their experience and cultural identity did not always easily fit within the dominant ideas of wartime patriotism. The Zoot Suit Riots directly targeted the Chicana/o community and were the direct spark that touched off “a chain-reaction of riots across the country in midsummer of 1943 with similar disturbances reported in San Diego, Philadelphia, Chicago, Evansville, Indiana, Beaumont, Texas, Detroit and Harlem” (McWilliams, 1968, p. 235). Such a hostile time period can serve to understand how Chicana/o youth were being perceived inside and outside the classroom by school officials and interrogate the origins of educational policies set in place during this period. The social context of this time can help us understand the schooling experiences of this community.

### **Significance of the Study**

The educational history of Chicana/os in South Central LA has yet to be recovered. The history of South Central Los Angeles schools has gone unexplored to shed light into the educational trajectory of Students of Color, specifically Chicana/os. Such work is made more critical by the fact that the educational history of Chicanas/os has gone underexplored and under researched as a whole (Donato & Lazerson, 2000; San Miguel, 1986, 1987). The majority of studies that have been written about this population have generally focused on the placement of Chicano students in separate “Mexican Schools,” which document the segregation of children of Mexican ancestry from San Antonio, Texas, to Santa Ana, California and Fort Collins, Colorado (Garcia, 2013, 2013, Donato, 2007, Gonzales, 1990, San Miguel, 1987). Although their work has been crucial in the advancement of the field of Chicana/o educational history, to date, there is no scholarship that focuses on the educational history of Chicana/os in Los Angeles generally and South Central Los Angeles specifically. Furthering the focus on South Central Los Angeles can only contribute to the body of work in this discipline and more importantly, shed light into the way Chicana/o youth experienced education in an urban integrated setting during the period under study.

The contemporary perception of South Central Los Angeles is reflected in the very limited literature that exists about this Southern California neighborhood. Scholars have relegated this neighborhood's history to the margins of the prevailing history of Los Angeles. The specific omission of Chicana/os from the history of South Central Los Angeles has given way to the rise of dominant discourse that frames Latinos in general and Chicana/os specifically as foreigners who have displaced the historical African American community (Gay, 2006; Waldinger, 1997; Wilson, 2003). The racist nativist<sup>3</sup> framing of history has continuously deemed Chicana/os as immigrants and non-native within U.S. society even though they were part of that historic past. According to Lindsay Perez-Huber, Corina Benavides Lopez, Maria C. Malagon, Veronica Velez and Daniel G. Solorzano (2008), "from this perspective the values, beliefs, and perceptions associated with whiteness are closely allied with a dominant national identity that maintains and supports not only a racial hierarchy with whites on top, but a normalized belief that whites are inherently native"(p. 41). The absence of Chicana/o voices in the historical record does not mean that their experiences did not exist but rather that racist nativist framing has allowed to continuously frame the Chicana/o community as non-native, and excluded their voice generation after generation.

The literature that explores the educational experiences of Chicanos and Chicanas in Los Angeles schools illustrate how educational officials often rationalized school segregation as part of a larger public safety discourse. Juvenile delinquency along with questioned moral standards where often cited as issues prevalent among Chicana/o youth (Balderrama, 2006). Not much is known about their experiences attending schools in South Central Los Angeles or their overall relationship with educational institutions. Further exploration in this field is critical to understand the curricular and pedagogical practices they experienced in schools.

### **Guiding Research Questions**

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<sup>3</sup> I am borrowing the definition of racist nativism from Perez-Huber et al., (2008) "as the assigning of values to real or imagined differences, in order to justify the superiority of the native, who is to be perceived white, over that of the non-native, who is perceived to be People and Immigrants of Color, and thereby defend the right of whites, or the natives, to dominance."

This dissertation study examines the educational history of Chicana/os in South Central Los Angeles from 1930 to 1949 within the context of discriminatory and anti-Mexican climate. As students in often, segregated schools, Chicana/os experienced an educational trajectory often mediated by race, class, and gender. The following three questions guide my research.

1. What were the social and economic conditions the Chicana/o community experienced in South Central Los Angeles during 1930-1949?

Understanding the demographic context of what it meant to be a Chicana/o in South Central Los Angeles during this time period provides a more complete picture about the intersectionality of their lived experiences. Social conditions refer to housing, occupation, income, and education attainment indicators. These social conditions are crucial to understand patterns of oppression but also highlight their resiliency, given the highly racialized origin of this neighborhood. South Central LA was a highly segregated residential neighborhood in the first half of the twentieth century (Sides, 2003; Flamming, 2005, US Census, 1930). Ruben Donato (2007) established the social context in which students of Mexican descent attended school in various Colorado communities from 1920-1960, thus providing a rich context to understand their educational experiences. I asked this question at the start of my study to highlight the importance of the multiple factors that make up Chicana/o students' lives, many of which are outside of the physical campus. Social conditions, in public and private spheres, can help illustrate the realities of growing up Mexican in urban South Central Los Angeles and help inform the educational conditions.

2. What were the dominant and non-dominant discourses about the Chicana/o community in South Central Los Angeles during 1930-1949?

This question is crucial to understand the larger dominant discourse and possibly negative frames that were operating during this highly anti-Mexican period. In other words, this questions sought to uncover the majoritarian story that was told in Los Angeles about the Chicana/o residents. Majoritarian stories are discourses that “privileg[e] Whites, men, the

middle and/or upper class, and heterosexuals by naming these social locations as natural or normative points of reference” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 28). The danger of such stories is that they erase structural inequalities and institutionalized racism by instead placing the blame – on perceived individual failures.

Local newspapers and school district literature constitute archival sources that capture the stories those with institutional power told. Teo (2000) stated that “[d]iscourse, especially the sort that we encounter everyday, in an almost routine and hence unremarkable way, can change our perceptions and attitudes regarding people, places and events and therefore becomes a potentially powerful site for the dominance of minds” (p. 9). Thus, the framing of the Chicana/o community in local newspapers like the *Los Angeles Times* and in institutional reports are a crucial part of the local majoritarian story. Los Angeles Unified School District memos and reports also reveal the official conversations about specific schools and students that ultimately add to the majoritarian story. In seeking to understand the majoritarian story, I also want to acknowledge the non-dominant narrative, or counter-story about this same community. Counter-stories are defined as “a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told. The counter-story is also a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32). Hence, the framing of the Chicana/o community in local non-dominant newspapers like *The Mexican Voice*, are important tools to uncover how this community was discursively framed. I ultimately seek to understand the language used to describe and talk about the Chicana/o community in urban South Central Los Angeles.

3. What impact did the dominant discourse have on the educational experiences of Chicana/o students in South Central LA during the period understudy?

Lastly, I am interesting in interrogating the relation that dominant stories about the Chicana/o community had on shaping the educational opportunity for Chicana/o students. Local school district literature and curricular documents from this time period capture the

stories those with institutional power told and enforced through educational practice and policy. This questions sought to understand the relationship discourse may have had on educational opportunity and policy for Chicana/o students attending South Central Los Angeles schools.

As a student who attended the same neighborhood schools that this dissertation focuses on, I sought to uncover the stories and experiences of Chicana/os who came before me. This study is rooted in my desire to make sense of my educational experience by investigating how Chicana/o students who attended school 80 years before me experienced schooling. In addition, this study is also an attempt to document a community's history through the stories of students and their families.



## **CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

Exploring the historical past of Chicana/o students in South Central Los Angeles requires a strong knowledge base from interdisciplinary fields. I organize this body of literature within historical writings that inform and provide insight to my research in significant ways. I begin by providing selected review of the texts on the topics of Chicana/o educational history, Chicana/o Los Angeles history, and local South Central Los Angeles history. Secondly, I provide my theoretical foundations, which illuminate and ground this dissertation research. I define the concepts of race and racism and provide an overview of Critical Race Theory in education and Critical Race History of education.

### **Historical Foundations**

#### **Chicana/o History of Education**

The field of Chicana/o educational history is one that is still developing and growing, yet fundamental in understanding the contemporary educational conditions Chicana/o students face today. San Miguel's (1986) historiography on the status of Chicana/o education illustrated the need for scholarship that could increase our understanding of the historical relationship between Chicanos and public schools in particular and minorities and education in general. This area of research, to date remains understudied and insufficiently unexplored (Donato & Lazerson, 2000). The works of San Miguel (1987, 2000), Ruben Donato (1997, 2007) and Gilbert Gonzalez (1990), Garcia (2013, 2012) are essential as they demonstrate the ways in which unequal educational opportunities played out for Mexican Americans in the Southwest. This scholarship is the heart of the field and remains central to my own research.

Guadalupe San Miguel's (1987) *"Let All of Them Take Heed," Mexican Americans and the Campaign for Educational Equality in Texas, 1910-1981* looked at the Mexican American struggle for equal schools in Texas, and the ways in which Mexican Americans challenged discriminatory educational practices in the state. A central theme to this narrative was the

segregation of Mexican students in schools. This scholarship is essential to understand larger education histories of Mexican Americans quest for quality education.

In San Miguel's (2000) *Brown, not White: School integration and the Chicano Movement in Houston*, community's political activism in education during the Chicano movement is highlighted to document their struggle against the Houston Independent School District (HISD). He describes the desegregation struggles that the Chicana/o community faced as they fought to reclassify Mexican American children as "Brown." San Miguel provides a historical account that bridges activism, educational opportunity and desegregation efforts as integral parts of the Chicana/o struggle in early 1970s.

Ruben Donato (1997, 2007) challenges conventional notions that Mexican Americans parents were passive victims accepting their educational fates. In *The other struggle for equal schools*, Donato argues that Mexican Americans parents were actively seeking educational justice for their children during the 1960's and 70's, in a Northern California community. He argues that to an extent, Mexican parents were primary educational decision-makers. He concludes by describing how the Chicana/o struggle, however, went largely unnoticed by most "Americans" in the United States.

In his second book, *Mexicans and Hispanos in Colorado schools and communities, 1920-1960*, Donato centralizes the political economy and positions it at the forefront of his narrative. The contextual analysis, primarily focusing on the economy, illustrated the ways it shaped the opportunity structure for the Mexican and Hispano community in Colorado. Donato establishes a rich social context to understand the experiences of Mexican and Hispano students who attended an array of very distinct schools in Colorado. His comparative approach focused on the experiences of Mexican and Hispano students who attended schools in sugar beet towns, Hispano students in Anglo dominant towns and Hispanos attending schools in autonomous towns. His text remains a seminal piece in Chicana/o educational history as one of the few texts that focus on Colorado. His analysis offers a rich social context in which he is able to connect the

social realities that intersected with student's educational experiences.

Gilbert Gonzalez (1990), in *Chicano Education in the Era of Segregation*, examines the schooling experiences of students of Mexican descent in the Southwest, during the first half of the 20th century. Like San Miguel, Gonzalez considers the expanding condition of segregated schooling of Mexican American children. However, Gonzalez provided a multi-layered analysis of segregation that looked at the relationship between the socio-political context of the dominant society and the development of IQ testing, curricular differentiation, Americanization, and vocational education. Gonzalez argues that the segregated schooling of Mexican American children reflected the specific economic interests of White communities throughout the Southwest. An earlier journal article by Gonzalez (1985) further illustrates the educational segregation in the city of Santa Ana, California. This piece remains as one of the few to document the social and political relationship between the Mexican and White community, and critically demonstrates the ways segregation developed, how it was justified and maintained by the Santa Ana Board of Education.

David G. García et al. (2012, 2013) examines the early twentieth-century origins of a dual schooling system that facilitated the reproduction of a cheap labor force and the marginalization of Mexicans in Oxnard, California. The authors provide a rich analysis of the 1930s Oxnard Elementary School District board minutes, alongside newspapers, maps, and oral history interviews, as they argue that school segregation privileged Whites and discriminated against Mexicans as a form of mundane racism. Their scholarship is seminal as it makes larger connections between the educational opportunity of Mexican students and their socio-economic conditions with patterns of residential segregation in Oxnard. In addition, the authors theorize the commonplace racial subordination of this community, which build on historical scholarship that documents the pervasiveness of racism in and outside of schools.

San Miguel (1987, 2000), Donato (1997, 2007), Gonzalez (1990), and Garcia et al. (2012, 2013) document the various educational experiences of Chicana/os across state and district

lines. Each historian added contextual layers that continue to inform my own research. The current scholarship strengthens the historical research on Chicana/o education, yet San Miguel's (1986) call for more research on local school districts throughout the United States, continues to be as important today as it was 30 years ago. Although the seminal works of San Miguel (1987, 2000), Donato (1997, 2007), Gonzales (1990), and Garcia (2012, 2013) have been crucial in the advancement of the field of Chicana/o educational history, to date, there is no scholarship that focuses on the educational history of Chicana/os in Los Angeles generally and South Central Los Angeles specifically. Furthering the focus on this neighborhood can contribute to document deeper and varied educational experiences of the Chicana/o community in an urban context.

There is very limited literature that explores the educational experiences of Chicanos and Chicanas in Los Angeles schools. According to Rios-Bustamante & Castillo (1986), public education used Americanization efforts to significantly impact the Chicana/o community. Not much is known about their experiences attending schools in South Central Los Angeles or their overall relation with educational institutions. Martha Menchaca and Richard R. Valencia (1990), add another dimension in the understanding of Chicana/o schooling experience by illustrating the historical development of racial ideologies of white superiority, and its influence on the schooling of Mexican children. The authors contend that racial ideology strongly influenced the formation of school segregation in Santa Paula, California, in the 1920's and in turn, justified the discriminatory racial practices. This scholarship provides an ideological approach to understand the educational experiences of students of Mexican descent and shed light on to institutional processes that respond and embody these ideologies. It is with this understanding that this study is grounded, as it historicizes the ideological discourses that operated and manifested in the educational experiences of Chicana/o students. San Miguel (1986) argues for the need of scholarship that explores the historical relationship between Chicana/os and schools across various school districts since our understanding about this historical past is still incomplete. I

therefore also draw from literature that informs my understanding of the larger history of Chicana/os in Los Angeles and South Central Los Angeles community.

### **History of Chicana/o Los Angeles**

Historical writings on Chicana/o Los Angeles have been critical for this study. Although there is limited literature in this field, the works that do exist are seminal to the understanding of the Chicana/o history in Los Angeles. The following texts are instrumental in historically contextualizing this study. Richard Griswold del Castillo (1979) offers an insightful and rich social history of Los Angeles in *The Los Angeles Barrio 1850-1890*. His piece illustrates the persistence and vitality of the Mexican American urban community in spite of economic exclusion and discrimination. Griswold del Castillo's analysis also includes the interrelated issues of education, literacy and socioeconomic mobility among the Chicana/o community of Los Angeles during that time period.

In Douglas Monroy (1999), *Rebirth: Mexican Los Angeles from the Great Migration to the Great Depression*, the narrative chronicles the history of the Mexican community in Los Angeles by exploring the social and cultural life. Although brief, Monroy (1999) does include a short discussion about the schooling of Mexican children during this time period. Moreover, Rodolfo F. Acuña's (1984), *A Community Under Siege*, provides a rich local history of Chicana/os east of the Los Angeles river. There, he offers detailed historical accounts of political and economic struggles within this community. Finally, the seminal piece by George J. Sanchez (1993), *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles 1900-1945*, documents the evolving relationship between ethnicity and identity among Mexican Americans in Los Angeles. Sanchez illustrates the social realities, which the Chicana/o community faced which included their work experiences, family networks and their efforts to gain civil rights.

## **Local South Central Los Angeles History**

As mentioned in Chapter 1 of this dissertation, the presence of the Chicana/o community in local history is scarcely documented. This selected review of historical writings that are available generally omits Chicana/o experiences within larger narratives of the city of Los Angeles.

South Central Los Angeles has not been the subject of historical Chicana/o writing. Most of the work that has been produced have documented the African American experience in this neighborhood (Davis 1990, Flamming 2005, Hunt 2010, Sides 2003). The major works underlying the racialized history of this area have documented Black Los Angeles, which have largely focused on the Central Ave. neighborhood. Josh Sides (2003) *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present*, explores South Central Los Angeles racialized history and briefly mentions the Chicana/o population in relations to the size of the African American community. While he provides a larger context to the interplay of race, space and education, Sides did not go into great detail about the education conditions facing this community. Of equal importance is the work done by Douglas Flamming (2005), which illustrates the vibrancy and cultural wealth of the African American community in South Central Los Angeles. Although this scholarship is crucial in understanding the racialized history of this neighborhood, the racial diversity that once existed in this area has not been written about. Not only has the presence of the Chicana/o community in this neighborhood not been scholarly acknowledged, but the educational history for both groups have gone under-researched and unexplored.

## **Theoretical Foundations**

### **Race, Racism and Critical Race Theory in Education**

In order to engage in a discussion about Critical race theory, we must first begin by defining the concept of race. Developing a clear definition of race allows to further problematize the notions of colorblindness since it provides an opportunity to critically analyze the impact of

racism in the lives of People of Color. While many definitions of race exist today and after many important scholarly debates, many scholars have agreed that race is a socially constructed category (Omi & Winant, 1994; Haney Lopez, 2000; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Delgado & Stefancic (2000) further explain this point, “race and races are products of social thought and relations. Not objective, inherent or fixed, they correspond to no biological or genetic reality; rather, races are categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient” (p. 7). Thus, race is used for the benefit and detriment of some, by society.

The implications of these “differences” for People of Color are many times economic, social and political. Negative implications are many times espoused by social structures and institutionalized practices. Manning Marable (1994) illustrates this point by defining race “as an unequal relationship between social aggregates, characterized by dominant and subordinate forms of social interaction, and reinforced by the intricate patterns of public discourse, power, ownership, and privileges within the economic, social, and political institutions of society” (p.30). Marable describes how race has been constructed in order to maintain and perpetrate institutionalized racism that lead to social inequities. These inequities are represented in every aspect of the lives of People of Color, whether it is educational opportunities, housing, income, health, job offers and various other areas of life. James Banks (1995) adds another layer to the definition of race by stating, “race is a human invention constructed by groups to differentiate themselves from other groups to create ideas about the ‘Other’, to formulate their identities and to defend the disproportionate distribution of rewards and opportunities within society” (p.22). Power is clearly mediated through the construction of racial categories to benefit whites and validate their positions in society compared to the ‘Others’.

Racism is the instrument of domination that pushes the social construction of race forward. It is the system, which keeps People of Color marginalized. The ideology of racism justifies and maintains white dominance in U.S. society. Delgado and Stefancic (2000) define racism as, “any program or practice of discrimination, segregation, persecution, or mistreatment

based on membership in a race or ethnic group” (p.154). According to Audre Lorde (1992), racism can be defined as, “the belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby the right to dominance” (cited from Solorzano, Allen & Carroll, 2002). In addition, Marable (1992) expands on Lorde’s definition by adding that racism is a system of “...ignorance, exploitation, and power” used to oppress African Americans, Latinos, Asians, Pacific Americans, American Indians and other people on the basis of ethnicity, culture, mannerisms and color”(cited from Solorzano et al., 2002).

Using both Lorde (1992) and Marable (1992) as a reference, Solorzano, Allen and Carroll (2002) identify three main elements of racism. They include (1) the claimed superiority of one group over another, (2) that this superior group has the power to commit acts of racism and (3) that racism affects multiple racial/ethnic groups. Thus, racism thrives within a structural hierarchy where a “superior” group has power over others and thus, the ability to perpetuate acts of racism. Derrick Bell (2005) names whites as the group who benefit from this system, “racism is a system of privilege, based on color, that advantages all whites regardless of whether they seek such advantage” (p. 333). What Bell describes is the concept known as white privilege.

Today, racism remains full of complexities thus a critical lens is required to understand and acknowledge how racism manifest itself through white privilege, racial microaggressions and liberal ideas of color-blindness in contemporary society. Delgado & Stefancic (2000) refer to white privilege as, “the myriad of social advantages, benefits, and courtesies that come with being a member of the dominant race” (p. 78). According to a famous list compiled by Peggy McIntosh, white people enjoy privileges that are attached due to their skin color, “include the assurance that store clerks will not follow them around, that their achievements will not be regarded as exceptional and that their occasional mistakes will not be attributed to biological inferiority” (cited from Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). Covert forms of racism, such as racial microaggressions, also need to be examined. Solorzano (2000) articulates racial microaggressions as, “unconscious or subtle forms of racism, while pervasive, are seldom



investigated” (p.60). An example of this type of aggression are statements such as “I don’t think of you as Mexican” or “You [a black person] are not like the rest of them. *You’re different*”. These statements demonstrate how covert forms of racism look. Although these statements many times are not recognized as racist by white perpetrators, the impact they may have on the psychological well being of a person is tremendous. According to psychologist Kenneth Clark, “human beings...whose daily experiences tells them that almost nowhere in society are they respected and granted ordinary dignity and courtesy accorded to others will, as a matter of course, begin to doubt their own worth” (Cited from Matsuda, Lawrence III, Delgado, Crenshaw, 1993). Finally, racism manifest itself through “color- blind” laws, practices and policies that perpetrate racial and ethnic inequalities. Critical race theory challenges dominant liberal ideals of color blindness and meritocracy and shows how these ideas operate to disadvantage people of color while further advantaging Whites (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000).

Critical Race Theory (CRT) sprang up in the mid-1970’s in the legal academy in the U.S. due to the disillusionment of Critical Legal Studies (CLS). “The consciousness of critical race theory as a movement or group and the movement’s intellectual agenda were forged in oppositional reaction to visions of race, racism, and law dominant in this post-civil rights period” (Matsuda et al., 1993). Critical race theory evolved as a direct response to the stalled progress of civil rights reforms. CRT as a theoretical model has further developed into the field of education.

The basic CRT in education theoretical model consists of five elements focusing on: (a) the centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination, (b) the challenge to dominant ideology, (c) the commitment to social justice, (d) the centrality of experiential knowledge, and (e) the transdisciplinary perspective (Solorzano, 1997, 1998) Each of these five themes is not new in and of themselves, but collectively they represent a challenge to the existing modes of scholarship. Through these elements, CRT functions to empower People of Color.

