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# "A New Weapon - A New Monster - The Walkout": The East Los Angeles Student Walkouts of 1968

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“A New Weapon – A New Monster – The Walkout”:  
The East Los Angeles Student Walkouts of 1968

By:

Camille Grace Christenson



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THE COLLEGE OF  
WOOSTER

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Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements of Senior Independent Study

Supervised by:  
Professor Jeff Roche

Department of History

March 27, 2017



## DEDICATION

Mom, Dad, Claire, Courtney, Catherine, James, and Julian

Five years ago, I could hardly understand my history textbook. Yet, I majored in the field. Thank you for never giving up on my success, helping me accomplish everything I do, setting an example of hard work, and contributing to my reading and comprehension improvement. Without you seven, this Independent Study and my entire education at The College of Wooster would not have been possible.

## ABSTRACT

In March of 1968, East Los Angeles witnessed thousands of Mexican American students walk out of Belmont, Garfield, Lincoln, Roosevelt, and Wilson High Schools. In what became known as the East Los Angeles Blowouts, the protests sparked a series of walkouts from high schoolers nationwide. The students protested what I call “educational racism.” This term refers to different ways the education system in East Los Angeles discriminated against Mexican Americans students on the basis of their race. This Independent Study analyzes how the students in East Los Angeles embraced their identity as both students and Mexican Americans to protest against the educational racism in their schools. By placing the students’ actions into a theoretical framework known as the “Movement Culture,” and using the concept of a “free space,” this study shows how the Mexican American students’ organizing, heightened political consciousness, execution of a massive protest, and the aftermath of the walkout led to a new specific student movement within the Chicano Movement as a whole.

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Lastly, my lovely friends, roommate, and Libby: I understand my expressions of love for my topic could be overwhelming at some points. Thank you for tolerating my excited rambles at rapid speeds over the past year, your amazing support, and making my college experience unforgettable. I love you all.





## INTRODUCTION

In February 2017, two hundred high schoolers packed Pittsburgh bridges during the school hours. They protested against the newly elected Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos. DeVos' strong support for school choice and more federal money being redirected from public schools to voucher-program schools led angry high schoolers to march and chant, "No ifs, no buts, no education cuts!"<sup>1</sup> The teenagers thrust signs in the air that read, "Bye Betsy," "Education is our human right," "You can't make us dumb," "We are Devo-stated" and "Only YOU can protect schools from DeVos!"<sup>2</sup> The disappointed pupils did not support Pennsylvania's Republican Senator Pat Toomey's vote in favor of electing the DeVos. The students presented the senator with four demands to protect their right to education; one in particular asked for an explanation of how he thinks Pennsylvania's education system would benefit from DeVos' leadership.<sup>3</sup> High schoolers left a meeting with Matt Blackburn, Toomey's Western Pennsylvania director, disappointed and unheard. Allerdice High School student explained the students' emotions: "He [Blackburn] had his opinion made up before he even heard us."<sup>4</sup>

The Pittsburgh high schoolers' action echo the student activism of Mexican American high schoolers in East Los Angeles almost fifty years prior. In both cities, the community watched almost identical scenes – teenagers marching out of their high schools into the streets, coupling picket signs with rally calls declaring and catchy

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<sup>1</sup> Molly Born, "Pittsburgh students protest DeVos confirmation; press Toomey on vote," *Pittsburg Gazette*, February 9, 2017, Accessed February 15, 2017, <http://www.post-gazette.com/news/education/2017/02/08/Pittsburgh-area-students-rally-against-confirmation-of-Education-Secretary-DeVos-Trump/stories/201702080141>

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

slogans. School officials failed to listen to student demands. Most importantly – and most frequently overlooked – high school students fought for educational equality fifty years apart from each other. Despite the apparent similarities, the two protests sought to achieve different aims. Unlike the Pittsburgh students who fought for funding for public schools, the Mexican American students protested against the deep-seeded racism embedded within the restricting education system. Nonetheless, both scenes depict high schoolers responding to larger educational issues.

By combining my studies in both history and education, I asked the following questions: First, how have students felt inequality in the education system throughout history? Secondly, how do students react to the inequality affecting their education? To answer these questions, I began exploring education in the 1960s. I chose this particular decade because of my previous knowledge pertaining to the college student protests occurring around the nation at this time. Through researching student activism during that era, I discovered the East Los Angeles Blowouts of 1968.

My Senior Independent Study examines how Mexican American high school students embraced their double identity as students and Mexican Americans to expose their communities to imbalanced education within the school district. By examining this dual-identity and bringing the students' voice into the spotlight, we are better able to understand what constituted as unequal from a students' perspective. The dominant historiography on this topic fails to fully examine the role of these students.

Over the course of two weeks in March of 1968, almost 15,000 Mexican American students walked out their high schools in protest<sup>5</sup> against what I call

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<sup>5</sup> Robert Cozens, "Taking Back the Schools," episode 3, Youtube video, 58:33, from a documentary based off the book *Chicano! A History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement*, released April 12, 1996,

“educational racism” embedded in Los Angeles school districts. “Educational racism” refers to different ways the schools restricted Mexican American students from reaching their full potential on the basis of race. For example, educational racism was evident in the schools’ hiring of prejudice teachers and administrators. Furthermore, despite several court cases, segregation based on location separated Mexican American students and Anglo students. Mexican American students had overcrowded classrooms. Lastly, curriculums perpetuated racism in two forms: first, administrators and teachers tracked Mexican American students on paths towards working after high school rather than preparing them for college; and secondly, teachers omitted references to Mexican culture and history from their lessons.

After months of organizing and planning, students walked out of five predominately Mexican American schools: Belmont High School, Garfield High School, Lincoln High School, Roosevelt High School, and Wilson High School. Students continued to walk out and rally until the Board of Education in Los Angeles responded in favor of the students. The students halted their walkouts when the Board of Education agreed to meet with them – the pupils presented a student written list of thirty-six demands to the Board of Education.

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posted by Mecha Georgetown, posted as “Chicano! The Documentary: Part 3,” December 17, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=liQQ-ws3IVU&t=215s>; hereafter cited as “Chicano! The Documentary: Part 3”; This documentary provided a great amount of information in the forms of interviews. Citations will follow the following format: “Interview with [person’s name] in “Chicano! The Documentary: Part 3,” if applicable.



**SCENES OF DISORDER** — Times map locates four of schools where violence, demonstrations occurred.

A lay out of the four of the five schools that participated in the walkouts: Roosevelt High School, Lincoln High School, Wilson High School, and Garfield High School. Not shown: Belmont High School.<sup>6</sup>

Echoing the words of historian Rubén Donato, “In the 1960s, American education entered a time of enormous change and turbulence.”<sup>7</sup> *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* in 1954 caused tension in the school districts with a high enrollment of minority students. The famous case declared segregation unconstitutional in schools nationwide. Despite the Court’s ruling, schools developed loop holes to maintain separation between students of different races. Professor of Educational Foundations at the University of Colorado at Boulder Donato stated the push for education reform in the 1960s emerged

<sup>6</sup> Reprinted from Dial Torgerson, “Start of a Revolution?: ‘Brown Power’ Unity Seen Behind School Disorders.” *Los Angeles Times*. Section C, March 17, 1968.

<sup>7</sup> Rubén Donato, *The Other Struggle for Equal Schools: Mexican Americans during the Civil Rights Era*, (New York: State University of New York, 1997), 1; hereafter cited as *The Other Struggle for Equal Schools*.

from the increase of scholarly sources centered around race and ethnicity in the South.<sup>8</sup> As a result, research regarding Mexican Americans' educational experience has grown over the past decades.

I lean on a particular theoretical framework – Movement Culture – to explain students' activism. Historian Lawrence Goodwyn framed his book *The Democratic Promise* around this idea in reference to the Farmer's Alliance during the Populist era.<sup>9</sup> The "Movement Culture" refers to the shared ideas, symbols, language, and political consciousness of those actors in a social movement.<sup>10</sup> It is a way for the movement to create an identity that defines them and those who share their ideas. The students developed "individual self-respect and collective self-confidence."<sup>11</sup> As a result, the high school schoolers not only identified as Chicanos, but they also embraced their identity as students. Their conjoint identity as students and Mexican Americans paired with their actions that ensued fit seamlessly with the notion of "Movement Culture."

I also borrow a concept to help show how the students created a student movement for themselves. In *Free Spaces: The Sources of Democratic Changes in America*, Sara M. Evans and Harry C. Boyte introduce the term "free space." They explain the concept as "public places in the community [...] in which people are able to learn a new self-respect, a deeper and more assertive group identity, public skills, and values of cooperation and civic virtue [...] settings between private lives and large-scale

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 1; Donato brought to light the how Mexican American parents pushed for their children's equal education in Bakersfield, California. This Independent Study challenges this stance by examining how students fought for educational equality in their school district and beyond.

<sup>9</sup> Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Democratic Promise: The Populist Movement in America*, (New York: Oxford University Press), 1976.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

institutions [...] with a relatively open and participatory character.”<sup>12</sup> For the high school students of East Los Angeles, the school stood as their institutional space; they created their “free space” and organized in full view of authority.

Scholars of youth activism in the 1960s have established a strong platform of information regarding student involvement in larger national movements. The scholarship on Chicano studies and Chicano racial identity has exploded over the past decades. The common themes among historians include the examination of “effects of race, class, and ethnicity on their schooling experience.”<sup>13</sup> However, there is a dearth of scholarship pertaining to the actions of high schoolers fighting for their identity as students. Historians fail to give high school students recognition as being aspirational youth and telling the history from a teenager’s perspective.

For my research of high school student activism, I have consulted a variety of sources. Newspaper articles from *The Los Angeles Times* were incredibly helpful. Jack McCurdy, journalist for *The Los Angeles Times* during this period, wrote a significant number of the articles I use pertaining to the walkouts. I also used quotes from student interviews and information from various documentaries and several newspaper articles. Lincoln High School, one of the schools in East Los Angeles that played a role in the walkouts, provided an article from the school’s newspaper *The Railsplitter*.<sup>14</sup> News clips from the events allowed me to view the walkouts firsthand and witness participants’

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<sup>12</sup> Sara M. Evans and Harry Boyte, *Free Spaces: The Sources of Democratic Change in America*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, April 1, 1992), ix.

<sup>13</sup> Donato, *The Struggle for Equal Schools*, 1.

<sup>14</sup> I reached out to the Belmont, Wilson, Roosevelt, and Garfield, however the schools either did not respond to my request of their historical articles or did not have them on file any longer. A note in the article from Lincoln High School’s *The Railsplitter* explained there was a lack of articles pertaining to the walkouts because not enough students attended school during those two weeks for the newspaper to successfully run.

emotions during the protest. The former students' responses provided a rich amount of substance pertaining to their contribution.

One book in particular I heavily rely on is Mario T. García and Sal Castro's *Blowout!: Sal Castro and the Chicano Struggle for Education*. Through this piece, the García and Castro strengthens our understanding of the pressing issues affecting East Los Angeles schools. Sal Castro provided a biography along with an analysis of his experience and contributions to the walkouts; his work chronicled the specific events of those two weeks. Castro praised the students' accomplishments, which is essential to recognize. However, the book argued the walkouts would have not occurred without Castro's role as a motivational educator.<sup>15</sup> Collectively, they placed Castro as the key figure and representative of the walkouts. García and Castro incorporate student voices to vocalize Castro's guidance before and during the walkouts. Although Castro's mission to fight against racism stemmed from his own experience in East Los Angeles schools as a student and a teacher, using him as a focal point pushes the students' accomplishments to the background.<sup>16</sup>

This Senior Independent Study is divided into four chapters. Chapter One examines the broader topography of Los Angeles in the 1960s. It provides an overview of the rising momentum of Mexican American activism in the Southwest. The chapter

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<sup>15</sup> Mario T. García and Sal Castro, *Blowout!: Sal Castro and the Chicano Struggle for Educational Justice*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 1 hereafter cited as *Blowout!*; Sal Castro frequently reiterates how proud he was of his students and they inspired him to fully dedicate himself to this effort.

<sup>16</sup> Sal Castro's education growing up was split between Mexico and East Los Angeles up until first grade. From there, his education would continue in East Los Angeles. His native tongue being Spanish, his first grade teacher forced him to sit in the corner until he learned English. His mother fought against school officials when they denied her request to remove her son from class early to attend catechism class. Castro watched his mother's resilience, which helped him develop the same characteristics. To learn more, see *Blowout!*, pages 32-40.



discusses how three outside factors came together to provide the students with the necessary skills to execute a protest. In Chapter Two, I re-introduce “educational racism” to show how it affected the East Los Angeles schools. We learn about the specific ways discrimination prevented Mexican American students from obtaining their right to education. Furthermore, the chapter examines students’ efforts to heighten their peers’ political consciousness. Lastly, the chapter outlines the students’ organizing of the walkouts.

Chapter Three puts the high schoolers at the forefront of the walkout narrative that spanned over two weeks. The chapter chronicles the spontaneity and success of the walkouts. It reveals the level of student frustration and their united front against the system. Most importantly, it shows the reader the students’ dedication to their cause that led them to accomplish their main goals of the walkouts. Lastly, Chapter Four explains the aftermath of the events of March 1968. Although changes did occur in the schools, the chapter outlines the unexpected backlash that occurred in the aftermath of the walkouts. The repercussions ultimately widened the goals of the students’ movement and affected other systems of society.

The East Los Angeles Blowouts were a single phenomenon; however, they tell a larger story of the educational experience for Mexican Americans in the 1960s. By having students as the protagonist, we encounter the effects of the racism in the schools at the core. Furthermore, the Blowouts open a conversation of how high schoolers created their own student movement as a section of the Chicano Movement – and created their own Movement Culture. The Mexican American students in East Los Angeles took the

necessary steps to have their voices as students and Mexican Americans heard in their school district. The students' voices can finally be heard in the larger scope of history.

## CHAPTER ONE:

### A NEW DEFINITION OF STUDENT ACTIVISM

When most people think about student activism in the 1960s, they usually think of the four young North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University students who sat at the counter at Woolworth to protest segregation in public facilities. Perhaps they think of the Berkley students demonstrating against the Vietnam War. Or their minds picture Berkley students sitting in the streets of their campus surrounding a police car to protest for their right to free speech. The students in East Los Angeles redefined student activism, however, when they walked out their classrooms and used their role as students and Mexican American to fight for equal educational opportunity.

Three specific forces came together in Southern California to influence the East Los Angeles high school students' decision to protests. First, Southern California had a high concentration of Mexican Americans as a result of a long history of Mexicans crossing the border. Mexican immigration to the United States led to segregation and violence attacks against Mexican Americans. This caused the second aspect that influenced the East Los Angeles students; California had a tradition of Latinx activism. Lastly, a combination of the demographics and activism caused the students to embrace their heritage and culture under a unified identity thanks to specific leaders of the Chicano Movement.

The United States experienced three waves of demographic changes in relation to Mexican immigration. From 1880-1929, Mexicans first crossed the border to avoid poverty and political oppression in Mexico. By 1930, a total of 368,013 Mexicans had

crossed the border into California alone; 97,116 populated Los Angeles alone.<sup>1</sup> During the second wave between 1930-1941, the Great Depression in the United States greatly impacted Mexican American workers, which forced them to return to Mexico – despite their citizenship as a result of being descendants from immigrants. California had the second highest number of repatriates return to Mexico during this time span.<sup>2</sup> Beginning in 1942 lasting long into the 1960s, the Southwest had the third wave of immigration as a result of legal ties between the United States and Mexico called the Bracero Programs.<sup>3</sup>

The Bracero Programs caused a third wave of immigration during the 1940s into the 1960s. On July 23, 1942, hesitant and desperate Mexican leaders agreed to the United States' proposal of a joint contract labor program. Both countries collectively announced a state of emergency in attempts to address major issues affecting the two countries; the program brought Mexicans into the United States to work for agricultural divisions.<sup>4</sup> Mexico agreed to the program with the hope of fixing their struggling economy. The United States experienced a labor shortage as a result of the large numbers of men fighting a two front war – bringing in unskilled labor benefitted the country to fill those gaps. Mexico signed an agreement to provide a base of protection for the rights of Mexicans. The programs continued until 1964, despite the temporary status when implemented, and 4.5 million Mexicans entered the United States labor force over

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<sup>1</sup> Armando Navarro, *Mexican American Youth Organization: Avante-Garde of the Chicano Movement in Texas*, (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1995), 17, see Table 2. U.S. Chicano/Mexicano Population; hereafter cited as *Mexican American Youth Organization*; Gonzalez, Manuel G., *Mexicanos: A History of Mexicans in the United States: Second Edition*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana: University of Indiana Press, 2009, 142; hereafter cited as *Mexicanos*.

<sup>2</sup> Navarro, *Mexican American Youth Organization*, 18-19.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>4</sup> Juan Ramon García, "The Bracero Program" in *Operation Wetback: The Mass Deportation of Mexican Undocumented Workers in 1954*, (London, England and Westport, CT: Greenwood Press: 1980), 23; hereafter cited as *Operation Wetback*.

twenty-two years.<sup>5</sup> The effects of the Bracero Program caused the mass population of Mexican Americans in California.

An unintentional consequence of the Bracero Programs was the affect it had on Mexican Americans' opportunity to receive an education. Although the low social economic status among Mexican Americans continued into the 1960s, Mexican Americans were commonly among the lowest social economic class as a result of working in the fields and low paid wages. Mexican American parents followed the common practice to pull their children out of schools; the family needed the extra hands in the fields for more economic income.<sup>6</sup>

The demographics of the city also caused severe segregation in the schools. Segregation affected Mexican students more than any other minority ethnic group by the end of the 1920s. The first wave of immigration occurred before World War I. Families with young children crossed the border; 65,527 Mexican students enrolled in California's schools by 1927.<sup>7</sup> The Anglo community responded by the demand of creating "Mexican schools" – Mexicans were bused to different parts of town to ensure the Anglo and Mexican students remained separate. In 1931, a study found that eighty percent of school districts with a significant number of Mexican students had segregated classrooms for purposes to "Americanize."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> García, *Operation Wetback*, 23.

<sup>6</sup> Sylvia Morales, "The Struggle In the Fields," episode 2, Youtube video, 1:02:17, from a documentary based off the book *Chicano! A History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement*, released April 12, 1996, posted by "Mecha Georgetown," December 17, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aN1xQrV2-Yo&t=818s>; hereafter cited as "Chicano! The Documentary: Part 2." This documentary provided a significant amount of interviews. If applicable the footnote will be cited as "Interview with [person's name] in "Chicano! The Documentary: Part 2."

<sup>7</sup> Charles Wollenberg, "Decline and Fall of "Separate but Equal" in *All Deliberate Speed: Segregation and Exclusion in California Schools, 1855-1975*, (Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1986), 111; hereafter cited as *All Deliberate Speed*.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

Residential segregation was also present in Los Angeles. This is shown through how each group defined the Mexican American section of Los Angeles. Mexican Americans referred to their neighborhoods as barrios; Anglos used the derogatory terms, “Little Mexico,” “Mextown,” and “Spiketown,” while they referenced the barrios.<sup>9</sup> This residential segregation translated into severely segregated public schools. Segregation occurred in two forms: de jure segregation and de facto segregation. De jure segregation resulted from implemented laws, which segregated students according to their race. De facto segregation separated students on the basis of other factors, such as the students’ geography.<sup>10</sup> The segregation resulted in the Mexican American students attending schools with a dominantly Mexican American student body.

