

CHICANO PARK AND THE CHICANO PARK MURALS  
A NATIONAL REGISTER NOMINATION

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CHICANO PARK AND THE CHICANOPARK MURALS  
A NATIONAL REGISTER NOMINATION

A Thesis Project

by

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Abstract  
of  
CHICANO PARK AND THE CHICANO PARK MURALS  
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Chicano Park and the Chicano Park Murals

Chicano Park is a 7.4-acre park located in San Diego City's Barrio Logan beneath the east-west approach ramps of the San Diego-Coronado Bay Bridge where the bridge bisects Interstate 5. Its main section is bounded by Interstate 5 to the east and National Avenue to the west, with a smaller pan-handle section extending from National Avenue to Newton Avenue and flanked to the south by Dewey Street. The park was created in 1970 after residents in Barrio Logan participated in a "takeover" of land that was being prepared for a substation of the California Highway Patrol. Since April 22, 1970, the park has been utilized by the Chicano community of San Diego as a place for social and political events. Its facilities include children's playgrounds, restrooms, a Kiosko or dance pavilion, picnic areas, multi-purpose courts, open play lawns, a raised plaza, community gardens, sculptures, fountain, and two small parking areas accessed from Logan Avenue and National Avenue. The park is distinguished by murals painted on the pillars, abutments, and ramps of the San Diego-Coronado Bay Bridge.

The Chicano Park murals consist of an assemblage of multiple vibrantly colored paintings on of the concrete pillars and two abutments (flanking Logan Avenue near Interstate 5) that support the San Diego end of the San Diego-Coronado Bay Bridge. Forty of these murals painted on twenty-four of pillars, abutments and ramps were constructed during the height of the Chicano Civil Rights Movement. These murals and their iconography depict images of Mexican pre-Columbian gods, myths and legendary icons, botanical elements, animal imagery, the Mexican colonial experience, revolutionary struggles, cultural and spiritual reaffirmation through the arts, Chicano achievements, identity and bicultural duality as symbolized in the search for the "indigenous self," Mexican and Chicano cultural heroes and heroines such as La Adelita, Cesar Chavez, Father Miguel Hidalgo, Che Guevara, Pancho Villa, Emiliano Zapata, and

scenes based on contemporary Chicano civil rights history. Today over 100 murals decorate the pillars of the San Diego-Coronado Bay Bridge; however, the bulk of the murals were painted in the 1970's and 1980's, by the major Chicano artists of California.

Barrio Logan's Chicano Park and the Chicano Park Murals appear to be eligible for the National Register under Criterion A at the local level of significance due to its critical association with the Chicano Civil Rights Movement and events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of the City of San Diego's political and social history. In 1997 Cherilyn Widell, California State Historic Preservation Officer concurred with the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) 1996 *State Historic Research Education Report for the San Diego-Coronado Bay Bridge* that Chicano Park and the Chicano Park murals, although not yet 50 years old, meet the exceptional importance criterion for listing in the National Register of Historic Places and the California Register of Historical Resources. The San Diego-Coronado Bay Bridge piers and supports that are grounded in Chicano Park are the "canvas" for the murals; the bridge must also be considered a contributing element of the Chicano Park murals.

\_\_\_\_\_, Committee Chair  
Dr. Lee Simpson

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this Project to all the residents of Logan Heights—past and present. The history of your contributions to the economic, social, political and cultural development of the City of San Diego has not been overlooked by your community.

To my parents Joe Nevarez and Sue Almanza Talamantez, I am grateful for the colorful historical narrative of your lives in Logan Heights that you shared with your youngest daughter. Your life experiences shaped my world view and provided me the tools necessary to survive.

To my late artist husband, Armando Ramirez Cid, your constant reminder of the value that the arts play in validating community will never be forgotten. Your ability to create something out of nothing in no effort was the standard you set.

To all activists who were part of the Chicano Park “Take-Over” April 22, 1970, your perseverance in the face of adversity left its mark for all to see. The decision to stand up and fight for our park defined us all.

And to all of the artists who have painted on the pillars of the San Diego-Coronado Bay Bridge, or who have sang, played music, danced, read poetry, created theatrical skits, the beauty of your creations will be documented in the chronicles of history for future generations to understand the plight of the Chicano Movement. Thank you.

Que Viva Chicano Park .

C/S

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It with sincere gratitude that I acknowledge Dr. Jim Fisher, retired California Department of Transportation Cultural Historian, for his recognition of Chicano Park and the Chicano Park Murals as a cultural resource. His encouragement to nominate the park and murals to the National Register were the force that led me to California State University, Sacramento's Public History program. Thank you.

The Project to nominate Chicano Park and the Chicano Park Murals to the National Register would not have been completed without the guidance and assistance that California State University Sacramento Public History Director, Dr. Lee Simpson, so patiently provided. Thank you so much Lee, you're the best.

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## INTRODUCTION

This is the story of an undocumented historical district called Barrio Logan, a section of the Logan Heights neighborhood of San Diego, California, its cultural resources—Chicano Park and the Chicano Park Murals, a tipping point in Chicano History, and its significance in relationship to the National Register of Historic Places.

The historical experience related in this Master's Thesis Project run parallel to my own life's journey of becoming a Public Historian.<sup>1</sup> The journey validates my family's century old roots in Logan Heights and the fruit of my community's self-determination, the establishment of the Park against all odds—of which I am a co-founder—the creation of over 100 beautiful cultural and historic murals, and the completion of a mandate to document and tell its history that was bestowed upon me in 1978 by community elders as they debated participation in the hour-long documentary entitled, *Chicano Park* produced by Redbird Films.<sup>2</sup>

The Master's Thesis Project is a complete nomination of Chicano Park and the Chicano Park murals to the National Register. The establishment of Chicano Park, on April 22, 1970, is associated with the Chicano Civil Rights Movement and the events that led to the “take-over” of the land to create the park contributed to the broad patterns of the social and political history of the City of San Diego. The Chicano Park Murals reflect the cultural and historical content of the era and the place that muralism has gained in mainstream art. The integrity of the property includes a historical narrative depicted in images designed and executed by local and established Chicano artists: a collection of over one hundred murals that have gained international recognition.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on my life's experience I have known many facts about the historical content in this Master's Thesis instinctively, but now I have had to define them as historical sources to validate facts cited.