## **Critical Race History of Education**

Critical race theory in education has ignited the development of other extensions of the theory such as Critical Race History of Education, which largely informs this study. This theoretical framework heavily focuses on the importance of the historical recovery of educational histories of People of Color. This CRHE framework looks to answer the call of Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw (1993) who state a CRT analysis “Challenges ahistoricism and insists on a contextual/historical analysis of [education]”, and “adopts a stance that presumes that racism has contributed to all contemporary manifestations of group advantage and disadvantage along racial lines” (p.6). The CRHE framework draws heavily from Solórzano’s (1998) five tenets of CRT in Education. The first tenet recognizes the central role racism has played historically in structuring schooling practices at macro and micro levels. In the case of this study, I link how discourses were used to shape and rationalize educational policy, which in turn shaped the everyday student experiences in the classroom.

Secondly, CRHE scholarship challenges dominant ideology by historically examining schooling as part of a critique of structural inequity. A CRHE approach challenges historical social and cultural assumptions regarding intelligence, language, academic ability, and criminality by providing examples about Communities of Color that challenge these.

The third tenet of the CRHE framework is committed to social justice. This commitment is directly linked to a social justice research agenda that responds to racial, class, and gender oppression and empowers Communities of Color. Thus, historical CRHE scholarship has the potential to provide anti-racist perspectives that build on asset-based approaches, and counter dominant historical accounts.

CRHE as a framework recognizes experiential knowledge of Communities of Color as legitimate and appropriate in the writing of educational history. With this in mind, CRHE scholars must utilize methods and non-traditional sources that center and draw on the strengths of the lived experiences of students such as personal and familial archives.

The final tenet of a CRHE framework insists on analyzing race and racism in both historical and contemporary context by showing the continuities of these in schooling structures, processes and discourses within education. The five tenets of a Critical Race History in Education theory provide a framework to create and recover community and educational histories that can help us better understand and challenge the historical legacies of race and racism.

Drawing on CRT in education and history methods, CRHE helped identify the historical legacy of race and racism in the educational histories of Chicana/os. In doing so, it has allowed me write an educational history unapologetically guided by theory. Bridging theory and educational history can afford us new ways of examining how educational theories, practices and discourses have been used to subordinate Students of Color historically.

### **CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY**

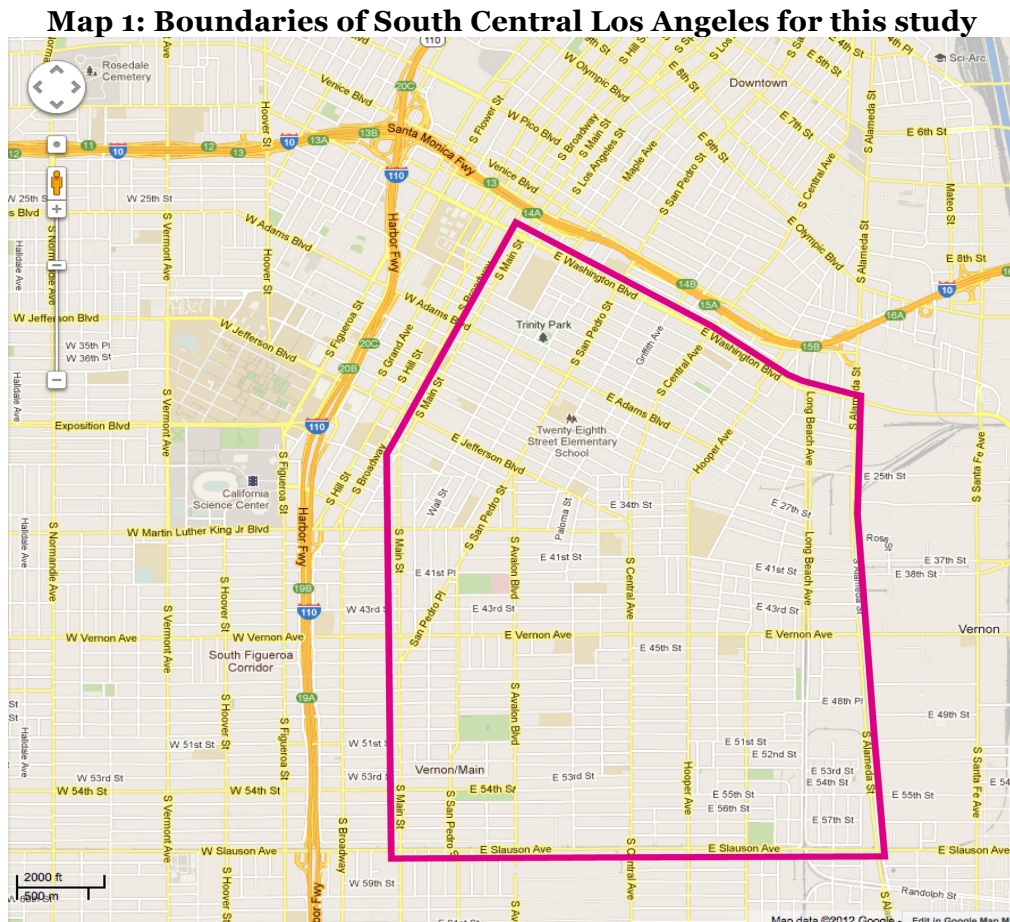
Majoritarian histories have been based on research instruments, methods, questions and analyses that have disempowered Chicana/o students and communities. In researching and writing an educational history rooted in the experiences of Chicana/o students in South Central Los Angeles, I choose to employ a methodology rooted in Critical Race History of Education that will explicitly challenge majoritarian stories and thus document the experiences of People of Color in socially just ways. This chapter outlines my own approach to this work. I begin with a description of my site, the neighborhood of South Central Los Angeles, California. I then discuss Jefferson High, the neighborhood school and important to the story of Chicana/os in South Central Los Angeles. I continue by giving an overview of all the primary sources used in this study, as well as the process of obtaining access to each one. I conclude with a section on the data analysis of this study.

#### **Defining South Central Los Angeles**

The South Central Los Angeles neighborhood has been defined differently through time. South Central Los Angeles, which was referred as the Central Ave. neighborhood was considered a jazz epicenter and has been historically referred as a center for African American art and culture (Flamming, 2005). Central Avenue, which runs north to south through parts of Los Angeles and Watts, has been documented as the main artery of the neighborhood. Flamming (2005) defined South Central as part of the “Eastside” area sprawled across two major north-south roads, Main Street and Alameda. Josh Sides (2003), defined South Central similarly, but his definition extended down to Watts by the 1940’s as the growing African American population expanded. For both of these definitions, the size of the African American population informed how South Central was spatially conceptualized.

For the purpose of this study, I utilize demographic markers of the 1930s and 1940s to define South Central Los Angeles. Based on demographic maps of this neighborhood using

census data from this time period, the African American and Chicana/o population historically resided within a very specific area, bounded by Alameda Street in the east, Slauson Avenue in the south, Main Street in the west and finally, Washington Boulevard in the north (see Map)(Velez & Solorzano, 2007). Hence, this definition of South Central Los Angeles is used for this dissertation study and one directly reflective of the demographic composition during the period understudy.



**Neighborhood school: Jefferson High**

Although there were various neighborhood schools within the community of South Central Los Angeles, for the purpose of this study, I largely focus on students from Jefferson High. During the period understudy, Jefferson High was the only high school in the

neighborhood. Established in 1916, Jefferson High is the fourth oldest public high school in the Los Angeles Unified School District.

I choose to focus on Jefferson High for a host of reasons. First, most educational historians have largely focused on documenting the experiences at the elementary grade school level. Much of what we know about schooling historically is rooted in the elementary schooling experiences and practices. This has been largely due to the low number of students who continued onto middle and high school. Yet, not much scholarship has looked at the experiences of those students who continued onto high school. Hence, Jefferson High offered a unique site to understand how Chicana/o students experienced schooling once at this segment of the educational pipeline. Secondly, Jefferson High was the only high school in the neighborhood of South Central Los Angeles, allowing me an opportunity to explore the historical experiences within a racially diverse urban setting. Finally, Jefferson High has a rich collection of yearbooks archived at their library, which were essential starting points to recover student trajectories. More on this topic will be discussed further in the next few sections.

I begin my discussion about methods with a reminder of my research questions that guide this study.

1. What were the social and economic conditions that the Chicana/o community experienced in South Central Los Angeles during 1930-1949?
2. What was the dominant and non-dominant discourse about the Chicana/o community in South Central Los Angeles during the 1930-1949?
3. What impact did the dominant narrative and counter narratives have on the schooling experiences of Chicana/o students in South Central LA during the period under study?

This study is situated in a very specific time period purposely. I have chosen to focus this study on the period between 1930-1949 for a host of reasons. First, the prevalent Anti-Mexican climate in Southern California during this time period provides a historical context ripe for a

critical analysis of what it meant to be Chicana/o in South Central LA in general, and a Chicana/o student specifically. For example, the *Great Depression* of 1929 led to heightened nativist rhetoric against the Chicana/o community. The political climate, symbolically represented by the repatriation efforts and nativist rhetoric, placed intense pressure on the Chicana/o population in the U.S. Secondly, the *Sleepy Lagoon Case* of 1942 proved to be a highly racialized case that epitomized the hostile environment for Chicana/os in the 1940's. *The Zoot Suit Riots*, which took place the following year in 1943, demonstrated the racial ideology that prevailed during wartime Los Angeles and made racism against Chicana/os youth violently visible (Alvarez, 2008). Thus, this study recognizes the importance of exploring the larger social context in relation to the historical educational experiences of Chicana/o students.

## **Methods**

This dissertation is completely archival. I originally intended to obtain oral histories of community elders, but unfortunately due to the time period of this study, this population is in their 80's and many have already passed. Unable to locate participants for this study, I turned to potential sites and repositories of the Mexican experience in Los Angeles. Below, I share the collections I utilize for this study, and the process in which I obtained access. Primary documents and sources are the main components that inform this study. In this section, I identify a range of archival sources, all of which document elements of Chicana/o educational history in South Central Los Angeles.

### **Archival Sources**

*Los Angeles Unified School District Arts & Artifact Archives*—After emailing and obtaining an appointment, the district archives were the first I visited. I went in looking for Jefferson High yearbooks to verify whether Mexican students actually lived in the neighborhood and attended its schools. After not finding any Jefferson yearbooks here, the archivist handed me a folder titled “*Mexican Delinquency Problems*” as a possible interest. This folder included curricular documents salient to the experiences of Mexican students in relation to their

perceived delinquency. In addition, this archive is essential in recovering the larger educational discourse among district officials and educational policies enacted in schools. This archive includes photographs of Jefferson High students in classrooms that illustrate the curricular programs in during the period understudy.

*Manuel Ruiz Papers*—I came across this collection through an online search using the Online Archive of California website. Through this website, I gained accessed to it's finding aid, which provided insight on the primary documents available in the collection. Once I located the boxes and folders of interest, I requested these a few days before my visit to the Stanford library, where this collection is located. The Manuel Ruiz papers included meeting minutes for the Citizens Committee for Latin American Youth, a group appointed by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors to improve the living and working conditions of Mexican youth in the 1940s. As a community activist in the 1940s, Ruiz was key in representing and advocating for the Mexican community in Los Angeles. His papers represent the various social, political and educational issues that affected this community. As so, his papers contain documents on the schooling of Mexican youth in Los Angeles.

*Carey McWilliams Papers at UCLA and UC Berkeley*—The McWilliams papers housed in the Bancroft Library and Young Research Library were used to provide rich data on the social conditions and experiences of Chicana/os in greater Los Angeles. These collections consist of primary and secondary documents relating to McWilliam's involvement in legal commissions that addressed juvenile delinquency among Chicana/o youth and his work documenting migration, labor, and race problems during the early twentieth century.

*Urban League Papers*—The Urban League papers, housed at UCLA's Special Collections, offer primary documents on the neighborhood of South Central Los Angeles. This collection included maps, community surveys, research proposals and reports on occupational trajectories of African American women in the neighborhood. This collection of papers included a map



critical for Chapter 4. In addition, these papers offer an intimate look at the neighborhood as it provides details about the various groups that lived there.

*Mexican Voice*—The Mexican Voice is a collection of a youth led newsletter for and about Mexican youth. I came about this collection while searching the UCLA Library catalog. This collection offers, as the title suggest, the voices of Mexican youth from Los Angeles. The newsletter articles offer their perspective on race, racism, education and civic responsibility. In addition, the youth draw from their own educational experiences to encourage others to persist. This in turn, offers a closer look at Mexican student accounts and perspectives through their own words. This collection is important as it highlights the agency and cultural wealth among Mexican youth during the period understudy.

*Jefferson High Yearbooks*—School yearbooks were essential in the educational recovery of student educational experiences and trajectories. Jefferson High had an almost unbroken collection of yearbooks that offered a window into the past. Additionally, I explored the collection of yearbooks, pictures, school newspapers and documents that reflected the student body historically. These documents, specifically the yearbooks, were critical in locating and visualizing student’s educational experiences. Yearbooks also provided a glimpse at the demographics composition of the student body throughout the years.

Specifically, I utilized the yearbooks to gauge the presence of Mexican students based on surname. I then verified this by pairing the student information found in the yearbooks; full name and approximate age with Census data. The specific process involved entering student information into Ancestry.com that yielded Census population schedules often dating from 1920s, 1930s and 1940. Once this process was completed, I was able to piece together a student’s familial and educational background. More detail regarding Census Schedules below.

*U.S. Census Population Schedules*—Census data provided socioeconomic demographic information of the Chicana/o community living in the South Central Los Angeles neighborhood. The Population Schedules were particularly useful because they included household information

of where a person lived; her/his place of birth and native language; the size of her/his family; her/his occupation; educational attainment; and, in the case of the 1930 and 1940 Census, whether s/he were racially designated as “Mexican.” These conditions were crucial to understand patterns of oppression but also to highlight their resiliency, given the highly racialized origin of South Central Los Angeles during the early half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In addition, the Census schedules were central in recreating three different blocks in the neighborhood of South Central Los Angeles utilizing the social and economic markers mentioned.

*T-Races HOLC Area Descriptions*—The T-Races website offered a repository of Home Owner Loan Corporation Maps and Area Descriptions for Los Angeles city. These documents illustrate the dominant perception of Communities of Color. In addition, the Area Description documents offer demographic information about Los Angeles neighborhoods including South Central Los Angeles.

### **Engaging Multiple Sources**

I started this section with a restatement of my research questions to show how they guide my primary choice of archival method. I conclude it with the table below that lays out how the multiple primary sources will help me answer each of my guiding research questions. See Table 1.

**Table 1: Research Questions and Sources**

Research Questions	Primary Sources
1) What were the social and economic conditions that the Chicana/o community experienced in South Central Los Angeles during 1930-1949?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Urban League Papers</li> <li>• U.S. Census Population Schedules (1920, 1930, 1940)</li> </ul>
2) What was the dominant and non-dominant discourse about the Chicana/o community in South Central Los Angeles during the 1930-1949?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• McWilliams Papers (UCLA and Berkeley)</li> <li>• Ruiz Papers</li> <li>• T-Races HOLC</li> <li>• Mexican Voice</li> <li>• U.S. Census Population Schedules (1930 &amp; 1940)</li> </ul>
3) What impact did the dominant narrative and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LAUSD Arts &amp; Artifact Archive</li> </ul>

<p>counter narratives have on the schooling experiences of Chicana/o students in South Central LA during the period understudy?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ruiz Papers</li> <li>• McWilliams Papers</li> <li>• Urban League Papers</li> <li>• Jefferson High Yearbooks</li> <li>• U.S. Census Population Schedules</li> <li>• UCLA yearbooks</li> </ul>
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### **Cultural Intuition as a Tool for Historical Recovery**

The interpretation of the researcher, in this case my cultural intuition, is a principle element in my research process. The concept of “cultural intuition” (Delgado Bernal, 1998b) is an extension of what Strauss and Corbin (1990) called “‘theoretical sensitivity’ – a personal quality of the researcher based on the attribute of having the ability to give meaning to data” (p. 563). The four sources of theoretical sensitivity that Strauss and Corbin identified are (a) the personal experiences of the researcher; (b) the existing literature; (c) the professional experience of the researcher; and (d) the analytical research process itself. However, Delgado Bernal argues that “personal experience goes beyond the individual and has lateral ties to family and reverse ties to the past as personal experience is partially shaped by collective experience and community memory” (Delgado Bernal, 1998b, p.564). She further describes cultural intuition:

A Chicana researcher’s cultural intuition is achieved and can be nurtured through our personal experiences (which are influenced by ancestral wisdom, community memory, and intuition), the literature on and about Chicanas, our professional experiences, and the analytical process we engage in when we are in a central position of our research and our analysis. Thus, cultural intuition is a complex process that is experiential, intuitive, historical, personal, collective, and dynamic (pp. 567-568).

My cultural intuition has been instrumental in how I approached, selected and analyzed the primary sources. It has largely influenced why I decided to recover the stories of students through a new methodological approach. Utilizing yearbooks and pairing them with U.S. Census data provided a way to center this study on the lives of Chicana/o students and their families historically. Recovering the stories of work, immigration and education provided an entry point into the heart of a community’s history. In the following sections, I further describe how my choice of methods guides data and analysis that leads to the historical recovery and construction

of Chicana/o educational and community histories.

## **Analysis**

### **Latina/o Critical Discourse Analysis**

I relied on Latina/o Critical Discourse Analysis as a tool to recognize the relation between discourse, power and social inequality. As Van Dijk (1993) posits, “Critical Discourse Analysis accounts for the relations between the discourse structures and power structures” (p. 250). Latina/o Critical Discourse Analysis is a developing methodological tool that bridges the tenets of LatCrit with those of CDA to extend how we locate and identify deficit frames specific to the Chicana/o community. In researching the ways CDA has been used by scholars across disciplines, I saw clear areas of overlap between the elements that constitute a LatCrit framework and those of CDA. Specifically, I saw five areas of alignment as provided below.

- 1) CDA is rooted in addressing social problems and is a form of social action. A LatCrit lens helps expose the structural conditions, which cause oppression in Latina/o communities.
- 2) CDA recognizes that power is discursive and LatCrit directly challenges the dominant ideology.
- 3) CDA helps illustrate the way discourse is driven by ideology. LatCrit framework is committed to social justice.
- 4) CDA centralizes the inclusion of the historical perspective whether at a structural or individual level because it acknowledges that discourse is historical. LatCrit acknowledges the importance of the lived experience and experiential knowledge.
- 5) Finally, CDA and LatCrit rely on interdisciplinary perspectives as both frameworks recognize social oppression is too complex to be dealt by only one field.

Acknowledging these congruencies, we can see how Latina/o CDA can serve as an important tool to conduct anti-racist research, guided by a social justice agenda.

Teo (2000) states that “[d]iscourse, especially the sort that we encounter everyday, in an almost routine and hence unremarkable way, can change our perceptions and attitudes

regarding people, places and events and therefore becomes a potentially powerful site for the dominance of minds” (p. 9). Cotter (2003) writes that this methodology is made “critical” via its preoccupation with “revealing societal power operations and invoking a call to social responsibility” (p. 418). The preoccupation with language in this framework – both what is written and what is implied – is a key part to understanding the various parts that make up a majoritarian story. Primary sources were read with the specific intent of recording when and how the Chicana/o community in general and students specifically were discussed. Latino/a Critical Discourse Analysis offered theoretical foundations and methodological implication to identify frames, especially in the printed word to interrogate the framing presented in institutional sources that we might otherwise take for granted. Latina/o Critical Discourse Analysis lends itself to proactively interrogate dominant frames and allow us to expose how they worked to shape educational opportunity for Mexican students in South Central Los Angeles during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

I will coded my primary sources consistent with what Hsiu-Fang Hsieh and Sarah E. Shannon (2005) describe as directed content analysis, whereby text was read with initial variables in mind and coding schemes are predetermined based on knowledge offered by prior research and existing literature. Special attention was given to historical writings about the larger Chicana/o community as it aided my understanding of larger themes prevalent in the history of this community and can help me further develop codes. However, I was open to emerging codes that added another layer of analysis. I coded for common word-choice used, rationalizing patterns, and perceived cultural differences, to better understand how the Chicana/o community was perceived by the dominant group and in turn how these frames were legitimated and reproduced educationally.

### **Data Analysis with a Critical Race History in Education Lens**

A Critical Race History of Education analysis was relevant and helpful to this dissertation study in a variety of ways. First, a CRHE approach placed great emphasis on the importance of

historicizing events, people and places to provide a critical racial historical context. This served as a reminder that an examination of the Chicana/o community in South Central Los Angeles during 1930-1949, must also take into account the anti-Mexican sentiment of the 1930's due to the Great Depression and repatriation efforts. The events of early 1940's against Chicana/o youth with the *Sleepy Lagoon Case* of 1942 and the *Zoot Suit Rebellion* of 1943, were central to the analysis process. While these events are not the focus of this study, they were examined for their potential link to the education experience of Chicana/o students. A CREH analysis also highlighted the centrality and intersectionality of race and racism with other forms of oppression, such as "gender, class, immigration status, surname, phenotype, accent, and sexuality" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p.25). This dissertation study actively sought out those intersections.

Another aspect of CREH is challenging dominant ideologies present in educational discourse, such as notions of "objectivity, meritocracy, color and gender blindness, race and gender neutrality, and equal opportunity" (Solórzano, 1998, p.122). When these ideologies and other coded language were found in archival or interview data, they were examined closely through a historical lens. Further incorporating from a CRT in education analysis, CREH also advocates for a commitment to social justice and experiential knowledge. The catalyst for this dissertation study was driven by the need to recover the stories of the Chicana/o community in ways that challenged dominant narratives and highlighted their resiliency.