Parents protested against the segregation within the Los Angeles school district in 1945. Five fathers challenged Judge Paul J. McCormick by stating “their children and 5,000 other children of ‘Mexican and Latin decent’ were victims of unconstitutional discrimination by being forced to attend separate schools.”<sup>11</sup> Judges at various court levels ruled in favor of the five parents. In 1947, Governor Earl Warren revoked segregation laws within the California Education Code. The result of the parents’ challenge resulted in the elimination of de jure segregation and “separate but equal.”<sup>12</sup> However, segregation still persisted. Although the Mexican American parents protested

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<sup>9</sup> Celia S. Heller, *Mexican American Youth: Forgotten Youth at the Crossroads*, (New York, New York: Random House), 1966, 27-28; hereafter cited as *Mexican American Youth*.

<sup>10</sup> Bernard R. Boxill, *Blacks and Social Justice: Revised Edition*, (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1992), 76-77.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

the education system in regards to segregation in the 1940s, the students in 1968 took it one step further by wanting changes to the entire education system.

Mexican Americans also experienced abusive prejudice against them in Los Angeles as a result of the demographics. Two particular historical moments in the 1940s – the Sleepy Lagoon incident and the Zoot-Suit Riots – revealed the depths of racism towards Mexican Americans in Los Angeles. These events resonated with the older generation, which propelled a sense of activism among the Latinx community.

In the summer of 1942, someone discovered José Díaz’s murdered body. The young Mexican American male was found by Sleepy Lagoon, “the water-filled gravel pit in South-Central Los Angeles traditionally used by local Mexican American children as a swimming pit.”<sup>13</sup> An argument between the Downey Boys and the 38<sup>th</sup> Street Club, two Mexican gangs in Los Angeles, led to his death. Police suspected members of the 38<sup>th</sup> Street Club for the death of Díaz, considering it was plausible he was a member of the Downey Boys. Police charged twenty-two members with murder and conspiracy. The following winter, an exclusively white jury found seventeen defendants guilty of assault and battery or homicide crime.<sup>14</sup> The police’s accusation and the lack of Mexican representation in the jury revealed the stereotypes towards Mexican Americans during this time. The Mexican American community of Los Angeles felt “it was the entire community, [...] who were being judged in the case.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> David G. Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1995), 124; hereafter cited as *Walls and Mirrors*.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>15</sup> Gonzales, *Mexicanos*, 171.

In June 1943, the violent Zoot Suit Riots broke out across Los Angeles. The Zoot Suit Riots occurred when United States servicemen attacked Mexican American teenagers. Servicemen and residents inflicted violence on Mexican Americans wearing zoot suits in various locations around the city. The marines and The servicemen and residents pulled Mexican Americans out of movie theatres, public transportation, and shops where the victims were “stripped, had their hair shorn, and were beaten by the mobs.”<sup>16</sup> The mislabeled title of the abrupt assault on Mexican Americans stemmed from the media’s misrepresentation of the youth as delinquent and savage. In reality, the series of violent acts in the Zoot Suit Riots emerged from Anglo servicemen hoping to re-establish a sense of masculinity within themselves by asserting violence onto others. They decided to attack Mexican Americans because of tension between the two ethnic groups in military camps in Southern California.<sup>17</sup>

The Sleepy Lagoon event and the Zoot Suit Riots emphasized the growing tensions between different ethnic groups in the city.<sup>18</sup> These events opened the doors to a larger historical context surrounding Mexican Americans’ experience in Los Angeles. The outcome of the Sleepy Lagoon trial caused “the first effective mobilization.”<sup>19</sup> The Zoot Suit Riots sparked a violence against Mexican Americans in other parts of California and nationwide. In the 1940s, Mexican Americans in Southern California questioned how white Americans could treat members of the Mexican American community so poorly when “so many members of their community were fighting

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<sup>16</sup> Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 124.

<sup>17</sup> Gonzales, *Mexicanos*, 172.

<sup>18</sup> Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 124.

<sup>19</sup> Gonzales, *Mexicanos*, 171.



overseas to preserve the American Way.” The confusion regarding identifying as “Mexican” or “American” persisted into the 1960s.<sup>20</sup>

The high concentration of Mexican Americans in Southern California by the 1960s contributed to the social consciousness of Mexican American students in East Los Angeles. “Teenagers constituted about twenty one percent Mexican American”<sup>21</sup> population collectively across the Southwest. During the 1960s, Mexican Americans experienced a second wave of urbanization, migrating from surrounding rural areas into the city. Approximately 1.4 million California residences were of Mexican decent at this time; eighty percent populated urban settings.<sup>22</sup> By the 1960s, approximately 800,000 lived in East Los Angeles alone – the highest number of Mexicans outside of Mexico.<sup>23</sup> The Mexican American students were surrounded by people of the same ethnic group both inside and outside of the schools – the close quarters could have contributed to the shared consciousness among the younger generation.

The second contribution to the East Los Angeles students’ decision to protest was the long tradition of activism in the Latinx population of California. Protests and strikes occurred throughout the first half of the twentieth century in various pockets of society. None of the demonstrations fought against the racism in the school districts – therefore students followed the examples of significant leaders that led before them in other spaces of society.

Latinx farm workers showed their spirit of activism by protesting the inhumane treatment they received from land owners. In the early half of the twentieth century,

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>21</sup> Heller, *Mexican American Youth*, 27-28.

<sup>22</sup> Wollenberg, *All Deliberate Speed*, 134.

<sup>23</sup> Johns H. Harrington, “L.A.’s Student Blowout,” *The Phi Delta Kappan* 50, no. 2 (1968): 74–79.

efforts in California to unionize usually failed. Mexican farm workers' rights were already limited – the chance to practice their right to a union was slim. Land owners retaliated by inflicting threats of deportation, firing workers, violence, and starvation.<sup>24</sup> Mexican organizers feared consequences to the point that they met in secret locations to avoid being caught and reported to the labor contractors.<sup>25</sup> However, the 1940s and 1950s prepared two new leaders for a life of activism during the 1960s – Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta.

In 1962, Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta created the United Farm Workers (UFW) to fight for equal opportunities for Mexican farm workers. In October of 1965, the UFW joined forces with the Filipinos in the Agricultural Workers Organization Committee (AWOC). Collectively, the two groups boycotted picking grapes in the Delano area; this became known as the famous Delano grape boycott.<sup>26</sup> The workers walked off the vineyards across California in protests against the harsh working conditions. They chanted, “Huelga!” –strike – as they turned their backs on the fields.<sup>27</sup> Although the U.S. Labor Department refused to raise the low wages for Filipino and Mexican workers, the spirit of activism continued the tradition of protest in California. The organization propelled the Chicano Movement into a national limelight.<sup>28</sup>

Cesar Chavez represented the masses of farm workers, which helped the farm workers in California trust him as an activist leader. Unlike other Mexican Americans in leadership roles up until this point, Chavez was the first national leader of the Chicano

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<sup>24</sup> Morales, “Chicano! The Documentary: Part 2”; Alaniz, *Viva La Raza*, 132.

<sup>25</sup> Morales, “Chicano! The Documentary: Part 2.”

<sup>26</sup> Rodolfo Acuña, “Chapter 9: Goodbye America: The Chicano in the 1960s,” in *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*, (Los Angeles, California: California State University at Northridge), 1988, 307-362, 325; hereafter cited as *Occupied America*.

<sup>27</sup> Morales, “Chicano! Documentary: Part 2.”

<sup>28</sup> Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 197.

Movement to be a member of the lower economic class – “he himself was a farm worker.”<sup>29</sup> In 1949, Chavez participated in a cotton strike.<sup>30</sup> Eliseo Mediana, a labor organizer, described Chavez as “a little guy, who’s very soft spoken...” However, Chavez impressed Mediana because “...the more he talked, the more I thought, not only can we fight – but we could win. There was fertile ground. We were angry. Many of us were afraid and many of us didn’t know what to do. But we were just waiting. We were somebody just waiting for somebody to throw a match. And that’s what Cesar did.”<sup>31</sup> Chavez’s leadership in organizing farmer protests played a part in the tradition of Latinx activism in Southern California.

Dolores Huerta’s activism was established long before her work with Cesar Chavez, yet her participation in the UFW significantly contributed to the tradition of activism among the Latinx population in California. Her middle-class status allowed her to have the confidence to emerge as a social activist. In the late 1950s, she started her activism by participating in more “female” responsibilities with various community based Mexican American activist groups; her responsibilities included organizing meetings, participation in different events, and educating people about citizenship.<sup>32</sup> Her dedication to activism led her to become the vice president in the Farm Workers Association with Chavez in the 1960s, where “she felt intensely about issues of poverty, injustice, and exploitation. An articulated and educated woman, she did not hesitate to offer opinions.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Morales, “Chicano! The Documentary: Part 2.”

<sup>30</sup> Alaniz, *Viva La Raza*, 149.

<sup>31</sup> Morales, Interview with Eliseo Mediana in “Chicano! The Documentary: Part 2.”

<sup>32</sup> Mario T. García, ed., *A Dolores Huerta Reader*, (Albuquerque, New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 2008), 56; Men typically held official positions and formed new chapters for the organizations.

<sup>33</sup> García, *A Dolores Huerta Reader*, 39-40.

The history of this activism demonstrated by Chavez and Huerta provided an example of activism for the Mexican American students in East Los Angeles in 1968. Chavez and Huerta both emerged as critical civil rights leaders in the Chicano Movement. The students watched the farm workers under Chavez and Huerta's leadership fight for equal opportunities in their spaces of society. The farm workers' activism and determination for civil rights The farm workers' activism and determination inspired the students to fight for equality in their space in society – the schools.

Traditional Mexican American organizations began to shift gears to fight for Mexican American civil rights in the 1960s. The oldest and most well-known conservative Mexican American organization, the League of Latin American Citizens (LULAC), adopted a more radical set of objectives the 1960s. Founded in 1929, the majority middle class LULAC members promised to dedicate themselves to the process of Americanization. As the organization expanded, Los Angeles became the main center for LULAC in California during the 1940s.<sup>34</sup> In the 1960s, however, the organization pledged to fight against discrimination. For example, LULAC fulfilled its promise in Albuquerque, New Mexico when its members protested against the disproportionately low number of Latinos in corporate positions. In 1965, members walked out of a conference with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.<sup>35</sup> This political action turned the page for LULAC's ideology and "marked the first time that the middle-class leadership had engaged in an act of collective protests against the government."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Gonzales, *Mexicanos*, 185.

<sup>35</sup> Carlos Muñoz, Jr., *Youth, Identity, and Power: The Chicano Movement*, (London, England: Verso, 1989), 56; hereafter cited as *Youth, Identity, and Power*.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

By LULAC expanding to California, a daughter organization called the Community Service Organization (CSO) emerged in East Los Angeles in September of 1947. CSO initially fought to elect Edward Roybal to the Los Angeles City Council, which he lost. Nonetheless, CSO continued to push for more Mexican American representatives and expanded throughout the state of California. Throughout the 1950s, CSO shifted their focus to education and police issues. The transformation occurred because CSO leaders became less appealed to the idea to run for office in the midst of the Cold War. The topics of education and police, however, “came to be seen as too controversial, and the organization was virtually transformed into a mutual-aid society by the sixties.”<sup>37</sup>

The American G.I. Forum also played an important role in the fight for Mexican American civil rights in the 1960s. World War II veterans founded the organization in 1948 upon their return home from war; the organization only admitted veterans.<sup>38</sup> The organization served Mexican American veterans, they worked to increase Mexican American representation in the politics.<sup>39</sup> Another aspect of their work in the early years “aimed at desegregating schools, recreational facilities, and transportation.”<sup>40</sup> Originally formed in Texas, the group expanded across the United States throughout the 1950s and 1960s; the G.I. Forum appeared in Southern California later in the decade. As the

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<sup>37</sup> Gonzales, *Mexicanos*, 185-187; Roybal eventually became a member of the Los Angeles City Council in 1949 and later elected to become a US Representative. He actually played a role in the 1968 walkouts, to be discussed further in Chapter Three of this Independent Study.

<sup>38</sup> Gonzales, *Mexicanos*, 186.

<sup>39</sup> Juan Gómez Quiñones, *Chicano Politics: Reality and Promise 1940-1990*, (Albuquerque, New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press), 1990, 62; hereafter cited as *Chicano Politics*.

<sup>40</sup> Gonzales, *Mexicanos*, 187.

organization persisted into the 1960s, their goals dwindled and only “encouraged members to run for elected office and endorsed candidates.”<sup>41</sup>

LULAC, CSO, and the American G.I. Forum leaders carried the tradition of Latinx activism that became more popular during the 1960s as a result of the rise of the Chicano Movement. However, they neglected the educational aspect focus solely on certain groups and increase the representation of Mexican Americans in American politics.

Another organization that emerged specifically for youth in the 1960s was the Mexican American Youth Organization (MAYO) founded in San Antonio, Texas. Founded by college and graduate school students, the organization later became the first political party fighting for Mexican Americans rights, known as *La Raza Unida*. The group addressed three specific goals: organize the barrios, education reform, and Mexican American political representation.<sup>42</sup> The founders and organizers of MAYO focused on changes in Texas; therefore the students in East Los Angeles did not benefit from their moves towards education reform.<sup>43</sup>

California college and university campuses served as another example of Latinx activism. Between 1963 to 1967, Chicax youth activists participated in civil rights groups that fought for other minorities’ civil rights.<sup>44</sup> Colleges and universities admitted low numbers of Mexican Americans, and the lack of Mexican American student

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<sup>41</sup> “LULAC Councils Map,” accessed March 1, 2017, [http://depts.washington.edu/moves/LULAC\\_map.shtml](http://depts.washington.edu/moves/LULAC_map.shtml).

<sup>42</sup> Navarro, *Mexican American Youth Organization*, x, 82; Navarro claims MAYO played the largest role in educational reform, which was demonstrated by the number of protests executed during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Although the group formed prior to the 1968 East Los Angeles walkouts, the boycotts he describes in Chapter 4: MAYO Protagonist for Educational Change happened in 1969 – a year after the original East Los Angeles walkouts.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>44</sup> Muñoz, *Youth, Identity, Power*, 51.

representation led Chicax students becoming members of the organizations protesting for civil rights overall, such as the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Student for Democratic Society (SDS), and others.<sup>45</sup> However, Mexican American college students grew frustrated with these groups' failure to specifically address issues related to Mexican American rights. The Mexican Americans students' interactions in an environment of protests was a learning experience for Mexican American students to create more focused civil rights groups.

The Mexican American students' heightened social consciousness propelled them to launch student activist groups on campuses across California in the 1960s. The Mexican American Student (MASA), the original college student organization in the Los Angeles district, emerged at East Los Angeles Community College in Southern California in 1967. The Mexican-American Youth Association (MAYA) appeared thanks to Chicano students in San Diego. The Student Initiative (SI), founded in 1967, transformed into the Mexican-American Student Confederation (MASC) at San Jose State College in Northern California. Chicax and Latinx students across California joined organizations focused on fighting for Mexican American civil rights. As a result of the increase of Mexican American focused civil rights groups in California, the members "became a powerful energizing force for the CYM (Chicano Youth Movement)."<sup>46</sup>

The college activists' goals on northern and southern California college campuses, however, significantly contrasted one another. Northern California inhabited a mixture of "Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, and other Latinos from Central and South

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<sup>45</sup> Navarro, *Mexican American Youth Organization*, 54.

<sup>46</sup> Navarro, *Mexican American Youth Organization*, 54-56.

America,<sup>47</sup> whereas Southern California was almost exclusively Mexican Americans. As a result of the different demographics between northern and southern California, the student organizations' goals differed. Campuses in the north focused on "university-related issues"<sup>48</sup> and better defined their main objectives. Students in the south emphasized community matters due to the large *barrios*, Spanish speaking sections of a community in the area. Northern campuses were originally deemed to be more successful. As time progressed, however, organizations in the south increased in numbers.<sup>49</sup>

The activism leading up to the 1960s and that persisted through the decade planted a seed in the Mexican American students' minds in East Los Angeles. The students in California were surrounded by Latinx participating in activism by watching Chavez and Huerta fight for equality in the fields, traditional organizations continue to promote Mexican Americans in politics, and college students create activist groups for their campuses across California.

The last component that propelled the East Los Angeles to protest in 1968 was the new recognition and embracement of their traditional heritage. Chicanxs articulated a cultural identity that extended across the nation in the 1960s. Mexican American youth "adopted the term *Chicano* as a powerful symbolic code. The term implied pride in the Mexican cultural heritage of the Southwest and symbolized solidarity."<sup>50</sup> The growing popularity of this label among high school and college students strengthened the cultural

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>50</sup> Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 184.



identity in the East Los Angeles Mexican American students; they would use this as a foundation in their acts of student activism.

For example, Rodolfo ‘Corky’ Gonzáles, although based in Denver, Colorado, contributed to the cultural identity across the nation which extended to California. He was a politically radical member of the middle-class protestors. He became John F. Kennedy’s Colorado Coordinator for the ‘Viva Kennedy’ campaign in 1960; he then served as Johnson’s Denver coordinator for the War on Poverty program.<sup>51</sup> In 1965, he disaffiliated himself from the Democratic Party as a result of re-evaluating where his loyalty lies: “I felt torn between the intense desire to involve myself in a new and dramatic move to unite the strength of groups who would work towards the goal of better government, and my dedication to my own ethnic group.”<sup>52</sup>

Gonzáles wrote the famous poem *I Am Joaquín* in 1967, which greatly contributed to the adoption of a shared cultural identity. He distributed it to college student activists; it was the first time both college and high school students had read or heard something about their heritage and culture written by someone who shared their experiences.<sup>53</sup> Carlos Muñoz Jr., a student leader organizer of the East Los Angeles high school protests, later emphasized the following sections as key inspirations for him and his peer student leaders. These sections of the poem helped them establish a cultural identity as they organized the walk outs:

I am Joaquin,  
lost in a world of confusion,  
caught up in the whirl of a gringo society,  
confused by the rules,

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<sup>51</sup> Muñoz, *Youth, Identity, and Power*, 57.

<sup>52</sup> Ernesto B. Vigil, *The Crusade for Justice: Chicano Militancy and the Government’s War on Dissent*, (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), 25.

<sup>53</sup> Muñoz, *Youth, Identity, and Power*, 57.

scorned by the attitudes,  
suppressed by manipulation,  
and depressed by modern society...

I have come a long way to nowhere,  
unwillingly dragged by that  
monstrous, technical,  
industrial giant called  
Progress  
and Anglo success...  
in a country that has wiped out  
all of my history,  
stifled all my pride,  
in a country that has placed a  
different weight of my indignity upon  
my  
age-  
old  
burdened back.

Inferiority  
is the new load...

I look at myself  
and see part of me  
who rejects my father and my mother  
and dissolves into the melting pot  
to disappear in shame.  
I sometimes  
sell my brother out  
and reclaim him  
for my own when society gives me  
token leadership  
in society's own name.

La Raza!  
Méjicano!  
Español!  
Latino  
Hispano!  
Chicano!

or whatever I call myself,  
I look the same  
I feel the same  
I cry and sign the same.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 61-62; To read the entire poem, see Gonzales, Rodolfo, *I am Joquin: An Epic Poem*, 1967.

Mexican American youth identified with the honest emotions expressed in the poem, causing it to become a staple to the emerging Chicano Movement, which promoted Mexican Americans to have a sense of pride of their heritage.