<sup>2</sup> Redbird Films approached the community during this time period and completed the first 20 minutes of a film clip that eventually turned into an hour long documentary entitled, “Chicano Park” completed in 1988.

Chapter one of the project articulates a discussion of the National Register program administered by the California Office of Historic Preservation, authorized under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. Included in the discussion is a narrative that provides the reader an understanding of the review criteria for nominating a site to the National Trust. Chapter one also documents the historical significance and content of Chicano Park and the integrity of the aesthetics of the Chicano Park Murals as delineated by the National Park Services' guidelines for nominating a site for inclusion on the National Register. The chapter articulates the nomination process based on Chicano Park's significance, historical content including the integrity of workmanship of the Chicano Park Murals, and the feelings associated with the site. A discussion on Chicano art and its relevance as an organizing and educational tool during the Chicano Civil Rights Movement is necessary for understanding the climate in which Chicano Park was established. The reader is provided with an overview of Mexican mural art and its relationship to Chicanos and Chicano artists during this era.

In chapter two the reader is introduced to Chicano history—a social history of the Mexican-Americans in the United States who identify themselves by the term Chicano.<sup>3</sup> This chapter is only an appetizer for the serious historian who wants to delve deeper into Chicano history, although it does provide a preliminary description of the racism and segregation endured by Chicanos/Mexicanos/Latinos and Indigenous people in California. Chicano history begins with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and includes the “Take Over” of land that became Chicano Park and sets the stage for the on-going painting of the murals.

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<sup>3</sup> Explanatory Note: (1) The term “Chicano” refers to people of Mexican ancestry who live in the United States and is the preferred nomenclature among many members of the contemporary generation of Mexican Americans. The term Chicano encompasses the political and social reality that its members for the most part are US citizens, not from Mexico, and have experienced a level of racial discrimination that has isolated them as “different” within American society. The use of the term Chicano officially came into use during the height of the Chicano Civil Rights Movement and was coined as an alternative to the US Government categorization of all Latinos as Hispanic, a category that does not recognize or validate a Chicano's indigenous roots, but categorizes by the European commonality—Spanish genetic roots and/or language.

Conveyed in the historical narrative is a glimpse of what evolved during and shortly after the creation of the park. It was a time of intolerance to the status quo, when the community, both young and old, united to define for themselves what was in their best interest. Once Chicano Park became a reality, art became the expressive weapon of choice. Poems documented the community, music echoed oral history, dance perpetuated traditional cultural heritage, and murals brought joy and alarm while educating the masses. Within the first ten years after the “Take Over” 40 murals were painted on the ramps, pylons and pillars of the San Diego-Coronado Bay Bridge. Once the artists started painting, they did not stop. Today there are over 100 brightly painted murals in Chicano Park.

An historical overview of the trajectory of Chicanos living in California prior to statehood up through the 1970s, with a focus on San Diego’s Logan Heights, is provided in chapter two. It is inclusive of high and low points faced by the community.<sup>4</sup> It is a history of a community’s intolerance to disregard and neglect and the demonstration of their self-determination to provide a lasting landmark branded with a barrio logo of their design and in their own style.

The Master’s Thesis Project nomination of Chicano Park and the Chicano Park Murals to the National Register of Historic Places is the final component of this narrative. In this section the National Park Service (NPS) Form 10-900 of the United States Department of the Interior is completed in preparation for its submission to the California State Historic Preservation Office (Ca. SHPO) for review by the California State Historical Resources Commission (SHRC). The package includes the completed NPS Form 10-900 with historical narrative substantiating the recommendation based on the significance, historic content and integrity of the cultural

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<sup>4</sup>Community refers to the broader inclusion of Chicanos as a whole in the Southwestern USA and in California in particular.

resources, Chicano Park and the Chicano Park Murals, along with reference sources, maps and photographs.

## CHAPTER 1

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CHICANO PARK AND THE CHICANO PARK MURALS

Chicano Park is an urban park with recreational facilities, a kiosk in the shape of an Aztec temple and over 100 murals painted by Chicano artists from the local community and California. Within the first ten years of its establishment 40 murals were painted on 24 bridge supports depicting the thinking, the background, the neighborhood, the Chicano people and their struggles.<sup>5</sup> The Park is a 7.4 acre site that was not created by the founding fathers of the City of San Diego or by the State of California as a park where the public would benefit from recreational activities. It was created out of resistance, a resistance that occurred when Barrio Logan residents no longer had faith that their interests were considered when public policy was being crafted for the community as a whole.

The residents of Logan Heights, the oldest neighborhood in San Diego, coupled with Chicano students and concerned citizens from throughout the Southwestern United States, came together to demonstrate intolerance to neglect and to create their own park. After many years of requesting a park to maintain a semblance of community that had been uprooted and destroyed by rezoning the area from residential to light industrial along with the invasion of freeways and bridges, the community came together and organized to occupy and “Take Over” a site that had been identified by the State and agreed upon by the City to become a California Highway Patrol Substation (an office and parking lot for over 140 employees. The “Take-Over” of the land for the development of Chicano Park took place on April 22, 1970, coinciding with the national environmental movement’s proclamation of the original Earth Day.

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<sup>5</sup> City of San Diego, Historical Site Board. *Designation of Chicano Park as a City of San Diego Historical Site*, #143, February 1, 1980.

Barrio Logan's Chicano Park and the Chicano Park Murals appear to be eligible for the National Register under Criterion A at the local level of significance due to its critical association with the Chicano Civil Rights Movement and events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of the City of San Diego's political and social history. Chicano Park and the Chicano Park murals, although not yet fifty years old, meet the exceptional importance criterion for listing in the National Register of Historic Places and the California Register of Historical Resources.<sup>6</sup> The San Diego-Coronado Bay Bridge piers and supports that are grounded in Chicano Park are the "canvas" for the murals; the bridge must also be considered a contributing element of the Chicano Park murals.