## **Conclusion**

This dissertation study is situated in the acknowledgement that South Central Los Angeles was a diverse community in the early twentieth century. Although the historical Chicana/o community has been omitted from the larger narrative about South Central, I want to honor those who walked the halls of Jefferson High School before I ever did. This study recovers, reconstructs and creates local community history, knowledge, and stories that are embedded within the neighborhood I call home.

**CHAPTER 4**  
**MIGRATION, SETTLEMENT AND PATTERNS OF OPPORTUNITY: A**  
**SOCIOECONOMIC SNAPSHOT OF THE MEXICAN COMMUNITY IN SOUTH**  
**CENTRAL LOS ANGELES**

**Introduction**

In the spring of 1940, just across the Wrigley Field<sup>4</sup> on San Pedro and 42nd Place, in South Central Los Angeles, Ygnacio and Cleotilde Codines settled to raise their family. Ygnacio, 40, born in Chihuahua, Mexico entered the U.S. through El Paso, Texas in 1916 when he was just 16 years old. Cleotilde, 37, was a U.S. citizen, born in Arizona and a second generation Mexican American whose mother was also a native of Arizona<sup>5</sup>. By the 1940 Census, they both raised their four kids in a rented home in the 400 E. 42nd Place block. With only an 8th grade education, Ygnacio worked as a laborer in the construction industry while Cleotilde, a high school graduate had recently joined the working world as a sales lady at a retail shop<sup>6</sup>. This is the story about the Codines household and the many other Mexican families who lived in the neighborhood of South Central.

The purpose of this chapter is to establish the social and economic conditions of the Mexican families of South Central Los Angeles in the first half of the twentieth century. More specifically, this chapter is an effort to understand the context in which schooling occurred for this community. An understanding of the schooling of Mexican youth is contingent on an examination that explores the socioeconomic position of Mexicans within dominant society. Moreover, to understand the educational history of Chicana/os in South Central Los Angeles, we must first begin by acknowledging the political domination and socioeconomic inequality, which

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<sup>4</sup> Built in 1925, the park was designed to be the home of the Los Angeles Angels. Like Wrigley Field in Chicago, the park was named after William Wrigley, the chewing-gum magnate who owned both the Cubs and the Angels. See: Ritter, L. S. (1992). *Lost ballparks: A celebration of baseball's legendary fields*. New York: Viking Studio Books.

<sup>5</sup> Arizona achieved statehood in 1912, which means Cleotilde's mother was born in Arizona when it was still a territory.

<sup>6</sup> Vicki Ruiz (1998) has argued Mexican women participated in the informal economy in the twentieth century across region and generation, which often went unaccounted in official records.

often shaped educational opportunity for the Chicana/o community historically.<sup>7</sup> As Gilbert Gonzalez (1990) explains, public school segregation involved an extension of a prior condition to the socialization process—the psychological and socioeconomic reproduction of a societal relationship dividing a dominant from a subordinate community. In the case of the Mexican community living in the residentially segregated neighborhood of South Central Los Angeles, it is important to establish the socio-economic conditions before we can explore the schooling experiences of Mexican students.

I begin this chapter by first situating the neighborhood of South Central Los Angeles historically. I then briefly explain the sources and methods of this chapter as a way to contribute methodologically to the historical recovery of more community histories. I then explore the experiences of Chicana/o families in relation to migration patterns, family structure, intergenerational marriage, educational attainment, occupations and homeownership. This chapter seeks to shed light into the socio-economic conditions of the Mexican community of South Central Los Angeles, by drawing on the real lives of families such as the Codines, who are the embodiment of a neighborhood history that has yet to be told.

### **The Neighborhood of South Central Los Angeles**

Like many cities across the U.S., residential segregation was maintained in South Central Los Angeles through the use of restrictive covenants (Sides, 2006; Davis, 2006). Josh Sides (2006) notes that Los Angeles was clearly divided by the color line, “but one side of that line was a large and vibrant patchwork of races and ethnicities” (p.18). As a whole, the neighborhood of South Central Los Angeles has been written about as being lower-middle class during this time period (Flamming, 2005). Douglas Flamming (2005) describes that people in this neighborhood “worked blue-collar jobs, operated cash-in-the-pocket business, lived in relatively small homes, and rented crowded apartments” (p. 96). This is the collective experience that has been etched

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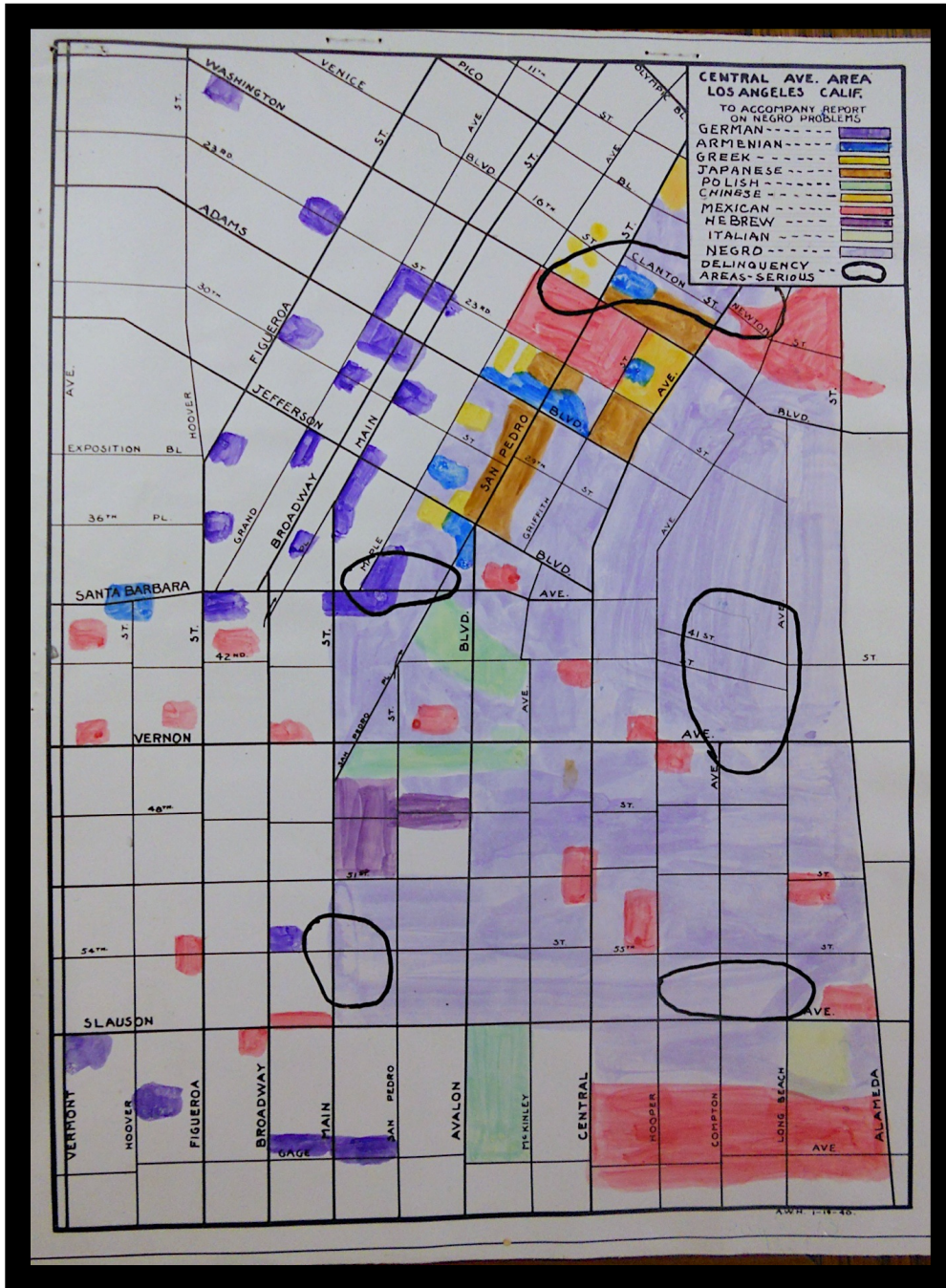
<sup>7</sup> Gilbert G. Gonzalez, *Chicano Education in the Era of Segregation* (Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 1990)



for the people of South Central. Yet, not much is known about the specific conditions Mexican descent families experienced. In an attempt to uncover the contours of opportunity for the Mexican families of South Central, I rely on quantitative data provided in the census population schedules of 1940 to write about the qualitative experiences shared by these families.

Guided by a map created by the Los Angeles Urban League (see Map 2) and utilizing Census Population Schedules from 1940, allowed me to recreate three neighborhood blocks and recapture the vibrancy and spirit of the families who lived and worked alongside each other. In January of 1940, the Los Angeles Urban League drafted a color-coded map to illustrate the housing patterns of the residents of South Central Los Angeles. The boundaries of this community include Washington Boulevard to the north, Main Street to west, Slauson Avenue to the south and Alameda street to the east. Using only a blank map of the neighborhood and a set of color markers, shapes of various colors and sizes were drawn demarcating the boundaries of the various ethnic enclaves. Some pockets of color blended in as watercolors, transitioning from one color to another, others pockets were little squares isolated in a sea of white. A total of 10 different colors covered the map, all representing ethnic groups living within the neighborhood which included Mexicans, Blacks, Germans, Armenians, Greeks, Japanese, Polish, Chinese, Hebrews, and Italians. Each pocket of color indicated concentrations of a particular ethnic group. In the case of the Mexican population, red colored marks on the map illuminated on blocks with high number of Mexican descent families.

**Map 2: Map of the ethnic diversity of South Central in 1940**

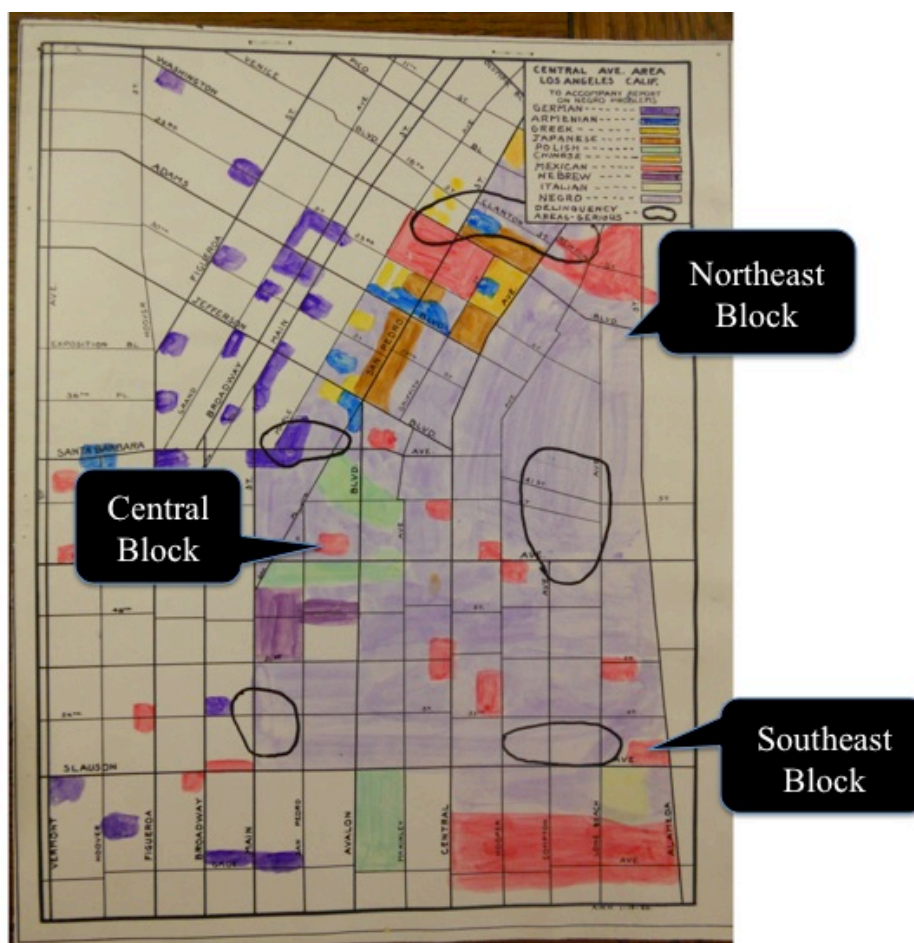


Source: Photograph of map created by Los Angeles Urban League, January 1940, Los Angeles Urban League Papers, Box 2, Folder 14. Department of Special Collections, University of California, Los Angeles.

Using the Urban League map, I selected three distinct areas within the boundaries of South Central. Two of the three areas selected were indicated in the Urban League map as

having concentrations of Mexicans. The third area selected was designated in the map as having high numbers of African American residents. Each area was chosen in 3 distinct regions throughout the South Central neighborhood, encompassing the Northeast, Central and Southeast areas (see Map 3). I recreated these three housing blocks as exemplars of the Mexican community in South Central. Once the areas were chosen, I pulled the corresponding 1940 Census Population Schedules for all three. Utilizing the Census website, I pulled the population schedules for the selected areas utilizing specific streets that bounded the pockets of concentration indicated in the map. Once the 1940 Census data was gathered for all three blocks, I selected individuals as exemplars of themes such as educational attainment, homeownership, occupation, and migration patterns. I gathered additional sources for these exemplars drawing from Census Population Schedules from 1910, 1920, 1930, and Immigration records found through the Ancestry.com website. These additional sources allowed for more complete life community stories.

**Map 3: Map of South Central Los Angeles with the three blocks selected**



Source: Source: Photograph of map created by Los Angeles Urban League, January 1940, Los Angeles Urban League Papers, Box 2, Folder 14, Department of Special Collections, University of California, Los Angeles.

The first housing block I selected is nestled in the northeast corner of the neighborhood on 21<sup>st</sup> Street and Long Beach Boulevard, just one block south of Washington Blvd and bordered by Alameda Street to the east. I will continue to refer to this as the Northeast block. The second block sat 2.6 miles west on 42<sup>nd</sup> Place and San Pedro. A centrally located block within the neighborhood, residents of this block lived right across Wrigley Field. San Pedro Street to the west and Avalon Blvd to the east bordered this Central block. I will refer to this block as the Central block. The third block selected sat on the southeast corner of the neighborhood, on 55<sup>th</sup> St. and Bandera Street, closely bordered by Alameda Street to the east and Slauson Avenue to

the south. I will continue to refer to this as the Southeast block. These three blocks have been recreated and are a starting point in understanding the social and economic conditions families of Mexican descent faced.

### **Telling the Story of the Blocks**

Although the Census Population Schedules of the 1940's indicated a racially white majority in all three blocks, a closer look at surnames, place of birth and citizenship status, allowed me to identify the families of Mexican descent, which had been racially accounted as 'white' by Census enumerators. The ethnic diversity in each block was consistent. In the Northeast block of 21<sup>st</sup> St., 23 families lived alongside each other. Mexican descent families composed the majority, totaling 13 of those families, followed by 7 white, 2 British Canadian and 1 Russian. The centrally located block on 42<sup>nd</sup> Place housed 34 families with Mexicans being the plurality with 12 families, followed by 8 Black, 8 white, 3 Italian, 1 Russian, 1 Hungarian and 1 British Canadian. The Southeast block on Bandera St. included 18 families, 14 of which were of Mexican descent, 1 African American, 1 White, 1 German, and 1 Syrian household. These three blocks are solid representations of the racial and ethnic diversity of this community and although the Urban League map indicated these blocks were among the Mexican pockets of South Central, the racial diversity of each block is not captured in the map.

### **Migration Patterns**

As documented by Los Angeles historian, George J. Sanchez (1993), the Mexican population of the city rose dramatically going from around 30,000 in 1920 to at least 97,000 by 1930. Patterns of residential settlement across Los Angeles reflected this influx. The large majority of the stories from the Mexican families living in all three blocks—Northeast, Central and Southeast—begin here.

Mexican descent families who were living in the three blocks selected for this study were largely Mexican immigrants, and Mexican Americans who most often came from the southwestern states of Arizona and New Mexico. Joe and Jacqueline Sandoval, both in their

late-thirties and both from Mexico, lived in the Northeast block in 1940. They both had immigrated to the U.S. in 1922 settling in the Belvedere township on 1<sup>st</sup> street as indicated by the Census of 1930. The following decade, the Sandoval's were living in the neighborhood of South Central Los Angeles within the Northeast block.

Unlike their neighbors, Fidel and Margarita Barrios, came from New Mexico and settled in the Northeast block sometime before 1940. Both Fidel and Margarita were born in New Mexico in 1871 and 1872 respectively. The earliest records found of them is in the 1910 Census Population Schedule which indicate both Fidel and Margarita's parents were New Mexicans. They married at the age of eighteen and by 1910, Fidel then 39, worked as a copper miner in the Santa Rita Village in New Mexico. Margarita did not work outside of the home as she cared for her eight children. A decade later, by the 1920 Census, Fidel and his family were living in Cochise, Arizona. Records indicate he and Margarita did not hold employment, as their daughter, Esther, 23, supported the family working as a servant at a private home. By the 1930 Census, Fidel and Margarita had settled in Los Angeles with three of their children, John, Louis and Esther along with Esther's daughter, Alvina. Soon after arriving to Los Angeles, the Barrios family rented a home in 25th St. and Main St., within the community of South Central Los Angeles. Fidel, 59 and Margarita, 58, were not gainfully employed but their son, John Barrios, 29, worked as a laborer at a cement company. By the following decade, Fidel and Margarita, both in their late-sixties, had moved a few miles east, into the Northeast block with their son Louis, 34. Both of these families, the Sandoval's and the Barrios, help illustrate the migration patterns among the Mexican families living in the neighborhood.

### **Family Structure**

To get a better understanding of home and family life, I hone in on the family structure among Mexican families to assess the social and economic opportunities. Thirty-one out of thirty-nine households were two parent households, whereby the "head of household" was often indicated as the father. Two parent homes were the main family structure among Mexican

families and in the majority of the cases, fathers were often indicated as the main source of income <sup>8</sup>. Through the “Head of Household” indicator in the Census Population Schedules for all three blocks, I found that 8 households out of 39 were lead by women who were either single mothers such as Bruna Fierro, Manuela Peters and Magdalena Loya or widowed as Maria Candelaria, Dolores Ruiz, Vernardina Prieto and Adela Witmer. Although two parent homes composed the majority of the households among the Mexican descent families, the women aforementioned each had a unique story and set circumstances that often forced them to be the only source of income and support for their families. As Vicki Ruiz (1998) reminds us, “The labor of female kin, regardless of age, proved instrumental in ensuring the family’s economic survival. Women preserved food for the winter, sold surplus commodities to neighbors, did laundry for Euro-American employers, and provided homes for lodgers” (p. 24). These sources of income often came from participating in the informal economy yet unacknowledged by traditional measures of employment. To explore the historical socio-economic dimensions of single motherhood among Mexican descent women in the context of South Central Los Angeles I turn to the case of Manuela Peters. Her story can illuminate on the urban experiences of single mothers in the 1940’s and the resilience among them.

Manuela Peters, a 46 year old single mother in 1940, lived in the Northeast block with her seven children (Census Population Schedule, 1940). Although the 1940 Population Schedule listed Manuela as “married” she was noted as the “Head of household” in the home of twelve occupants. Manuela was born in Mexico in 1893 and immigrated to the U.S. in 1916, when she was approximately 23 years old (Census Population Schedule, 1930). Two years later, by the age of 25, Manuela married Ben Peters, a 26-year-old U.S. citizen born in Arizona whose father was French and mother was Mexican. By the 1930 Census Population Schedule, Manuela and Ben, both in their late-thirties, lived in Nogales, Arizona with their six children. Their eldest, Ben Jr.

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<sup>8</sup> Vicki Ruiz (1998) has argued Mexican women participated in the informal economy in the twentieth century across region and generation, which often went unaccounted in official records.

was 11, Maria del Carmen 9, Josefina 8, Ruben 6, Socorro 4, and Dora 2. The Peters were one of the few families who owned their home in the Nogales, Arizona neighborhood. Although Ben worked as an immigration inspector, the 1930 Census indicate Manuela was “alien” or undocumented.

A decade later by 1940, Manuela lived in the Northeast block on 21<sup>st</sup> St. in South Central with her now seven kids. Manuela was then 46 year old, listed as married but neither was Ben Peter’s or a current spouse’s name listed anywhere in the Population Schedule. She was listed as the “head of household” to one of the largest households in the entire block. Her eldest, Benjamin Jr. was 21 years old and worked as a salesman in a vegetable market<sup>9</sup>. He had stopped attending school after his junior year of High school. Maria del Carmen 19, had stopped attending even earlier by 9<sup>th</sup> grade and had instead entered the labor market as a laborer in a fruit factory. Josefina, 17, had married Gilbert Zepeda, 22, whom worked as a truck driver for a wholesale market and lived in Manuela’s home. As the two eldest siblings, Ben Jr. and Maria del Carmen, both worked to support the family and allowed for the rest of their siblings, Ruben 16, Socorro, 13, Dora, 12 and Manuel 11 to continue their education. All of Manuela’s sons and daughters lived with her in the home she rented on 21<sup>st</sup> Street along with four lodgers. Two of the lodgers were brothers from Texas, Raul and Ramiro Llamas, who worked in the nearby wholesale produce market. The two remaining lodgers were from Arizona, one worked at the wholesale produce market and the other at a stockyard. It is my hunch that although Manuela did not have paid employment, she rented out space of her home to the lodgers to make some income. Mexican women of South Central claimed a space for themselves and their families by “building community through mutual assistance while struggling for some semblance of financial stability” (Ruiz, 1998, p. 7).