Reies López Tijerina appeared as another cultural figure of the Chicano Movement in the Southwest. In 1963, he founded a group known as *La Alianza Federal de Mercedes* (The Federal Alliance of Land Grants) in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The organization emphasized the US' violations of the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.<sup>55</sup> *La Alianza* organized protests to fight for Mexicans who recently arrived to the United States. In 1966, the group demonstrated in the Echo Amphitheatre, a national forest campground, to fight for property rights for Mexicans; they fought to have the lands returned to the original Mexican owners.<sup>56</sup> Tijerina and *La Alianza* framed the issues of property rights as a conflict between Mexicans and the Anglos. Tijerina “represented the radical wing of the Chicano movement, not in ideological terms, but in practice, because he raised the issue of property rights.”<sup>57</sup> Even in the 1960s, his emphasis on this land originally belonging to Mexico helped Mexican Americans across the Southwest to fight for the land that originally belonged to them; therefore contributing the reclamation of specific aspects of their traditional culture and history.<sup>58</sup>

The Mexican American students encountered a series of outside influences that set them up for a successful protest. The demographics of Southern California due to centuries of immigration embedded the students in a location where shared ideas could be

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<sup>55</sup> David R. Maciel and Juan José Peña, “Chapter Ten: La Reconquista: The Chicano Movement in New Mexico,” in *The Contested Homeland: The Chicano History of New Mexico*, ed. David Maciel, and Erlinda Gonzales-Berry, (Albuquerque, New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press), August 1, 2000, 274.

<sup>56</sup> Acuña, *Occupied America*, 340.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 274.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 274.

heard. The rich tradition and history of Latinx activism in California provided an example of fighting for civil rights for the students in East Los Angeles. Furthermore, the political and cultural consciousness of the age infused the idea of protesting into the minds of the students. Significant figures of the Chicano Movement encouraged Mexican Americans across the Southwest to embrace their identity as Chicanx and Mexican Americans. As the Mexican American students became more socially aware, they decided to take matters into their own hands; they began organizing for a protest against the education system of East Los Angeles that would occur in March of 1968.

## CHAPTER TWO:

### “WE BELIEVE THIS IS A CRISIS”

15,000 Mexican American students walked out of seven high schools across East Los Angeles in early March 1968.<sup>1</sup> The protests continued for two weeks. Students stood on desks. They flooded the hallways and banged on lockers. Margarita ‘Mita’ Cuaron stood on a car; a traffic cone amplified her voice as she chanted “Walkout!”<sup>2</sup> Her peers surrounded her with picket signs that read, “We Want Education, Not Eradication,” “Better Education,” and “Unite for Better Schools!”<sup>3</sup> Bewildered administrators and teachers watched from the safety of their classrooms.

Mexican American students in East Los Angeles schools began to recognize and to fight against the educational racism within their school district. I use the term “educational racism” to mean discrimination against Mexican Americans that reached every level of the education system. The multilayered inequality restricted students from succeeding and obtaining their educational needs because of their race. John Ortiz, former Garfield student, articulated the concept of educational racism best: “We

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Cozens, “Taking Back the Schools,” episode 3, Youtube video, 58:33, from a documentary based off the book *Chicano! A History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement*, released April 12, 1996, posted by Mecha Georgetown, posted as “Chicano! The Documentary: Part 3,” December 17, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IiQQ-ws3IVU&t=215s>; hereafter cited as “Chicano! The Documentary: Part 3”; This documentary provided a great amount of information in the forms of interviews. Citations will follow the following format: “Interview with [person’s name] in “Chicano! The Documentary: Part 3,” if applicable.

<sup>2</sup> “Lincoln High School Walkouts,” YouTube Video, 17:31, from the Asian Americans Advancing Justice – Los Angeles and Lincoln High School’s “V.O.I.C.E.” and “M.E.Ch.A” organizations. Originally titled “Walking Out For Our Rights.” Posted by AJLA Youth Films, July 5, 2015. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QMxSYWc7jz4&t=52s>; hereafter cited as “Lincoln High School Walkouts.”; This short documentary provided a great amount of information in the forms of interviews. Citations will follow the following format: “Interview with [person’s name] in “Lincoln High School Walkouts” if applicable.

<sup>3</sup> Louis R. Torres, “Civic Leaders Hear Students Complaints: Wednesday,” *The Railsplitter: Abraham Lincoln High School*, Volume 106, Issue 3. March 15, 1968; hereafter cited as “Civic Leaders”; “Chicano! The Documentary: Part 3.”

[Mexican American students] were disenfranchised by not being given the same resources to compete in the outside world that other students were given.”<sup>4</sup> Like other Mexican American students across the Southwest, the students in East Los Angeles attended school in poorly constructed buildings. Caudron remembered that “the conditions in the schools in the 60’s were pretty deplorable.”<sup>5</sup> Former Lincoln teacher Alicia Sandolva mentioned in the *Los Angeles Times* that “‘anyone with eyes’ could see that the schools on the East Side were run down.”<sup>6</sup> Students over-crowded classrooms and sat on the floor because schools lacked the proper number of classrooms to hold all the students.<sup>7</sup> Teachers taught students a curriculum that either neglected or improperly represented Mexican history and culture. Regulations prohibited students from speaking Spanish. The schools aimed to assimilate Mexican American students into the culture of the United States, which “meant learning the English language, lessons of American culture, and new modes of behavior.”<sup>8</sup> School administrators registered Mexican American students for vocational classes rather than placing them in classes meant to prepare them for colleges and universities. Teachers presented “ethnically or racially biased”<sup>9</sup> achievement tests that focused on topics that stand more familiar to Anglo students; teachers then segregated students into different classes based on those results.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Frank Del Olmo, “No Regrets, Chicano Students Who Walked Out Say: ’68 Protests Brought Better Education, Most Believe,” *Los Angeles Times*, Mar. 26, 1978; hereafter cited as “No Regrets.”

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Mita Caudron in “Lincoln High School Walkouts.”

<sup>6</sup> Del Olmo, “No Regrets.”

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Rubén Donato, *The Other Struggle for Equal Schools: Mexican Americans during the Civil Rights Era*, (New York, New York: State University of New York, 1997), 17; hereafter cited as *The Other Struggle for Equal Schools*.

<sup>9</sup> Mario T. García, and Sal Castro, *Blowout!: Sal Castro & the Chicano Struggle for Educational Justice*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press), 2011, 113; hereafter cited as *Blowout!*.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 113-114.

Lastly, the schools hired teachers and authorities who did not ethnically represent the student body. According to the California State Department of Education, Mexican American teachers made up only 2.25% of the teachers in California in the 1966-1967 school year. As a result, “There is little likelihood that a Spanish surname student will be taught by a teacher of his own ethnic group.”<sup>11</sup> Pupils experienced what President George W. Bush once called the “soft bigotry of low expectations.”<sup>12</sup> The high schools grew frustrated with how the educational racism in their schools limited their educational opportunities. The students mobilized to take action towards equal education.

Mexican American students were in the majority in East Los Angeles schools in the 1960s. More than two thousand students were enrolled in Lincoln High School – ninety percent of them were of Mexican decent. Mexican American students represented eighty-three percent of Roosevelt High School’s student population, and at Wilson High School they constituted seventy-six percent of the student body.<sup>13</sup> As a result, Mexican American students shared experiences of mistreatment with their classmates.

Mexican Americans in East Los Angeles attended school for a lesser amount of years than the Anglo peers. Mexican Americans generally sustained an average level of

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<sup>11</sup> Thomas P. Carter, *Mexican Americans in Schools: A History of Educational Neglect*, (New York, New York: College Entrance Examination Board), 1970, 80; hereafter cited as *Mexican Americans in Schools*. Educational racism affected Mexican American teachers in addition to the students. Carter addressed the issue that “the general rule holds: Mexican American teachers, especially elementary school teachers, are placed in schools that have high percentages of Mexican American students” (page 80). To learn more, see section “Mexican American Teachers” on page 77-81.

<sup>12</sup> “Excerpts from Bush’s Speech on Improving Education,” *New York Times*, September 3, 1999, <http://www.nytimes.com/1999/09/03/us/excerpts-from-bush-s-speech-on-improving-education.html>.

<sup>13</sup> García and Castro, *Blowout!*, 110-111.

eight years; Anglos received an average of twelve.<sup>14</sup> This disparity even caught the attention of President Lyndon B. Johnson who said:

In five of our Southwestern States, nineteen percent of the total population has less than eight years of school. Almost one-fifth of the population in five States has less than eight years in school. What is the percent of the Mexican-Americans with less than eight years of school? How many Mexican-Americans have less than eight years of school? Fifty-three percent. Over half of all the Mexican-American children have less than eight years of school. How long can we pay that price?<sup>15</sup>

Mexican American students dropped out of East Los Angeles Schools in significant numbers, usually after ninth grade. Garfield High School, for example, had a fifty-seven percent dropout rate. It was a region-wide problem as well; in 1967, sixty percent of Mexican American students dropped out of high school across the Southwest.<sup>16</sup> Anglo students at Monroe High School and Palisades High School on the West side of Los Angeles dropped out at a rate of 2.6 percent to 3.1 percent in comparison to the dropout rate of Mexican Americans, which spanned from 43.5 percent to 53.8 percent at East Los Angeles schools.<sup>17</sup> As former student Henry Gutierrez put it, students were not dropping out as much as they were being “pushed out” not only by an unsympathetic administration, but also “because their needs weren’t being met, their

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<sup>14</sup> Margarita Berta-Ávila, Anita Tijerina Revilla, and Julie López Figueroa, ed., *Marching Students: Chicana and Chicano Activism in Education, 1968*, (Reno, NV: University of Nevada Press, 2011) 15; hereafter cited as *Marching Students*.

<sup>15</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson: "Remarks at the Welhausen Elementary School, Cotulla, Texas.," November 7, 1966, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=28003>. Lyndon B. Johnson gave this speech at Welhausen Elementary School in Cotulla, Texas. Welhausen Elementary School was predominately Mexican American students. Johnson’s career began by teaching at this particular school, where he interacted with students at every level. He articulated in his speech: “I worked as a teacher for the fifth, sixth, and seventh grades. I worked as principal of five teachers. I worked as a playground supervisor. I coached the boys’ baseball team. I was a debate coach. [...] In my spare times I sometimes acted as assistant janitor.” He fought for equal education for Mexican Americans because of his personal relationships and connections to those most affected.

<sup>16</sup> Cozens, “Chicano! The Documentary: Part 3”; “Lincoln High School Walkouts.”

<sup>17</sup> Berta-Ávila, *Marching Students*, 15; Donato, *The Other Struggle for Equal Schools*, 63.



culture was not addressed, the school wasn't really doing anything for them.”<sup>18</sup> The disparity in dropout rates between Mexican American and Anglo students in Los Angeles schools revealed contrasting expectations from these different groups.

Uncaring and often hostile administration staff did little to improve student graduation rates. As one unidentified student said during a newscast after the walkout: “The educational process of Mexican Americans for over twenty years in East Los Angeles and throughout the Southwest have been disruptive. It’s failure to communicate with the Mexican American, that is the disruption. When fifty-seven percent of the students at Garfield drop out year after year, there has to be a problem. We’re not operating in a vacuum, there’s social injustice.”<sup>19</sup> Administrators frequently allowed fourteen and fifteen-year old students to leave school, despite a law that required them to stay until they are sixteen. School officials prevented students who had gotten pregnant from returning to school.<sup>20</sup> As a result, students continued to leave school before the completion of their secondary education.

Another factor compounding the high dropout rate was that students’ reading comprehension levels lagged far behind national averages. One student during the walkout made the issue clear: “We have the lowest reading rate in East L.A., in the East L.A. schools. We have graduates from high school that are in twelve grade that graduate and are out to face the world and they can only read an eighth and ninth grade reading level. We believe this is a crisis.”<sup>21</sup> Language Arts achievement levels for Mexican American students were significantly lower than Anglo students – both nationally and

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<sup>18</sup> Cozens, Interview with Henry Gutierrez in “Chicano! The Documentary: Part 3.”

<sup>19</sup> Newscast interview in “Lincoln High School Walkouts.”

<sup>20</sup> García and Castro, *Blowout!*, 119.

<sup>21</sup> Cozens, Interview in “Chicano! The Documentary: Part 3.”

locally.<sup>22</sup> Mexican American students struggled with reading English so much that Mexican American college students volunteered to tutor in reading. The continuation of low reading levels stemmed from the longstanding practice of teachers passing students to the next grade because of their age rather than their ability to read.<sup>23</sup>

Under-qualified and culturally insensitive Anglo teachers taught in East Los Angeles schools. Mexican American parents mentioned that Anglo teachers in predominately Mexican American schools were frequently “rejects from more affluent schools.”<sup>24</sup> Teachers commonly begrudged their placement in “barrio schools,” which caused educators to leave. The frequent turnover of Anglo teachers continued the hiring of second-rate teachers.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, Los Angeles schools improperly trained teachers regarding Mexican culture, including the failure to teach them Spanish. Anglo teachers could not draw from personal experience to relate to their Mexican American students nor speak their native language, which left students to be “taught by teachers [...] whose training [left] them ignorant and insensitive to the educational needs of Chicano students.”<sup>26</sup> As a result, teachers who taught in the East Los Angeles schools did not represent the majority of their students.

The Anglo teachers and administrators in East Los Angeles schools followed the educational norm to exclusively teach white history and cultural values with the intention of Americanizing Mexican American students. The absence of Mexican ethnic

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<sup>22</sup> Carter, *Mexican Americans in School*, 16.

<sup>23</sup> Cozens, Interview with Freddy Resendez in “Chicano! The Documentary: Part 3.”

<sup>24</sup> Howard P. Holladay, *Communication of Mexican Americans with public school personnel: A study of channel, code, receiver, and source preferences*, (Los Angeles, California: University of Southern California), 1971, 5; hereafter cited as *Communication of Mexican Americans with public school personnel*.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 5; Donato, *The Other Struggle for Equal Schools*, 63.

<sup>26</sup> Alfredo Mirande, “Chapter 5: Education: Problems, Issues, and Alternatives” in *The Chicano Experience: An Alternative Perspective*, (Norte Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985) 92.

representation “was psychologically destroying their [the students’] culture.”<sup>27</sup> Historian Carlos Tejeda placed the Los Angeles curriculum within the “schooling for subservience” framework. Tejeda defined “school for subservience” as a method of schooling where the intention of the curriculum installed a dominant set of values through teaching and pedagogy, thus perpetuating a social and cultural hierarchy.<sup>28</sup> Rosalinda Méndez González, former student in East Los Angeles, provided support for Tejeda’s “school for subservience” in her alma mater’s district:

From the time we first begin attending school, we hear about how great and wonderful our United States is, about our democratic American heritage, but little about our splendid and magnificent Mexican heritage and culture. What little we do learn about Mexicans is how they mercilessly slaughtered the brave Texans at the Alamo, but we never hear about the child heroes of Mexico who courageously threw themselves from the heights of Chapultepec rather than allow themselves and their flag to be captured by the attacking Americans... We look for others like ourselves in these history books.<sup>29</sup>

Educational racism even drove curricular objectives; teachers and administrators consistently placed Mexican American students into vocational courses rather than college prep. They believed this track best prepared them to work after high school. Classes referred to as the industrial arts included wood shop and metal shop classes.<sup>30</sup> Female students were tracked into home economic courses. A home economics teacher told Patssi Valdez and her friends, “Okay, you little Mexicans, you better learn and pay attention. This class is very important, you know, because most of you will be cooking or cleaning for other people.”<sup>31</sup> Former student Bobby Lee Verdugo remembered, “It was

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<sup>27</sup> “Poor March In Capital Protests L.A. Arrests: Leaders Claim Mexican-Americans Were Indicted Unfairly for Walkout at Schools,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 4, 1968.

<sup>28</sup> Tejeda, *Marching Students*, 12-13.

<sup>29</sup> García and Castro, *Blowout!*, 115.

<sup>30</sup> Cozens, Interview with Tom Dyer in “Chicano!: The Documentary: Part 3”; Tom Dyer was the Principal at Lincoln High School during the time of the walkouts.

<sup>31</sup> Cozens, Interview with Patssi Valdez in “Chicano! The Documentary: Part 3.”

those labels that stuck to a lot of people.”<sup>32</sup> These narrow-minded teachers and tracking policies left students with a frustrated desire for a more meaningful educational experience and preparation for college. Gerald Richer, former teacher, remembered years later: “we didn’t expect [Latino students] to go to college.”<sup>33</sup>

The lack of college counselors in the East Los Angeles schools also contributed to the limitations on post-graduation opportunities for Mexican American students. Only one college counselor assisted approximately four thousand students at Garfield High School. Counselors were burdened with responsibilities because “it was not unusual to have five hundred kids assigned to one counselor.”<sup>34</sup> Because of the low student-counselor ratio, students asked teachers for college advice; The teachers did not provide any help. The lack of support for Mexican Americans to receive information regarding different options after high school kept them on a track to exclusively enter the workforce.

Mexican American students’ consciousness of the educational racism affecting East Los Angeles angered the students. The students’ anger propelled them to demonstrate. Students began to organize clandestine meetings, ultimately leading to an event now known as The Mexican Revolution of 1968 because “this [was] a time in which enough Chicano students had gained the mastery of the tools necessary to shake up the system, and had taken the ideals of the country to heart and so we protested for our

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<sup>32</sup> Interview with Bobby Lee Verdugo in “Lincoln High School Walkouts.”

<sup>33</sup> Elaine Woo, “’60s ‘Blowouts’: Leaders of Latino School Protest See Little Change,” *Los Angeles Times*, Mar. 7, 1988; hereafter cited as “’60s ‘Blowouts.’”

<sup>34</sup> García and Castro, *Blowout!*, 113; Interview with Elsa Cisneros in “Lincoln High School Walkouts.” For example, a teacher ignored student Elsa Cisneros’ request for college guidance when she could not see a counselor.

rights.”<sup>35</sup> Former student Robert Rodriguez argued the walkouts were inevitable “because something had to be done.”<sup>36</sup>

Throughout the 1960s, high schoolers created student groups in hopes to raise awareness of the educational racism in their schools. Vicky Castro, David Sánchez and other students from various East Los Angeles schools joined together to create the Young Chicano Community Action (YCCA) in 1965 (later to become the Brown Berets, then eventually United Mexican American Students).<sup>37</sup> The YCCA members attended a Mexican American Youth Leadership Conference, which politicalized the students. The members of the YCCA met at a coffee shop called the Piranya Coffee House to simply discuss important topics; later this would become the meeting site for members of the YCCA and high schoolers as they collectively began to organize the walkouts.<sup>38</sup>

Tasked by the Mexican American Education Committee “to help promote Mexican American youth leadership.”<sup>39</sup> The L.A. Commission on Human Relations established camps for students. Beginning in 1963, students started attending an event called the Spanish-Speaking Youth Leadership Conference; this later became the Mexican American Youth Leadership Conference. The conference was held at Camp Hesser in Malibu, California. Mexican American volunteers, including teachers, social

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<sup>35</sup> Dial Torgerson, “Start of a Revolution?: ‘Brown Power’ Unity Seen Behind School Disorders,” *Los Angeles Times*, Section C, Mar. 17, 1968; hereafter cited as “Start of a Revolution?”; Cozens, Interview with Moctesuma Esparza in “Chicano! The Documentary: Part 3.”