Chicanos have a long history in the southwestern region of the United States, arriving with the first Spanish expeditions from Chihuahua, Mexico in 1540 and 1563 and prior to the English arrival in 1621 to Massachusetts.<sup>7</sup> Yet their history is not readily known nor has their existence been validated. Out of resistance and sheer determination the Chicanos in Barrio Logan were adamant about preserving their cultural roots and their historical contributions to the City of San Diego for their children and for future generations. Though the reasons for Chicanos to preserve their cultural heritage are different from early American preservationists, their motives are similar to those of all preservation movements in the United States.

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb15/nrb15\\_7.htm#crit%20con%20g](http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb15/nrb15_7.htm#crit%20con%20g) Fifty years is an estimate of the time needed to develop historical perspective and to evaluate significance. A property that is less than fifty years is eligible if it is of exceptional importance. Each state also has a state register of historical resources that applies the same criteria for evaluation. For example, the importance of an event or an entire category of resources that is so fragile that survivors of any age are unusual. This category is measured by the property's importance within an appropriate historical context, whether the context is local, state, or national. In the case of Chicano Park and the Chicano Park Murals the historical context is local, but also impacts on a statewide and regional level.

<sup>7</sup> In 1997 the author, Josie S. Talamantez, attended the annual National Historic Preservation Conference in Santa Fe, New Mexico. While on a conference tour around the city she was privileged to be taken to the oldest Barrio in the United States where the Mexican Indians that traveled with Spanish explorers looking for the Seven Mystical Golden City of Cibola lived upon arriving in Santa Fe, New Mexico. This Barrio pre-dates the arrival of the pilgrims to Plymouth Rock.

The history of American preservation has evolved from the private sector to a balanced inclusion of the public sector. The initial focal point of American preservation stemmed from patriotism, which William J. Murtagh referred to as “secular pietism.” He cites one reason given in the saving of Andrew Jackson’s Tennessee home in 1856 as an example: “it is good policy in a republican government to inculcate sentiments of veneration for those departed who rendered services to their county in times of danger.”<sup>8</sup> And though the American preservation movement has broadened its criteria in the twentieth century to include aesthetics it is the initial focal point that resonates in the preservation of Chicano Park. The creation of Chicano Park was the community’s self determined stance to be recognized and not ignored. After its establishment, it became *sacred ground*, where the community would gather to celebrate and validate the creation of the park and to memorialize those past heroes who were part of the founding of the park.<sup>9</sup>

The historical documentation of the creation of Chicano Park began on April 22, 1970, and continues this today, as artists sang the story, painted the history, recited individual narratives and danced the struggle. Poets created poetry and lyricists/musicians created *corridos*<sup>10</sup> (historical narrative songs) citing the story of the Chicano Park “Take Over.” Dancers choreographed dances and performance artists celebrated Chicano Park. Artists came from far and near painting Chicano history and specifically the history of the Chicano Park “Take Over” and idolizing those that were willing to sacrifice their lives for the park.

The establishment of the National Historic Preservation Act in 1966 expanded the preservation movement from focusing on the preservation of old buildings to include the

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<sup>8</sup> William J. Murtagh, *Keeping Time The History and Theory of Preservation in America* (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2006), xvii.

<sup>9</sup> The Chicano Park Murals reflect in visual documentation many of the Chicano Park founders, e.g., the late Jose Eligio Gomez on pillar#46, the late Laura Rodriguez #60 and the Chicano Park “Take Over” depicting Mario Solis referred to as our “Chicano Paul Revere” as a Mayan Runner # 37.

<sup>10</sup> Popular narrative song, or ballad, documenting public history

recognition of architecture, design and aesthetics and historic and cultural values. It further expanded the preservation of buildings and landmarks to include areas and districts that are of value to the community. The thinking leading up to the implementation of the National Historic Preservation Act encouraged extensive focus on economic conditions and tax policies in a solid effort to preserve the heritage of the nation. The Act created the National Register of Historic Places, recognized as the National Register. The National Register is the Nation's official list of cultural resources worthy of preservation.<sup>11</sup>

The process for listing a site on the National Register of Historic Places is quite extensive. It includes an in-depth analysis to determine a structure's historical and architectural significance, but also assesses other factors such as integrity, evaluation of significances, exceptional importance, and thematic/historic content considerations enhancing the narrative context. The historical and architectural significance of a structure falls between two different perspectives: historical or cultural importance and architectural value. Either perspective constitutes a contributing factor in determining the significance of a structure or a combination of both perspectives provides additional worth to the overall significance. The National Register's Criteria for Evaluations lists four standards to determine the historic significance of a property.<sup>12</sup> The criteria are:

- *The property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of American history.*
- *The property is associated with the life of a significant person in the American past.*

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.nationalregisterofhistoricplaces.com/>

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb22/nrb//\\_XIII.htm](http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb22/nrb//_XIII.htm)  
[http://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb15/nrb15\\_2.htm](http://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb15/nrb15_2.htm)



- *The property embodies distinctive features of a type, period, method of construction, or high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.*
- *The property and its site yield, or are likely to yield, important information in history or prehistory.*<sup>13</sup>

In the analysis of Chicano Park and Chicano Park Murals for listing on the National Register it appears that they are eligible based on criteria one. Chicano Park and the Chicano Park Murals are associated with an event, the “Take Over” of the land that became the Park. The act of the community taking over the land has contributed significantly to the broad patterns of the local history of San Diego. The community’s seizing of the land also correlates to the broader patterns of Chicano social history in the United States during the 1960’s and 1970’s. This is recognized as the Chicano Civil Rights Era. From the community of Logan Heights it was an act of self determination. Long time residents such as Laura Rodriguez, an elder turned community activist, Angie Avila, social worker, organizer, activist and strategist, Jose Gomez, a community activist, Josie Talamantez, a resident, community college student and activist, Diane Bolivar, long time resident, student, and community activist, and others declared that a park was in the best interest of the community.<sup>14</sup> The “Take Over” constitutes significance at the local level as a defining moment in the local history of San Diego and was determined so by the San Diego Historic Board in 1980, only ten years after the establishment of the park. The California State Historic Preservation Officer concurred in January 1997.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<http://www.achp.gov/nrcriteria.html>

Norman Tyler, Ted J. Ligibel, Ilene R. Tyler, “*Historic Preservation: An Introduction to its History, Principles and Practice*” (New York \* London : W.W. Norton & Company, 2009),p 134.