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<sup>9</sup> I speculate that the wholesale market related occupations were linked to the Los Angeles wholesale Produce Market on Central Ave. & 7<sup>th</sup> St. Built in 1918 as a replacement for the City Market, this much larger building became the focus of the produce trade in Los Angeles. See: Robert M. Alvarez, Jr. Mexican Entrepreneurs And Markets In The City Of Los Angeles: A Case Of An Immigrant Enclave. *Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development*, Vol. 19, No. 1/2, Immigrants in U.S. Cities. pp. 99-124



## **Generations and Citizenship**

A prevalent theme among the Central block located on 42nd Place and San Pedro, was the marriages across generational lines. Through the “Place of birth” category found in the Census Population Schedules of the 1940’s, one can trace the intergenerational marriages among Mexican migrants and Mexican Americans. Fred and Elvira Carrizoza’s marriage illuminates what Ruiz (1998) calls the “layering of generations” (p. 25). Fred and Elvira lived in the Central block. He was a Mexican immigrant and Elvira, a native Arizonian. After the birth of their first two children in Arizona, Fred and Elvira moved to Los Angeles, where they settled in South Central. Fred and Elvira were not the only intergenerational marriage in the Central block, among them were 5 other families with similar familial stories. One of these five families include Ygnacio and Cleotilde, whom we began this chapter with. Ygnacio migrated to the U.S. from Chihuahua Mexico while Cleotilde was U.S. citizen from Arizona.

## **Educational Attainment and Socio-Economic Status**

In attempting to explore the social positions Mexican families occupied in South Central Los Angeles in 1940, I have utilized a Holligshead four-factor index of social status. This measure has been devised to determine the social economic status of families by taking into account education, occupation, gender and marital status. The years of schooling an individual has completed are believed to have a direct relation with the occupation. Computed scores assign family units within a social strata ranging from high upper, high middle, middle, lower middle and lower class (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Social Strata and Corresponding Occupation**

Social Strata	Type of Occupation	Score
High Upper Class	Professional	66-55
High Middle Class	Technical	54-40
Middle Class	Skilled craftsmen	39-30
Lower Middle Class	Semiskilled worker	29-20
Lower Class	Unskilled laborers	19-8

The highest social strata, high upper class, is composed of major business and professional occupations. High middle class assumes business and minor professional, along with technical occupations. Middle class is composed of skilled craftsmen, clerical and sales occupation. Lower middle class requires semiskilled and machine operating occupations. The lowest social strata, lower class involves menial service worker and unskilled laborers. Across all three blocks Mexican families were overwhelmingly unskilled laborers, and fell within the lower class social strata. The average score for Mexican families in the Northeast block was 16 compared to 21 for whites, which positioned whites in the lower middle class strata. In the Central block, the average score for Black families was 16, followed by Mexican families with a score of 19, both still within the lower class strata and illustrative of the unskilled occupational positions they often held. Whites in the Central block averaged a score of 18, within the lower class strata but when the data is disaggregated by citizenship, U.S. born whites total increases to 23, illustrating a higher social position for U.S. born whites in relation to ethnic whites. The Southeaster block exemplified the same social strata pattern for Mexican families as they averaged a score of 17, within the lower class strata compared to whites who averaged a score of 20, within lower middle class strata.

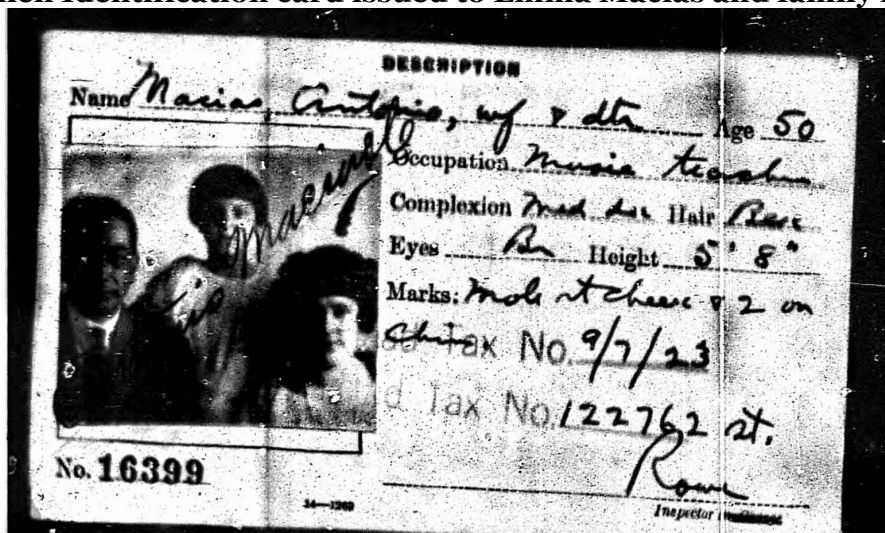
These social economic positions are closely connected to the educational attainment levels of the parents or indicated head of household as they are taken into account to calculate the Hollingshead score. The educational level for parents of Mexican descent were varied. When we look at the educational levels among women and men, we see that women had lower attainment levels. Across all three blocks, women in the Northeast block were less likely to continue their education passed elementary school. Margaret Barrios, a resident of the Northeast block can help illustrate this. She was born in New Mexico and had the lowest grade level attainment among the residents of this block with a 2<sup>nd</sup> grade education. Margaret's neighbor Carmen Fuentes, had only a 4<sup>th</sup> grade education, and Dolores Ruiz had a 5<sup>th</sup> grade education. The men on the other hand, had higher educational attainment levels. For example,

the men from this same Northeast block, had educational levels ranging from 8<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Such was the case of Joe Sandoval who had a 12<sup>th</sup> grade education and worked as a butcher in a meat factory, or Joe Lopez, an electric shop laborer who had a 9<sup>th</sup> grade education. In the Central block, four of the mothers had partially completed high school out of 12 women. In the Southeast block, the highest educational level for both mother and father figures was 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

One of the households that scored within the lower middle class strata was headed by Ernesto Pelayo, a 38 year-old radio repair shop worker who lived in the Central block. Ernesto lived with his wife Graciela, 23, daughter Angelica, 2, and mother-in-law Emma Macias, 43. Although Graciela did not have paid work, her mother, Emma held a steady job as a private music teacher, one of the highest occupations among her Mexican descent neighbors in the central block on 42<sup>nd</sup> Place. Census data indicate Emma was working on “her own account” from her own home.

Emma Macias, the private music teacher had immigrated to the United States with her husband Antonio Macias and daughter Graciela in 1923 (Census Population Schedule, 1930). An “Alien Identification card” (see figure 1) that was issued in El Paso, Texas on September 12, 1923 indicates that all three entered together. Included in the identification card is a picture of the entire family, a young Emma softly smiles as she stands next to her husband Antonio, a serious man who stood at 5’8 as their 6 year old daughter, Graciela, posed between the two. The identification detailed Antonio’s age and occupation; he was 50 years old and was a music teacher.

**Figure 1: Alien Identification card issued to Emma Macias and family in 1923**



The newly arrived Macias family settled in El Paso, Texas as the 1930 Census Population Schedule indicates, where they rented an apartment. Emma's husband, Antonio worked as a music teacher while their daughter Graciela, 13 attended school. There was some sort of discrepancy in the ages since the Census indicated Antonio was 53 in 1930 but was 50 when he immigrated to the U.S. in 1923. Regardless, Antonio and Emma had a 20-age difference. They married when he was thirty-eight and she was only eighteen. Sometime between the 1930's, Emma and Graciela made their way to South Central Los Angeles. Graciela's own daughter was born in California, making me speculate they migrated to the golden state sometime in the mid-1930's. By the 1940's Census Population Schedule, Emma Macias lived with her daughter and son-in-law, in the Central block.

Raymundo Cisneros, a 31-year resident of the Southeast block also scored within the lower middle class strata. He had an 8<sup>th</sup> grade education and worked as a meat smoker at the time of the 1940 Census. He was married and lived with his wife Elsi also 31-years old and their 1-year old daughter Martha in 5521 Bandera Street, a home which they owned. Raymundo and Elsi were both born in Mexico, 549 miles apart. Raymundo was born in Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua in May 19, 1909 while Elsi was born in Guaymas, Sonora in September 27, 1909. Seven months after she was born Elsi entered the U.S. through Nogales, Arizona.

The earliest record I have of Elsi and her family trace back to the 1920's Census. Elsi, whose actual name was Eloisa was the daughter of John and Adela Witmer. John was born in York county, Pennsylvania and Adela was born in Mexico but was a naturalized citizen of the U.S. John and Adela rented a home in El Paso, Texas where they lived with their daughters Eloisa, 10 and Beatrice, 8. John worked as a foreman in a lime quarry and Adela did not work. By the following census in 1930, the Witmer family lived in Northeast Los Angeles. John continued working as a foreman and both daughters, Eloisa then 20, and Beatrice 18, worked as seamstresses.

Meanwhile, Raymundo immigrated to the U.S. in April of 1929 and entered through El Paso, Texas. In July of 1934, Elsi and Raymundo married and the following summer in 1935, Raymundo had submitted his petition for naturalization. By this year, Raymond and Elsi were already living in a home in Bandera St. in the Southeast block. In the naturalization petition Elsi's father, John Witmer is mentioned along with two witnesses, Gilbert Webb and Charles Barber, who signed to support Raymundo's application. Raymundo become a naturalized citizen by November of 1935. The 1940 census indicate Raymundo and Elsi owned their home on 5521 Bandera Street. A few houses down the Southeast block, Adela Witmer, 48, widowed by then, lived on her own in the same block as her daughter.

### **Home Ownership**

Although considered a lower-middle class community (Flamming, 2005) I wanted to explore the social position of the Mexican families of this neighborhood. Economically speaking, homeownership is critical in recapturing notions of capital, wealth and economic position. When looking at the Mexican families in the three distinct blocks, whites were more likely to own their home than Mexican and Blacks. Although Mexican families made up the plurality in these blocks, they were the group with the least homeownership. For instance, out of the 13 families of Mexican descent who lived in the Northeast block, only one owned their home, compared to five out of the ten white families. In looking at the Northeast block, Whites were six

times more likely to own a home compared to Mexicans. Moreover, the disparity in homeownership didn't look that different in the Central block, where 17 percent of Mexican families were homeowners (2 of 12), compared with 12 percent of Black families (1 of 8) and 64 percent of White (9 of 14). In the Southeast block on Bandera St., the pattern continues as Whites were 2 times more likely to own their home than Mexican families. Out of 14 families of Mexican descent only 4 families owned their home. The area had a high proportion of renter-occupied housing as Mexican families primarily rented their home in all three blocks.

Maria Candelaria, a 52 year-old widow, was the only homeowner of Mexican descent on the Northeast block. She owned the house in 1721 E. 21<sup>st</sup> Street where she worked as a seamstress making and selling dresses out of her home. Maria was born in New Mexico, and had only a third grade education. She married at the age of 19 and had five kids, all of whom in the spring of 1940 ranged in age from 11 to 30 years old. Her eldest, Helen, was 30, single and working at a fruit factory. Maria's three sons, Louie, 28, Manuel, 26, Joe, 21, all worked as deliverymen for a retail market. The youngest, Celia, was 11 and in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade. The five of her children lived in this home, along with Louie's wife and three children. The 1940 Census classified Maria as "working on own account"<sup>10</sup>. This classification was often used to signify entrepreneurship, and as a seamstress working from home, her home doubled as a business where she sold garments.

Alvino Peralta, was another homeowner of Mexican descent who lived in the Southeast block in 1940. He was 35 year old and lived with his wife Alice, 26, and their three children, Dolores, 6, Juanita, 5, and Robert, who was 9 months. The 1910 Census Population Schedule indicate Alvino was no stranger to the neighborhood of South Central and to the Southeast block near Bandera St. since he had grown up just one street over on 5507 Alba Street. The 1910 Census noted Alvino's parents, Eulogio and Angelita Peralta were homeowners of that home which housed their nine children. Eulogio and Angelita had immigrated to the U.S. in 1868 and

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<sup>10</sup> The 1940 Census classified each individual as a particular type of worker ranging from worker in private work (PW), worker in governmental work (GW), Employer (E), working on own account (OA), and unpaid family worker (NP). Examples of this type of occupation under OA included private music teacher and restaurant owner.

1876 respectively and were listed as “Mexican-Spanish” in the 1910 Census. They married at the age of 19 and by 1910, they had 9 children ranging from 1–month to 18 years old, which included Alvino who was 5 years old. During this time, the Census indicates Eulogio, 44, was the proprietor of the grocery store where he and Angelita worked in.

A decade later, the 1920 Census indicate Alvino’s family continued to live in the neighborhood although they had moved a few blocks down in Alba Street, into a home which they also owned. Alvino’s father Eulogio was now working as a manager of a “pool room” or pool hall. His three eldest daughters worked as engravers in the tile industry as Alvino, then 15, continued going to school. By the 1930 Census, the Peralta family was back in the 5507 home in Alba Street, the house they lived in 1910. Eulogio was listed now as the proprietor of the pool hall he previously managed. All grown up by this point, Alvino, 25, worked as a truck driver at a fruit ranch.

By the following decade, in 1940, Alvino had married Alice and had 3 children. They had purchased a home close to where he had grown up, in the Southeast block on Bandera St. Both Alvino and his wife Alice had an 8<sup>th</sup> grade education, He was employed full-time working as a laborer in a flourmill. The Peralta family exemplifies the intergenerational transfer of wealth through homeownership.

## **Conclusion**

These stories, about family, work, occupation, migration, and education, are all stories that help illuminate the urban experiences of Mexican families living and working in South Central Los Angeles. Although most scholarship has focused on the stories of those that lived east of the LA River, my hope is to offer a historical counterstory, one that draws from real people’s life histories and trajectories to piece together a collective narrative of those who made their home into the neighborhood of South Central Los Angeles.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DEFINING THE MEXICAN COMMUNITY AS A PROBLEM: DEFICIT DOMINANT DISCOURSE PRODUCED, CONSUMED AND CONTESTED**

#### **Introduction**

In the previous chapter I established the social and economic conditions the Mexican population of South Central Los Angeles confronted in the first half of the twentieth century. For the purpose of this chapter, I will focus on answering my second research question, which explores the dominant and non-dominant discourse about the Mexican community of South Central during 1930-1949. I begin this chapter by first situating how the dominant group perceived the community of South Central in general, and the Mexican people who lived there. I then briefly illustrate how two distinctly Los Angeles events, the *Sleepy Lagoon Case* of 1942 and *Zoot Suit Riots* of 1943 intensified the production and consumption of deficit discourse about the Mexican family and youth that characterized them as intellectually unfit, immoral and lazy. Lastly, I illustrate how the Mexican community, in particular youth, pushed back and resisted these preconceived notions about them and reaffirmed their cultural wealth and value. To begin to explore how the neighborhood of South Central Los Angeles was perceived, I turn to the Home Owner Loan Corporation's (HOLC) area descriptions from 1939. These primary sources offer a glimpse into the dominant narratives about neighborhoods.

#### **“Appraising” the Community of South Central Los Angeles**

Created under President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal in 1933, the Home Owner Loan Corporation was designed to reinvigorate the homeowner financial market in response to the Great Depression. The HOLC created one of the most significant cartographic series providing neighborhood-specific appraisal maps, known as Residential Security Maps, in the late 1930s for all U.S. cities with a population exceeding 40,000<sup>11</sup>. Neighborhood assessments and appraisals undertaken by the agency were the basis of city Residential Security Maps. Each

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<sup>11</sup> See Kristen B. Crossney & David W. Bartelt (2005) Residential Security, Risk, and Race: The Home Owners' Loan Corporation and Mortgage Access in Two Cities, *Urban Geography*, 26:8, 707-736, DOI: [10.2747/0272-3638.26.8.707](https://doi.org/10.2747/0272-3638.26.8.707)



neighborhood assessment included a final grade and a corresponding color. Similar to an academic grading scale, the highest grade a neighborhood could receive was an ‘A’ which corresponded with the color green while the lowest grade, ‘D’ conferred a red. Table 1 illustrates the four-point scale used by the HOLC to create the 1939 Security Maps with descriptive words often associated and used for each grade.

**Table 3: HOLC Grading System**

<b>Letter grade</b>	<b>Color</b>	<b>Description</b>
A	Green	Best; homogeneously
B	Blue	Still desirable
C	Yellow	Declining
D	Red	Hazardous

Standard in Residential Security Maps were qualitative descriptions of the neighborhood which included rationales for the corresponding grade and color. While the assessors described urban planning concerns as key elements for the corresponding grade, a central narrative among the HOLC neighborhood descriptions was the deficit framing of particular populations. Specifically, the HOLC framed People of Color and ethnic whites as “hazards.” The systematic neighborhood appraisals incorporated deficit views about the “quality” of the residents, which were informed by the agency’s perceived racial hierarchy. Homogeneous white neighborhoods were highly valued and appraised by the agency. The following are examples of the language used in the descriptions of two neighborhoods in Los Angeles County, Los Feliz and Morningside Park who were predominately white and awarded an “A” grade.

Letter Grade “A” Descriptions

With a convenient location, ideal building sites and high caliber deed restrictions, this area should continue indefinitely to attract a substantial type of resident (Los Feliz Residential Security Map, 1940).

Deed restrictions govern improvements and provide uniform “setbacks”, architectural supervision and protection against racial hazards. The district is attracting the upper medium income group and is prospectively homogeneous (Morningside Park Residential Security Map, 1940).

As these two examples illustrate, the HOLC rationalized high scores by the perceived quality of deed restrictions. As the description for the Los Feliz and Morningside Park neighborhoods demonstrate, “high caliber deed restrictions” were highly regarded as they functioned to protect whiteness from the threat of “racial hazards.” Hence, homogeneous neighborhoods were highly ranked and perceived as desirable. These descriptions are in stark contrast from low scoring neighborhoods.

The following are descriptions from two neighborhoods, Northwest Compton and San Gabriel Whittier Way, which were ethnically diverse and accorded the lowest grade of a “D”.

#### Letter Grade “D” Descriptions

The prospects for this area are not bright and while a “medial red” grade is assigned it is believed that its downward trend will continue. If population density increases it may easily develop into a “slum district (Northwest Compton Residential Security Map, 1940).

This is an extremely old Mexican shack district, which has been “as is” for many generations. Like the “Army mule” it has no pride of ancestry nor hope of posterity. It is typical semitropical countryside “slum” (San Gabriel Whittier Way Residential Security Map, 1940).

Both the neighborhoods of Northwest Compton and San Gabriel Whittier Way were ethnically diverse. Guided by white supremacist ideology, the HOLC perceived anything beyond the homogeneous white neighborhood as a “slum”. As whiteness decreased so did the HOLC grades. The threat People of Color posed was immediate, as their presence in any neighborhood could “define” it’s potential development. Thus, in a system that rewarded whiteness, ethnically diverse populations and communities did not stand a chance to financially survive and thrive.

In 1939, the agency’s appraisers assessed the neighborhood of South Central and accorded it a “low red” grade, the lowest of its kind. The description of the neighborhood (Central Ave. Residential Security Map, 1939) highlighted how the appraiser rationalized the low score. They wrote:

This is the “melting pot” area of Los Angeles, and has long been thoroughly blighted. The Negro concentration is largely in the eastern two thirds of the area. Original construction was evidently of fair quality but lack of proper maintenance is notable. Population is uniformly of poor quality and

many improvements are in a state of dilapidation. This area is a fit location for a slum clearance project.

The Residential Security Map description sheds light onto the ways the agency systematically dehumanized neighborhoods that were primarily non-white. For the neighborhood of South Central, HOLC assessors tabulated 40% of the population was composed of “foreign families” described as “Mexicans, Japanese and low class Italians” as well as “Negro” families making up 50%. South Central was indeed racially diverse. Yet, the agency’s views on the ethnic and racial diversity of the neighborhood are captured by their perceived assessment of the population as “uniformly of poor quality.” HOLC appraisers did not want nor cared to get to know the people of South Central Los Angeles. Their ethnic background highlighted their ‘otherness’ which automatically presumed them deficient.

Although the Residential Security Maps assessed the overall state of the neighborhood buildings and housing, I argue that these documents were primarily used to identify and map out racially diverse communities in relation to majority white neighborhoods. Residential Security Maps included a section to capture the neighborhood’s population. Yet, this section only contained two ethnic designations for the agency’s assessor to fill-in, “Foreign Families” which I speculate was code for “Mexican” or “Other” and “Negro.” In addition, the security map also documented whether these populations were increasing, decreasing or static in size and used language such as “infiltration” to label population movement. In the case of the South Central Los Angeles Residential Security Map, the population was potentially shifting as they noted “Encroachment of industry a threat”. Thus, the HOLC was primarily concerned with documenting ethnic communities and their respective size as they related to the dominant white surrounding neighborhoods.

Although the HOLC’s Residential Security Maps illustrate how People of Color were perceived in general, a report from this same agency (HOLC Report, 1939), offers a glimpse into more specific perceptions about the Mexican community. The report indicates:

While many of the Mexican race are of high caliber and descended from the Spanish grandees who formerly owned all the territory in Southern California, the large majority of Mexican People are a definite problem locally and their importation in the years gone by to work the agricultural crops has now been recognized as a mistake (pp. 7).

As the report reveals, the perceived value of Mexican people is dependent on their Spanish descendency. Although the ancestry of Mexican people was one recognized for its *mestizaje*, the melding of both pre-Columbian and Spanish roots, the report only acknowledges their European ancestry. Furthermore, the Spanish past is recognized and highly valued as the source for “high caliber” attributes within the Mexican community. However, the Spanish ancestry was not enough to keep the dominant group from perceiving “the large majority” of Mexicans as a historical problem. The report continues:

Here again, is one of the more serious aspects of the relief situation in Los Angeles County, for the Mexican group constitutes an almost permanent charity ward of the Government. Their standard of living, except for the “Spanish” Mexican, is very low and they can get along very comfortably even on their small state relief payments and “bountifully” on a W.P.A. salary. It is very difficult to dislodge them from a type of living to which they have been accustomed for generations and for which they are not receiving money with little or no work involved. This is a problem that Los Angeles faces and one for which no solution has been developed as yet (pp. 25).