<sup>36</sup> Del Olmo, “No Regrets.”

<sup>37</sup> García and Castro, *Blowout!*, 136.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 105. The Mexican American Education Committee was an organization formed by “small businessmen, and a few were professionals.” Mentionable members include Dr. Francisco Bravo, Phil Montez, Irene Tover, and Dr. Paul Sheldon of Occidental College. The organization emerged as a result of Mexican American leaders in Los Angeles who were concerned about the conditions of the schools. The low drop-out rates among Mexican American students and “the lack of opportunity for Mexican American youth” upset them the most. To learn more, see García and Castro, *Blowout!*, 105-106.

workers, police officers, county sheriffs, and college students, staffed the conferences. Mexican American college students contradicted college counselors and teachers by telling students about the possibility of attending college after high school. Teenagers, young adults, and teachers alike danced to traditional music around bonfires. Participants broke into small groups for discussion and read Corky Gonzales' powerful poem *I am Joaquin*.<sup>40</sup>

The L.A. Commission on Human Relations originally held the conferences to help Mexican American students “develop themselves into the mainstream of Anglo-American life.”<sup>41</sup> The camps, ironically, empowered the Mexican American students to become proud of their own heritage instead; the conferences contributed to the increase of the students' political consciousness towards issues in the educational system as a whole.<sup>42</sup> Vicki Castro, student at Roosevelt High School and attendee of the original conference in 1963, claimed the conference was where she found her love for justice.<sup>43</sup> Rather than becoming more comfortable with American culture, the Mexican American students grew to become “proud of their Mexican background.”<sup>44</sup> In particular, the 1967 Mexican American Youth Leadership Conference politicalized high school and college students alike that participated in the 1968 walkouts. Paula Crisostomo stated, “I found it safe to say what I believed in and not be criticized. I felt empowered. My world was

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<sup>40</sup> *Walkout!*, Directed by Edward Olmos, Performed by Michael Peña and Alexa Vega, (United States: HBO), 2006, DVD.

<sup>41</sup> Dolores Delgado Bernal, “Grassroots Leadership Reconceptualized: Chicana Oral Histories and the 1968 East Los Angeles School Blowouts,” (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), Volume 19, No. 2, 118; Originally called the Spanish-Speaking Youth Leadership Conference, the next year organizers changed the name of the conference to the Mexican American Youth Leadership Conference in 1964. For more on the conference, see García and Castro, *Blowout!* 104-109.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>43</sup> García and Castro, *Blowout!*, 109.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

opened up. I felt validated. I found my voice.”<sup>45</sup> Students who participated in the 1967 conference became the student leaders of the walk outs in March of 1968. That year’s camp was the seed of the larger Southern California Movement.<sup>46</sup>

Mexican American students felt moved to share their newfound knowledge with the rest of the student body in East Los Angeles schools. They distributed Chicano underground newspapers detailing issues impacting their education in hopes of raising their fellow students’ awareness. A common newspaper that circulated around the schools included the liberal newspaper *Chicano Student News*. Raul Ruiz, founder of *Chicano Student News*, specifically intended for high school students to be the main audience for his newspaper.<sup>47</sup> The students considered the articles of the *Chicano Student News* and other similar publications including *Inside Eastside* to be “pivotal publication; it was a catalyst for discussion.”<sup>48</sup> One student, Paula Crisostomo, handed out these articles to her peers. After administrators prohibited her from publicly distributing the underground newspapers, Crisostomo strategically placed the newspapers where students would find them. She then informed her classmates of the secret locations where they could find them.

The YCCA created a student survey in preparation for the walkouts to gain an understanding of the main concerns the entire student body. The surveys gathered the Mexican American students’ opinions on school conditions with the hope to provide a list of criticisms to the school district. Vicky Castro, president of the YCCA, and Paula

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 138; García and Castro, *Blowout!*, 108-109.

<sup>47</sup> García and Castro, *Blowout!*, 144; Elizezer Risco was the editor for the underground Chicano newspaper *Inside Eastside*. His assistant Raul Ruiz founded *Chicano Student News* after Sal Castro asked them to help him spread awareness of the upcoming walkout. For more on Chicano underground press and Raul Ruiz. To learn more, see García and Castro, *Blowout!*, 144.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

Crisostomo, student leader, distributed surveys to students in the beginning of 1967-1968 school year. The survey asked ten questions; several hundred students across the five Los Angeles schools responded to the survey.<sup>49</sup> Vicky Castro summarized the responses: “They [the complaints] went from better food all the way up to, you know, we want to go to college.”<sup>50</sup> The surveys revealed the wide range of inequalities students faced in the schools; furthermore, the student leaders began to realize the large number of students who shared their frustration. Castro and Crisostomo collated the responses into a list of criticism for the school officials. By default, the surveys unintentionally heightened student awareness by providing the non-student leaders an opportunity to reflect on their educational experiences.

When Castro and Crisostomo presented the list of grievances to the Los Angeles School Board, the school authorities’ rejection of the demands further demonstrated the depths of educational racism in East Los Angeles schools. Ralph Richardson, former president of the L.A. School Board, dismissed the students’ demands because the school board does “not have the authority to control what the whole of society is doing.”<sup>51</sup> Esparza remembered the school board “patted us on the back”<sup>52</sup> and threw away the survey responses, blatantly ignoring the student demands. The Board of Education failed to demonstrate any real effort to bring change to the school district. In the students’ list of demands, Mexican American student leaders threatened to walk-out of school if the Board of Education failed to meet their demands.

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>50</sup> Cozens, Interview with Vicky Castro in “Chicano! Documentary: Part 3.”

<sup>51</sup> Cozens, Interview with Ralph Richardson in “Chicano! Documentary: Part 3.”

<sup>52</sup> Cozens, Interview with Moctesuma Esparza in “Chicano! Documentary: Part 3.”



The Mexican American students' collective efforts raised their peers' political consciousness. The surveys, newspapers, and addressing the Board of Education started to create a sense of shared identity and ideas amongst the East Los Angeles student body. The students laid a foundation which would eventually lead to their own student movement within the larger Chicano Movement to fight the education system as a whole.

Social studies teacher Sal Castro contributed to the politicization of Mexican American students. Castro was one of the few Mexican American teachers in East Los Angeles schools. He recommended that students attend the Mexican American Youth Conference; he urged students to follow through with the opportunity. He encouraged students to engage in leadership roles—more Mexican American students joined student council.<sup>53</sup> Luís Torres, former Lincoln High Student, recalled the impact Sal Castro made on his education:

The classroom experience with Sal Castro was memorable. He didn't shy away at all from having a point of view and expressing it. That point of view was 'know your history and be proud of who you are.' This was like a mantra, and it was a wildly revolutionary notion to us. Nobody said this. He exuded this feeling that he was one of us and he respected us, and this made a difference for us.<sup>54</sup>

Sal Castro's classroom was instrumental in the students' learning of the issues affecting the school district.

Castro assisted students with the walkout in the fall of 1967 after they approached him; he immediately responded: "Don't walkout. Organize."<sup>55</sup> During the months leading

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<sup>53</sup> Gilda L. Ochoa, "Teaching is a Fight: An Interview with Sal Castro," *Rethinking Schools*, Winter 2010. Before teaching at Lincoln High School, Sal Castro worked at Belmont High School. He was transferred over to the Lincoln after he encouraged students to create a political party to run for student council. The students named the political party "The Tortilla Party."

<sup>54</sup> García and Castro, *Blowout!*, 127.

<sup>55</sup> Torgerson, "Start of A Revolution?"

up to the walkouts, he helped the high school students recruit college participants in United Mexican American Students (UMAS) at the University of California – Los Angeles to stand as bodyguards between the students and police in case police responded violently to the protest. He connected students to the editors of the underground newspapers. Castro also recruited college students who graduated from the East Los Angeles schools such as Moctesuma Esparza and others to support the protests and help organize when needed.<sup>56</sup> Students easily approached Castro because of his dedication to his students obtaining equal education and because “we trusted him.”<sup>57</sup>

Student leaders at Roosevelt, Lincoln, and Garfield high schools created strike committees prior to the walkouts with the intention that they would manage the walkouts when they occurred. The student leaders from Lincoln included Paula Crisostomo, Freddy Reséndez, and Robert Rodríguez. The student leaders from Garfield were Mita Cuarón and John Ortiz. Roosevelt representatives were Tanya Luna Mount, Rita and Kathy Ledesma, Robert (Bobby) Sánchez, and Mario Esparza. Students at Wilson walked out of lunch protesting against the sudden cancellation of their school play; it was the strike committees’ responsibility to meet at their respected high schools to discuss possibilities of further action from the other schools. Student leaders demanded Lincoln and Roosevelt students walkout to stand in solidarity with Wilson High School.<sup>58</sup>

Garfield students protested before the strike committee decided for them. John Ortiz, head of the strike committee for Garfield High School, answered “it’s the Garfield High

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<sup>56</sup> García and Castro, *Blowout!*, 136.

<sup>57</sup> Alison Sotomayor, “SAL CASTRO & the 1968 East LA Walkouts,” YouTube video, 15:19, Written and narrated by Patt Morrison for the National Media Coalition’s Impact Award Gala in 2006, posted by Alison Sotomayor, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-3TKnj0fXZs&t=612s>; This was said by Sal Castro’s former student Paula Crisostomo.

<sup>58</sup> Ian F. Haney López, *Racism on Trial: The Chicano Fight for Justice*, (President and Fellows of Harvard College), 2003, 20-21.

School strike committee. We organized this, the Garfield High School strike committee”<sup>59</sup> to a newscaster when asked who was responsible for the walkout.

Mexican American students’ heightened political awareness, which caused tension throughout the schools. Joe McKnight, teacher at Lincoln High School, recognized the growing tension; he tried to warn his colleagues of the possibility of a student demonstration. He urged them to react in a way to prevent possible violence.<sup>60</sup> Students could also feel the tension permeating through the school. Crisostomo said on the matter:

I know tension had heightened, activity had heightened district wide, a lot of schools were talking about it [walking out], everyone knew it was going to happen, everyone was waiting for the sign. But I remember the atmosphere was absolutely tense, I mean it was just electric in school. This had been building for so long, and everyone knew it was going to happen and everyone was just waiting and waiting.<sup>61</sup>

The tension within the schools continued to grow in the months leading up to the walkouts.

The Mexican American students felt they needed to responded to all aspects of the educational racism within their school district as a result of the tension. Region-wide, the high school youth received a less education in comparison to their Anglo counterparts. Mexican American students read at a significantly lower rate as a result. Furthermore, teachers and administrators pushed Mexican American students out of the school system prior to graduation; the school authorities’ discriminatory actions contributed to one of the highest drop-out rates among high school students in the

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<sup>59</sup> Cozens, Interview during a newscast with John Ortiz in “Chicano! Documentary 3.”

<sup>60</sup> García and Castro, *Blowout!*, 117.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

country. Students learned a distorted version of their Mexican culture and history due to a disconnect between Anglo teachers and the material.

The Mexican American students' collective efforts of raising the political consciousness of their peers and taking actions to change the educational system displayed the beginnings of their Movement Culture within the schools. The Mexican American students in East Los Angeles specifically decided to fight against what was happening within their district when they realized that "change wasn't going to come from within [the schools], it had to come from without."<sup>62</sup> Their methods of spreading information created shared ideas among the classmates; the teenagers developed a sense of common purpose and identity as students fighting for their education. The students' organization, planning, and rising awareness of the conditions of their schools had a much larger impact than they anticipated.

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<sup>62</sup> Cozens, Interview in "Chicano! The Documentary: Part 3."

### CHAPTER THREE:

#### “BRAINIACS, JOCKS, CHEERLEADERS, NERDS, AND GANGBANGERS ALL MARCHING TOGETHER.”

February 28, 1968 was the final dress rehearsal before opening night for Wilson High School’s production of *Barefoot in the Park*. Mexican American students proudly rehearsed the play for their principal Donald Skinner. His conservative beliefs, however, made him a tough critic for the romantic comedy. In the play, the husband simply asked his new wife, “Shall we go to work today or go back to bed?” Principal Skinner’s anger erupted at the character’s supposedly raunchy request. He proclaimed, “No, no, this play is not going to be shown here at Wilson,”<sup>1</sup> and he cancelled it. These famous last words tipped Mexican American students over the edge. For the next two weeks, the community watched students perform an act much greater than what they had expected – and with a much larger cast. Mexican American students successfully accomplished their goals in the walkout of gaining attention of the larger community, even on scales they did not anticipate.

Even after months of planning, the walkouts began by accident the day after the cancelation. Two hundred and fifty Wilson students walked out during their lunch hour to protest Skinner’s decision.<sup>2</sup> Wilson students had not been involved in the planning; their inspiration to walkout stemmed from rumors hinting at the possibility of protests. They threw food at teachers and gained attention from police.<sup>3</sup> Surprised student organizers at

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<sup>1</sup> Mario T. García and Sal Castro, *Blowout!: Sal Castro and the Chicano Struggle for Educational Justice*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 149; hereafter cited as *Blowout!*.

<sup>2</sup> “8 Youths Suspended In School Ruckus,” *Los Angeles Times*, Mar. 2, 1968.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

other high schools grasped the opportunity to continue the momentum to successfully conduct the mass walkout. Over the course of two weeks, approximately 15,000 students across East Los Angeles high schools participated in the walkouts.<sup>4</sup>

Mexican American students prioritized unity between the schools now that the walkouts officially begun. Ortiz announced the students' main intention: "The number one issue was unity; we had to be together."<sup>5</sup> They also recognized supporting each other was the most effective way to send a message to the larger community.<sup>6</sup> Harry Gamboa refused to allow the students to become divided; at one rally he asked: "We don't want them to split us up, do we? That's why we're not going to be here like separate schools, we're all united together, right?"<sup>7</sup> Additionally, the unified front allowed for a large enough number of students to fully gain the attention of the community and beyond.

Student leaders quickly assigned specific dates for each school to walkout after Wilson's outbreak, and students expressed different emotions when the day for them to walk out arrived. Bobby Lee Verdugo, who was only sixteen, feared what would happen to him if he participated. He also worried what would happen to his brothers as a result of his actions. Patsi Valdez questioned whether or not she could build up the courage to

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<sup>4</sup> Robert Cozens, "Taking Back the Schools," episode 3, Youtube video, 58:33, from a documentary based off the book *Chicano! A History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement*, released April 12, 1996, posted by Mecha Georgetown, posted as "Chicano! The Documentary: Part 3," December 17, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IiQQ-ws3IVU&t=215s>; hereafter cited as "Chicano! The Documentary: Part 3"; This documentary provided a great amount of information in the forms of interviews. Citations will follow the following format: "Interview with [person's name] in "Chicano! The Documentary: Part 3," if applicable.

<sup>5</sup> García and Castro, *Blowout!*, 154.

<sup>6</sup> "Lincoln High School Walkouts," YouTube Video, 17:31, from the Asian Americans Advancing Justice – Los Angeles and Lincoln High School's "V.O.I.C.E." and "M.E.Ch.A" organizations. Originally titled "Walking Out For Our Rights." Posted by AJLA Youth Films, July 5, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QMxSYWc7jz4&t=52s>; hereafter cited as "Lincoln High School Walkouts."; This short documentary provided a great amount of information in the forms of interviews. Citations will follow the following format: "Interview with [person's name] in "Lincoln High School Walkouts" if applicable. Interview with Bobby Lee Verdugo in "Lincoln High School Walkouts."

<sup>7</sup> Cozens, "Chicano! The Documentary: Part 3."

walk beside her peers.<sup>8</sup> Luís Torres was excited about the possibility of his “first Big Story” as editor of Lincoln High School’s newspaper, *The Railsplitter*.<sup>9</sup> Some students surely thought they would be participating in a campus-wide “prank.”<sup>10</sup> Gamboa, however, never questioned it: “My decision to walkout was probably the lightest decision in terms of what I probably would have liked to have done at that point with that kind of youth and energy, and anger.”<sup>11</sup>

Garfield students walked out first on March 5. Cuarón reflected: “I remember looking at the clock that morning and then the fire alarm went off and we walked out. [...] Some of us on the strike committee decided that we would stay out and began calling on the students not to return to class.”<sup>12</sup> Two hundred and fifty agitated students marched out of Garfield’s doors. They picketed with signs declaring, “no more fences (around the school),” “smaller classes,” “strike now,” and “Walk out now or Drop out Tomorrow.”<sup>13</sup> John Ortiz, Garfield student leader, coined the title ‘blowout;’ this would become a common chant among the students for the remainder of the two weeks. Police arrested two people; one of them was only seventeen. The arrests did not prevent students from continuing. Instead of attending class, they rallied at Atlantic Park two blocks down the road.<sup>14</sup> Sal Castro vocalized many students’ thoughts: “The walkouts at Garfield gave

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<sup>8</sup> García and Castro, *Blowout!*, 156.

<sup>9</sup> Luís Torres, “We stood up, and it mattered,” *Los Angeles Times*, Mar. 8, 2008.

<sup>10</sup> Frank Del Olmo, “No Regrets, Chicano Students Who Walked Out Say ’68 Protests Brought Better Education, Most Believe,” *Los Angeles Times*, Mar. 26, 1978; hereafter cited as “No Regrets.”

<sup>11</sup> Cozens, Interview with Harry Gamboa in “Documentary Chicano!: Part 3.”

<sup>12</sup> Cozens, Interview with Mita Caudron in “Documentary: Chicano! Part 3.”

<sup>13</sup> Jack McCurdy, “Students Disorders Erupt at 4 High Schools: Policeman Hurt: Youths Boycott Classes Stage Protests Marches and Class With Officers Attempting to Quell Disturbances,” *Los Angeles Times*, Mar. 7, 1968; hereafter cited as “Student Disorders at 4 High Schools”; García Castro, *Blowout!*, 152.

<sup>14</sup> McCurdy, “Students Disorders Erupt at 4 High Schools.”

us no choice now but to get back in control and immediately get the other schools to walk out.”<sup>15</sup>

The walkouts gained the attention and support from community members in other parts of Los Angeles. Following the example of their East Los Angeles counterparts, black students and teachers at Jefferson High School began to boycott classes on March 5, which continued for three days. They also piggy-backed off the Mexican American’s protest to fight against the educational racism towards black students in their school, therefore joining the Mexican American high school student movement. Black students made up a majority of the student body at Jefferson, which was in Watts. Approximately four hundred students refused to enter the building; instead they gathered on the football stadium bleachers. However, some students, parents, and school authorities entered the building; they broke the library’s silence to debate the students demands.<sup>16</sup> On the third day of the boycott, March 8, Black teachers followed the example of Mexican American students by marching out of their schools. The teachers’ absence closed Jefferson High School for another three days.<sup>17</sup>

Wednesday, March 6, eight hundred Lincoln High School students finally walked out of their school.<sup>18</sup> That morning, students packed the school with excitement and anticipation. The question, “Today?” had circled the halls for the past week; Sal Castro and student leaders finally answered, “Yeah, today.”<sup>19</sup> Paula Crisostomo shared in the

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<sup>15</sup> Garía and Castro, *Blowout!*, 151.

<sup>16</sup> McCurdy, “Students Disorders Erupt at 4 High Schools.”

<sup>17</sup> McCurdy, “But Won’t Remove Police: School Board Yields to Some Student Points in Boycotts,” *Los Angeles Times*, Mar. 12, 1968; hereafter cited as “But Won’t Remove Police.”