<sup>14</sup> Marilyn Mulford, Mario Barrera, “Chicano Park” video documentary (Berkeley: Red Bird Film, 1988)

<sup>15</sup> Cherilyn E. Widell, CA. SHPO to Chris White, Chief, Environmental Analysis Branch “B” Ca. Dept of Transportation, January 11, 1997, stored at the Ca. State Historic Preservation Office in Sacramento, Ca.

Additional information that supports the historical significance of Chicano Park and the Chicano Park Murals fall within criteria 3 and 4 mentioned above. The Chicano Park Murals maintain high artistic value and represent a distinctive time period in art history recognized as Chicano Art reflective of the Chicano Movement—mid 1960’s through the 1980’s (also referenced as the Chicano Civil Rights era.) Chicano Art is rooted in resistance and reflected in muralism and serigraph posters. Muralism gained international attention in the mid 1930’s with the post-revolutionary works of the Mexican Masters Diego Rivera, Jose Orozco, and David Siqueiros. They created their work for the public in public settings and not in galleries to be owned by a few. Chicano artists of the Chicano Movement era, following in the traditions of the Mexican masters, used the arts to tell the story of the Chicano struggle for basic civil rights, depicting the story of discrimination, segregation, and lack of access to education and services. They painted Chicano history. In the 1970’s Chicano artists painted on buildings, walls, neighborhood and community centers, businesses, and on bridge pillars. They created some of the first public works of art that led, in some cities, to a public arts policy.<sup>16</sup>

In preparing a nomination to the National Register, an essential element a property needs for determining historic significance is *integrity*. This element carries such importance that the National Register program has identified seven factors to be considered when determining the significance of a structure:

- *Location*
- *Design*
- *Setting*
- *Materials*

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<sup>16</sup> RCAF artist Armando Cid’s 1976 public art tile mosaic murals in Sacramento, Ca. were the first commissioned art that set the precedence for a 2% ordinance that allocated public funds from community development public projects for art and lead to the establishment of the Sacramento Metropolitan Arts Commission.

➤ *Workmanship*

➤ *Feeling*

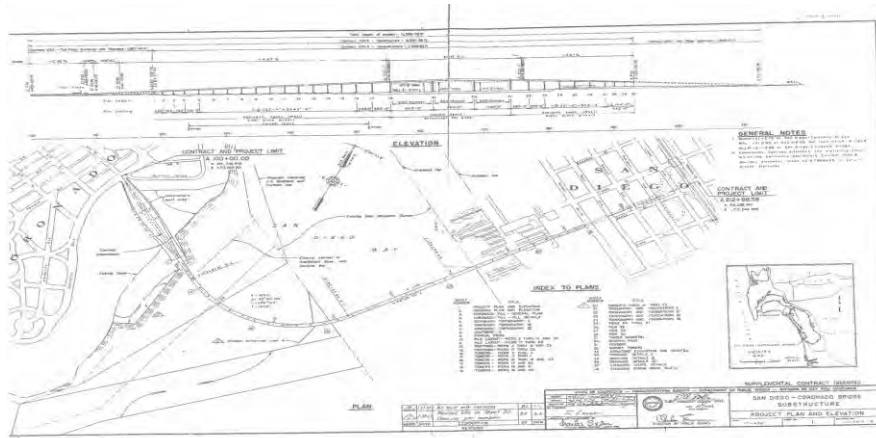
➤ *Association*

In the case of Chicano Park and the Chicano Park Murals the location is significant, as Logan Heights was the first land development and the oldest neighborhood in San Diego, established in the 1880's. After the turn of the century the railroad and the automotive industry paved the way for further real estate development that did not demand closeness to employment. Logan Heights, because of its proximity to the fishing and lumber industries and discriminatory housing covenants, became the home to San Diego's Chicano and African American citizens.<sup>17</sup>

The section of Logan Heights affectionately referred to as *Barrio* Logan is where the majority of the Chicanos resided. Geographically it is located in the North West section of the community. In the late 1950's through the end of the 1960's urban renewal and transportation public policy left *Barrio* Logan bisected by Interstate 5 traveling from South to North and then quartered as the San Diego-Coronado Bay Bridge projected East to West off of Interstate 5. With the proposition of the establishment of a California Highway Patrol station in 1970 on the site that the community had identified for a future park the community created local history by standing up in defiance to the State of California and the City of San Diego to occupy the land and create their own park.

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<sup>17</sup> Leroy E. Harris, *The Other Side of the Freeway: A Study of Settlement Patterns of Negroes and Mexican Americans in San Diego, California* (Doctor of Arts dissertation, Carnegie-Mellon University, 1974), pp. 165-180. Alvena Suhl, *The Historical Geography of San Diego County*. (M.A. Thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1927) P70.



**Figure 1 Chicano Park in San Diego, California**

The design of the park is in the style that the community demanded that reflected the indigenous roots of the Americas. Within the design of the park there is an Aztec kiosk dance pavilion, sculpture and indigenous plant gardens, along with over 100 brightly painted murals on the bridge approach ramps and support pillars. Visually the park is stimulating, unique, and significant.

The setting and the workmanship of Chicano Park and the Chicano Park Murals are critically important to recognize. The pillars on which the murals are created are the canvas on which many local and internationally recognized artists painted. The Royal Chicano Air Force, an internationally recognized artist's collective (Jose Montoya, Esteban Villa, Ricardo Favela, Armando Cid, Juanishi Orosco, Rudy Cuellar, Louie "the foot" Gonzales, Celia Rodriguez, Irma Barbosa etc...) based in Sacramento painted on several of the pillars and approach ramps. Internationally and academically recognized Rupert Garcia (Stanford University professor) directed the painting of the Mexican Masters and other influential Chicano public artists such as Gilbert "Magu" Lujan, (of the legendary East Los Angeles Chicano artist collective "Los four"), Victor Ochoa, Guillermo Aranda, Salvador Torres, Guillermo Rossette, and Mario Torero (original founders of the San Diego Toltecas en Aztlan), Yolanda Lopez (San Francisco Chicana

feminist artist), Michael Schnorr (original member of the Border Arts Workshop), Susan Yamagata, and others are all represented. Following the precedent set by the Mexican Masters, the Chicano artists mentioned are all recognized for contributing their arts talent for the people and not for the few during the height of the Chicano Art Movement and up to the present day. The Chicano Park Murals continue to grow in numbers telling the history of the struggles of the Chicano people in the Americas.