The report reveals the dominant perception about the Mexican community framed them as a social problem across generations. However, it must be noted that not all Mexicans were perceived the same. “Spanish” Mexicans were viewed and held at higher regard. It is unclear how “Spanish” ancestry was determined, my hunch is that phenotype and class may have been used. As this example illustrates, the “Spanish” Mexicans were the exception to the rule as they were not perceived they same way as the general Mexican population. Spanish descendency was positively associated, as it was closer to whiteness than the indigenous pre-columbian ancestry. In this example, discourse operated to frame the Mexican community as lazy. They are viewed as a “permanent charity ward” that relied completely on the government to support them. The passage from the HOLC report historicizes the perceived apathetic behavior, which frames the

Mexican community as a fraudulent group of people who do not contribute to the nation and have only taken advantage of it. These assertions included in the agency's report push forward the idea of the lazy Mexicans as a social problem. This report also helps advance the notion of the "good" and the "bad" Mexican where Spanish ancestry defined good social and moral character. These deficit perceptions about the Mexican community were heightened to extreme levels with the *Sleepy Lagoon Case* in 1942 and the *Zoot-Suit Riots* of 1943. These two events allowed for the proliferation of negative frames about the Mexican youth and their families, which discursively framed them as unfit and prone to delinquency. These frames were massively consumed nationwide.

### **Markers of Local Anti-Mexican Climate: The Sleepy Lagoon Case and the Zoot-Suit Riots**

*The Sleepy Lagoon Case* of 1942 proved to be a highly racialized case that epitomized the hostile environment for Chicana/o youth. In the summer of 1942 a young Chicano was found dead near Sleepy Lagoon, "a water-filled gravel pit in South Central Los Angeles traditionally used by local Mexican American children as a swimming hole" (Gutierrez, 1995, pp. 124). On the basis of circumstantial evidence, the Los Angeles police arrested twenty-two local Chicano youth on charges of murder and conspiracy. After a sensational trial, seventeen of the defendants were found guilty. McWilliams (1968), describes, that for years "Mexicans had been pushed around by the Los Angeles police and given rough time in the courts", but the *Sleepy Lagoon* prosecution embodied "community-wide prejudice" (pp. 228). This trial in essence illustrated dominant sentiment about a whole community, and particularly about Mexican youth.

Dominant newspapers incited hysteria around a "crime wave" led by "zoot-suiters" or "pachucos" (Obregon Pagan, 2003). This case became known as the *Sleepy Lagoon* murder and intensified the discourse around Mexican youth and their families. The following year, in the summer of 1943, vicious attacks on Mexican youth by servicemen in Los Angeles led to the *Zoot-*

*Suit Riots*. As noted by Carey McWilliams, the words “zoot-suit” and “pachuco” began to appear in the newspaper so regularly during this time period, that within a few months, they had replaced the word “Mexican.” Both of these events escalated the production of dominant discourse about the Mexican community. Although the dominant discourse about the Mexican population never explicitly targeted those exclusively living in the neighborhood of South Central Los Angeles, it must be noted that youth apprehended and involved in the *Sleepy Lagoon Case* lived in the neighborhood under study. For example the Census Population Schedule from the 1940 indicate Henry “Hank” Leyvas lived on the East 45th Street block, Gus Zamora lived on East Vernon Avenue, and Lorena Encinas lived in East 31<sup>st</sup> Street, all within the neighborhood of South Central Los Angeles. These three are examples of the connection this traumatic chapter in Los Angeles history has direct ties to the neighborhood of South Central Los Angeles. In fact, sources suggest these youth might have been students of Jefferson High as well. For example, Lorena Encinas, a young Chicana involved in the *Sleepy Lagoon Case* was in student at Jefferson High before she was apprehended and sent to the Ventura School for Girls.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the general dominant discourse about the Mexican people was directly linked to the youth and families living in the South Central Los Angeles neighborhood during this time period.

## **Producing Deficit Dominant Discourses of Mexicans**

### **Discourses of Deficiency: The State Narrative**

As Los Angeles reeled from the *Sleepy Lagoon Case*, the *Special Committee on Problems of Mexican Youth* was formed to study, report and recommend solutions to the issues of Mexican youth. The 1942 Grand Jury report indicates a series of speakers where invited to express their views on the causes of the violent outbreaks among youth of Mexican descent. This hearing took place after the Sheriff and Police department heads appeared before the Grand Jury with their own set of opinions and reasons for the outbreaks. On August 11<sup>th</sup>, Los Angeles

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<sup>12</sup> [http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/zoot/eng\\_peopleevents/p\\_encinas.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/zoot/eng_peopleevents/p_encinas.html)

County Sheriff, Mr. Eugene W. Biscailuz and Los Angeles City Chief of Police, C. B. Horrall stood before the Grand Jury to present a report read by Lieutenant Edward Duran Ayres titled, *Statistics: the nature of the Mexican American criminal*. In the report, Ayres (1942) outlined the contributing factors to crime, which ranged from institutional and societal discrimination to deficit cultural and biological characteristics.

The three-page report began by admitting the discrimination Mexicans faced in housing, labor, schools and even in restaurants, swimming pools and public parks. However, none of these factors were perceived as salient to the violent outbreak as the perceived cultural and genetic dispositions of Mexican youth. Ayres (1942) argued:

Broken homes, liquor, loose morals, are also contributing factors....But to get a true perspective of this condition we must look for a basic cause that is even more fundamental than the factors already mentioned, no matter how basically [sic] they may appear. Let us view it from the biological basis—in fact, as the main basis to work from. Although a wild cat and a domestic cat are of the same family they have certain biological characteristics so different that while one may be domesticated the other would have to be caged to be kept in captivity;

Ayres along with the Sheriff and Police departments, defined the Mexican community by its assumed immorality and drunkenness. The perceived “broken” homes of Mexican families established as fact by Ayres are contrary to my findings discussed in chapter four which found the majority of Mexican households in the neighborhood of South Central Los Angeles were composed of both parents. Yet, Ayres takes it a step further and asserts the “fundamental” factor for the outbreaks among Mexican youth lie in the biological make-up of this community. He likened this community to a “wild” animal who could not be tamed or “domesticated.” This analogy is telling as he concludes that the only solution to handle the “wild cat” is to keep it in a cage. This analogy alludes to imprisonment as the only viable solution to deal with the perceived threat of the Mexican community. Ayres (1942) continued the report by linking these “wild” characteristics to the Indian ancestry, which he asserts, “total disregard for human life has always been universal throughout the Americas among the Indian population, which of course is well known to everyone.” Thus, the “wild” and immoral characteristics of Mexicans are a result

of the Indian ancestry and not the Spanish side. He contended, “the Mexican Indian, is mostly Indian—and that is the element which migrated to the United States in such large numbers, and looks upon leniency by authorities as an evidence of weakness or fear” (Ayres, 1942). Ayres’ report to the Grand Jury of 1942 illustrates the dominant perceptions about the Mexican community as inherently Indian, which defined them as criminal, immoral and unfit for society.

On January 4<sup>th</sup>, 1943, the Citizen’s Committee on Latin American Youth, a major organization that led the efforts to explore the needs and solutions for the Mexican American community, asked Judge of the Juvenile Court, Robert H. Scott to speak on his ideas to prevent juvenile delinquency. Judge Scott’s preventive measures for “Latin American children” included suggestions that framed Mexican families as unfit and immoral. Through the detailed minutes of the organization (Citizens Committee on Latin American Youth Minutes, 1943) Judge Scott asserted:

The immediate objective should be to clean up the homes and see that they receive a knowledge of proper methods of sanitation and nutrition; to improve the moral atmosphere of the home by developing programs of better church attendance and abstention from movies and drinking.

Judge Scott’s view of juvenile delinquency is telling of the deficit frame used to understand the Mexican family. As someone who primarily dealt with youth in his courtroom, he perceived issues of juvenile delinquency as a byproduct of the Mexican home. Primarily framing parents as the irresponsible contributors to social ills, Judge Scott suggested the “clean up” begin at home. “Cleaning up the homes” not only referred to proper sanitation in the literal sense, framing the Mexican family as dirty and unfit in even the preparation of their meals. But his assertion points out the “cleaning” of the immorality that was perceived abound within the Mexican home. Judge Scott’s solutions to the moral dilemma suggested Mexican families get closer to God and curtailed their assumed alcohol consumption. Judge Scott (Citizens Committee on Latin American Youth Minutes, 1943) continued:

I would like to have the committee feel that there is no better group potentially than the boys of Latin American background. If at all times they are found



retarded below the level of other children, this is due to the home conditions rather than to intellectual impoverishment. Placed in a different environment, the I.Q. of the Latin American child goes up.

Judge Scott's words expose once again his view of the Mexican household by directly correlating perceived low ability to home conditions. His suggestions indicate his belief that if youth were taken out of their homes and placed in an entirely different "environment", youth would automatically be of higher ability. Thus, the perceived root of the problem is the Mexican household, who are believed to produce immoral and unintelligent boys. Although Judge Scott does not delineate the alternate desirable environment for these boys, I contend that institutions such as schools and juvenile delinquency boot camps were often viewed as the solution.

The following year, in 1944, in the meeting minutes of the Assembly Interim Committee on Juvenile Delinquency, Mr. Paul McKusick, Superintendent of the Fred C. Nelles School for Boys at Whittier, California argued that the primary cause of delinquency was "lack of parental care" (Assembly Interim Committee on Juvenile Delinquency Minutes, 1944). McKusick also argued that the principle cause of the present-day increase in juvenile delinquency was the breakdown of the home, which he attributed to many factors principally "working mothers." In addition, he argued that "general wide-spread disrespect for law and order entertained by the parents and adults" was "the end product of such mental attitude inculcated in the child on the theory that anything was all right to do if he wasn't caught" (Assembly Interim Committee on Juvenile Delinquency Minutes, 1944). Again, we see here the perceived notion that parents instilled immoral values onto their children, resulting in juvenile delinquency.

### **Contesting Dominant Discourse: Mexican Voices Speak Back**

The deficit discourse perpetuated about youth of Mexican descent often labeled them unintelligent, lazy, and criminal. Youth themselves contested this discourse by leveraging their collective voices and experiences. There are many forms of resistance that youth used during this period that have yet to be explored. Compelling examples of resistance I found have been in the pages of newspapers, correspondence, and yearbooks, which dispute and interrupt the

consumption of dominant narratives. To re-center their voices and experiences, youth took it upon themselves to write themselves into the narrative.

### **The Mexican Voice**

An example that richly illustrates the resistance activated and exercised was a newsmagazine by and for Mexican youth called *The Mexican Voice*. Created in 1938, this newsmagazine provided the voices of Mexican youth throughout Southern California. *The Mexican Voice* was a concerted effort among youth of Mexican descent from various Los Angeles area neighborhoods. Illustrative of the collectivity was the editorial board, with Felix Gutierrez, a native from Monrovia, California as editor and Jesse Aguirre, the appointed business manager from Watts, California. Fellow youth from various neighborhoods were appointed as reporters for the paper to provide news from their district and the opportunity to write about issues affecting their community. A complete youth-led and produced effort, the creation of *The Mexican Voice* in itself contested the idea of Mexican youth as unintelligent, criminal and lazy. In a reflection titled *Nosotros*, Felix Gutierrez, the editor of the paper who often wrote under his pen name Manuel de la Raza,<sup>13</sup> described the collective support the newsmagazine received from his fellow youth at a meeting, he illustrates “Following the hectic discussion at the leaders’ meeting July 10th, I came back with a feeling that everybody is behind our paper because it’s **theirs**.” From the editorial staff to the reporters, a collective effort among youth throughout Southern California was evident. Thus, *The Mexican Voice*, was an organized effort among youth of Mexican descent as a platform by and for them. The very creation of this news magazine challenge notions of Mexican youth as unintelligent and lazy. To organize a collective of youth from various neighborhoods to participate in the creation and production of a newsmagazine is a commendable act and one of its kind during this time period. Youth

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<sup>13</sup> Chapter 6 in Rivas-Rodriguez and Olgin (2014) *Latino/as and War World II: Mobility, Agency, and Ideology*, indicate Felix Gutierrez wrote under this pen name.

recognized the need for a newsmagazine that included their perspectives, their experiences, and their voices.

As their very first issue indicated on the cover, *The Mexican Voice* was “The Big Little Paper. The Little Magazine with a big thought!” (Mexican Voice, 1938). Often found in the newsmagazine was a slogan for the paper as “The Voice of the Modern Mexican Youth.” This twelve page newsmagazine was truly “big in thought” as the articles illustrated an impressive set of stories that challenged assumptions about them as Mexican youth and were asset based in nature. Youth reporters consistently penned articles that grappled and engaged readers with critical conversation around issues affecting the Mexican community. Examples of some of these articles include Manuel Ceja’s ‘*Are we Proud to be Mexicans?*’; Joe Rodriguez’s ‘*The Value of Education*’ and ‘*Social Obligations of Youth*’; Paul Coronel’s ‘*Social Conditions of the Mexican People in General*’; Dora Ibanez’s ‘*A Challenge to the American Girl of Mexican Parentage*’ and Rebecca Munoz’s ‘*Que Sera De Nuestros Ninos?*’ The level of sophistication in their analysis to confront issues affecting the Mexican community illustrate youths’ critical awareness and high intellect. This set of stories all challenge dominant frames used to define the Mexican community.

An exemplar of this is an article found in the very first issue of *The Mexican Voice*, in July 1938 by Manuel Ceja, an eighteen-year old from Los Angeles. A son of Mexican immigrants and a political science student at Compton Junior College, Ceja penned an article (Ceja, 1938) entitled “Are we Proud to be Mexicans?” where he explores questions of ethnic pride among Mexican descent youth. He begins by recalling of an incident in which he overheard a young Mexican boy describe himself as “Spanish” when asked about his ethnic background. He posits: “Why are we so afraid to tell people that we are Mexicans? Are we ashamed of the color of our skin, the shape and build of our bodies, or the background from which we have descended?” Ceja really pushed the readers of *The Mexican Voice* to interrogate internalized racism. Although he never calls it that, he succinctly describes the biological and genetic deficient

language that has framed them as so by acknowledging phenotype and genetic descendancy. He continues to call cultural and ethnic pride among youth of Mexican ancestry by acknowledging the richness and value in who they are. He calls for youth to value their pre-Columbian ancestry and view their bilingual abilities as an asset rather than a linguistic obstacle. Ceja acknowledges the lack of respect dominant society has for the Mexican community yet he argues youth can respond the following way:

But what can one individual do about this situation? He can uplift the Mexican name by constant--hard work with others who have the same high ideals and aims. By securing an education, not just high school but a college one. By being a clean-cut fellow, trustworthy and dependable, with the highest moral aims. A Mexican boy can and must provide a favorable opinion wherever he goes. A Mexican must be a Mexican (Ceja, 1938).

Essentially, Ceja's approach is one that aims to 'prove them wrong'. His suggestions for individuals to demonstrate hard work, academic achievement and moral responsibility seemed to be in direct response to the dominant frames that continuously rendered Mexican youth unintelligent, criminal and lazy. Ceja's suggestion to Mexican boys to "provide a favorable opinion wherever he goes" demonstrates an understanding of the way race functioned for boys like him. He knew whether they wanted or not, raced perceptions of one individual had implications for the larger Mexican community.

Other stories in *The Mexican Voice* highlighted the value of education and demystified the process of pursuing higher education. These stories included articles such as, "*The Value of Education*" (Rodriguez, 1938) penned by nineteen-year old Jose Rodriguez, a San Bernardino Junior College student, who rallied Mexican youth with his message of "EDUCATION is our only weapon!" His article called for youth to continue their education beyond high school as the only means to prosper in society. Stephen Reyes, a graduate of University of California Los Angeles from El Modeno, California shared his academic aspirations, the obstacles he faced through his educational journey and shared how he overcame these. His story was inspirational in nature as he described to readers his story started in the orange groves of El Modeno, where

he worked picking oranges every summer break after grammar school to save money for his education. He graduated high school and attended Junior College where he received his Associate in Arts (AA) degree in 1933 and started at UCLA soon after. When Reyes wrote this reflection for *The Mexican Voice* in September of 1938, he lead a local playground in El Modeno as director and taught night school (Reyes, 1938). Articles such as these were not singular in nature as *The Mexican Voice* tirelessly worked to define themselves.

*The Mexican Voice* worked to highlight and re-affirm the accomplishments of individuals of Mexican ancestry. Every issue dedicated an article to highlight the accomplishments of individuals of Mexican descent, which explored their life story, educational journey and career goals. An example of this is the portrait written about Dr. A. A. Sandoval in the September 1938 issue. An optometrist with an office in Azusa, California Dr. Sandoval immigrated to the U.S. when he was only thirteen from Michoacan, Mexico. From working as a “dock hand” in San Pedro to learning English in Berendo Junior High, *The Mexican Voice* helped illustrate Dr. Sandoval’s journey to reach his goals. Dr. Sandoval attended the Spanish American Institute, followed by four years in Loyola University, then San Mateo Junior College to study barbering and finally attending University of Southern California all while working odd jobs. His story is used to inspire youth to not give up on their scholastic dreams as they conclude, “He [Dr. Sandoval] wants us who have more privileges than he to take advantage of them. Education to him is not purely a matter of money -- it is the will -- our compass. If we point our keel toward success, we’ll get there--someday. But is better late than never!” (The Mexican Voice, 1938). The story of Dr. Sandoval is one of many to highlight the struggles and resilience found within each and Mexican boy and girl.

The *Mexican Voice* was a platform that represented Mexican youths’ concerns and opinions but also highlighted youth who served as role models for other boys. From the first issue, a section was dedicated to honor and congratulate fellow youth in their *Nosotros* section which showcased the resiliency among the youth, often disregarded in dominant news outlets.

These accomplishments often highlighted achievements and skills among youth of Mexican descent throughout the educational pipeline. This included the likes such as Henry Ramirez, Student Body President of Jordan High School, Manuel Banda, Art Editor of Compton Junior College publications, and Ignacio Coadillo, Captain of the Compton Junior College championship basketball team. Hence, while dominant accounts rendered Mexican youth ignorant, criminal, and lazy, *The Mexican Voice* disrupted and challenged those beliefs in every issue.

### **Chicanas Strike Back**

Young Mexican-American pushed back on the dominant deficit narratives utilizing print media. In June of 1943, during the *Zoot Suit Riots* at full swing, a group of women meet and organized in protest of the articles printed by Los Angeles newspapers. The girls pictured below, petition the publisher of the *Eastside Journal*, a newspaper from the East Los Angeles, to lodge a protest on their behalf by presenting them to the public. They wanted to contest the articles in the larger Los Angeles papers, which inferred the girls' moral characters were questionable. The young women wanted the world to see them for who they were. One of the women from the group illustrated their resistance as she was quoted in the newspaper article:

It is true that they [Daily LA Newspapers] did not say that every girl of Mexican extraction, but the general public was led to believe that such was the fact. The girls in this meeting room consist of young ladies who graduated from high school as honor students, of girls who are now working in defense plants because we want to help with the war and of girls who have brothers, cousins, relatives and sweethearts in all branches of the American armed forces. We have not been able to have our side of the story told (*Eastside Journal*, 1943).

Young women demanded to be seen as a way to contest the stories that has been propagated about them. They exercised their voice to assert who they were, intelligent, hard-working, honorable women who directly supported the war effort. They were women who lived and work in and for a nation, young women with aspirations and goals. Not immoral or delinquent as newspapers had suggested.

**Figure 2: Mexican-American women in Eastside Journal**



Source: Newspaper clipping, “Mexican-American Girls Meet in Protest,” June 16, 1943, Carey McWilliams Papers, Box 28, Folder 28, Department of Special Collections, University of California, Los Angeles.

### **The Story of Alfred Barela**

In May 1943, Alfred Barela, a young Chicano penned a critical and telling letter to Judge Guerin (Barela, 1943), after being picked up by Police. In the letter, Barela shared his account of the night he was arrested and powerfully asserts his voice to raise questions of discrimination among the police force against Mexican youth. He inserts his voice and perspective through the letter as he begins by reminding Judge Guerin of his experience in the courtroom. Barela stated:

However you gave us quite a severe lecture, said we were a disgrace to our people and you said Mexican boys are a grave problem and you don't understand yourself what's wrong. You asked us whether we know but you didn't wait for any answer. I really wanted to say something. I wanted to tell our side of the story because for one thing I was glad to get out of this trouble since I've never been in any kind of trouble before.

This passage illustrated Barela's impotence in the court. Constrained by the space, and unable to directly respond to the Judge's comments, we see how Barela wanted to contest the claims about the criminality of Mexican boys. Furthermore, he explained he had never been involved in trouble, challenging the assumptions the Judge was making about him and the rest of boys brought into the court. This letter itself is a testament of how Barela, a Mexican boy responded to the deficit discourse. Barela (1943) continued:

Ever since I can remember I've been pushed around and called names because I'm Mexican. I was born in this country. Like you said I have the same rights and privileges of other Americans....We're tired of being told we cant do this show or that dance hall because we're Mexican or that we better not be seen on the beach front, or that we can't wear draped pants or have our hair out the way we want to.

Barela offers a vivid portrayal of life for a young Mexican boy in Los Angeles in the 1940s. He asserts that even though he was a U.S. citizen, he was still mistreated and discriminated against on the basis of his Mexican descent. Barela's letter offers a counter to the dominant narrative of the criminally inclined youth, by detailing exactly the level of social repression and discrimination Mexican youth face daily.

Barela ended his letter with a powerful message that resonates with today's Black Lives Matter movement seeking racial justice. Barela wrote:

Why doc cops hate the Mexican kids and push them around? You should see the way cops searched us for knives and guns as though we were gangsters. They didn't let us call our folks and my ma was plenty worried about what happened to me. You say we've got rights like everybody else. Then how can they do this to us? Other Mexican kids are like me and my friends. Their [sic] may be a few tough ones like their [sic] are in every neighborhood, but it's not because they're Mexican. Maybe it's because they're poor. I don't want any more trouble and I don't want anyone saying my people are in disgrace. My people work hard, fight hard in the army and navy of the United States. They're good Americans and they should have justice (Barela, 1943).