<sup>18</sup> Louis R. Torres, “Civic Leaders Hear Students Complaints: Wednesday & Friday,” *The Railsplitter: Abraham Lincoln High School*, Volume 106, Issue 3. March 15, 1968; hereafter cited as “Civic Leaders.”

<sup>19</sup> García and Castro, *Blowout!*, 156.



palpable anticipation buzzing in the student body, “at 9 a.m., when we were all sitting in class, everyone was aware this was going to happen.”<sup>20</sup>

The clock struck at ten o’clock – and Lincoln students walked out. Students embraced the cloudy day as they filled the street; teachers peered from the windows. Luís Torres remembered what his peers looked like that day:

Nearly all the protestors were Chicano – brainiacs, jocks, cheerleaders, nerds, and gangbangers, all marching together. I remember the bellbottoms and the wildly colorful paisley shirts, alongside the skintight polyester A-1 Racers and madras shirts. There were starched khakis topped by straight-cut Sir Guy Shirts – shirts that looked like dark dentist’s smocks, only less fashionable. I remember beehive hairdos next to hippie straight tresses, next to is that-a-girl-or-a-boy shaggy hairstyles. There were a few diehard, slicked-back *cabezas* on guys who seemed determined to look like their ducktail-sporting older brothers of the late 1950s and early 1960s.<sup>21</sup>

The students continuously circled around school once they reached the outdoors.<sup>22</sup> They held picket signs trumpeting, “We Want Education, Not Eradication,” “Better Education,” and chanted, “Walkout! Walkout!”<sup>23</sup> The crowd marched ten blocks to the offices of school authorities. Superintendents approached the arriving students to discuss their demands.<sup>24</sup>

While the students proudly departed Lincoln, college students and Brown Berets entered the school building, directly into Lincoln’s administrative building. The college students and Brown Berets “didn’t walkout. I [Esparza] ran through the halls here yelling, ‘Walkout!’ so that other students could walk out.”<sup>25</sup> Administration failed to discontinue

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<sup>20</sup> Cozens, Interview with Paula Crisostomo in “Documentary Chicano!: Part 3.”

<sup>21</sup> Torres, Luís, “We stood up, and it mattered,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 8, 2008; hereafter cited as “We stood up.”

<sup>22</sup> García and Castro, *Blowout!*, 156; Torres, “Civic Leaders.”

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Carlos Montes in “Lincoln High School Walkouts.”

<sup>24</sup> Jack McCurdy, “Student Disorders Erupt at 4 High Schools; Policeman Hurt: Youths Boycott Classes, Stage Protest Marches and Clash with Officers Attempting to Quell Disturbances,” March 7, 1968; hereafter cited as “Student Disorders Erupt.”

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Moctesuma Esparza in “Lincoln High School Walkouts.”

the movement of students. Power transferred from administration to the students when Carlos Montes declared, “leave us alone. It’s happening. [...] Yes, this is it! The walkout! Let’s do it!”<sup>26</sup>

Up until March 7, Belmont High School students impatiently waited for their turn to walkout.<sup>27</sup> Students walked out around noon during their lunch hour. Demonstrating the same level of enthusiasm for their causes as the students who walked out before them, Belmont student voices beckoned, “Walkout, strike, walkout!” Brown Berets chanted “Strike walkout, we want better food, we want Chicano teachers.”<sup>28</sup> Teachers could not hear Principal Ernest Naumann’s intercom announcements demanding them to confine their students to the classroom.<sup>29</sup>

The walkouts climaxed on March 8, 1968 – several high schoolers packed the streets that day. Lincoln students, accompanied by Sal Castro, welcomed dawn as they finalized details; phones had rung the night before all across East Los Angeles to spread the word of the next day’s unified walkouts; students had stayed up all night to craft picket signs; media outlets received notices to assure they were present to get the students’ actions on that night’s news.<sup>30</sup> Bobby Verdugo confessed that because of the spontaneity of the walkouts at Wilson a few days earlier, “how many people were going to do it and who was going to do it was decided that morning [March 8] for a lot of us, myself included.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Interview with Carlos Montes in “Lincoln High School Walkouts.”

<sup>27</sup> García and Castro, *Blowout!*, 169.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>31</sup> Cozens, Interview with Bobby Verdugo in “Chicano! The Documentary: Part 3.”

Lincoln High School were eager to walk out that day. When the clock struck nine – Lincoln students walked out of the doors. Louis Torres was amongst the crowd of two thousand with his tape recorder and notebook in hand for his first front page story in the school’s newspaper *The Railsplitter*.<sup>32</sup> Sal Castro traded his role as a teacher for the position as a protestor as he marched side by side his students. Students marched in the rain; their chants encouraging people to “Walkout!” and “Blowout!” invigorated nearly everyone into the halls and streets.<sup>33</sup> The weather did not prevent the students’ determination to fight towards educational equity. Students proudly held the signs handed to them by the Brown Berets high in the air, despite the illegible writing from the rain.<sup>34</sup> Principal Engles shared with Moctesuma Esparza “that it was terrible that the pastoral passivity of the students had been destroyed.”<sup>35</sup>

The protesting students succeeded in creating a sense of enthusiasm for educational reform even from the students who did not participate in the walkout. Nearly one thousand pupils’ fear of violence glued them to their seats.<sup>36</sup> Lincoln High School’s student body president Lenard Gomez focused on his schoolwork rather than participate. On behalf of the student body who refused to engage, he declared, “[we] support the demands for educational changes, but oppose the boycott.”<sup>37</sup> The principals and school officials threatened protesting students with the consequence of suspension, expulsion, or repeal of scholarships to colleges or universities. This administrative move could be one factor to force students to disengage with the walkouts; they wouldn’t want to disrupt

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<sup>32</sup> Torres, “We stood up, and it mattered.”

<sup>33</sup> Garía and Castro, *Blowout!*, 173.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Moctesuma Esparza in “Lincoln High School Walkouts.”

<sup>36</sup> Johns H. Harrington, “L.A.’s Student Blowout,” *The Phi Delta Kappan* 50, no. 2 (1968): 74–79.

<sup>37</sup> McCurdy, “But Won’t Remove Police.”

their already limited educational opportunities. Although a certain amount of students did not engage in the protests, the student leaders successfully accomplished their main goal of raising political consciousness among their peers by gaining the support of many students who decided to stay in school.

Walkouts spread to unexpected high schools in Montebello, North Hollywood, and San Fernando high schools over the course of those two weeks. Police interfered at these schools in a similar fashion to how they reacted in East LA. Mexican American students fought with police at these schools, similar to those at Roosevelt and Belmont. Sal Castro believed these demonstrations were “to our advantage because it put additional pressure on the school board and school officials.”<sup>38</sup>



This scene at Garfield High School; Principal Reginald Murphy responding to the students demands by addressing the student body directly; March 7, 1968.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

<sup>39</sup> Reprinted from Simpon, Kelly, “East L.A. Blowouts: Walking out for Justice in the Classroom,” (KCETLink) March 7, 2012, URL: <https://www.kcet.org/shows/departures/east-la-blowouts-walking-out-for-justice-in-the-classrooms>. Original copy courtesy of the Los Angeles Public Library.

One of the clear goals of the walkouts was to gain the attention of the school administrators, which the students accomplished. For example, Principal Dyer sprinted into action to prevent the walkout from attracting an even larger number of students. On March 7, he scheduled a last minute staff meeting at seven thirty in the morning and announced: “I think you are all professional educators and would encourage you to talk these problems over with your students.”<sup>40</sup> Around one hundred and forty eight teachers and staff followed their supervisor’s advice to discourage students from participating. Furthermore, he arranged a school assembly for March 8; he invited Julian Nava, member of the Board of Education, and U.S. Congress Representative Edward Roybal, who flew to Los Angeles from Washington D.C. to respond to the walkouts, to attend. Principal Dyer hoped to prevent from his students from departing the school. Principal Dyer spoke to the crowd of fifteen hundred students about his plans to improve the school.<sup>41</sup> Nava and Roybal vocally endorsed the mass protest – triggering an even larger student reaction. Despite Principal Dyer’s best efforts to avoid it, Roosevelt students proudly walked out of the school’s gymnasium. The students found the gate surrounding their school locked as a way to keep them contained.

Fortunately, Lincoln students marched to Roosevelt High School to find students trapped behind the bolted fence. Students attempted to leave by climbing over it.<sup>42</sup>

Montes described the scene when he arrived:

We saw the [Roosevelt] students coming to the gate, pushing it. They couldn’t get out. So we went up the gate and said, “what are we doing?”

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<sup>40</sup> Ken Reich, “Dyer’s Test by Fire: Principal Walks Narrow Path in School Walkouts,” *Los Angeles Times*, Mar. 14, 1968.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Bobby Lee Verdugo in “Lincoln High School Walkouts.”

The lock had a chain, okay. The students threw out a rope. A big old rope they used in gymnastics. They tied it and threw us the other side. They said, “PULL.” I said, “Okay, we’re going to pull on this side. [...] They on the inside were pushing it [the gate]. I’m talking about hundreds of students packed. Pushing, pushing, and it went on for a couple minutes. [...] They kept pushing and pushing. All of a sudden – BAM – the chain broke, the lock broke. The gate jumped open and all these students walked out.”<sup>43</sup>

Authorities at other schools started responding to the walkouts by calling for education reform. Jefferson High School teachers continued the fight for educational equality in response to the Mexican American students’ example. On March 8, Jefferson teachers cancelled class at eight thirty in the morning to convene before class “because teachers felt they could no longer hold classes under prevailing conditions.”<sup>44</sup> Instead of teaching, the teachers drew up their demands for a Black principal, echoing the students’ requests. Jefferson students substituted for the teachers to fill in their absences. Through organizing a mass demonstration in the gymnasium and in the libraries, students addressed the issues limiting students in the school district from reaching their full potential. The students spoke to the following: other students, School Board President Georgina Hardy, Ralph Richardson, and a black Board member Reverend James Jones filled the audience in those spaces.<sup>45</sup>

An unintentional consequence of the large size of the walkout was the involvement of the Los Angeles Police force. Police played a central role throughout the demonstrations, even though the students resented police involvement. Bobby Avila, an undercover cop, enrolled as a student at Wilson High School; he fed information

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<sup>43</sup> Interview with Carlos Montes in “Lincoln High School Walkouts.”

<sup>44</sup> McCurdy, “1,000 Walk Out in School Boycott.”

<sup>45</sup> McCurdy, “But Won’t Remove Police.”

regarding the planning of the walkouts to his officials.<sup>46</sup> Policemen at Lincoln surrounded the perimeter of the campus dressed in casual clothing.<sup>47</sup> News clips revealed policemen at Garfield warning students to disperse from protesting grounds, arresting students who disobeyed. The loudspeakers boomed threats in both English and Spanish warning the possibility of rounding up students onto school buses to stop the demonstration.<sup>48</sup> Authorities pushed through the multitude of protesting students in the halls of Belmont High School; school officials permitted the police to cross the threshold. Lines of sheriffs forcefully pressed their bodies up against Brown Berets and students to prevent them from crossing the street to help Garfield students—Caudron “sensed it started to get dangerous.”<sup>49</sup> County sheriffs trolled Garfield’s grounds expecting students – snipers perched on the roof observed the scene while deputy sheriffs surveilled the football field.<sup>50</sup> The Board of Education, however, did not mandate the police force to remove themselves from the high school campuses despite the tension.<sup>51</sup> The Moctesuma Esparza vocalized the students’ rising anger towards law enforcement: “Police were not our friends at the time. They were there to keep us down. Certainly, the authorities of the time thought we were just crazy. You know, the Mexicans were getting out of control.”<sup>52</sup>

Roosevelt students retaliated and rioted against the police force during the walkouts. Elsa Cisneros observed four hundred of her classmates fly out of the back door

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<sup>46</sup> García and Castro, *Blowout!*, 169. Bobby Avila was original assignment at Wilson High School was to investigate possible drug interactions. He overheard students discussing the possibility of a walkout. He reported this information back at the station. The police authorities double assigned Avila to investigate the drug involvement and report further information regarding the potential walkouts.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 159-160.

<sup>48</sup> Cozens, “Documentary, Chicano! Part 3.”

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Mita Caudron in “Lincoln High School Documentary.”

<sup>50</sup> García and Castro, *Blowout!*, 151.

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Bobby Lee Verdugo in “Lincoln High School Documentary.”; MuCurdy, “But Won’t Remove Police.”

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Moctesuma Esparza in “Documentary: Chicano! Part 3.”

like doves released from their cage during the lunch hour. Police interfered two hours later and “declared an unlawful assembly.”<sup>53</sup> Suddenly, students arrived with eggs, police officers dodged the flying food in their direction.<sup>54</sup> The students hurt one police officer with a bottle and by “hurling objects at passing motorists. One patrol car was pelted with eggs.”<sup>55</sup> After their interactions with the police, the students left campus and marched to Evergreen Park waving “Viva la Revolucion” signs. The crowd dispersed around the time the school day ended.

The police inflicted violence on participating students at Garfield, Roosevelt, and Belmont. Verdugo voiced his opposite experience with gratitude in his eyes: “I recognize how lucky I was that here at Lincoln we didn’t have that same violence. You know, we owe them [Garfield, Roosevelt, and Belmont students] a lot. They are the people that got hurt.”<sup>56</sup> Cops hurled insults at the students, “you dirty spicks, you dirty Mexicans. Who do you think you are?”<sup>57</sup> Ortiz witnessed a Chicano cop beat a female student with his club. Roosevelt students reported to their Principal Thomas Dyer that police had “beaten [one student] so badly he was unlikely to live.”<sup>58</sup> News excerpts revealed multiple policemen chasing a student, grabbing a him the shirt, pushing him to the ground, and beating his head; another student rushed to assist his classmate, and attempted to dodge them but received the same treatment. Police attacked students with their clubs and

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<sup>53</sup> McCurdy, “Students Disorder Erupted.”

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Elsa Cisneros in “Lincoln High School Walkouts.”

<sup>55</sup> McCurdy, “Students Disorders Erupt.”

<sup>56</sup> Interview with Bobby Lee Verdugo in “Lincoln High School Walkouts.”

<sup>57</sup> Alison Sotomayor, “SAL CASTRO & the 1968 East LA Walkouts,” YouTube video, 15:19, Written and narrated by Patt Morrison for the National Media Coalition’s Impact Award Gala in 2006, posted by Alison Sotomayor, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-3TKnj0fXZs&t=612s>; hereafter cited as “SAL CASTRO.”

<sup>58</sup> García, and Castro, *Blowout!*, 151; Reich, Ken, “Dyer’s Test by Fire: Principal Walks Narrow Path School Walkout,” *Los Angeles Times*, Section B6, March 14, 1968.



arrested them in the halls of Belmont and Roosevelt; school officials constrained students from escaping by locking the doors.<sup>59</sup> Mita Caudron expressed student confusion behind the police brutality: “to see outright hostility, brutality [from police]– it didn’t match the thing that we were doing. We didn’t commit a crime. We were protesting.”<sup>60</sup> Violence entered the non-violent protest when the police intervened.



Police outside Garfield High School waited for students to exit their schools.<sup>61</sup>

Outside of the schools, the students successfully found a spot to organize and continue the protest. Protesting students congregated at Hazard Park several times throughout the walkouts. Approximately one thousand students from Lincoln, Garfield, Roosevelt, and Wilson participating in the Hazard Park rally on March 8. Parents, teachers, school board member Julian Nava, and even Representative Edward Roybal – who flew in from Washington D.C. – finally witnessed students taking control of their education.<sup>62</sup> The student speakers used the gathering to encourage their peers to “walkout

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<sup>59</sup> Sotomayor, “SAL CASTRO.”

<sup>60</sup> Documentary, “Chicano!: Part 3”; Interview, Mita Caudron, “Chicano! Part 3.”

<sup>61</sup> Reprinted from Dial Torgerson, “Start of A Revolution?: ‘Brown Power’ Unity Seen Behind School Disorders,” *The Los Angeles Times*, Mar. 17, 1968.

<sup>62</sup> McCurdy, “1,000 Walk Out in School Boycott”; Representative Edward Roybal was a member of Congress from 1962-1992.

once more.”<sup>63</sup> Student leaders, such as Harry Gomboa, Robert Rodríguez, and Moctesuma Esperza demanded the Board of Education to meet with the students. Esperza said, “there was this tremendous energy and fervor [at the rally]. There was an excitement that we had actually pulled it off.”<sup>64</sup>

By having Hazard Park as a gathering spot for the students, they were able to accomplish their main goal of getting the attention of the Board of Education and higher officials. For example, policemen appeared at Hazard Park during the rally. Student leaders told police officers over the microphone their attendance was unnecessary—the gathering was a peaceful demonstration. Congressman Roybal sided with the students and warned “the policemen, if they are here, should leave the area. I think that we can take care of things ourselves.”<sup>65</sup> Students clapped and cheered as policemen walked the opposite direction from the massive mob of students after the student announcements and Roybal’s declaration that school officials should be left to handle the situation. Julian Nava spoke positively in response to the protests. Nava, being the only Mexican American on the Board of Education, spoke honestly about his reactions to the students’ actions. Nava welcomed the students’ demonstration because he thought “this thing [the walkout] is fully controllable and is positive and constructive.”<sup>66</sup> He proclaimed to the students, “You have proven you can act by walking out. You made your point. The way the walkouts were conducted made me feel proud, for you have done this in a way not to hurt the school.”<sup>67</sup> Nava continued to support the walkouts when interviewed by news

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<sup>63</sup> Cozens, “Documentary: Chicano! Part 3.”

<sup>64</sup> Cozens, Interview with Moctesuma Esperza in “Documentary: Chicano! Part 3.”

<sup>65</sup> Cozens, Newsclip in “Documentary: Chicano! Part 3.”

<sup>66</sup> McCurdy, “1,000 Walkout in School Boycott.”

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

reporters and journalists. He told reporters, “These students are resisting the efforts of outsiders to become influential. As long as we keep up the dialog, things should remain all right.”<sup>68</sup> By Nava’s indirect promise to the students to remain in communication with the students demonstrated that the students had achieved their aim of gaining the Board of Education’s attention.



School officials Ralph Richardson, Julian Nava, Congressman Edward Roybal listen to Robert Rodriguez at Hazard Park on March 8, 1968.<sup>69</sup>

At Hazard Park, students used this space to communicate with each other and with members of the Board of Education. Principal Ralph Richardson attempted to settle the students by recognizing the purpose of the walkouts: the problem of racism in the schools affecting them as students. However, Richardson responded by stating, “to the extent that you dramatize the problem, you help me. To the extent that you convince the

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<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> Reprinted from García, Mario T., and Sal Castro, *Blowout!: Sal Castro and the Chicano Struggle for Educational Justice*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina, 2011), 176; Original copy courtesy of Los Angeles Times Photographic Archive, Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

public, that you will advance at all cost, you handicap me. Consider that.”<sup>70</sup> Julian Nava expressed his pride in the younger generation for standing up for their beliefs and fighting the fight; he also requested the students remain non-violent, and in return the Board of Education would not punish students.<sup>71</sup> While standing on a platform in the midst of the crowd, a white school authority attempted to calm the students by declaring he could not promise the Board of Education to meet with them. Moctesuma Esparza eloquently reiterated the students’ request for the authority figure to simply relay the information to the Board of Education rather than speak on their behalf.<sup>72</sup>

The walkouts resulted in the students achieving their goal of meeting with the Board of Education in order to list their demands. On Monday, March 11, The Board of Education responded to the students’ calls by opening their regular session. The Board felt pressure to host a meeting in attempts to end the protests; Dr. Ralph Richardson said the Board would “give full attention to the problems.”<sup>73</sup> For three hours, about five hundred students, parents, and community members confronted the School Board. Two hundred crammed into the board’s chambers and three hundred others poured out into the hearing room.<sup>74</sup> During that time, The Board unanimously granted amnesty to nearly one thousand students who boycotted classes. However, the Board rejected the student’s push for them to remove police from their schools. The Board did not hear the student demands at this meeting, despite the intention behind the initial meeting.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Cozens, “Documentary: Chicano! Part 3.” A common excuse the Board of Education used when they failed to meet the demands of the students was the limitation of money. When Ralph Richardson said, “at our cost,” he literally meant on the school’s dime.