The feeling of the site is evident during the annual celebration of the founding of Chicano Park. The community comes to celebrate and validate their efforts at self determination in defining their needs in the throes of adversity. The community is represented by the local residents and supporters from throughout the Southwest and beyond. There have been local, state and national filmmakers, as well as those from Europe, attending to get a glimpse of the beauty and the community ambient. There are people from all walks of life in attendance, blue collar, white collar, academics, as well as local politicians and civic leaders. The feeling of success continues to permeate within the environment as old acquaintances rekindle friendships and new faces light up with pride.

The integrity of a property includes the element of association with an important historic event or person and a historic property. Chicano Park is associated with the Chicano Civil Rights era. It was established during the height of the Chicano Civil Rights Movement in 1970. Other events that coincide with founding of Chicano Park and the Chicano Civil Rights Movement include the “Occupation” of San Diego’s *Old Neighbor*—Neighborhood House Association—the first settlement house west of the Mississippi (now recognized as the Chicano Health Center one block away from Chicano Park) and the founding of *El Centro Cultural de la Raza*—the only Chicano/Indigenous art and cultural center in San Diego’s Balboa Park. Many of

the same individuals involved in the establishment of Chicano Park were also involved in the above mentioned events.

Within each historical and architectural evaluation criteria used by the National Park Service to determine the historical significance there are four other attributes that can be applied to each of the above mentioned criteria—age, style, unaltered, and/or historical. Any of these four factors can increase or decrease the level of historical significance.<sup>18</sup>

The age rule maintains that a historical structure must be fifty years old or older, unless it meets additional criteria rendering it exceptional through historical significance or architectural design. This rule is the focal point of discussion that historians today are having over the “recent past” movement. Historians, at opposite ends of the same dichotomy, are grappling with what to do with the large number of modern-era post World War II structures, less than 50 years of age that represent the mid twentieth century era, such as shopping malls, fast-food restaurants, and suburban developments that are found throughout the world and the United States. The discussion focuses on identifying and preserving the most outstanding of these modern-era structures that are rapidly disappearing to more energy efficient structures and sustainable designs.<sup>19</sup>

The “recent past” movement is important in the case of Chicano Park Murals. Many murals were painted during the height of the Chicano Civil Rights movement, less than 50 years ago, with many more being painted annually. The founders of Chicano Park foresaw the murals being painted on the pillars “All The Way to the Bay.”<sup>20</sup> Today Chicano Park has more than 100

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<sup>18</sup> Norman Tyler, Ted J. Ligibel, Ilene R. Tyler, *Historic Preservation: An Introduction to its History, Principles and Practice* (New York \* London : W.W. Norton & Company, 2009),p138-139.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p 144.

<sup>20</sup> From 1970 to 1987 the Logan Heights community fought for Chicano Park to be extended “All The Way To The Bay” a slogan that contributed towards the development of a small park on the San Diego Bay. After close to 50 years the Logan Heights community had access to the bay again.

murals painted on the pillars and bridge ramps. As the current “Recent Past” movement focuses on the conservation of buildings, sites, and neighborhoods of the post-World War II era, Chicano Park and the Chicano Park Murals represent the conservation of the history of a Chicano neighborhood and a celebration of that community’s right to define their own existence. The creation of Chicano Park and the Chicano Park Murals represent an era in which Chicanos across the Southwestern United States were demanding their civil rights. The cultural resources, Chicano Park and the Chicano Park Murals, must be preserved and protected especially in light of encroaching gentrification and the potential development of a new football sports complex.<sup>21</sup>

Thematic/historic context is another critical element to be considered in determining historic significance. According to Norman Tyler, “*Historic context* refers to the cultural situation through which a property was created, including its subsequent evolution...historians...have traditionally used the themes and concepts process to determine the cultural significance of the subject of their research.”<sup>22</sup> Utilizing this consideration, the designation process becomes stronger when set within the context of larger trends. This framework was first adopted in 1936 by the National Park Service’s History Programs. The themes concept and the guidelines have been vital to the process over the years and have been revised numerous times. The most recent revision was completed in 1994 to reflect everyday people in daily life within our national, state, and local history.<sup>23</sup>

Chicano Park and the Chicano Park Murals correspond well with the thematic framework of people, time, and place used by the Programs of the National Park and Landmark System. It

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<sup>21</sup> Chicano Park is located within walking distance of the San Diego Convention Center and Padres Stadium, as San Diego debates the development of a new stadium for the infamous Chargers football team, Barrio Logan sits right in the geographic path of “future development” as referred to by Jose Gomez in the Chicano Park video documentary by Mulford and Barrera.

<sup>22</sup> Norman Tyler, Ted J. Ligibel, Ilene R. Tyler, “*Historic Preservation: An Introduction to its History, Principles and Practice*” (New York \* London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009), p144.

<sup>23</sup> Norman Tyler, Ted J. Ligibel, Ilene R. Tyler, “*Historic Preservation: An Introduction to its History, Principles and Practice*” (New York \* London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009), p145.

was the sons and daughters of laborers and field workers defining their own history by resisting the status quo to create their own reality in 1970—that of a park for the community. The establishment of the park came after two decades of neglect and neighborhood annihilation by the San Diego political leaders and state and national transportation policies. During the 1950's and 1960's more than 5,200 homes were destroyed by the development of Interstate 5 and the San Diego-Coronado Bay Bridge, which bisected and dissected the self contained neighborhood of Barrio Logan.<sup>24</sup> Adding further insult to injury, during this same timeframe the City of San Diego had also rezoned the area from residential to light industry, infusing the Barrio with auto junk yards, dismantlers and reassembling yards interspersed between houses, elementary schools, community centers, tortilla shops, restaurants, and small mom-and-pop grocery stores.