Barela is critical about how racially discriminatory practices are justified and state sanctioned. His letter helps historicize the experiences of People of Color in the U.S. and expose the ways they lived and resisted through these structures. Barela's letter is symbolic as it represents the critical perspectives and experiences of Mexican youth outside of schools.



Figure 3: Alfred Barela's letter to Judge Guerin in 1943

May 21, 1943

Honorable Arthur S. Guerin  
Municipal Judge  
Los Angeles, California

Dear Sir:

I am one of the ten boys who was on trial in your court the other day. We were charged with disturbing the peace and helping to create a riot or something like that out in Ocean Park, and you dismissed the case after you had heard the foolish testimony of one of the police officers.

However, you gave us quite a severe lecture, said we were a disgrace to our people and you said that Mexican boys are a grave problem and you don't understand yourself what's wrong.

You asked us whether we know but you didn't wait for any answer. I really wanted to say something. I wanted to tell our side of the story because for one thing I was glad to get out of this trouble since I've never been in any kind of trouble before.

I'll tell you the truth. Though I was glad you dismissed the case I was sore at your lecture because instead of bawling out the cops, you bawled us out and took it for granted that we really had been doing something we shouldn't.

We never got a chance to tell our stories and I heard what happened to all those boys. It was just like me. We were down on the beach separately with friends, having a good time. We had nothing to do with any riot or any fighting. The cops picked us up, pushed us around, made fun of our clothes, grabbed some of us by the hair and said they're going to give us a haircut.

I suppose no one would dare say this in court but the cop who picked me up was drunk.

Ever since I can remember I've been pushed around and called names because I'm a Mexican. I was born in this country. Like you said I have the same rights and privileges of other Americans.

Until a couple of weeks ago I was working in a factory and I hurt my hand bad. If you had looked at my hand you would have seen that I couldn't be in any fight.

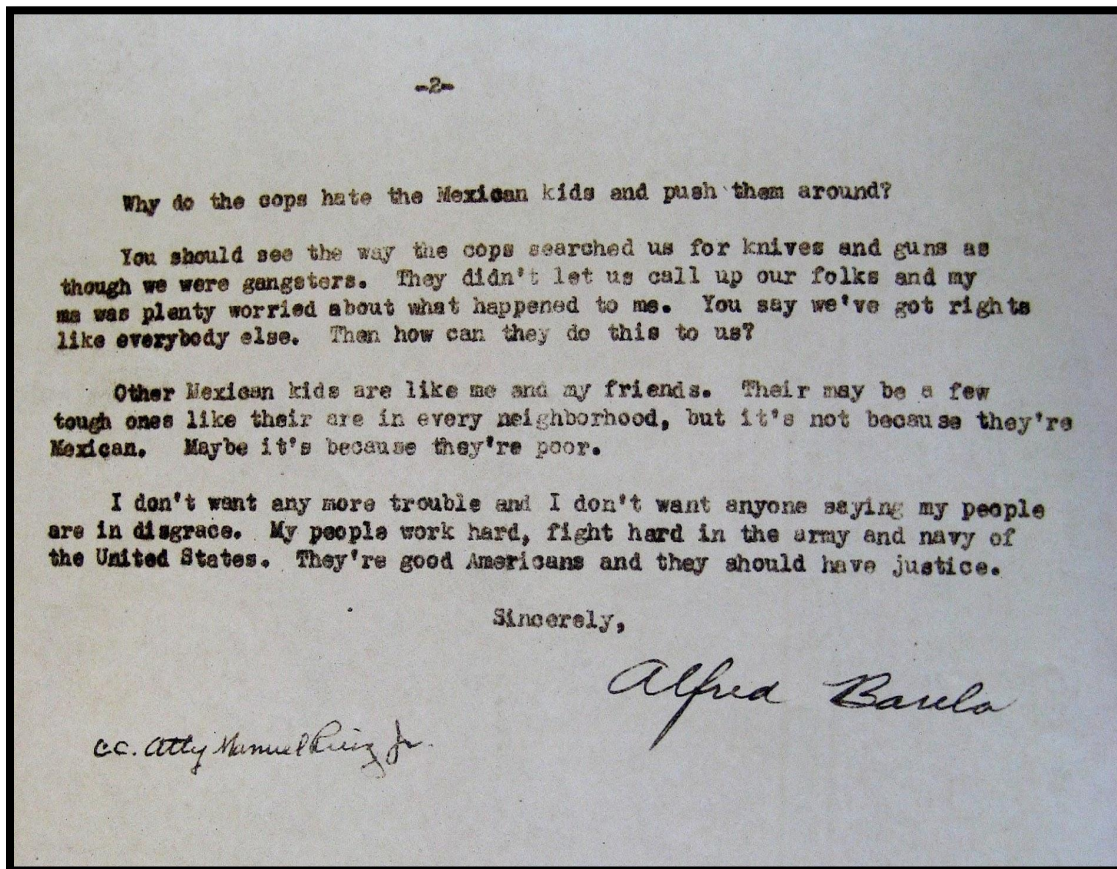
Pretty Soon I guess I'll be in the army and I'll be glad to go. But I want to be treated like everybody else. We're tired of being pushed around.

We're tired of being told we can't go to this show or that dance hall because we're Mexican or that we better not be seen on the beach front, or that we can't wear draped pants or have our hair cut the way we want to.

Why didn't you bawl those cops out? How come he said there were twenty five hundred people in that mob and only a few Mexican kids, but all the arrests were of the Mexican kids and none of the others were arrested?

Source: Letter from Alfred Barela to Judge Guerin, May 21<sup>st</sup>, 1943, Manuel Ruiz Papers, Box 15, Folder 16, Department of Special Collections, Stanford University.

**Figure 4: Alfred Barela's letter to Judge Guerin in 1943, Second page**



Source Letter from Alfred Barela to Judge Guerin, May 21<sup>st</sup>, 1943, Manuel Ruiz Papers, Box 15, Folder 16, Department of Special Collections, Stanford University.

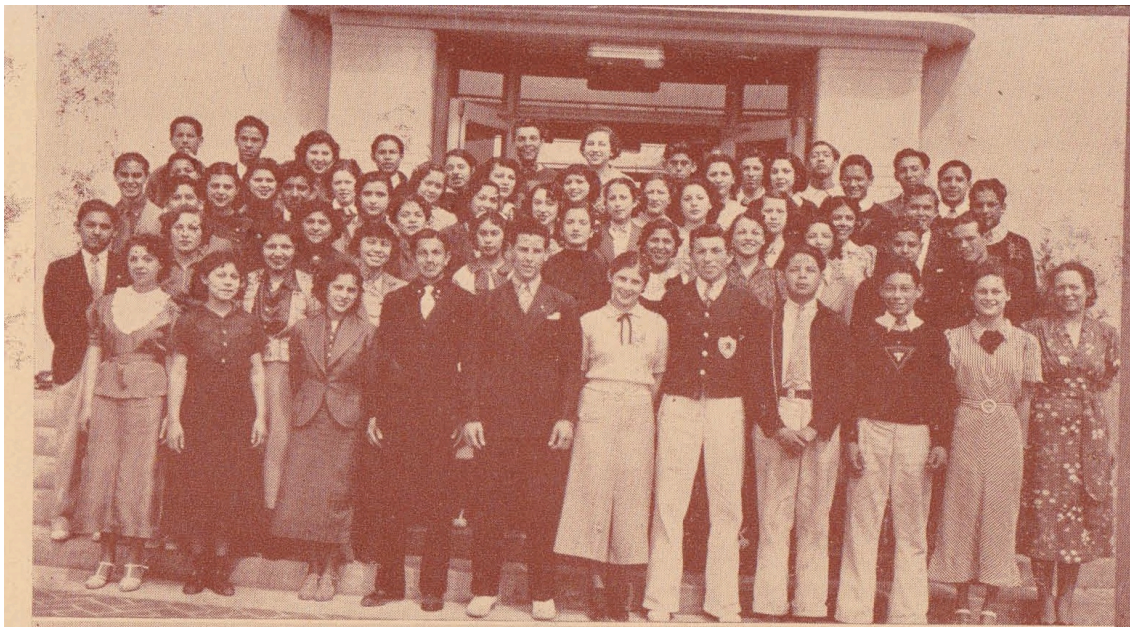
### **El Club Cuauhtemoc of Jefferson High**

While doing research at the LAUSD district archives, I came across the minutes for the 1943 Office of the Los Angeles County Superintendent of Schools sponsored workshop on the Education of Mexican and Spanish-speaking pupils in public schools. During a session on July 9, Josephine Stevens from Jefferson High School was the guest speaker. Through these minutes, I discover that Mrs. Josephine Stevens is a Mexican-American teacher, as she introduces herself as such. During this session, Mrs. Stevens began describing the “social work” she’s involved at Jefferson High, which included “Encouragement of pride in the Mexican cultural background” (Office of the Los Angeles County Superintendent of Schools Workshop Minutes, 1943).

This encouragement in cultural pride was through a student club she sponsored called Cuauhtemoc Club, which had two hundred members enrolled and meet every Wednesdays after school (Office of the Los Angeles County Superintendent of Schools Workshop Minutes, 1943). This club was my first indication of the size of Mexican students in Jefferson High. Once I looked through Jefferson High yearbooks, I was able to document the development of cultural pride among the Mexican students.

Yearbooks were significant in tracing the development of the Mexican student club at Jefferson High. An official “Mexican Club” picture debuted in the yearbook of 1937,

**Figure 5: Yearbook picture of Mexican Club in 1937**



Source: Jefferson High Yearbook 1937, Jefferson High Library, Los Angeles, Ca.

As seen in figure 5 there, a group of about 60 students posed, smiling at the camera. The description noted, “The club was originated for the purpose of creating deeper interest among the Mexican in this school. It’s [sic] primary object, naturally, is to serve the school and to unite and bring together the Mexican students of Jefferson.” Organizationally, students took on leadership roles ranging from President of the club, to historian to school newspaper reporter. The next year, in the 1938 yearbook, the “Mexican Club” renamed itself “Club Cuatemoc” [sic], as seen in figure 6.

**Figure 6: Jefferson High Yearbook picture of Club Cuatemoc of 1938**



Source: Jefferson High Yearbook 1938, Jefferson High Library, Los Angeles, Ca.

According to the yearbook description, their new name was in honor of “one of Mexico’s most famous writers.” The name change encapsulated a developing identity grounded in an unsure past, given the misrepresentation of Cuauhtemoc, an Aztec ruler as a famous writer and the misspelling of his name. The club’s identity development also coincides with the shift in faculty sponsor, as Ms. Josephine de Rojas, the only teacher of Mexican descent, took on this role. It must be noted that Mrs. Josephine de Rojas later married and changed her last name to Stevens, as she was the same teacher that was a guest speaker in the 1943 Workshop. By this time, the description of the club’s purpose had also shifted, “to learn more about Mexican customs and to plan social activities during the semester” (Jefferson High Yearbook, 1938). Membership to “Club Cuatemoc” was solely based on Mexican heritage.

By 1939’s yearbook, the club was now “El Club Cuauhtemoc” with the correct spelling of the ruler and recognizing he was “an Indian patriot of Mexico” and not a “famous writer.” The

club's description noted meetings were “wholly conducted in Spanish” and its purpose was “to learn more about Mexican literature, music, and art” (Jefferson High Yearbook, 1939).

**Figure 7: Jefferson High Yearbook picture of El Club Cuauhtemoc of 1939**



Source: Jefferson High Yearbook 1939, Jefferson High Library, Los Angeles, Ca.

Yearbooks have allowed me to trace the development of the Chicana/o student club at Jefferson High and highlight it as a source of cultural wealth and youth activism. The Cuauhtemoc club offers another example of the ways Mexican youth contested dominant discourse by engaging in ways that re-affirmed one another and instilled cultural pride.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter addressed the research question of the dominant and non-dominant discourses about the Mexican community of South Central Los Angeles. I provided various examples that illustrated how racialized dominant perceptions framed this community as largely deficient and criminal. The perceived deficiency of Mexican youth and their families were closely linked to the discourses around the *Sleepy Lagoon Case* of 1942 and the *Zoot Suit Riots* of 1943. Furthermore, I demonstrated the connection between these specific events and the Mexican

families of South Central Los Angeles, as youth involved in the *Sleepy Lagoon Case* lived in the neighborhood and some attended Jefferson High. I concluded by illustrating multiple examples of how youth contested the dominant frames used to render them criminal and inherently un-American. The *Mexican Voice* newsletter, an *Eastside Journal* article, Alfred Barela's letter and *Club Cuauhtemoc* of Jefferson High are examples of the resistance and resiliency among Mexican youth who asserted their voice to speak truth to power and encourage pride in their Mexican cultural background.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **CONSTRUCTING STRUCTURES OF DEFICIENCY: LEGITIMIZING UNEQUAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY FOR MEXICAN STUDENTS**

In the previous chapter, I illustrated how discourses of deficiency emerged in state and public discourse, from courthouses to newspapers. I presented the way state and local discourses of deficiency operated to discursively frame Mexican youth and their families. These practices framed the Mexican community as unintelligent, lazy and criminal. For this chapter, I will weave in the educational discourses to help understand how district officials and educators perceived Mexican students. I illustrate the *discourses of deficiency* that operated to frame this student population and demonstrate how these helped construct *structures of deficiency*. I present two examples of how these structures of deficiency shaped and manifested in schools through curriculum and pedagogy. I conclude by highlighting a student of Jefferson high, Consuela Rivera who navigated the unequal structures of opportunity.

During the early 1940's, the education of Mexican students became a major topic among Los Angeles school officials. This was partly due to the size of the Mexican student population in public schools, as a *Los Angeles Times* article noted that 75,000 Mexican and Spanish speaking pupils attended schools in Los Angeles County in 1938, and 60 percent were in the city of Los Angeles (Los Angeles Times, 1942). By the sheer size of this student population alone, educational officials were taking notice. Furthermore, two distinctly Los Angeles events, the Sleepy Lagoon case in 1942 and the Zoot Suit riots in 1943, gave rise to discourses of juvenile delinquency among Mexican youth. As previously noted in chapter 5, these events intensified the local production of deficit discourses of Mexican families and youth. Coupled together, the size of the Mexican students in schools and the growing perceived delinquency problem among this same population, schooling officials organized their first educational workshop focused on the Education of Mexican students.

## **Educational Discourses of Deficiency**

During the summer of 1942, the Office of the Los Angeles County Superintendent of Schools sponsored a two-week workshop to assist in the education of Mexican and Spanish-speaking pupils in public schools. The workshop sought to learn more about the student population and as workshop organizers announced “educational programs’ can be more effective if teachers understand and know better this group of the school population and plan for the adaptations of curriculum practices which appear valid and fruitful” (Los Angeles Times, 1942). Thus, the workshop was intended to explore how to best teach and adapt the classroom to these students. Held in Montebello Junior High, approximately ninety teachers and administrators attended what became the first Los Angeles countywide workshop of its kind. Through a report detailing the day-to-day activities of the workshop (Los Angeles County Schools Workshop in Education of Mexican and Spanish Pupils Report, 1942), teachers and administrators discussed the most pressing issues affecting Mexican students and its implication in schools. The report explained:

The members of this minority group live for the most part within segregated geographic areas, which provide little stimulation or opportunity for the use of the English language, or to become active participants in the various activities of the larger American community. The restrictions of employment and the low wage received denies to them many of the advantages of broad and varied experiences enjoyed by other citizens. The children from such communities enter school with distinctive, although often too little recognized, handicaps of language, social techniques, and experiential background.

Although the district discourse in the report recognized the ways the Mexican community was systematically discriminated and denied equal opportunity, they did not discuss ways schools were taking part in this practice. Instead, the educational discourses about the student population were rooted in their perceived deficiencies. From the report, there was a clear consensus among teachers and school administrators about how they perceived Mexican students. For them, this student population was viewed as being not only linguistically “handicap[ped]” as some scholars have pointed out (San Miguel 1987, 2000, Gonzalez 1990, Donato 1997, 2007) but socially and experientially deficient as well. That is to say, teachers



perceived Mexican students to lack an understanding of socially accepted behavior, skills, and common-sense knowledge or the “social techniques.” In addition, they discursively framed students as lacking “experiential background” which were the practical wisdom and knowledge gained through experiences. Doing so, posited students as empty vessels coming into schools without the ability to communicate, behave appropriately and lacking any prior knowledge. Thus, the workshop convened teachers and administrators who from the very beginning, perceived their Mexican students as lacking linguistic, social, and experiential knowledge, even before they entered their classrooms.

I argue that discourses of deficiency, which premised racial and cultural inferiority, were used and accepted to understand the Mexican student population. A major theme in the 1942 summer workshop was the discourses that framed Mexican students as academically deficient and inherently susceptible to immoral and criminal behavior. Marie M. Hughes, Director of the workshop and Coordinator for Los Angeles County Schools, helped illustrate this in her session titled, “Behavior Patterns and Values of Mexican and Spanish-speaking Peoples.” In her presentation (Hughes, 1942) Hughes explained the role of teachers in building better relations with students. She commented:

In order to understand properly the needs, attitudes, aspirations, ideals, and behavior patterns of Spanish-speaking pupils and their parents, it is essential that teachers know the backgrounds from whence they come and the forces, which shape their personalities. Without such knowledge, it is impossible to understand why certain individuals are sensitive and shy, why they lie, exaggerate, steal, and why they engage in gang rivalry and hoodlum activities (Hughes, 1942, pp. 29).

The above quote demonstrate the discourses of deficiency that was prevalent even among key educators; in this case Hughes was the workshop organizer. Hughes message to teachers and administrators to get to know their students and their families was not rooted in the desire to create meaningful relationships between the home and schools. Rather, Hughes viewed teacher and student relations as a vehicle to understand the inherent criminality of Mexican students. The presumed “hoodlum” behavior was framed as a standard trait among these students.

Moreover, Hughes' broad statements of Mexican students as liars who "exaggerate, steal, and engage in hoodlum activities" set criminal expectations and characteristics as the norm. Hughes' description depicted the discourses of deficiency, which operated to frame Mexican students devoid of an understanding of social mores and assumed criminality.

During another session of the 1942 summer workshop titled, "The American School Child of Mexican and Spanish-speaking Descent – As I know Him", headed by school principals, educational psychologists, district officials, a social worker and a college professor, discussed "well-known observations" of behavior prevalent among Mexican students (Los Angeles County Schools Workshop in Education of Mexican and Spanish Pupils Report, 1942, pp. 25). During this session once again, discourses of deficiency helped frame the Mexican student, this time with the help of panelist personally attesting to these observations. Part of the panelist's observations included the assertion that Mexican students were "irregular in attendance, reluctant to cooperate with teachers, exhibit fits of anger, and resort[s] to violence" (Los Angeles County Schools Workshop in Education of Mexican and Spanish Pupils Report, 1942, pp.25). These "observations" fueled the idea that Hughes had presented earlier, that Mexican students lacked an understanding of conventional codes of conduct in schools. However, this panel helped to define these students as defiant and aggressive inside the classroom, echoing the previous ideas of the "hoodlum" behavior. Thus, this panel helped cement the idea that these students were a threat to teachers and schools. Not only were Mexican students perceived as a general threat to society, with the assumed "gang" participation outside of schools, but were viewed as disinterested in education, disrespectful, uncooperative, and violent within schools.

The educational discourses that defined students of Mexican descent as academically deficient and inherently criminal often constructed these within culturally deficient frameworks. Remsen D. Bird, president of Occidental College in 1942 illustrates this in his workshop talk titled "What it means to be a Member of a Minority Group" (Bird, 1942). There he stated:

One task of the schools is to help minority groups themselves to examine carefully certain practices and habit patterns practiced, such as extreme aggressiveness, rudeness, or conceit that are objectionable to the majority or are inconsistent and in conflict with the American way of life. Then the next step should be a sincere effort to remedy and overcome them. On the part of the schools, this calls for an effective counseling system designed to help minority groups to make the desired cultural adjustments (Bird, 1942, pp.29).

President Bird, made broad statements to assert and associate negative traits of “extreme aggressiveness, rudeness or conceit” as part of the cultural make-up of People of Color. We see again the negative trait of “extreme aggressiveness” continuously used to frame Communities of Color. Their perceived cultural “practices” of being extremely aggressive and rude place an immediacy to label People of Color as a social threat. In addition, the discourses of deficiency allow to frame entire communities as inherently un-American. President Bird calls on schools to provide “effective counseling” for the “cultural adjustment” of minority groups, which echoes rationales for Americanization efforts across schools serving Mexican children. These discourses of deficiency helped shape how educators and district officials designed education for students.

It must be noted that the discourses of the criminality of Mexican students was heavily intertwined and rooted in discourses of juvenile delinquency from the *Sleepy Lagoon Case* of 1942 and later the *Zoot Suit Riots* of 1943. In fact, during the last day of the workshop, the topic of juvenile delinquency was tackled by a series of panelist, which included Karl W. Holton, Chief Probation Officer of Los Angeles County and Stephen J. Keating, Deputy Probation Officer. There, the panel asserted that the problem of juvenile delinquency was not just a problem among Mexican and Spanish-speaking youth. However, they continued, “It is a problem that is at present particularly acute among members of that group. This year 439 boys and 160 girls, of this group have been referred to the juvenile court in Los Angeles” (Holton & Keating, 1942, pp. 33). The seriousness of those numbers become more evident as you realize these numbers were not for the entire year, these figures represented only the cases up to the time of the workshop,

in July 23, 1942. Thus, these figures were representative of only half a year. This means, approximately 99 boys and girls of Mexican descent were referred to Juvenile court in Los Angeles every month from January to July of 1942.

The panel suggested educational solutions to the issue of juvenile delinquency. They heavily focused on the training students should get in schools, they described:

The schools cannot solve the delinquency problem alone but they can do much. They can do more to really understand the Mexican and Spanish-speaking youth and their problems. Schools and teachers can do more to understand their culture and system of values, to help them with their language difficulties, to understand their parents, and more can be done in the way of personal and vocational guidance as well as vocational training. They are capable of being trained in skilled vocations. That they are educable is proved by the experiences with the Los Angeles County forestry camps where they are given constructive tasks to do, good leadership and supervision (Holton & Keating, 1942, pp. 33).