<sup>71</sup> Torres, “Civic Leaders.”

<sup>72</sup> Cozens, “Documentary: Chicano! Part 3.”

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*; Torres, “Civic Leaders.”

<sup>74</sup> McCurdy, “But Won’t Remove Police.”

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*.

During this session, the Board of Education listened to the students' demand of a special session at Lincoln High School rather than the usual chambers. Unknown to the Board, the students had not yet finished writing the demands when they agreed to the initial meeting and needed more time; they had not anticipated a response so quickly. Robert Sánchez theatrically declared the protests emerged from student frustration towards the blatant educational inequality in Los Angeles schools. Students proudly stood and spoke their grievances after Sánchez's initial speech to the Board members.<sup>76</sup> The meeting at Lincoln High School would work in the students' favor because they and Sal Castro realized the Board had never seen the conditions of the East Los Angeles schools. The postponement of the presentations of demands contributed to the students' success in two ways: first, students received extra time to finish writing the demands, and secondly, the Board of Education was forced to experience the conditions of the East Los Angeles schools firsthand.<sup>77</sup> The students' demand to hold a meeting at Lincoln was granted when the Board of Education members "voted 6-1 to meet at Lincoln High at the earliest date when the school's auditorium is free and all board members have time available."<sup>78</sup>

After about two weeks, the students from East Los Angeles begrudgingly returned to their classrooms. Parents, teachers, and school officials encouraged students to take the role as student again. The students passed the baton to parents, community leaders, and some teachers for them to press for change in response to the original demands. Robert Rodriguez promised early on in the walkouts, "if we get the board here [in East Los

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<sup>76</sup> García and Castro, *Blowout!* 197; Sal Castro instructed Robert Sánchez to dramatize the situation at the initial meeting with the Board of Education in order to have more of an effect on the Board members. Sánchez, who wanted to become an actor, intentionally pretended to collapsed to the floor to add affect and get the attention of the Board of Education.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>78</sup> McCurdy, "But Won't Remove Police"; The only Board of Education member to vote against the proposed meeting at Lincoln High School was J.C. Chambers.

Angeles], we don't have to walkout."<sup>79</sup> The Board had scheduled a trip to Lincoln High School for March 26 – students remained true to their word. Garfield High faculty member Ray Ceniceroy proclaimed what everyone was thinking, “we feel disturbed and ashamed that these kids have been fighting for these things as teachers and as a community. Apparently we have been using the wrong weapons.”<sup>80</sup>

As the East Los Angeles high school students sat down in their old desks, other members of the community stood up to take their place to support them. On March 12, three hundred junior high students at Edison Junior High School (where Black students constituted the majority of the student body) rioted; the students ignited fires, shattered glass windows, and stormed out of class before the final bell. Grass-root organizations arranged a rally to show support at Obregon Park—around five hundred people attended.<sup>81</sup> Parents met frequently to discuss best methods for them to support their children; they became involved through attending the rally at Hazard Park, Obregon Park, and joining the Educational Issues Coordinating Committee (EICC). They requested a meeting with the Board of Education, but were denied.<sup>82</sup> Fifteen hundred Anglo students at Venice High School walked out during lunch.<sup>83</sup> Even Senator Bobby Kennedy met with the students. The senator of California publically told the students their demands and walkouts were warranted.<sup>84</sup> A parent member at an EICC meeting validated the students'

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<sup>79</sup> McCurdy, “1,000 Walk Out in School Boycott.”

<sup>80</sup> McCurdy, “But Won't Remove Police.”

<sup>81</sup> Jack McCurdy, “Venice High Youths, Police Clash.” *Los Angeles Times*, (Los Angeles, CA) Mar. 13, 1968; García and Castro, *Blowout!*

<sup>82</sup> Cozens, “Documentary: Chicano! Part 3.”

<sup>83</sup> McCurdy, “But Won't Remove Police.”

<sup>84</sup> García and Castro, *Blowout!*, 181; Senator Kennedy later wrote a follow-up letter, which validated his support of the walkouts. The letter was directed to “East Los Angeles Chicano Students” and Sal Castro. It read the following: “I support fully and wholeheartedly your proposal and efforts to obtain a better education for Mexican Americans. *Viva La Raza*.” For more on the meeting with Senator Kennedy, see *Blowout!* Pages 180-182.

actions by declaring, “what else have they left for us to do? All we can do is support them.”<sup>85</sup>

Two weeks later after students returned to class on Tuesday, March 26, security escorted the Board of Education members to Lincoln High School. Beginning at four, twelve hundred students overflowed the school’s auditorium into the hallways and “the mood was jovial, loud, vocal, and boisterous.”<sup>86</sup> Media reporters throughout the room wanted to catch every angle of the first Board of Education meeting outside of the Board’s chambers. Paula Crisostomo, Freddie Resendez, John Ortiz, Mita Cuarón, and Robert Rodríguez presented the thirty six demands that “range[d] from the frivolous to the fundamental”<sup>87</sup> changes to the Board of Education.<sup>88</sup> Students and Board members stayed for four hours to discuss the list of demands.<sup>89</sup>

The Board of Education compromised with the students during the meeting. The Board pushed back only on the demand for reallocation of the money within the school district.<sup>90</sup> Ralph Richardson, President of the Board of Education, later blamed the system rather than themselves: “What can we do when do not have the absolute authority to control what the whole of society is doing? If we could distribute everybody equally, have equal funds everywhere, have equal quality of teachers, there would be no problem.”<sup>91</sup> The Board of Education presented three concessions to the protestors: 1) no

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<sup>85</sup> Cozens, “Chicano! The Documentary: Part 3.”

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> Jack McCurdy, “Frivolous to Fundamental: Demands Made By East Side High School Students Listed,” *Los Angeles Times*, Mar. 17, 1968; hereafter cited as “Frivolous to Fundamental.”

<sup>88</sup> “The State: Education: Caught in the Middle,” *Los Angeles Times*, Mar. 31, 1968.

<sup>89</sup> To see a full a list of the demands and the Board of Education’s response to each individual demand, please see Jack McCurdy’s *Los Angeles Times* article: “Frivolous to Fundamental: Demands Made By East Side High School Students Listed.”

<sup>90</sup> García and Castro, *Blowout!*, 224; McCurdy, Jack, “Frivolous to Fundamental.”

<sup>91</sup> Cozens, Interview with Ralph Richardson in “Chicano! The Documentary: Part 3”; Ralph Richardson was the Former President of the L.A. Board of Education.

punishment towards the protesting students or teachers, 2) the Board of Education would review the charges against arrested students, and 3) The Board of Education would create small committees of Board members to review the students demands.<sup>92</sup> Students departed with a sense of empowerment – “we had won.”<sup>93</sup>

Principal Donald Skinner may have told the students they could not perform *Barefoot in the Park*, but like true actors always say – the show must go on; it continued for two weeks. Mexican American students directly confronted the educational racism in their school system with their determination, pride, and ability to proclaim their voice. They accomplished their goal of exposing the Board of Education to the educational system; on a larger scale, students shook the foundation of East Los Angeles schools. Communities around the United States soon watched similar performances as the protests empowered Mexican American students to raise consciousness and fight the educational racism in their districts. Mexican American students carried the fight in other regions of California; school officials could not maintain their students all across Texas; the chant from East Los Angeles rang so loudly students in Denver, Colorado and Chicago, Illinois poured out of their high schools. The show went on – and it was a smashing success.

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> García and Castro, *Blowout*, 192.



## CHAPTER FOUR:

“TOGETHER WE HAVE A POWER WE DIDN’T REALIZE WE HAD BEFORE”

*“In retrospect, there were about fifteen thousand kids out in the streets in that week of March. There were about sixteen schools involved, not only senior highs throughout East Los Angeles, but also in West Los Angeles in support of the kids in East L.A. There were junior high schools involved. There were about forty-five high school students arrested, about twenty-five adults [arrested.]”*  
-Sal Castro<sup>1</sup>

As a result of their organizing and protest, the Mexican American students of East LA enacted positive changes in their schools. The school district implemented bilingual education curriculums into over six thousand classrooms for Spanish-speaking students by 1988. Leadership positions somewhat better reflected the demographics of the school – over the course of twenty years, the number of Latinx teachers increased from three percent to ten percent; Latinx principals headed thirty-two percent of high schools and elementary schools. William R. Anton – a Mexican American – became the Deputy Superintendent, which is the second highest ranking of authority in a school district.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, students attended a “Fiesta de Los Barrios” arranged by Castro on the one year anniversary of the walkouts. At this event, students and Castro celebrated the

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Cozens, “Taking Back the Schools,” episode 3, Youtube video, 58:33, from a documentary based off the book *Chicano! A History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement*, released April 12, 1996, posted by Mecha Georgetown, posted as “Chicano! The Documentary: Part 3,” December 17, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IiQQ-ws3IVU&t=215s>; hereafter cited as “Chicano! The Documentary: Part 3”; This documentary provided a great amount of information in the forms of interviews. Citations will follow the following format: “Interview with [person’s name] in “Chicano! The Documentary: Part 3,” if applicable.

<sup>2</sup> Elaine Woo, “’60s ‘Blowouts’: Leaders of Latino School Protest See Little Change.” *Los Angeles Times*, Mar. 7, 1988.

Mexican culture. They displayed artwork, served Mexican food, and engaged in singing and dancing rituals.<sup>3</sup>

This chapter outlines the several events in the aftermath of the East Los Angeles blowouts, which eventually expanded the shared ideas of the students' movement. The Board of Education partly recognized the students' demands, however the students soon realized the lack of recognition was only the first step in an uphill battle. The walkouts successfully unified the Mexican American community in Los Angeles. The event, however, brought extreme backlash considering it caused the arrest of thirteen participants, one of them being Sal Castro. The arrests led to the "first political trial of the Chicano Movement."<sup>4</sup> The repercussions of the arrests led to more protest – widening the movement's membership and motives.

One positive outcome of the walkouts was the increase of Mexican American representation on college campuses. Higher institutions in the Los Angeles area reached out to more Mexican American students; some East Los Angeles high school seniors who participated in the walkouts attended college because the higher institutions admired their leadership.<sup>5</sup> In 1969, California colleges and University of California campuses implemented Chicano Studies programs after several college students conducted hunger strikes and protested. These programs extended to universities in Arizona, Texas, New

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<sup>3</sup> Mario T. García and Sal Castro, *Blowout!: Sal Castro and the Chicano Struggle for Educational Racism*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina), 222; hereafter cited as *Blowout!*.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 207; This quote was said by Raul Ruiz, publisher for *Chicano Student News*, a radical underground Chicano newspaper. To learn more about Ruiz's role in the newspapers, see page 144.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

Mexico, and Wisconsin throughout the 1970s. The programs grew to become departments, and increased representation of Mexican American professors.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, the walkouts increased Mexican American activism for equal education beyond the East Los Angeles community, which helped the students gain more supporters of their student movement. The East Los Angeles walkouts, which were “the first and largest walkout,”<sup>7</sup> helped thousands of Mexican American youth to want their history respectfully taught and equal education.<sup>8</sup> Just like the sit-in protests that spread across the South after the highly publicized sit-in at Woolworth in Greensboro, North Carolina, Mexican American students adopted the walkout technique across the Southwest – mostly Texas – Denver, Colorado, and Chicago, Illinois. Students in Texas executed thirty-nine walkouts between 1968 and 1972.<sup>9</sup>

Perhaps one of the biggest outcomes of the walkouts was the community’s sense of organization to collectively fight against educational racism. Another positive aftereffect of the walkouts was that “the Chicano community in L.A. had risen up in a way not seen before [...] the kids had awakened them to this critical perspective and the adults now moved on it.”<sup>10</sup> Students had introduced their parents and the Chicano Movement as a whole to the importance of educational civil rights.<sup>11</sup> The new awareness of the problems in the schools led Reverend Mardirosian and other community members

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<sup>6</sup> Guadalupe San Miguel, "Chicana/o Struggles for Education: Activism for Education: Contestation," *University of Houston Series in Mexican American Studies*, 7 (2013): 24-56. Accessed February 9, 2016. ProQuest Ebrary, 29-31; hereafter cited as “Chicana/o Struggles for Education.”

<sup>7</sup> San Miguel, “Chicana/o Struggles for Education,” 25.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>10</sup> Garcia and Castro, *Blowout!*, 194.

<sup>11</sup> Cozens, “Chicano! The Documentary: Part 3.”

to create the Educational Issues Coordinating Committee (EICC) as the walkouts started to dwindle.<sup>12</sup>

Parents, college students, and religious leaders created the Educational Issues Coordinating Committee to continue the fight for their students; the students' walkout led them to recognize "that the schools, rather than being the solution to Mexican American problems, were in fact part of the problem."<sup>13</sup> Towards the end and after the walkouts, members marched in protest to the Board of Education when student demands were clearly neglected. The organization arranged weekly meetings with the Board of Education after the protests diminished to properly implement changes. They addressed specific issues pertaining to each individual school to assure each institution enacted substantive changes. Furthermore, the members contributed to the increased political consciousness of those not in the EICC by organizing "community walk-throughs."<sup>14</sup> The walk-throughs involved EICC members conversing in English and Spanish to people around the community about the educational issues and promoting ways to fight alongside them.<sup>15</sup>

Despite the student's successes in bringing changes to the educational system, the school district failed to address the long-term discriminatory structural issues such as class sizes, drop-out rates, and reading levels of Mexican American students. The Board of Education continued to ignore the East Los Angeles schools. The Board of Education neglected a majority of the original thirty-six demands; they only implemented changes

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<sup>12</sup> García and Castro, *Blowout!*, 195.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 195-196.

that involved small investments.<sup>16</sup> Twenty years after the walkout, classroom sizes swelled in predominately Latinx schools. The dropout rate still hovered between thirty percent to forty-nine percent. Lastly, Mexican American student reading levels stayed in the lowest twenty-five percent.<sup>17</sup>

Beyond the school setting, walkouts sparked a series of arrests of thirteen men who participated in the blowouts. On May 31, 1968, Sal Castro ran afternoon errands in preparation for Lincoln High School's prom night; Castro filled with excitement and pride thinking about his students' success with the blowouts. Although he physically approached his apartment with a rented tuxedo in hand, his mind fast-forwarded to the events later that evening. Two policemen snapped him back to the present moment as they arrested him, handed him a search warrant, and entered into his home unwelcomed.<sup>18</sup> Carlos Muñoz, Jr. awoke to a literal nightmare of police threatening to kill him at two thirty in the morning. Moctesuma Esparza questioned the non-responsive policemen as they handcuffed him and pushed him into the back of a squat car.<sup>19</sup> In total, police arrested thirteen men that night as a result of their association with the East Los Angeles high school walkouts on the account of being "outside agitators."<sup>20</sup> Nicknamed "The East L.A. Thirteen,"<sup>21</sup> the group included: Sal Castro, Moctesuma Esparza, Henry Gómez, Fred López, Carlos Montes, Carlos Muñoz Jr., Gilbert Cruz Olmeda, Ralph Ramirez, Joe Razo, Eliezer Risco, David Sánchez, Pat Sánchez, and Richard Vigil.

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

<sup>17</sup> Woo, "'60s 'Blowouts'"; Belmont High School did, however, experience an increase in reading levels.

<sup>18</sup> García and Castro, *Blowout!*, 200-201.

<sup>19</sup> Cozens, Interview with Carlos Muñoz, Jr. in "Chicano! The Documentary: Part 3,"; Cozens, Interview with Moctesuma Esparza in "Chicano! The Documentary: Part 3."

<sup>20</sup> Cozens, Interview with Moctesuma Esparza in "Chicano! Documentary: Part 3."

<sup>21</sup> García and Castro, *Blowout!*, 200.

The fact that more supporters of the students' actions became beneficial, for the community members now protested the arrests. One hundred and fifty protestors appeared outside of the police building the following day.<sup>22</sup> Even Oscar Zeta Acosta, who would come to represent the East L.A. 13 while they were on trial, spoke at the demonstrations.<sup>23</sup> The community donated money to help with the bail charge. Signs read, "Free Castro," "Free Risco," and "Inferior Education Caused the Walkout." The protestors peacefully chanted, "Freedom Now," and "Chicano Power!"<sup>24</sup>

On June 3, 1968, nine members of the East L.A. Thirteen entered the courtroom to hear the decisions of the courts. The District Attorney charged each individual with "two counts of disturbing the peace and disturbing the peace of the schools. In addition, there were fifteen counts of conspiracy involving two other charges, for a total of thirty counts, with each count carrying a maximum sentence of five years."<sup>25</sup> The possibility of sixty-six years in prison loomed over each individual after the indictment of conspiracy as outside agitators. Esparza explained why the East L.A. 13's confusion: "When we were told what we were arrested for, we were shocked. Because in particular they created a felony indictment. Disrupting a public school was only a misdemeanor. But the conspiracy to commit a misdemeanor was a felony."<sup>26</sup> This trial was significant because "the East L.A. 13 was the first political trial of the Chicano Movement."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 200; Einstoss, Ron, "13 Indicted in Disorders at 4 L.A. Schools; Arrests Underway," *Los Angeles Times*, June 1968; hereafter cited as "13 Indicted."

<sup>23</sup> García and Castro, *Blowout!*, 204.

<sup>24</sup> Einstoss, "13 Indicted."

<sup>25</sup> García and Castro, *Blowout!*, 206.

<sup>26</sup> Cozens, Interview with Moctesuma Esparza in "Chicano! Documentary: Part 3."

<sup>27</sup> García and Castro, *Blowout!*, 207; This quote was said by Raul Ruiz, writer and editor for *Inside Eastside* Chicano radical newspaper.

A majority of the East L.A. 13 were members of the militant group called the Brown Berets. Originally called the Youth Chicanos for Community Action (YCCA), the Brown Berets emerged in 1967; David Sánchez founded the group after dropping out of college. Like their Black Panther counterparts, the Brown Berets utilized their militant principles to prevent police from inflicting violence on the Mexican American community.<sup>28</sup> The East Los Angeles walkouts was their first time practicing their main mission; this propelled them into national spotlight. The new recognition helped their movement grow. After the walkouts, the Brown Berets publicized their organization by describing their participation in the walkouts. This helped them gain more members.<sup>29</sup> By 1970, the Brown Berets grew into multiple independent chapters throughout twenty eight cities.<sup>30</sup>



Left to right: Fred Lopez, David Sánchez, Carlos Montes, and Ralph Ramirez. All of them assisted with the walkouts as Brown Berets; all four would become a part of the East L.A. 13.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Carlos Muñoz, Jr., *Youth, Identity, and Power: The Chicano Movement*, (London, England: Verso, 1989), 87; hereafter cited as *Youth, Identity and Power*.