The remaining residents of Barrio Logan, trying to redefine the neighborhood and to maintain a sense of dignity, began meeting with City officials to request the development of a park. The requests fell on deaf ears, instead of a park on the community's targeted parcel of land, a California Highway Patrol Station and parking lot was being built. That was the final blow that sent the community into a state of panic. It was a decisive moment when older long-time residents joined their children and neighbors' children by forming a human chain around the construction workers, stopping the State of California and the City of San Diego from building the proposed Highway Patrol station. The community "Take Over" of the land lasted twelve days before an agreement was reached to support the development of Chicano Park. This was a turning point in local history for all involved.

Within the benchmarks used by the National Park and Landmark Service there are eight thematic categories that provide a systematic process for looking at the patterns of the country's

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<sup>24</sup> Peter Row, "Emerging Enclave: Primarily Chicano Area Has Rich History Rooted in Struggle", *San Diego Union Tribune*, Sunday August 29, 2010



history. This structure provides an in-depth filter pertinent for historic preservation consideration when assessing where we, as a country, have been and where we are going. This analysis is referred to as a historic context statement and is required in most National Register of Historic Places and National Historic Landmark nominations. There are eight thematic categories to be considered.

1. Peopling Places: examining human population movement and change; dealing with demographic shifts in American society, including family structure, lifestyle, gender issues, migration, and ethnicity.

The “Take Over” of Chicano Park and the creation of the Chicano Park Murals reflect a change in attitude by the Chicano community of Barrio Logan and their relationship to the broader community of the City of San Diego. This change reflected the ethnic and cultural demographics of the area. After years of invisibility, discrimination, and segregated housing, the residents of Logan Heights stood up for themselves and took over a small parcel of land to create a park on the first nationwide celebration of *Earth Day*.

2. Creating Social Institutions and Movements: Social institutions, associations, and organizations, play a role in shaping society.

The Chicano Park Steering Committee was formally established to address the concerns of the community and to specifically negotiate on behalf of Chicano Park. Other organizations playing a significant role in the creation of Chicano Park and the Chicano Park murals included M.E.CH.A (*Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano en Aztlan*), a Chicano student organization, the Chicano Federation, a coalition service organizations, the Centro Familiar, a Catholic social service agency, the Brown Berets, a national activist group of Chicanos concerned with civil rights issues, and Toltecas en Aztlan, a group of artists and cultural preservationists.

### 3. Expressing Cultural Values: Cultural expressions and their associations.

The annual Chicano Park Celebration includes—music, dance, theater, art, literature/poetry, as well as community leaders speaking on Chicano Park, the Chicano Park Murals and other social justice issues. The painting of the Chicano Park Murals, which began in 1974 with the first mural marathon, has produced more than 100 murals to date. The murals express the historical and cultural, concepts, themes and values of Chicano and Indigenous people of the Americas. The Chicano artists that painted murals in Chicano Park have been identified as trailblazers of the California Chicano art movement.

### 4. Shaping the Political Landscape: Including federal, state, local and tribal institutions politically active and shaping public policy.

The establishment of Chicano Park became a defining moment in the history of San Diego, but especially for the Chicano people from Logan Heights. Chicano Park and the Chicano Park Murals represented the timeframe of the Chicano Civil Rights era. During this period of history public policy was being shaped on many levels. Most significant was the impact that Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerta, and the United Farm Workers (UFW) had on agri-business (statewide and nationally), specifically the right for field workers to organize to create a union to negotiate on their behalf. The Royal Chicano Air Force (RCAF), an internationally known artist collective based in Sacramento that also included educators, local and statewide politicians, community organizers, used the arts—visual, literary & performing arts—to educate the masses on social injustice issues endured by Chicano and Indigenous peoples. Through their talents they were impacting local and statewide policies that still have lasting effect.<sup>25</sup> In San Diego, the Toltecas

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<sup>25</sup> They were recognized as the arts warriors working closely with the UFW creating much of the visual propaganda and working in tandem on many of the negotiating teams. Their public art in the City of Sacramento was the precedent for a 2% law for city construction and development and for the establishment of the local arts agency to oversee arts policy.

En Aztlan and the Congreso de Artistas Chicanos en Aztlan, and other artists' collectives were also using the arts as a strategic method of teaching and pointing out social and political issues. The Brown Berets, during this timeframe, contributed towards changing public policy that ignored and/or violated the rights of Chicano citizens of the United States. These and other Chicano activist organizations all contributed towards the founding of Chicano Park and the Chicano Park Murals.

5. Developing the American Economy: Sites that represent points in our economic history. Barrio Logan represented a thriving neighborhood that was rich in history, culture, and local commerce representing Chicano and non-Chicano business owners. On the exact same geographic site that Chicano Park is situated there were homes, apartments, a restaurant, and a night club where the local community lived, ate and celebrated cultural entertainment—music, dance and spirits. Although the site would not represent a point in the nation's economic history, it was part of the economic sector valued by the residents of Logan Heights.

6. Expanding Science and Technology: focusing on science, physical science, the social sciences and medicine.

Logan Heights experienced urban renewal and national transportation policies in the worst possible way; that resulted in a dismantling process that rendered the neighborhood powerless during a time when public comment was not mandatory. The California Department of Transportation defined the route of Interstate 5 traveling South to North to bisect the Logan Heights community starting in the late 1950's through the 1960's with the connecting ramps between Interstate 5 and the San Diego-Coronado Bay Bridge. Through urban renewal the neighborhood was rezoned to include light industry that wrecked havoc on its residents.

This theme specifically focuses on experimentation and invention, technological applications, scientific thought and theory, and effects on lifestyle and health. The freeways and bridges of the era fit the category; specifically the San Diego-Coronado Bay bridge, it was elegantly designed by principal architect Robert Mosher. It is 11,179 (2.1 miles) long and ascends at a 4.67 percent grade before curving 80 degrees east and has a span that reaches a maximum height of 200 feet. At the time that it was built it had the longest box girder in the world (holding this distinction until it was surpassed in 2008 by a bridge built in Chonquin, China.) The bridge is not a straight connection between San Diego and Coronado, but rather it has a curve. In addition, the bridge is the third largest orthogonal box in the country. In 1970, only one year after it was completed, it won the Most Beautiful Bridge award from the American Institute of Steel Construction.<sup>26</sup>

The Chicano Park Murals contributed to the well-being of the community. The 1978 President's Commission on Mental Health documents the positive impact of the arts and culture has on the Chicano community.<sup>27</sup> The murals are painted on the pillars, approach ramps and abutments of the San Diego-Coronado Bay Bridge; they represent the canvases for the murals. The bridge is a contributing factor in the nomination of Chicano Park and the Chicano Park Murals to the National Register.