In the quote above, the Probation Officers, Holton and Keating, offered schooling officials ideas how to help solve the issue of juvenile delinquency. Among their suggestions was the idea of building better relations with students and their families as a way to better understand their social realities. However, the curricular solution they offered to curb juvenile delinquency was based on vocational training and the idea that these students were “capable of being trained in skilled vocations.” The educational discourse thus posited Mexican students as able to learn a trade, which most often involved manual labor. In the case of the Probation Officers, this idea was supported by the county sponsored camp programs, which sent youth to do work in the mountains as a form of rehabilitation and schooling. These camps first established in 1932 near the San Bernardino Mountains, housed 12 to 18 year old boys who worked eight hours a day, five days a week, on forestry projects such as chopping the winter supply of wood (Los Angeles Times, 1944). Because of the perceived success of these camps ran by the Probation department, officials pushed for public schools to begin taking a vocational approach to educate Mexican students. The Probation authorities were among many other speakers in the event who voiced their support for vocational training.

Flaud C. Wooton, Coordinator for the Inter-American Affairs, was another official who supported vocational training for Mexican students. In his talk titled “The Relation of Needs of Spanish-speaking youth to that of all Youth in American Society” he shared:

Extensive vocational changes are taking place and the vocational needs of youth occupy an important place in the total picture. Youth need guidance to prevent [them from] being exploited by employers, and to keep them from choosing the occupations for which they lack aptitude. There is need for school programs and the world of work to be brought closer together (Wooton, 1942, pp. 32).

Wooton’s quote illustrates the discourses of deficiency that assume Mexican students’ low educational and intellectual ability. He viewed these students as lacking the intelligence to select the right occupations for them. Thus, Wooton assumed and implied that vocational trades were within Mexican students’ capabilities. Conveniently, Wooton framed his idea of bringing school closer to “the world of work” as beneficial to Mexican students who would otherwise get taken advantaged or waste their time in careers they are unfit for. In essence, the educational discourses in the 1942 workshop, also framed Mexican students as fit for vocational training.

The discourses of deficiency were not exclusive to the 1942 workshop as they manifested themselves in multiple other spaces and mediums. This can be illustrated in a 1944 district memo (Lane, 1944) that demonstrated how these discourses operated and took form in shaping educational opportunity for Mexican students. In this memo, Robert Hill Lane, Assistant Superintendent of the Los Angeles City School District, sent an impassionate call to all elementary school principals. Lane, devoted the entire memo on the issue of juvenile delinquency and immediately conflated the issue as a Mexican problem. Lane began the memo with his first point:

We are never going to come to grips with juvenile delinquency until we realize that there are two groups of Mexican youth who are not salvageable. First are the boys and girls of teen-age and older who are wantonly and viciously cruel, who have no respect for the law and do not recognize those moral codes which help hold society together (Lane, 1944, pp. 1)

Assistant Superintendent Lane attempted to construct a typology of the different types of Mexican students who “are not salvageable” and cannot be fixed or saved. In the above quote,

Lane describes the first group of Mexican students as “viciously cruel,” criminal, and immoral. Once again, we see how Mexican students were constructed as inherently delinquent and prone to “hoodlum” behavior. Lane argues that these students lack “moral codes,” which allow him to once again, frame Mexican students as a threat to society. The second group of Mexican students who Lane believed were not “salvageable” were described as culturally deficient. Lane continued:

[those]who cannot be assimilated into our culture, who find it so alien and so distasteful to them that they are rebellious, unhappy and usually subversive in their influence on other young people. They should be returned under some feasible working agreement with Mexico to a setting more congenial to them (Lane, 1944, pp. 2).

The second group of Mexican students in Lane’s typology constructed them as culturally and socially deficient, as well as inherently foreign. Lane described Mexican youth as culturally deficient as he framed them as unable to be assimilated into dominant culture. Moreover, these youth were perceived as being forthright in their rejection of American values and mores. In addition, youth were described as rebellious, and resisting established authority. This second group of Mexican youth was also perceived as a social threat, as they could potentially undermine and derail the development of socially responsible younger generations of Mexican youth. Finally, Lane proposed to send this group back to Mexico, even though a large majority of them were U.S. born. Framed as foreigners, this group was perceived as defective goods, seemingly needing to be returned back to “their” country. This was the message constructed and sent to elementary school principals by one of the highest-ranking officials in the district.

Lane concluded his message to elementary school principals concerning juvenile delinquency by proposing an “either-or” solution. Either invest in “pre-vocational schools for Negro, Mexican and certain types of Anglo-Saxon adolescents or Bigger and worsen San Quintins [California state prison], More Jails, More juvenile courts, More probation officers” (Lane, 1944, pp. 5). The alarmist call attempted to rally other principals to support the idea to invest in vocational training as the educational solution to solve delinquency issues among this

student population. His call to invest in vocational training, framed Mexican students as predisposed criminals, headed to a life in prison. His proposition is very telling of his raced perceptions of Students of Color in general, as he makes an exception for that only “certain types of Anglo-Saxon” youth be steered into the vocational track. Lane’s sentiments were part of the ongoing discourses of deficiency about Mexican students. Constructed as unruly, rebellious, violent and criminal, these discourses largely influence and helped shape the educational opportunity for students in schools.

### **Constructing Structures of Deficiency**

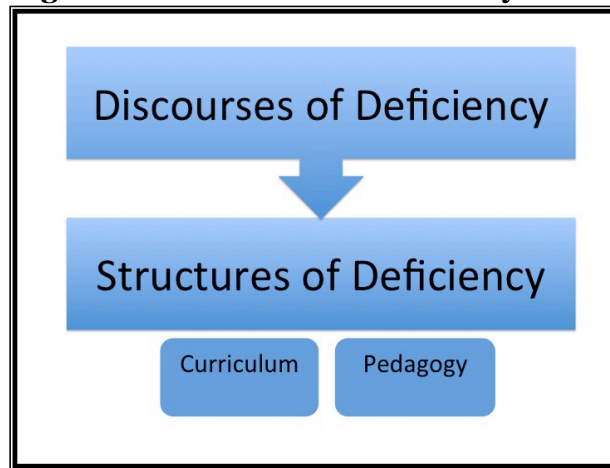
In this next section, I will demonstrate how these discourses of deficiency helped to construct structures of deficiency. As I have stated before, I use the term discourses to describe the institutionalized ways Mexicans were perceived and understood. As I explained in Chapter 3, Critical Race History of Education as a framework, helps researchers understand how the historical legacy of racism shaped racialized perceptions of People of Color, which continue to this present day. This has informed how I define and use the term discourses of deficiency to be the institutional ways Mexican families and students were perceived and understood as deficient racially, culturally, socially and intellectually. I argue that discourses of deficiency allow for the construction of structures of deficiency.

### **Defining Structures of Deficiency**

Structures of deficiency are the construction of educational opportunity based on perceived low educational abilities and perceived racial, cultural and social deficiencies. A visual representation of this model (Figure 8) establishes how I understand these concepts that can help explain historical schooling practices rooted in the deficit perceptions of Students of Color. For this dissertation, I argue that discourses of deficiency rationalized the creation and maintenance of structures of deficiency. These structures of deficiency take on different forms in the everyday educational student experiences. In this section, I will examine how these discourses were lived within the context of education, in the experiences of Mexican students.

More specifically, I argue that structures of deficiency manifested themselves in the schooling experiences of Mexican students through curriculum and pedagogy. These structures of deficiency forever shaped the historical educational opportunities of students and continue to have contemporary implications.

**Figure 8: Structures of Deficiency Model**



### **Structures of Deficiency in Curriculum**

As previous examples demonstrated, discourses of deficiency operated to frame Mexican students as deficient in character and intelligence which functioned to justify vocational training and bringing “school programs and the world of work” closer together as Wooton had suggested in the County workshop in 1942. A committee report for the Conference on Educational Problems in the Southwest with Special Reference to the Educational Problems in Spanish-Speaking communities, held in Santa Fe, New Mexico in the summer of 1943, offers another example of the educational discourse with special attention to vocational training. Included among the committees’ four major recommendations, was a proposed curricular shift in the material taught to Mexican students. The report asserted:

While giving due recognition to the demands which the war is making on the Spanish-speaking people for work to which they were previously unaccustomed, the committee on occupation adjustment insisted on the need for long range occupational planning. Occupational adjustment opportunities, they pointed out, should be extended to the elementary schools in most Spanish-speaking communities since pupils’ school life in their communities is usually limited to the elementary grades (Conference on



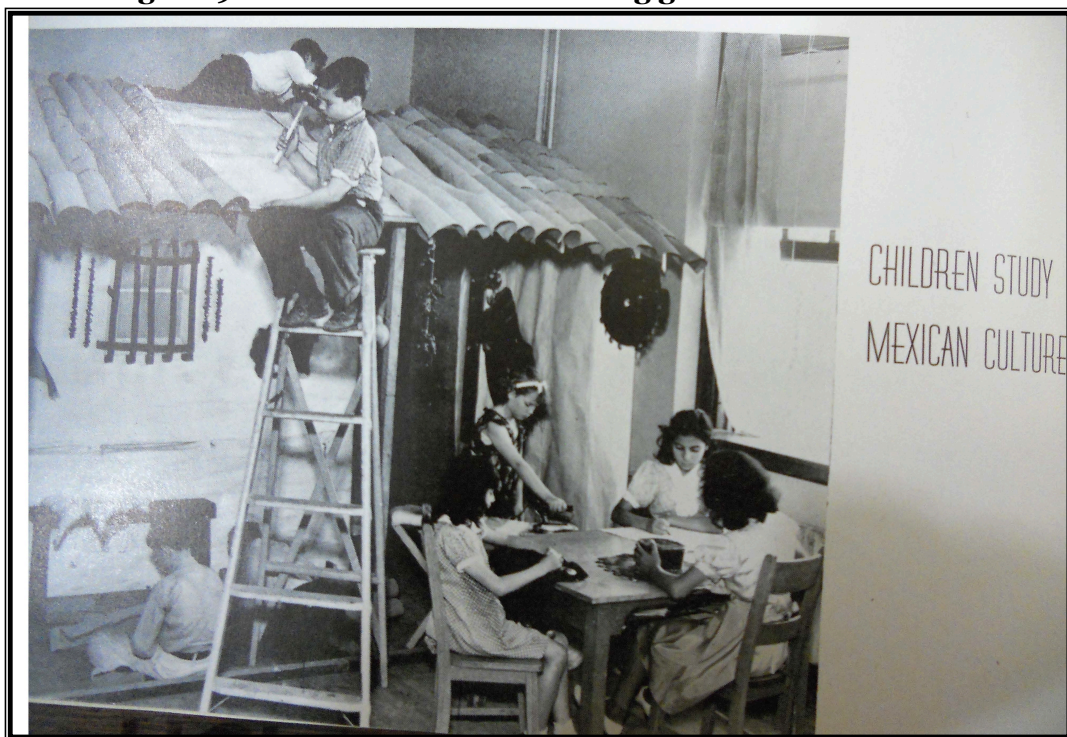
Educational Problems in the Southwest with Special Reference to the Educational Problems in Spanish-speaking communities Report, 1943).

This conference's occupational adjustment committee not only recommended vocational training for students in Spanish-speaking communities, which often implied Mexican students, but advocated for the teaching of vocational skills at the elementary level. The very fact that this conference had a committee on the "occupation adjustment" is telling of the low-expectations they had for the life and academic trajectories of young students. The concern was focused on the "need for long range occupation planning" within elementary school years rather than tackling the achievement gap they alluded to. Vocational training programs as early as elementary school was rationalized as effective for students of Mexican descent as a way to provide viable occupational pathways.

A series of pictures included in the report for the second "Los Angeles City and County Schools Workshop in the Education of Mexican and Spanish-Speaking Pupils" held in 1943, help illustrate how these structures of deficiency looked like historically. The report included a detailed schedule for day-to-day activities and speakers. Sprinkled throughout the report were a series of pictures of Mexican students in various settings, all related to their education. Figure 9, is a visual representation of structures of deficiency. The picture shows elementary age students engaged in gendered vocational trade. The four girls are depicted around a table, the first looking down at a garment, presumably marking it up as another young girl sitting next to her is working on a hat. A third girl who also sits around the table is looking down at a sheet of paper as she is writes. The last young girl stands as she irons a garment. My hypothesis is that these young girls were being trained in home economics and working on seamstress related skills. The young boys on the other hand, are portrayed manually working on a large house. One student sits on a ladder hammering the roof, while another young student is on the actual roof of the house, stretched out working on it as well. A third boy works on the foundation of the playhouse. It seems these young boys were being trained to gain construction skills. These gendered

vocational skills were linked to occupational trajectories for Mexican students. Although the picture vividly illustrates how vocational training looked like for young elementary students, the most problematic was the caption accompanying the picture, which read “Children Study Mexican Culture.” The school district believed Mexican culture was synonymous with low-skilled occupations. The deficit understanding of the cultural background of Mexican students resulted in deficit curricular and pedagogical approaches. In the case of this picture, the curriculum was designed based on deficit notions of cultural background and academic ability.

**Figure 9: Mexican students learning gendered vocations**



Source: Picture included in the “Los Angeles City and County Schools Workshop in the Education of Mexican and Spanish-Speaking Pupils,” 1943, Carey McWilliams Papers, Box 28, Folder 26, Department of Special Collections, University of California, Los Angeles.

I argue that vocational training are curricular examples of structures of deficiency because they are anchored on the perceived low educational ability of Mexican students. To bring this analysis to South Central Los Angeles, I turn to the vocational training programs that Jefferson High, a high school in the neighborhood under study. Utilizing photographs found in

the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) archives, I will highlight how structures of deficiency manifested themselves in the curriculum at Jefferson High, through the use of vocational programs.

Jefferson High, the neighborhood high school in South Central Los Angeles housed various vocational training programs similar to what Figure 9 showcased in the elementary school years. For example, Jefferson High was the only school in the district with a maid-training program (Raftery, 1984). As the picture below (Figure 10) illustrate, Jefferson had a practice house in which young female students trained how to properly set a table. The young girls, whom one appears to be African American and the other of Mexican descent, even wore traditional maid outfits. Although there was not much information attached to this photograph, a report found in the Los Angeles Urban League collection helps tell the story on the intersection of race, gender and occupation in Los Angeles. A 1933 student thesis from Occidental College titled “Occupation for Negro Women in Los Angeles” indicates that from Census data from 1930, out of the 8,454 Black women who held employment, 7,332 worked in the domestic and personal service sector. When desegregated further, almost 6,000 of those women were employed as servants (Los Angeles Urban League Employment for Negro Women Thesis, 1933).

**Figure 10: Practice House at Thomas Jefferson High**



Source: Photograph of Practice House at Jefferson High, 1942, LAUSD Art and Artifacts Archives.

Thus the vocational training young Girls of Color received in Jefferson High through the maid train program, aligns with the context of the occupational opportunity structures. The raced and gendered aspect of the curricular programs at Jefferson High, limited educational opportunity and social mobility for Students of Color in general, and Mexican students specifically

Vocational training for the boys of Jefferson High in the 1940's included machine shop, as illustrated in Figure 11, where African American and Mexican descent boys gained skills in the machine shop trade. The picture illustrates an all-boys class, comprised of nine students around a table working on their own machine station. The maid-training program and the machine shop courses are examples of the type of training Jefferson High students received. In particular, vocational training programs were geared for Students of Color, specifically Mexican and African American students as the educational solution to their perceived inherent criminality.

Discourses of deficiency such as those espoused by Assistant Superintendent Lane helped construct educational opportunity, which framed them fit for manual labor.

**Figure 11: Machine shop at Jefferson High**



Source: Photograph of Machine Shop Classroom at Jefferson High, 1942, LAUSD Art and Artifacts Archives.

### **Structures of Deficiency in Pedagogy**

Structures of deficiency also manifested themselves in the ways teachers taught Mexican students. In particular, I argue that the use of fear, violence, and intimidation, perceived as effective pedagogical practices by teachers in classroom, were manifestations of the structures of deficiency. These practices often used to teach Mexican students, was rooted in deficit notions of academic ability, which deemed these students educable only under the threat of physical violence.

An example to help us understand how these classroom practices looked like, I turn to a 1943 study proposal by Dorothy W. Baruch, Professor of Education in Whittier College titled, “Projected Plan for Experimental Procedures in Reducing Discrimination through Teacher

Education.” Dr. Baruch attempted to obtain funding to research prejudice among teachers. In her proposal (Baruch, 1943), Dr. Baruch cited a growing concern regarding racial prejudice against Students of Color by teachers. Dr. Baruch wrote:

In recent study by Floyd Covington, of the Urban League in Los Angeles, and in further informal surveys by him, not only students, but teachers openly admitted feelings of discrimination. Onto blank after blank they wrote avowals of prejudice against Negro, Mexican, Filipino and Jew. As informal conversations are held with teachers, as their attitudes come out in meetings, and as they are evidence in classroom practices, the widespread incidence of prejudice again appears (Baruch, 1943).

Dr. Baruch continued by including an account of a new teacher coming in to a fourth grade class. There the new teacher describes how these classroom practices looked like. She wrote:

I noticed when I went up to a child and put my hand out, perhaps to touch a shoulder or to give a pat, the child would wince back and cringe. Finally one boy asked incredulously, ‘aren’t you going to hit me?’  
‘No,’ I said, ‘I don’t believe in that sort of thing.’  
‘But all other teachers do.’  
I didn’t quite believe it until I watched. Then I was told,  
‘It’s the only thing to do with these Negroes and Mexicans and Jews. They don’t understand any other language. You have to control them. And the only thing they listen to is being hurt. You have to hit them hard: ‘really show them.’ It was demonstrated to me. A double-up fist to the back of the neck. Not very pretty! Talk about repression. Those children are virtually told when to use their right and left hands, to stand, to sit. They can’t talk. They can’t move without tip-toeing after first having to ask permission. They’re looked on as something low and despicable, untrustworthy, vile. It’s no wonder that things happen when they get out of school. It’s no wonder that the Mexicans gang up against the Negroes and they Negroes against the Jews and so on. It’s no wonder they chase each other when school is out with pieces of broken glass and nail files. They’re so hurt, they’d hurt anyone in return (Baruch, 1943).

This new teacher account illustrates how pedagogical practices as an extensions of structures of deficiency, were guided by the idea that Blacks, Mexicans and Jews could only learn through pain. The harrowing account illustrated the treatment elementary school students received from their teachers, reminiscent of the tactics a trainer would use to tame a wild animal. In fact, as illustrated in Chapter 5, state discourses framed Mexican youth as “wild animals” who needed to be caged, in the context of delinquency. One can argue Mexican students were living these discursive practices everyday in classrooms like the one described, through the fear, hurt and repression inflicted by teachers. The account offered a very telling example of the deficient

practices informed by deficit discourses that perceived students as “something low and despicable, untrustworthy, vile.” This is an example of how discourses of deficiency shaped the pedagogical dehumanizing approaches teachers took in educating Mexican students.

While looking through Box 28, labeled “Mexicans in Education” in the *Carey McWilliams Papers*, I found a document that helps illustrate this same pedagogical approach in an East Los Angeles school. The document titled “Statements made by students of Belvedere junior high school” was dated April 1945 and included statements from 16 different students. One by one, the student statements described the brute force endured in the school. Although not much information regarding the actual student statements is found in the file, McWilliams might have been attempting to document Mexican student experiences in schools. I will share a few student statements that capture the deficit pedagogical approaches and they way students made sense of these. Student #1 explained:

This is to explain how us Mexican boys get beat up in Belvedere Jr. High school. We get swats with a strap ½ inch thick and about 18 inches long about 5 in. wide. They have 3 special rooms we get swats. One room is on the shop building it is a small room. The next is on the Phy. Ed. Office. The next room is [in] one the vice principal office. [These] three rooms are used for the same purpose. The ones who give the swats to us Mexicans are Hizther and Bohme and several other teachers. I have got several swats for things that I have [not] even done. This is not a joke or education. I think the way they feel when they hit us is nothing more than discrimination and hatred for Mexican boys. We boys think something should be done about this. As to us, school is just like going to jail (Statements by Belvedere Jr. High Students, 1945).

The account shared by the student is very telling of the conditions students experienced. In particular, the association of the schools being like jail is reminiscent of the call Assistant Superintendent Lane had made to invest either in schools or prisons. Student#1 described the violence and prison-like repression in a middle school setting. One can argue that schools such as Belvedere middle school might have been structured like a prison and justified by the discourses of deficiency that framed these students as inherently criminal. Student #1 helped illustrate how these discourses are lived and experience in schools. In addition, this student rejects the notion that he’s receiving an actual education, as these conditions were not conducive

to learning. These acts of violence were not contained in the “special rooms” as described by Student #1, nor exclusive to young boys, as other student recalled witnessing the violence against female students. Student #2 and Student #3 recalled:

“I saw Teresa V. hit by Mrs. Lymon counselor because she got out of her seat to give a girl a paper. The way she did it was slapped her face & pulled her hair and punched her on the back” (Statements by Belvedere Jr. High Students, 1945).

“I saw Miss McCord paddle Louise Loera for not bringing a paper in time in front of all the class” (Statements by Belvedere Jr. High Students, 1945)

As students #2 and #3 shared, violence was used, as a way to manage and regulate perceived misconduct. It was a way to hurt, and make an example for the rest of the class to see. These public forms of violence sent a message that repressed and controlled students. As these student statements suggest, student behavior was under intense scrutiny and surveillance. Unwarranted attacks were used to intimidate and humiliate students that were perceived as only educable under such conditions.

The aggression endured by the students of Belvedere Junior high was evident by the statements documented. These statements highlight the pedagogical practices that existed in schools like Belvedere and others like it, which were largely attended by Students of Color. I argue that these practices were part of the larger structures of deficiency. The brutal pedagogy used to teach Students of Color were the manifestations of deep-seated beliefs about the low-educational abilities of these students. Beliefs that were justified by deficit discourse and upheld through sanctioned structures of deficiency.