<sup>29</sup> Ian F. Haney López, *Racism on Trial: The Chicano Fight for Justice*, (President and Fellows of Harvard College), 2003, 186; hereafter cited as *Racism on Trial*.

<sup>30</sup> Alaniz, Yolanda, and Cornish, *Viva La Raza: A History of Chicano Identity and Resistance*. Seattle, WA: Read Letter Press. 2008, 184; hereafter cited as *Viva La Raza*.

<sup>31</sup> Reprinted from Dial Torgerson, "Start of a Revolution? 'Brown Power' Unity Seen Behind School Disorders," *Los Angeles Times*, Mar. 17, 1968.

Lawyer Oscar Zeta Acosta, known as the Brown Buffalo, was one of the seven lawyers to represent the thirteen men in the trial.<sup>32</sup> Mexican immigrants gave birth to Acosta in 1935 before moving from El Paso, Texas to Riverbank, California. Acosta thrived throughout high school, joined the air force post-graduation, and graduated from San Francisco Law School in 1965.<sup>33</sup> The only law aspect of his resume included a legal aid attorney and divorce cases.<sup>34</sup> Despite his lack of experience, the EICC hired Oscar Zeta Acosta to represent the men alongside the other lawyers already hired and associated with the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU).<sup>35</sup> This was his first major case; but he later became the main lawyer for future cases in the Chicano movement. He identified as “the only militant Chicano lawyer in the country.”<sup>36</sup>

Six other lawyers from the ACLU worked with Acosta on the East L.A. 13 trial. In August of 1968, Al Wirin, then Chief Counsel of the Southern California Chapter, in conjunction with Acosta and Fred Okrand of the ALCU, filed statements to prevent prosecution on their clients. They requested the following:

1—Enjoin Dist. Atty. Evelle J. Younger from prosecuting the defendants, because they allegedly have been denied equal protection of the law.

2—Set aside the indictment on the basis that further prosecution of the defendants would violate their constitutional rights to freedom of speech, press, and assembly and to petition the government for the redress of grievances.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ron Einstoss, “Prosecution of 13 Militants: Legal Action Filed in Case Involving Persons Accused of Sparking Student Walkouts at 4 High Schools in March,” *Los Angeles Times*, Aug. 24, 1968; hereafter cited as “Prosecution of 13 Militants.”; Haney López, Ian F., *Racism on Trial*, 4.

<sup>33</sup> Haney López, *Racism on Trial*, 28.

<sup>34</sup> Haney López, *Racism on Trial*, 28; García and Castro, *Blowout!*, 204.

<sup>35</sup> García and Castro, *Blowout!*, 203; Haney López, *Racism on Trial*, 30.

<sup>36</sup> Haney López, *Racism on Trial*, 30.

<sup>37</sup> Einstoss, “Prosecution of 13 Militants.”



In addition, the team of lawyers called out the discrimination by highlighting the actions of “singling out [...] the defendants.”<sup>38</sup> Richard Hecht, Deputy District Attorney, responded by stating he would prevent attempts to end the prosecution.<sup>39</sup>

Acosta hated the courts, which led him to use the trial strategy of questioning the legal system rather than the East L.A. 13. He subpoenaed one hundred and four county judges after discovering who would serve on the grand jury.<sup>40</sup> Herman Sillas, another attorney working on the case, and Acosta questioned the process of selection for the grand jury in the Superior Court. When Acosta asked the two questions: “Who have you [more than thirty Superior Court judges] nominated for the grand jury in the last five years?” and “Well, who’s your gardener?,” the Superior Court judges could only provide names of Mexican Americans for the latter. Left dumbfounded, the judges failed to respond when Acosta and Silla followed up with questions asking why the judges never considered the Mexican Americans for the grand jury.<sup>41</sup> Judge Kathleen Parker investigated the depths of this discrimination afterwards. She conducted 1,602 interviews to learn that only thirty-eight Mexican Americans served a seat on a grand jury over the course of ten years.<sup>42</sup> Acosta was the first lawyer to approach this type of case on the basis of racism in the grand jury. He said, “Perhaps the most compelling reason for their [lawyers] failure to raise the issue is that ultimately what the lawyer says in such a motion

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Burton Moore and Alessandra Cabello, *Love and Riot: Oscar Zeta Acosta and the Great Mexican American Revolution*, (University of Texas: Austin, Texas: Floricanto Press, 2003), 42; hereafter cited as *Love and Riot*.

<sup>41</sup> García and Castro, *Blowout!*, 230.

<sup>42</sup> Moore and Cabello, *Love and Riot*, 42.

is an indictment of the profession which he professes and a castigation of the society to which he belongs.”<sup>43</sup>

The court proceedings for the East L.A. 13 trial lasted for two years. The lower courts originally agreed with the indictments, however Acosta and Silla’s question of the Superior Court judges turned the tables in favor of the East L.A. 13. In the summer of 1970, an appellate court countermanded the felony indictments of conspiracy.<sup>44</sup> Moctesuma proudly declared, “The case coming out of the walkouts was thrown ultimately thrown out of court unappalled. Again, based on the Bill of Rights. Freedom of speech. Freedom of assembly. Freedom to petition the government.”<sup>45</sup> Despite the backlash on an individual level for the thirteen men because of the walkouts, Acosta exposed prejudice practices in the judicial system.

In September of 1968, Sal Castro lost his job as a result of being charged with conspiracy charges; this was another unintentional consequence of the walkouts. The morning following his release from jail in spring of 1968, Castro walked into Lincoln High School to start the school day. Principal George Ingles, however, revoked Castro’s teaching privileges due to the indictments established over the weekend by explaining, “there was a ruling part of the Education Code that if you are arrested, you cannot be in the classroom. Then because I was indicted, I was an indicted felon. I sure could not be in the classroom.”<sup>46</sup> Castro could not be near children because of his newfound status as a

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<sup>43</sup> Haney López, *Racism on Trial*, 33.

<sup>44</sup> García and Castro, *Blowout!*, 230; Robert B. Young, “30 in Mexican American United Quit in Dispute Over Teacher,” *Los Angeles Times*, Feb. 19, 1971.

<sup>45</sup> Cozens, Interview with Moctesuma Esparza in “Chicano! Documentary: Part 3.”

<sup>46</sup> Cozens, Interview with Sal Castro in “Chicano! The Documentary: Part 3.”

felon. The regulation even prohibited Castro from entering the high school campus on graduation day. Castro insisted the media knew about his inability to teach.

The East Los Angeles students and community protested once again. Jack Crowther, the superintendent, transferred him to The Bemini Center, the Administrative building, to keep Castro out of the classroom.<sup>47</sup> This time, however, protesters demanded Castro's reinstatement to his teaching position at Lincoln High School. Henry Gutiérrez and his parents founded the Chicano Legal Defense Committee in an effort to make this possible. The EICC organized protests outside of the Hall of Justice and Lincoln High School to demand Castro's return. For ten days, the community picketed outside the building. Community members packed board meetings every Tuesday and Thursdays. East LA elementary school teacher Raquel Galan stated, "[Castro] is a person who put himself out on the line and his community came to his support. At that point, whether you liked him or you didn't like him, it wasn't the issue. The issue was that this community, the Chicano community in Los Angeles had to have a role in what the schools did."<sup>48</sup> The students and community members protesting for the better treatment of their teacher expanded the stance of their student movement to fight for the protecting of all Mexican Americans affected by educational racism.

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<sup>47</sup> García and Castro, *Blowout!*, 213; The Bimini Center the cite of Administration work.

<sup>48</sup> Cozens, Interview with Henry Gutierrez in "Chicano! Documentary: Part 3"; Cozens, Interview with Raquel Galan in "Chicano! Documentary: Part 3."



Protests outside of Lincoln High School at the beginning of the 1968. The man holding the sign declaring “Sal is for you. Are you for him?” is Oscar Zeta Acosta, who defended the East L.A. 13.<sup>49</sup>

The next school year began with Sal Castro not being re-instated into his teaching position, despite the demonstrations in the spring. Protesting outside the Hall of Justice did not have the same effects as protesting outside the schools some months earlier, so the community strategized and decided upon another plan. From September 26-October 2, 1968, they engaged in civil disobedience by remaining in the Hall of Justice until the Board reinstated Castro – twice.<sup>50</sup> Video clips revealed men turned the desks into bunk beds; some laid on top amongst the microphones, others underneath with blankets laid out as beds. Ralph Guzman, journalist, described the protesters:

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<sup>49</sup> Reprinted from García, Mario T. and Sal Castro, *Blowout!: Sal Castro & the Chicano Struggle for Educational Justice*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina, 2011), 214. Photographer: Myron Dubee, Original courtesy of Herald Examiner Collection/Los Angeles Public Library.

<sup>50</sup> Cozens, “Chicano! Documentary: Part 3.”

The protesters at the Board of Education were, to say the least, a very mixed company. There was at least one Catholic priest, one Episcopalian priest, and several Protestant ministers. There were Mexican American college students from UCLA and from California State College, Los Angeles. Most were, indeed, Mexican Americans and very few were more than 30 years of age. Some wore beards and brown berets; others, college clothing and neat business suits.<sup>51</sup>

Just like the walkout in March, the Mexican American protestors represented diversity within their group. Galan articulated the reasoning of their actions: “Well, we’re not going to leave. We’ll sit here, and we’ll stay here until you make the decision that our needs of the Chicano community in this city are taken care of. The community has the right to make the decisions about the kinds of people who teach in their schools.”<sup>52</sup>

The group entertained itself as the Board of Education attempted to get them to leave. Despite the intentional lack of air conditioning, video clips show people reading, mass services, and everyone enjoying each other’s company. Castro embraced a woman as he watched his community support him. Most importantly, the community saw “it was a time were we discussed what we were going to do next.”<sup>53</sup>

The police interfered after seven days of the second round of sit-in demonstrations. The remaining thirty-five protestors waited for them. Over their loud speaker, the cops warned the community members that the building would be shutting at ten o’clock; if they stayed, they would be arrested for trespassing.<sup>54</sup> Nearly half of the thirty-five people arrested were youth. Esparza declared with sadness, “It was clear to us we did not have the power and they could crush us if they decided to as they certainly crushed several

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<sup>51</sup> Ralph Guzman, “The Gentle Revolutionaries: Brown Power,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 26, 1969.

<sup>52</sup> Cozens, Interview with Raquel Galan in “Chicano! Documentary: Part 3.”

<sup>53</sup> Cozens, “Chicano! Documentary: Part 3.”

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

other movements.”<sup>55</sup> Ultimately, the police action did not halt the sit-in protests. As seen in March during the walkouts, the protesters refused to give up until the Board met with the demonstrators.<sup>56</sup>

On October 3, 1968, the Board of Education voted on the reinstatement of Sal Castro. Protestors demanded their voice be heard; they packed the room. A supporter in favor of Castro’s reinstatement argued, “we are here to express to you that in accepting a Mexican teacher who says that he is good to the Mexican, you are also accepting a principle that may govern our city without barred wire in the middle of the street [...]”<sup>57</sup>



Sal Castro and the crowd celebrating after the Board of Education voted in favor of his reinstatement.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Cozens, Interview with Moctesuma Esparza in “Chicano! Documentary: Part 3.”

<sup>56</sup> Jack McCurdy, “Arrests of 35 End 2<sup>nd</sup> Sit-In at School Board: Backers of Sal Castro Had Decided to Renew 7-Day Demonstration,” *Los Angeles Times*, Oct. 3, 1968.

<sup>57</sup> Cozens, News clip in “Chicano! Documentary: Part 3.”

<sup>58</sup> Reprinted from García, Mario T. and Sal Castro, *Blowout!: Sal Castro and the Chicano Struggle for Education*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 219. Photograph granted to García and Castro from Los Angeles Times Photographic Archive, Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

The crowd erupted into cheers when the Board voted in support of re-instating Sal Castro as a teacher at Lincoln High School. Smiles, chants, and applaud filled the room as the crowd carried Castro out of the meeting in victory. Just as Richard Nixon famously visualized his victory with his hand, Sal Castro put two fingers in the shape of a ‘V’ into the air. He was a teacher again.

Despite the celebration, not everybody supported the Board of Education’s decision. Teachers, administrators, and the school district begrudged his participation in the walkouts in the spring of 1968.<sup>59</sup> Forty Lincoln High School teachers appealed to be transferred to other Los Angeles Schools. The lack of open teaching positions at other schools limited the teachers’ chances of succeeding in being transferred. J. C. Chambers, the only member to vote against even considering the re-instatement of Castro, hoped to revoke the Board’s decision.<sup>60</sup> The restoration of Castro’s position caused tensions with the non-Mexican community of Los Angeles; the L.A. City College newspaper printed what a letter denouncing Castro’s position in the school; Castro referred to the letter as “a very vicious racist attack.”<sup>61</sup> Nonetheless, the protestors finally won by having Castro re-instated.

The aftermath of the walkouts exploded in ways the students may never had predicted. Although the Board of Education overlooked the students’ demands, the students’ pride was justified. Collectively, they changed the face of the Mexican

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<sup>59</sup> García and Castro, *Blowout!*, 221; After returning to his teaching position, Castro lost his position as a playground assistant, he lost friendships, and the Principle Ingles revoked Castro’s position as the athletic director.

<sup>60</sup> Jack McCurdy, “40 Teachers Ask for Transfers After Reinstatement of Castro: Lincoln High School Faculty Member Will Return to Job Monday; Reassignments Won’t Take Effect Until Spring,” *Los Angeles Times*, Oct. 8, 1968; McCurdy, Jack, “Latins Urge Reinstatement of Teacher Who Led Walkout: School Board Asked by Large Crowd to Put Instructor Back on Job, Agrees to Reconsider Matter in Private,” *Los Angeles Times*, (Los Angeles, CA), Aug. 30, 1968.

<sup>61</sup> García and Castro, *Blowout!* 223-224; the full letter is written on pages 223-224.

American activism by increasing the political consciousness of older generations. This widened those who agreed with the motives of their student movement. Mexican Americans embraced their heritage in the schools; Mexican American representation in school authority positions increased. Oscar Acosta's contribution to the East L.A. 13 trial revealed the discrimination towards Mexican Americans in the judicial system; it provided a legal case that allowed innocent men walk free. The community protests against Sal Castro being fired expanded the student movements' intention and the members. Most importantly, the Mexican American students of East Los Angeles discovered that, "Collectively, we have a strong voice. And together we have a power we didn't realize we had before."<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> *Walkout!*, Directed by Edward Olmos, Performed by Michael Peña and Alexa Vega, United States: HBO, 2006, DVD. The film showed interviews with the former students during the closing credits. Bobby Vertugo deserves credit for this quotation.



## CONCLUSION:

“IT WAS A BEAUTIFUL DAY TO BE A CHICANO”<sup>1</sup>

The student leaders of the East Los Angeles blowouts exceeded the expectations set for them by their high school teachers and administrators. Paula Crisostomo became a college administrator. Vicky Castro serves as a Los Angeles schools as a member of the L.A. School Board. Mita Caurón works as an artist and registered nurse. Carlos Muñoz Jr. is a professor and researcher of Chicana history at the University of California Berkley. Louis Torres’ writing for the Lincoln High School’s *The Railsplitter* provided him the necessary skills to become a successful journalist. Harry Gambota creates art for a living. Moctesuma Esparza, Lincoln’s class of 1967, became a film producer. Bobby Vertugo helps people through his role as a social worker.<sup>2</sup> The students’ bright futures reflect the innovative, determined independence they showed as activists during their high school years.

The conditions of the 1960s in East Los Angeles were ripe for this type of protest, but the students still had so much to overcome. The convergence of three significant influences provided the students the ingredients to demonstrate against the education system as a whole. According to Carlos Montes, “[the walkouts were] a political revolution of a group of Chicanos in East L.A. asserting their real identity and then getting involved and realizing that the [education] system wouldn’t change unless you took more direct action.”<sup>3</sup> Over the course of two weeks in March 1968, thousands of

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<sup>1</sup> Gilda L. Ochoa, “Teaching is a Fight: An Interview with Sal Castro.” *Rethinking Schools*, Winter 2010.

<sup>2</sup> *Walkout!*, Directed by Edward Olmos, Performed by Michael Peña and Alexa Vega, United States: HBO, 2006, DVD.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

high school students heightened the community's awareness of the educational racism in their school district. Nationally, walk-outs became a common approach to protesting for equal education. However, these students' voices are still absent from most historical work on California in the 1960s.

The East Los Angeles students planned and organized the walkouts months leading up to March 1968; this benefitted them to maintain a successful walkout when one high school unexpectedly began the walkouts. Their walkouts sparked a student movement for educational changes within the larger Chicano Movement fighting for Mexican American civil rights. By protesting the trial of the East L.A. 13 and for the reinstatement of Sal Castro, the students expanded the motives of their student movement. Not only did they fight to improve their educational experience, they now included the intuition of preventing educational racism from affecting more Mexican Americans other than just students in the educational setting. Elsa Cisneros clarified in addition to organization and planning the walkouts, "...there was a lot of work put into that. A lot of hope. A lot of love. A lot of *coraje* [courage]."<sup>4</sup>

Although the protests did not achieve all the educational changes the students had demanded, the walkouts' impact reverberated beyond the school walls and inspired students and the larger Chicano community. Bobby Vertugo returned to Lincoln High School to graduate in 2008, which "forty years after the walkouts, [...] was one of the

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<sup>4</sup> "Lincoln High School Walkouts," YouTube Video, 17:31, from the Asian Americans Advancing Justice – Los Angeles and Lincoln High School's "V.O.I.C.E." and "M.E.Ch.A" organizations. Originally titled "Walking Out For Our Rights." Posted by AJLA Youth Films, July 5, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QMxSYWc7jz4&t=52s>; hereafter cited as "Lincoln High School Walkouts."; This short documentary provided a great amount of information in the forms of interviews. Citations will follow the following format: "Interview with [person's name] in "Lincoln High School Walkouts" if applicable. Interview with Elsa Cisneros in "Lincoln High School Walkouts."

proudest moments of my life.”<sup>5</sup> Moctesuma Esparza recalled that “the walkouts represented us taking our lives into our own hands and us saying that we had power. And that we could make a difference. We could demand, and take, and make justice happen.”<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, more students felt empowered to enroll in college; the number of Mexican American at the University of California Los Angeles grew from forty to twelve hundred by the 1969 fall semester. On a larger scale, Mexican Americans representation on college and universities jumped from two percent to twenty-five percent.<sup>7</sup>

The lessons learned in the educational setting can greatly impact an individual. A majority of teachers choose this career path with the intention of transforming their students’ lives.<sup>8</sup> Ray Cenicerroz, a faculty member at Garfield High School at the time of the walkouts, reflected this idea when he spoke on behalf of the Garfield faculty: “We should have been fighting for these things [equal education] as teachers.”<sup>9</sup> The East Los Angeles students, however, certainly showed the potential and power of youth in the school setting, which should not be overlooked. Through organizing and fighting to transform the systems, they became agents of change. Their actions as students and in a

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<sup>5</sup> “Lincoln High School Walkouts,” YouTube Video, 17:31, from the Asian Americans Advancing Justice – Los Angeles and Lincoln High School’s “V.O.I.C.E.” and “M.E.Ch.A” organizations. Originally titled “Walking Out For Our Rights.” Posted by AJLA Youth Films, July 5, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QMxSYWc7jz4&t=52s>; hereafter cited as “Lincoln High School Walkouts.”; This short documentary provided a great amount of information in the forms of interviews. Citations will follow the following format: “Interview with [person’s name] in “Lincoln High School Walkouts” if applicable. Interview with Bobby Lee Verdugo in “Lincoln High School Walkouts.”