7. Transforming the Environment: Our environment has become a human artifact as we have continued to affect it through our continued settlement.

The community of Logan Heights established the Chicano Park as a cultural resource. After the near total destruction of the neighborhood a park was requested to maintain a sense of normality.

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<sup>26</sup> <http://www.coronado.ca.us/egov/docs/1206671591334.htm> <http://www.coronadosandiego.com/coronado-bridge.php> <http://www.asbi-assoc.org/projects/project.cfm?articleID=4BB4CE9B-F1F6-B13E-8C4C3F0AB1CE483F&categoryIDs=44A57F74-F1F6-B13E-81940961706FF0A9&type=search&searchString=&categorySubIDs=&type=search>

<sup>27</sup> 1978—4-volume Report to the President from the President's Commission on Mental Health

When the request fell on deaf ears the residents took it upon themselves to build their own park. The Chicano community locally and from throughout the Southwest revere and adore the park. One example is Lincoln Park in El Paso, Texas. This park was modeled in the image of Chicano Park—a park built under a freeway with murals painted on the pillars.<sup>28</sup> Chicano Park artist Felipe Adame was asked to paint the first mural on the pillars under the Spaghetti Bowl by Lincoln Center in 1983.

8. Changing Role of the United States in the World Community: Exploring diplomacy, trade, cultural exchange, security and defense, expansionism, imperialism, etc...looking at our relationship with indigenous and native populations and international community's investigating diplomatic policies throughout history and the individuals involved with creating and administering them.

The Logan Heights community at one time had a self contained population of over 20,000 that dwindled to 5,000 after the area was rezoned changing it from residential to light industry and public policy targeted it as the route of freeways and bridges. The establishment of Chicano Park became a defining moment in the history of the City of San Diego. After years of discrimination and neglect the City now needed to look at its relationship with its Chicano residents/citizens. It was a defining moment for the City of San Diego and the Chicano residents of Logan Heights.

The timing for the nomination of Chicano Park and the Chicano Park Murals to the National Trust is critical to ensure the preservation of these significant cultural resources. The Park and the Murals are located within walking distance to the San Diego Convention Center, Petco Park, and the Downtown Gas Lamp district. There has been on-going discussion of building a new football stadium for the San Diego Chargers and the constant focus on more

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<sup>28</sup> [http://www.convictedartist.com/lincoln\\_park\\_day\\_car\\_show.html](http://www.convictedartist.com/lincoln_park_day_car_show.html)

tourist development. Barrio Logan, Chicano Park, the Chicano Park Murals and what is left of the residential housing are situated in the path of further commercial development.

Chicano Park and the Chicano Park Murals appear eligible under Criteria A at the local level of significance due to their association of the Chicano Civil Rights era and through events that have made a significant impact of the broader patterns of the City of San Diego's political and social history. The nomination process is quite extensive and requires in-depth research utilizing the National Registers criteria for evaluation, the seven factors that define the historical significance of integrity, and historic themes and context to determine the cultural significance for the subject of the research. This chapter utilized the reference criteria to articulate the significance of Chicano Park and the Chicano Park Murals.

## CHAPTER 2

### CHICANO HISTORY: RACISM, DISCRIMINATION, SEGREGATION AND THE “TAKE OVER” OF CHICANO PARK AND THE CREATION OF THE CHICANO PARK MURALS

The story of the Chicano Park “take over” and creation of the Chicano Park Murals does not reside in a vacuum. In a historical sense one could say its story is a product of the times. On April 22, 1970 members of the community of Logan Heights, a San Diego, California neighborhood, stood up for themselves and claimed their right to have their voices heard. No longer willing to endure the disrespect and injustices experienced on an on-going basis, they claimed and occupied a parcel of land for a park for their children. The “take over” of Chicano Park occurred during turbulent times, as the 1960’s and 1970’s were a time of social, political and civil unrest. The time frame is recognized as the civil rights era and, like African Americans before them, Chicanos were claiming their rights as equal citizens. Yet the history of Chicanos does not begin during these turbulent times. The history of Chicanos officially began when northern Mexico was ceded to the United States in 1848 by the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. It was at this point in time that the border crossed Mexico and Mexicans became Chicanos, invisible citizens of the United States, subject to racism, discrimination and segregation.<sup>29</sup>

As Americans moved westward in search of new territories the vast wealth of Mexican land was enticing. Under the pretense of Manifest Destiny, Americans believed it their inalienable right to “drive out the wilderness and establish civilization.”<sup>30</sup> The rapid expansion

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<sup>29</sup> Within the Chicano community there is a saying, “we didn’t cross the border the border crossed us” referring to Mexicans left in the United States after the signing the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. This statement is in reference to a community proverb.

<sup>30</sup> John O’Sullivan, <http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-manifest-destiny.htm>

west began with the annexation of Texas and spread to California validating the “from sea to shining sea” propaganda that contributed toward the immediate exploitation of the Western half of the North American continent.<sup>31</sup>

The United States war with Mexico (1846-1848) ended with signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. In one swoop the United States seized Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Upper California, and parts of Nevada, Utah, Wyoming, and Colorado from Mexico. Though the Treaty theoretically guaranteed Chicanos living in the newly occupied United States protection of property and civil rights, the United States Senate ratified the treaty on March 10, 1848 deleting Article X that guaranteed the protection of Mexican land grants.<sup>32</sup> Land owning Mexicans of Northern Mexico became landless, oppressed, discriminated-against second class Chicano citizens in the newly occupied United States territory.