### **Challenging Structures of Deficiency: The Story of Consuelo Rivera**

In this next section I will attempt to illustrate how one student, Consuelo Rivera, navigated the unequal educational opportunity at Jefferson High. This student was selected from Jefferson High yearbooks and then traced back using Census schedules from 1930, and 1940 along with University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) yearbooks and undergraduate and



graduate transcripts. All this data was used to begin to develop a portrait of Consuelo and begin to give voice her story.

Consuela Rivera graduated Jefferson High in the Spring of 1930. Native of New Mexico, Consuela's family lived in the neighborhood of South Central Los Angeles on 46st Street and San Pedro St, less than two miles away from Jefferson High. She lived in the home with her mother Henrietta Rivera, stepfather Guido Lammori, an Italian butcher and her three siblings. Consuela's mother Henrietta, was a native of New Mexico and in 1930 worked as a department store saleswoman. Through her first marriage, Henrietta had four children, Arthur, 22; Julia, 18, Consuela, 16; Dora, 14. Henrietta's eldest children also worked in a department store at different capacities, Arthur as a packer and Julia as a stenographer in the department store offices. The youngest of the bunch, Consuela and Dora attended neighborhood schools.

I first came across Consuelo's name through the Jefferson High yearbook of 1931. In the "Where are they now" page of that year's yearbook, Consuela's name appear as an alum from the previous graduating class of 1930 who was listed as a first year undergraduate at UCLA majoring in Spanish. Consuela's yearbook picture from Jefferson High offers an interesting caption that reads "Constantly Getting A's, Rich She Is In Legend Lore" (Jefferson High Yearbook, 1930).

**Figure 12: Consuelo Rivera's Jefferson High Yearbook Picture, 1930**



Source: Photograph of Consuelo Rivera's Yearbook Picture, Jefferson High Yearbook 1930, Jefferson High Library, Los Angeles, Ca.

After graduating from Jefferson High in 1930, Consuelo began her academic journey at UCLA. She majored in Spanish and became involved in the Sigma Delta Pi, an honorary Spanish fraternity. By 1934, the Spanish fraternity page in the UCLA yearbook listed her name as a graduating senior. Although she did not appear in the UCLA yearbook pictures, her undergraduate transcripts from UCLA indicate she was a student from 1930-1934. After receiving her undergraduate degree from UCLA, Consuelo continued on to obtain a graduate degree in Spanish and a secondary teaching credential in 1935 from this same institution. Her transcripts indicate UCLA sent the credential to L.A. City Schools, what we now know as LAUSD.

Through the use of the 1940 Census, Consuela's story continued. By this time, Consuela was 26 years old. She lived in the Westside of Los Angeles and worked as a public school teacher. Although her story ends here for now, Consuela's story is symbolic of the resiliency among Chicana/o students who in spite of the discourses and structures of deficiency that were laid out in this Chapter, she persisted and became a teacher. Consuela was able to overcome the structural obstacles that were meant to funnel her into a gendered vocation. Despite the unequal opportunity for college preparation at Jefferson High, Consuela manages to get to UCLA and obtain not one but three degrees. In many ways, the story of Consuela is my story seventy years later. Although different, I experienced structures of deficiency at Jefferson High. Like the two weeks I was placed in Cosmetology class during 9<sup>th</sup> grade because my counselor assumed I would like it. After petitioning my counselor to switch me, she placed me in Film class, which had a lasting impact on my development as a student. As I became ready to graduate, I learned too late about college application process. The college application cycle had passed and nobody had told me about it. There were no workshops or counseling meeting. I didn't know I had to apply to college during my junior year. After graduating from Jefferson, I enrolled at Santa Monica College where it took me four years to transfer. Once there, I often wondered if I would ever be able to transfer. Ten years later, in spite of that, I reflect on the structures that made my educational journey much more difficult than it needed to be.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter addressed my third research question, which asked about the influence dominant discourses have in the educational experiences of Chicana/o students in South Central Los Angeles. This chapter first introduced the discourses that were prevalent among teacher and district officials. These discourses, which framed Mexican students as deficient, expose the racial and cultural assumptions that drove these perceptions forward. The influence this discourse had in the educational experiences of Mexican students yielded the discussion on the concept of *Discourses of Deficiency* and *Structures of Deficiency*. I concluded by showcasing the life

trajectories of Consuelo Rivera, a Jefferson high alum to demonstrate her resiliency in navigating and surviving structures of deficiency. Her story even if captured in fragments, begin to give voice to her experience as I recognize the valuable lessons her story can teach us about current educational conditions in South Central Los Angeles today.

## CHAPTER 7 DISCUSSION

A decade before embarking on this dissertation, while a student of Jefferson High, I learned valuable and empowering lessons about my neighborhood's history using only a camera to document the history of jazz in South Central Los Angeles. Ten plus years later after graduating from Jefferson High, I knew I wanted to dedicate my dissertation work to writing Chicana/os in the educational history of South Central Los Angeles.

My first attempt to recover any traces of the Chicana/o community began at the LAUSD Arts & Artifacts Archive, an institutional site of educational Los Angeles history. I went there looking for old Jefferson High yearbooks to get a sense of the student population during the period understudy. I quickly discovered this institutional archive did not hold any such yearbooks. The archive had a vast collection of other schools' yearbooks from various parts of Los Angeles, but none from any neighborhood schools in South Central Los Angeles.

Determined to find old Jefferson High yearbooks, I remembered what my parents always used to say to me: "*Mija, lo poquito que tenemos, lo tienes que cuidar*"<sup>14</sup> which applied to everything my parents were able to provide for us, as a reminder to honor the hard work it took to acquire it. These words rang true as to why I decided to step back from the institutional archives and into the community. I asked myself who else would recognize and honor the value of a working-class community than the people from that community themselves. It was back at Jefferson High where I found an almost unbroken collection of school yearbooks and student newspapers dating back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. A school librarian had begun preservation efforts at the turn of the century, preserving an impressive collection that documented snippets of students' academic lives that visually captured the racial diversity and cultural vibrancy of South Central Los Angeles.

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<sup>14</sup> Honey, what little we have, you have to remember to take care of it.

Developed into a full dissertation research project, learning more about the Chicana/o families who lived in the neighborhood was essential. In revisiting the research questions that this study sought to explore, we can see how rich accounts of community history, and historical actors emerged.

### **Revisiting the Research Questions**

*What were the social and economic conditions the Chicana/o community experienced in South Central Los Angeles during the 1930-1949?*

This first research question was my first attempt to locate and learn about the qualitative aspect the Mexican community in South Central Los Angeles. Most scholarship on the neighborhood's history has anchored their data and analysis on the African American experience and very little is known about the Mexican people who lived alongside them. Thus, this first question was contextual as it helped me learn more about this community's patterns of social and economic opportunity.

The social and economic conditions of the Chicana/o community of South Central Los Angeles were explored through real social conditions of Mexican families. Utilizing Census data from 1910, 1920, 1930 and 1940, along with a map found in the Urban League papers, I recreated three distinct blocks in the neighborhood spatially located in the Northeast, Central and Southeast areas. These three blocks were a window into the past, as I was able to reconstruct the stories of the families in relation to migration, family structure, intergenerational marriage, educational attainment, occupation and homeownership.

Utilizing these indicators to gauge social opportunity, the emerging historical themes highlighted the varied life stories of the Mexican community. For instance, the Mexican community in South Central Los Angeles in the period understudy were largely either Mexican immigrants like Joe and Jacqueline Sandoval who had come to the U.S. in 1922 or Mexican-Americans from the Southwestern states of Arizona and New Mexico. In addition, this community was most often comprised of two-parent household.

In terms of their occupations, across all three blocks Mexican families were overwhelmingly unskilled laborers, and fell within the lower class social strata. The unskilled occupations they held included cone maker, swamper, and seamstress among others. The educational levels for the parental units of each family were varied. When we looked at the educational levels among women and men, we find that women had lower attainment levels. Across all three blocks, women in the Northeast block were less likely to continue their education past elementary school. Margaret Barrios, a resident of the Northeast block can help illustrate this. She was born in New Mexico and had the lowest grade level attainment among the residents with a 2<sup>nd</sup> grade education. Margaret's neighbor Carmen Fuentes, had a 4<sup>th</sup> grade education, and Dolores Ruiz had a 5<sup>th</sup> grade education. The men on the other hand, had higher educational attainment levels. For example, the men from this same Northeast block, had educational levels ranging from 8<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Such was the case of Joe Sandoval who had a 12<sup>th</sup> grade education and worked as a butcher in a meat factory, or Joe Lopez, an electric shop laborer who had a 9<sup>th</sup> grade education. In the Central block, four of the mothers had partially completed high school out of 12. In the Southeast block, the highest educational level for both mother and father figures was the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Thus, the low educational attainment levels narrowed occupational opportunity for the Mexican families of South Central Los Angeles.

Lastly, homeownership among Mexican families allowed me to explore the social position of the Mexican families of this neighborhood. Economically speaking, homeownership is critical in recapturing notions of capital, wealth and economic position. When looking at the Mexican families in the three distinct blocks, whites were more likely to own their home than Mexican and Blacks. Although Mexican families made up the plurality in these blocks, they were the group with the least homeownership. For instance, out of the 13 families of Mexican descent who lived in the Northeast block, only one family owned their home, compared to five out of the ten white families who were homeowners. These social and economic indicators illustrated the

context in which the Mexican families of South Central Los Angeles lived in the first half of the twentieth century.

*What were the dominant and non-dominant discourses about the Chicana/o community in South Central Los Angeles during 1930-1949?*

In Chapter 5, I discussed the dominant and non-dominant discourses used to frame the Chicana community of South Central Los Angeles. In particular I situate the discourses within two important Los Angeles events, the *Sleepy Lagoon Case* and the *Zoot Suit Riots*. I specifically illustrate the connection of the Sleepy Lagoon Case to the neighborhood of South Central Los Angeles, as the majority of Mexican youth involved in this case were from this neighborhood, such as Hank “Henry” Leyvas and Gus Zamora. The connection of the neighborhood to this case has been largely overlooked yet important in understanding the links and implications of dominant deficit discourses to the Mexican families of this community. In this chapter, I demonstrate how these two events, the *Sleepy Lagoon Case* and the *Zoot Suit Riots*, exacerbated the production of deficit dominant discourses about the Mexican family and youth. Through the use of primary sources I illustrate how state discourses framed the Mexican family as a problem, perceived as socially and culturally deficient. The deficit dominant discourses about the family often used to explain the perceived inherent criminality of Mexican youth. In the case of the Mexican community, the perceived notion that parents instilled immoral values onto their children, resulting in juvenile delinquency.

In an attempt to disrupt the dominant deficit discourse perpetuated about youth of Mexican descent, which often labeled them unintelligent, lazy, and criminal, non-dominant discourses were used to frame and leverage the Mexican communities’ collective voices and experiences through an asset-based approach. In particular, these non-dominant discourses were youth-led and produced. Youth exerted a counter to dominant discourses in various ways such as student newspapers such as *The Mexican Voice*, a Mexican youth driven newspaper that flipped the dominant script on its head showcasing their educational aspirations and



trajectories. Or in newspaper articles, such as the *Eastside Journal*, where young Chicanas leveraged their voice to contest dominant narratives about them as “immoral.” This section also includes a letter from a young Mexican boy, Alfred Barela, to a Los Angeles City Judge, as he critically pushes back on the racially discriminatory practices he experiences daily. Lastly, Jefferson High’s own Mexican Student Club offers a glimpse at how students developed cultural pride in schools. These historical examples of non-dominant discourses dispute dominant narratives by re-centering the voices and experiences of the Mexican community in powerful and transformative ways.

*What impact did the dominant discourses have on the educational experiences of Chicana/o students in South Central Los Angeles during the period under study?*

Having illustrated the dominant discourses about the Mexican community in the previous chapter, this final chapter explores the educational discourses about Mexican students. In particular, the educational discourses that operated to define students of Mexican descent, framed them as academically deficient and inherently criminal, often constructing these using culturally deficient frameworks. It must be noted that the discourses of the criminality of Mexican students was heavily intertwined and rooted in discourses of juvenile delinquency from the Sleepy Lagoon case of 1942 and later the Zoot suit riots of 1943. I argue that discourses of deficiency, which premised racial and cultural inferiority, were used and accepted to understand the Mexican student population. I demonstrate how these discourses of deficiency rationalized the creation and maintenance of structures of deficiency. These structures of deficiency took on different forms in the everyday educational student experiences. More specifically, I argue that structures of deficiency manifested themselves in the schooling experiences of Mexican students through curriculum and pedagogy.

Discourses of deficiency framed youth as deficient in character and intelligence, which functioned to justify vocational training programs as suitable option for Mexican students. Thus,

vocational training programs were theorized as curricular examples of structures of deficiency, as they were anchored on the perceived low educational ability of Mexican students. Structures of deficiency also manifested themselves in the ways teachers taught Mexican students. In particular, I argue that the use of intimidation tactics and corporal punishment in the classroom, were manifestations of the structures of deficiency. These practices often used to teach Mexican students, was rooted in deficit notions of academic ability, which deemed these students educable only under the threat of physical violence.

### **Contributions**

The contributions of this study have been guided by the social justice principles of theory and methods, employed to recover the stories of resiliency and resistance within the Chicana/o community in South Central in the period understudy. These stories recognize the cultural wealth often overlooked in the scholarship of Communities of Color like South Central Los Angeles. The following are the contributions this study makes to theory, methods, and pedagogy.

#### **Theoretical Contributions**

This study contributes to the field of education by building and developing a Critical Race History of Education (CRHE) theoretical approach. Drawing on CRT in education and history methods, CRHE helped me anchor this dissertation in identifying the historical legacy of race and racism in the educational histories of Chicana/os. In doing so, it has allowed me write an educational history unapologetically guided by theory. Bridging theory and educational history can afford us new ways of examining how educational theories, practices and discourses have been used to subordinate Students of Color historically. This study has allowed me to develop a CRHE theoretical approach to understand how racism has been lived and experienced historically in schools. Specifically, I offer some linkages between the CRHE framework and its relation to writing educational history. This theoretical framework has five tenets that have guided my approach in perspective, research methods and analysis.

The first tenet recognizes the central role racism has played in structuring schooling practices at macro and micro levels. In the case of this study, I link how discourses of deficiency were used to shape and rationalize educational policy, which in turn shaped everyday student experiences in the classroom. I illustrate these macro and micro practices in Chapter 5 and 6, which trace the way structures of deficiency were created and maintained in curriculum, through vocational training programs and pedagogy, looking at corporal punishment as experienced by Mexican students.

Secondly, CRHE scholarship challenges dominant ideology by historically examining schooling as part of a critique of structural inequity. A CRHE approach challenges historical social and cultural assumptions regarding intelligence, language, academic ability, and criminality by providing examples about Communities of Color that challenge these. In chapter 5, I offer multiple historical examples of how youth contested deficit discourse by asserting their agency such as the group of young Chicanas who took it upon themselves to contact the editor of the *Eastside Journal*, to demand their side of the story to be told.

The third tenet of the CRHE framework is committed to social justice. This commitment is directly linked to a social justice research agenda that responds to racial, class, and gender oppression and empowers Communities of Color. This particular tenet is important as I often credit my high school documentary project as the beginning of an empowering and transformative process in my development as a student. Thus, historical CRHE scholarship has the potential to provide anti-racist perspectives that build on asset-based approaches, and counter dominant historical accounts.

CRHE as a framework recognize experiential knowledge of Communities of Color as legitimate and appropriate in the writing of educational history. With this in mind, CRHE scholars must utilize methods and sources that center and draw on the strengths of the lived experiences of students. For my dissertation, locating key primary documents that captured the student voice and perspective, such as the youth-led *Mexican Voice* newsletter, was crucial in

writing this dissertation. New alternative methodological approaches as well as data sources must be identified to recover the stories of historical actors who might not be alive anymore. I offer more detail on this in the methodological contribution section.

The final tenet of a CRHE framework insists on analyzing race and racism in both historical and contemporary context by showing the continuities of these in schooling structures, processes and discourses within education. The five tenets of a Critical Race History in Education theory provide a framework to create and recover community and educational histories that can help us better understand and challenge the historical legacies of race and racism.

### **Methodological Contributions**

Through this dissertation, I employed new strategies in the historical recovery research process. In particular, being unable to find elders for oral histories forced me to strategize on new ways of finding the voices and experiences of the Chicana/o population in general and students in particular. This has allowed me to develop new methodological approaches and identify rich primary sources which have not been fully explored in the field of educational history.

A new approach that I used to gather contextual data on the social and economic realities of the Chicana/o community was the method I employed in Chapter 4. In this chapter, I utilized a historical map found in the Urban League Papers in conjunction with the Census Population Schedules, to re-create three distinct blocks. This method provided block-level data on individual families', which helped piece together, their stories of migration, occupation and education. This approach allowed me weave together family portraits within the social history of the neighborhood.

The school yearbooks have been an invaluable asset in finding the Chicana/o student population. They have served as a window into the past. Yearbooks have allowed me to see the faces of students and match their names to their academic pathways and extracurricular

activities. These are the experiences of Lylia Carbajal, a graduating senior in the Winter of 1931, who studied stenography and was part of the Secretarial Efficiency Club while a student in Jefferson High, and Anita Duran, also a graduating senior that same year, who was in the “Literary, College Preparatory” track and involved in the Spanish Club. Students’ academic trajectories as illustrated in the pages of old yearbooks are a source of knowledge in understanding how they might have experienced schooling.

Yearbooks hold a wealth of knowledge that can work in conjunction with federal records, such as U.S. Census, to paint an even more complete picture of the life trajectories of these students. As a member of a community of Chicana/o scholars, I had seen how federal records, such as the United States Census Population Schedules, were utilized to recover snapshots of familial history. This was the approach my advisor had taken in finding his grandfather in the 1930 census. The way he traced his familial history in essence influenced how I decided to recover a community's history, utilizing the students who filled the yearbooks as the historical protagonists.

This last strategy can be employed in data collection to learn more about a student’s educational and occupation trajectory. This was the case for the Rico brothers, Albert and Benjamin, graduating seniors from Jefferson High in 1937. The 1920 Census population schedule illustrates that both their parents, Guadalupe and Felicitas Rico, immigrated from Mexico and settled near the downtown Los Angeles area. Their father Guadalupe, worked as a welder for the railroad and Felicitas was a housewife (U.S. Census, 1920). By the 1930’s the Rico family included four more siblings and had moved into a home on 53<sup>rd</sup> St in the South Central neighborhood (U.S. Census, 1930). By April of 1940, Albert, 22, was a waged worker in a governmental agency, which possibly could mean he enlisted in the armed forces as this was during WWII and Benjamin, 21, worked in the fruit canning industry (U.S. Census, 1940). Their occupation is telling of what Gonzalez (1990) argued is the direct link between schools, the

student, and economy. The Rico brothers had been trained to enter the industrial wage-labor market instead of pursuing higher education.

Utilizing the wealth of information found in these often unrecognized primary sources provide a new approach in doing educational history of Chicana/os. Furthermore, school yearbooks in conjunction with U.S. Census Population Schedules can yield rich data that draws on student life trajectories to re-center them as holders and creators of knowledge in the archival research process. Specifically, my approach to the research data continues to be shaped by my parents' *consejo*. Drawing from their sage advice embodies the "complex process that is experiential, intuitive, personal, collective and dynamic" in activating and cultivating my cultural intuition to piece together the stories of the students of Jefferson High (Delgado Bernal, 1998, p. 568).

### **Pedagogical Contributions**

Pedagogically, this dissertation offers the basic tools for doing archival research. In my methods chapter, I've detailed the special collections I've used, how I selected them and accessed them. It is my hope that this study advances our understanding about how we teach CRHE and how we engage in the methods. In particular, the CRHE pedagogical contributions can be used and applied in the K-12 setting. The CRHE framework informed how my two colleagues, Michaela Lopez-Mares Tamayo and Ryan Santos, and I designed and taught the process of historical recovery to high school students.

Grounded in a Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) approach, two UCLA colleagues and I developed a research project anchored on methodological tools for Critical Race History of Education. Through the Puente Research Team, a collaborative project with Pasadena, California high school students, we facilitated workshops on elemental social science research methods along with oral history and archival methods. Working as a research team, students engaged in the research design, protocol development and data collection, to investigate the schooling experiences of students of Mexican descent in Pasadena from 1940-

1949. Through oral history interviews of community elders and primary documents, students presented their findings at the National Association of Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS) annual conference. Teaching young students how they can historically recover and recreate stories about their community is a transformative pedagogical lesson for both teachers and students.

### **Future Research**

The following recommendations for future research are based on how we can continue to excavate and recover historical experiences and connections between schools and Communities of Color. In particular, the field can benefit from comparative studies between the various racial groups within a school site. For example, Jefferson High was highly diverse school, reflective of the racial diversity of the neighborhood of South Central Los Angeles. This study focused solely on the Chicana/o experience as a starting point. Future research needs to engage in looking at how other students attending Jefferson High experienced schooling during the same time period.

To examine the comparative educational experiences of Mexican, Black, Asian and ethnic Euro-Americans students attending Jefferson High, school yearbooks, pictures, district minutes and correspondence must all be used in conjunction with Census Population Schedules to that can offer students' educational, occupational, and overall life trajectories post high school.

### **Conclusion**

This study offers the collective experience of Mexican students who have historically been placed at the margins. This dissertation offers the stories of young men and women who confronted and transcended the entrenched educational obstacles meant to impede them. This is an educational history of the students of South Central Los Angeles that illustrate their resiliency and tenacity to persist despite the discourses and structures of deficiency that operated against them. This study honors and acknowledges the lives of Chicana/o students and

their families. It is a testament of the historical presence Chicana/os have had in the neighborhood of South Central Los Angeles. This study is a rich community history, which highlights the contours of the varied experiences of Mexican students within a neighborhood high school.



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