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Moctesuma Esparza in “Lincoln High School Walkouts.”

<sup>7</sup> *Walkout!*, Directed by Edward Olmos. Performed by Michael Peña and Alexa Vega, United States: HBO, 2006, DVD.

<sup>8</sup> Michael G. Fullan, “The Professional Teacher: Why Teachers Must Become The Agents of Change,” *ASCD: Educational Leadership Archives*, (March 1993), vol. 50, no. 6, pgs. 12-17, Accessed Spring 2017, URL: <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/mar93/vol50/num06/Why-Teachers-Must-Become-Change-Agents.aspx>.

<sup>9</sup> Jack McCurdy, “But Won’t Remove Police: School Board Yields to Some Student Points in Boycotts,” *Los Angeles Times*, (Los Angeles, CA), March 12, 1968; hereafter cited as “But Won’t Remove Police.”

school setting started a specific student movement fighting to change the education system.

Although the East Los Angeles blowouts were a set of events that occurred in just over two weeks, the educational racism shown in East Los Angeles schools in the 1960s still persist today. In 2014, California ranked the highest segregated state for Latinx students.<sup>10</sup> According to David Garcia, who unsuccessfully ran for superintendent in 2014 in Arizona, school segregation was never a topic of discussion, “not even by minority groups.”<sup>11</sup> Research and discussion pertaining to Latinx education remains limited, therefore making it more difficult to find solutions. By examining the initial motives, protests, and outcomes of the walkouts in 1968, however, society can be better understand how extreme the actions need to be to address the issue of unequal education. Garfield faculty member Ray Cerniceroy described the impact students had on the fight for educational equality: “Apparently we have been using the wrong weapons. These students introduced a new weapon – a new monster – the walkout.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Jessica Epperly, "UCLA Report Finds Changing U.S. Demographics Transform School Segregation Landscape 60 Years After Brown v Board of Education." UCLA Report Finds Changing U.S. Demographics Transform School Segregation Landscape 60 Years After Brown v Board of Education — The Civil Rights Project at UCLA, March 14, 2014, Accessed February 28, 2017, URL: <https://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/news/press-releases/2014-press-releases/ucla-report-finds-changing-u.s.-demographics-transform-school-segregation-landscape-60-years-after-brown-v-board-of-education>.

<sup>11</sup> Rebecca Klein, “Latino School Segregation: The Big Education Problem That No One Is Talking About,” *The Huffington Post*, Oct. 26, 2015, Accessed March 10, 2017, URL: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/latino-school-segregation\\_us\\_561d70a5e4b050c6c4a34118](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/latino-school-segregation_us_561d70a5e4b050c6c4a34118).

<sup>12</sup> Jack McCurdy, “But Won’t Remove Police: School Board Yields to Some Student Points in Boycotts.” *Los Angeles Times*, Mar. 12, 1968.

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“8 Youths Suspended In School Ruckus.” *Los Angeles Times*, March 2, 1968.

This article is one of the first walkouts to cover the events of the walkouts; specifically discusses the spontaneous walkouts of Wilson High School that sparked the entire protest. It reveals the initial frustration of the students and the original responses from authorities. It helped me see the evolution of authorities responses as the walkouts became more significant.

Del Olmo, Frank. “No Regrets, Chicano Students Who Walked Out Say: ’68 Protests Brought Better Education, Most Believe.” *Los Angeles Times*, March 26, 1978.

This article served as a reflection for what changes occurred as a result of the walkouts. It provided me insight into the students’ feelings after time elapsed and what they believed changed as a result of their efforts ten years later. This was significantly helpful in Chapter Four: “Together We Had A Power We Didn’t Realize We Had Before.”

Galan, Hector. “Chicano! The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement.” Released April 12, 1996. YouTube Videos. Posted December 17, 2012.

Part 1 “Quest for the Homeland”:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xl6JPNiPeVY&t=743s>,

Part 2 “The Struggle in the Fields”:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aN1xQrV2Yo&t=818s>,

Part 3 “Taking Back the Schools”:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IiQQ-ws3IVU&t=196s>,

Part 4 “Fighting For Political Power”:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GeKenK6rha4>.

Director Héctor Gálan and his team of several producers created this four-episode documentary that nationally aired April 1996 on PBS along with the publication of the book in 1997. The documentary focused on the Chicano Movement, but provided a history of the Mexican experience in the United States. By separating the Chicano Movement into different social spheres – the fields and the education sphere – I was able to separate the different social movements and come to my own conclusions about what influenced the East Los Angeles students. Although typically identified as a secondary source, I pulled information from the interviews and news clips from the actual event incorporated in the documentary.

The interviews with former students, administrators, teachers, parents, and other community members provided a genuine and firsthand description of the walkouts. I was able to use this information to bring the student voices to the forefront and support my overarching argument. Although I did not have access to the original news reports or have a method of interviewing protestors myself, I feel comfortable with the content within this documentary.

García, Mario T., and Sal Castro. *Blowout!: Sal Castro & the Chicano Struggle for Educational Justice*. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011.

Mario T. García, author of several books covering Chicano history and professor of history and Chicano Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara joined together paired with Sal Castro, former Lincoln High School teacher who was heavily involved in the walkouts, describes Castro's experience before, during, and after the walkouts. As the most used source, this particular book provided a great depth of detail regarding Sal Castro's and the students' planning, execution, and aftermath of the walkouts. Sal Castro's narrative provided me a detailed explanation for every action before, during, and after the walkouts. Although easily considered a secondary source, I intentionally use it as a primary source to pull information from Castro's narrative and the students' interviews incorporated through the text.

Gonzales, Rodolfo. *I am Joquin: An Epic Poem*. 1967.

Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales, a major figure in the Chicano Movement, wrote a poem that greatly influenced the creation of a new cultural identity that resonated with the younger generation. This poem specifically inspired the East Los Angeles students to become prideful of their ethnicity. By reading this poem, I gained a better understanding a key factor of the influences on the students. This became helpful in Chapter 1: The Contributions to a New Definition of Student Activism.

Harrington, Johns H. "L.A.'s Student Blowout." *Phi Delta Kappa International*. Oct. 1968.

A couple of months after the walkouts, this piece provided an overview of the events. By reading this piece I was able to contextualize the events as a whole. It helped me recognize important clarifying details to include in my research to help the reader understand. Furthermore, it stood as a basis of what information I could exclude to avoid confusion.

Heller, Celia S. *Mexican American Youth: Forgotten Youth at the Crossroads*. New York, New York: Random House, 1966.

Although this is a sociological piece, sociologist Celia Heller's work provided me information regarding the demographics of Los Angeles at the time. I was able to use her statistics of Mexican Americans, specifically youth, to support my claim of social consciousness spread partly because of the mass's shared identity. This was helpful in Chapter 1: The Contributions of a New Definition of Student Activism.

"Lincoln School Walkouts." YouTube Video. 17:31, from the Asian Americans Advancing Justice – Los Angeles and Lincoln High School's "V.O.I.C.E." and "M.E.Ch.A" organizations. Originally titled "Walking Out For Our Rights." Posted by AJLA Youth Films, July 5, 2015. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QMxSYWc7jz4&t=52s>.

I became aware of this YouTube clip when I emailed Lincoln High School asking for newspaper articles and information. Current Lincoln high schoolers created the film in honor of Sal Castro. Despite the fact that the documentary is from YouTube, current Lincoln High School students created this documentary. They met with and included interviews from 1968 participants in their documentary; I feel comfortable using this information because the narratives of the walkouts comes directly from those who were present in 1968. Although usually defined as a secondary source, the documentary is exclusively interviews with participants of the walkouts including students, college students, and Brown Berets. I use the information from their firsthand accounts a memories of the walkout to benefit my aim to bring student voices to the forefront.

*Los Angeles Times*, 1923-Current File, Los Angeles, California.

The *Los Angeles Times* served as my main primary source for this Independent Study. Being a prominent newspaper for Southern California and nationwide since 1881, the newspaper closely covered the East Los Angeles Blowouts of 1968 from the beginning in March until 1970 when the East L.A. 13 court proceedings finished. The news source produced several articles that provided images, descriptions of the event, quotes, and various perspectives from participants. The multiple selected articles provided me fresh information in the heat of the walkouts, which allowed me to analyze the information without the influence of another person's interpretation of the walkouts.

McCurdy, Jack. "Student Disorders Erupt at 4 High Schools; Policeman Hurt: Youths Boycott Classes, Stage Protest Marches and Clash with Officers Attempting to Quell Disturbances." *Los Angeles Times*. March 7, 1968.

Jack McCurdy's article chronicled the police interactions with the protesting students. By reading this article, I was exposed to how altered the narrative was about the police intervention on the walkouts. As a result of the false representation, I needed to use the information from this article and cross reference it with other sources to get a better reality of the relationship between the police force and the protestors.

McCurdy, Jack. "1,000 Walk Out in School Boycott: Jefferson Teachers Quit Classes; 19 Juveniles, 1 Adult Arrested." *Los Angeles Times*, March 9, 1968.

This newspaper article allowed me to see how far the walkouts spread across Los Angeles during the two weeks of protest. It shows that the students' successfully had their voices heard and showed how other schools responded in solidarity.

McCurdy, Jack. "But Won't Remove Police: School Board Yields to Some Student Points in Boycotts." *Los Angeles Times*, March 12, 1968.

Jack McCurdy's newspaper report on the meeting with the Board of Education allowed me to see firsthand how the Board of Education immediately responded to the students' demands. It outlined the organization and scheduling of the meetings in both the Board of Education Chambers and at Lincoln High School. Furthermore, it exposed me to other walkouts in schools in other regions of Los Angeles.

McCurdy, Jack. "Venice High Youths, Police Clash." *Los Angeles Times*, March 13, 1968.

This newspaper article covered the stories pertaining to high schools on the West side of Los Angeles and middle schoolers reacting to the example put forth by the Mexican American students in East Los Angeles. A predominately Anglo school district at the time, the West side walking out is significant because it showed the Anglo students standing in solidarity with the East Los Angeles students. Furthermore, this piece first introduced me to the fact that middle schoolers participated in the walkouts. This shows how big of an impact the walk outs had on even younger members of their generation.

McCurdy, Jack. "Frivolous to Fundamental: Demands Made By East Side High School Students Listed." *Los Angeles Times*, March 17, 1968.

Published shortly after the end of the walkouts, this article presented me all of the students' demands they presented to the school board. Furthermore, it outlined the Board of Education's response to each individual demand. This source was helpful to me because I was able to see the specific student demands word for word; the additional information of the Board of Education's responses allowed me to see the relationship between the students and the Board of Education.

Torgerson, Dial. "Start of a Revolution?: 'Brown Power' Unity Seen Behind School Disorders." *Los Angeles Times*, Section C, March 17, 1968.

This article helped me understand how the media depicted the role of the Brown Berets in the walkouts. The article framed the students in actions of mass



militancy, therefore framing the students in a different sphere than the students intended. The article allowed me a firsthand reputation of the Brown Berets.

Torres, Luís R. "Civic Leaders Hear Students Complaints: Wednesday." *The Railsplitter: Abraham Lincoln High School*, Volume 106, Issue 3. March 15, 1968.

Granted to me from Lincoln High School, this article from the school's newspaper provided me a student's nonbiased report of the walkouts. Although Torres engaged in the walkouts, his article allowed me to see students' responses to the walkout from a non-protesting perspective. Additionally, the lack of articles pertaining to the walkouts due to students not being in school, therefore not able to write for the paper helped me realize how much of an impact the walkouts had on the school.

Torres, Luís. "We stood up, and it mattered." *Los Angeles Times*, March 8, 2008.

Luís Torres' reflection of his experience forty years after the event provided a rich amount of imagery. Furthermore, using a piece reflecting on the event which such detail revealed to me how important the walkouts were to the participating students. Furthermore, his piece revealed to me how it impacted him on a personal level, which gave me a sense of how other individual students and participants felt. It was the first piece that helped me see the students as individuals rather than just the collective bunch of students protesting.

Woo, Elaine. "'60s 'Blowouts': Leaders of Latino School Protest See Little Change." *Los Angeles Times*, March 7, 1988.

This article was extremely helpful in Chapter Four: "Together We Had A Power We Didn't Realize We Had Before." It allowed me to see that the changes that occurred as a result of the walkouts stemmed from the changed attitudes of the students rather than from actual changes from the Board of Education. By reading this reflection article twenty-years after the walkouts, I was exposed to the continuation of racism in the school district.

## **Secondary Sources**

Carter, Thomas P. *Mexican Americans in Schools: A History of Educational Neglect*. New York, New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1970.

Thomas P. Carter, who received his doctorate in education from the University of Texas, initiated the conversation of Mexican American education. As a trailblazer in the field of Mexican American education, briefly covering the history of the Mexican American experiences in the United States, Carter directly discusses the issues within the classroom in the Southwestern region during the 1960s in lieu of the discrimination of the first half the twentieth century. This piece helped me understand the initial conversations of Mexican American

education and see the evolution of Mexican American education literature over time.

Donato, Rubén. *The Other Struggle for Equal Schools: Mexican Americans during the Civil Rights Era*. New York, New York: State University of New York, 1997.

Although Donato's piece focuses solely on Bakersfield, California, his piece provided guidance and insight on how to narrow my topic to one particular place. This piece stood as an example for applying larger issues to a single location. Furthermore, his argument regarding the lack of scholarship on Mexican American education in the guided my thinking as I started noticing which parts of the narrative were still excluded from historical literature on this subject matter.

Evans, Sara M. and Harry C. Boyte. *Free Spaces: The Sources of Democratic Change in America*. Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1986.

This piece helped me understand how the students were capable of organizing protests within the school walls. By applying Evans and Boyte's concept of "free spaces" to my Independent Study, I was able to contextualize the student activism in their institutional space. Furthermore, it benefitted my research by placing the concepts of the students' movement culture to a specific pocket of society. Without pairing Evans and Boyte's concept of a free space for the emergence of a social movement with Lawrence Goodwyn's explanation of a Movement Culture, I would not have been able to structure my Independent Study.

García, Juan Ramon. "The Bracero Program" in *Operation Wetback: The Mass Deportation of Mexican Undocumented Workers in 1954*. London, England and Westport, CT: Greenwood Press: 1980.

Juan Ramon García's piece answered my question pertaining to the high number of Latinx residing in the Southwest region of the United States. His information is relevant in Chapter One: A New Definition of Student Activism when I explain the driving forces behind the East Los Angeles students' protests. By including information regarding Bracero Programs from this into my Independent Study, I was able to provide the reader an idea about legislation in the United States contributed to the poor treatment of Mexican field workers, which by extension affected their education.

Goodwyn, Lawrence. *The Democratic Promise: The Populist Movement in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1976.

Lawrence Goodwyn's piece on the populist movement provided me the main theoretical framework of my Independent Study. I borrow his structure of "Movement Culture" to help me frame how the students defined themselves within the larger Chicano movement. Goodwyn's application of shared ideas,

cultural values, and common identity to the Farmer's Alliance during the Populist era is applicable to student actions in East Los Angeles.

Gutiérrez, David G. *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity*. Berkley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1995.

David Gutiérrez was the associate professor of history at the University of California, San Diego. His piece provided over one hundred years of American history and explained how immigration from Mexico shaped California and Texas's politics around the subject. I used his work to explore and deepen my understanding of how the history of the area shaped Mexican American's cultural identity, and politics. Furthermore, he argued Mexicans created a space for themselves in the United States Southwest. I take his argument one step further by declaring that students followed this example by taking ownership of the schools as their space in East Los Angeles.

Haney López, Ian F. *Racism on Trial: The Chicano Fight for Justice*. President and Fellows of Harvard College, 2003.

Author of three books and law professor at the University of California Berkley Ian F. Haney López was extremely beneficial on my fourth chapter, which focuses on the aftermath of the walkouts. In conjunction with articulating his argument that forces us to re-evaluate racism in the judicial system, he narrates the events regarding the East L.A. 13. His detailed overview of the event provided me a substantial amount of information, and led me to realize the significant amount of backlash that occurred as a result of the walkouts. Furthermore, this piece exposed me to the greater affects the walkouts, which was the exposure of racism in the judicial system.

Muñoz, Carlos Jr. *Youth, Identity, and Power: The Chicano Movement*. London, England: Verso, 1989.

Carlos Muñoz, Jr.'s piece was the first scholarly piece written on the Chicano Movement of the 1960s. It was extremely helpful in Chapter 1: "The Contributions to a New Definition of Student Activism." His monograph of student activism since the 1930s His perspective from both a participant of the East Los Angeles blowouts and a historian supplied a rich analysis of how the Chicano activism, college student activism, and how the era influenced the Chicano youth in East Los Angeles at the time of the walk outs. His piece led me to realize the gap in historical narrative regarding high school student protests.

Navarro, Armando. *Mexican American Youth Organization: Avant-Garde of the Chicano Movement in Texas*. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1995.

Armando Navarro's monograph provided me information regarding the civil rights group MAYO fighting specifically for youth. Navarro professionally serves as a professor of Ethic Studies at the University of California, Riverside. He is also an activist and has years of experience in politics, one of those roles being a political scientist. On a broader scale, it provided a wealth of information regarding traditional Mexican American groups. The major topics of his books revealed to how MAYO's political motives neglected high schoolers from their ambitions. From there, I was able to conclude the students from East Los Angeles needed to fight for civil rights in their free space.

San Miguel, Guadalupe. "Chicana/o Struggles for Education: Activism for Education: Contestation." *University of Houston Series in Mexican American Studies* 7 (2013): 24-56. Accessed February 9, 2016. ProQuest Ebrary.

San Miguel Guadalupe is a professor of history at the University of Huston, with a primary focus on Chicano history. This piece first introduced me to the East Los Angeles Walkouts of 1968 in the spring of 2016. By mentioning the walkouts as a staple of changes that occurred in the 1970s and 1980s, his piece was where a majority of my questions formulated. His piece also provided a substantial amount of information regarding the effects of the walkouts in California on a grass-root level and judicial level.

*Walkout!*. Directed by Edward Olmos. Performed by Michael Peña and Alexa Vega. United States: HBO, 2006. DVD.

By watching the movie depiction of *Walkout!*, I received a reliable depiction of how the walkouts emerged and progressed over the course of a couple months. It provided me clarity regarding the linear progression of the walkouts. It also answered minor questions that stemmed from different explanation of facts. Moctesuma Esparza, a major figure in the walkouts, produced the film, therefore I trust that the content of the film is accurate.

Wollenberg, Charles. "Decline and Fall of "Separate but Equal" in *All Deliberate Speed: Segregation and Exclusion in California Schools, 1855-1975*. Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1986.

Charles Wollenberg held the position of the Chair and professor of Social Science Department at University of California, Berkley. His book focuses on how segregation over one hundred years affected the public school system in California. His work granted me a wealth of knowledge that deepened my comprehension regarding how racism became so embedded in the school districts for all minorities in California. I was able to understand the unique aspects of Mexican Americans experience in the public school system.

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