California during this time period was combating with its own lawlessness, as thirty three rebel Americans stormed Sonoma and annexed California from Mexico, declaring it an independent republic in 1846. This incident and the discovery of gold in 1848 made California more appealing to explore and exploit. The non-native population of California prior to 1848 was approximately 15,000, of which Mexicans made up approximately 6,000. By 1850 the non-native population rose to 100,000 most arriving by boat or coming over land from the eastern United States. In 1860 the census counted this population at 360,000.<sup>33</sup>

During the early years of California statehood, a rash of discriminatory laws were enacted that were targeted toward Chicanos. The Foreign Miners Tax law of 1850 applied a fee of \$20 per month to immigrants of Asian, Mexican and Latin America decent, including California born Chicanos guaranteed citizenship through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. The anti-vagrancy

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/guadalupe-hidalgo/>

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.census.gov/dmd/www/resapport/states/california.pdf> ;



law that became known as the Greaser law and the 1855 act negating constitutional requirements that all laws be translated into Spanish demonstrate the attitude toward Mexicans in California.<sup>34</sup>

The Anglo population grew at an alarming rate in California between 1850 through the end of the nineteenth century, while the Chicano population remained relatively consistent. The loss of land by changes in laws, bureaucratic loopholes, and implementation of squatter's rights relegated Chicano landowners to the lower echelons of California citizenry. With the loss of their land holdings went their opportunity for self-sufficiency. The loss of jobs by design and/or through discrimination further eroded the socio-economic system and from the 1890's through the 1930's Chicanos existed by living close to poverty on menial unskilled labor employment.<sup>35</sup>

With inadequate resources and the loss of land and Anglo-imposed segregated restrictive covenants on real estate, Chicanos had limited access as to where they could reside. *Barrios* and/or *colonias* (Spanish speaking neighborhoods) existed out of necessity and desire as Chicanos were unwanted in Anglo segregated areas and because extended families and friends found comfort in the company of each other. The process of *barrioization* is not to be viewed as entirely a negative experience and proves to be one of the attributes that contributed to the preservation of Chicano cultural heritage. Ricardo Griswold del Castillo in his book, *La Raza Hispano Americana* concludes on a *Barrio* observation:

The *Barrio* gave identity and a feeling of being at home for the dispossessed and poor. It was a place, a traditional place, that offered some security from the city's social and economic turmoil...In a sense the creation of the *Barrio* was a means of cultural survival. Proximity of residence reinforced the language, religion, and social habits of Chicanos and thus insured the continuation of their distinctive culture.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Jose Pitti, Antonia Castañeda, Carlos Cortes, *Five Views An Ethnic Sites Survey for California*, (California Department of Parks and Recreation, Sacramento, Ca., December 1988) pg 210

<sup>35</sup> Ibid pg 210-211.

<sup>36</sup> Ricardo A. Griswold del Castillo, *La Raza Hispano Americana: The Emergence of an Urban Culture among the Spanish Speaking of Los Angeles, 1850-1880*, Ph.D. dissertation, (University of California, Los Angeles, 1974) page 255.

The Chicano population grew tremendously in the first three decades of the twentieth century due to war and civil unrest in Mexico and the expansion of United States industries such as agriculture, canneries, mining, and railroads. The influx of Mexican immigrants was welcomed by the business industries primarily because they provided cheap labor for the profit and growth of the local and regional communities. Labor was needed and Mexicans came to work despite the fact that they were relegated to menial unskilled/semi-skilled jobs and had little hope for upward mobility. Chicanos constituted up to two-thirds of the workforce in most of these industries in the 1920's.<sup>37</sup> They generally settled throughout the southwest; however, by 1930 more than thirty percent of Mexican-born United States residents lived in California, working in every possible industry.<sup>38</sup>

A growing concern in the United States between 1890's and the 1930's was the concept of the American identity. Though the concept had existed since the founding of United States independence, the mass influx of Southern and Western Europeans, in the last part of the nineteenth century, was the impetus of the Anglo Saxon being considered the true American identity. This concept led the way for educational policy focusing on English and American cultural norms as the strategy of assimilation.

The Americanization movement took a firm root in the second decade of the twentieth century with the establishment of Settlement Houses providing English and lifestyle classes for immigrants. Frank Van Nuys, in his book, *Americanizing the West: Race, Immigrants, and Citizenship, 1890-1930*, discusses racism and social control agendas as the impetus of the Americanization efforts. He notes that Americanizers initially believed that immigrants would adopt American values, life styles and adopt the English language naturally. As immigrant

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<sup>37</sup> Jose Pitti, Antonia Castañeda, Carlos Cortes, *Five Views An Ethnic Sites Survey for California*, (California Department of Parks and Recreation, Sacramento, Ca.) page 210.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

communities held steadfast to their own language and cultural values, many of the Americanizers placed their faith in the socialization process transferred through the education system as the preferred method of transforming immigrants into productive citizens.

In 1914 the settlement house called Neighborhood House was established in San Diego, geographically situated in the heart of the *Barrio* and the tuna industry where the majority of the Chicano community lived and worked. Neighborhood House Americanization programs provided services and classes to the community. Many settlement houses' goal was to "Americanize" immigrants through teaching English and American customs. Some of these programs were unsuccessful in Chicano communities, primarily because they did not deal with the hard economic reality faced by Chicanos during this time period. Interestingly enough the San Diego Chicano community participated fully in the services being provided Neighborhood House (public showers, home economics classes, community cultural events, English and citizenship classes, a fresh milk station, day nursery—precursor to kindergarten classes, medical clinic services providing free immunization shots, cultural events, to name just a few) not because they wanted to assimilate but because they were experiencing hard economic times and the services were either free or offered at a low cost.<sup>39</sup> The community embraced Neighborhood House because it was a central gathering place of services and acted in the capacity as the first community cultural center in Logan Heights.

Most of the settlement house resident workers believed in the Americanization concept for Chicanos, as their attitudes toward Chicanos were based on negative stereotypes of

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<sup>39</sup> Richard Griswold del Castillo, Isidro Ortiz & Rosalinda Gonzalez; "Mexican and Chicano History, La Lucha: The Beginnings of the Struggle, 1920-1930's—What was the Neighborhood House?" (San Diego State: San Diego Mexican and Chicano History, 2000) found on-line at <http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/dept/mas/chicanohistory/chapter07/c07s03.html>

“Mexicans being lazy and liars.”<sup>40</sup> The perspective of resident worker, Helen Marston Beardsley, of Mexican people was drastically altered by her experience of working at Neighborhood House from 1917 through 1920.<sup>41</sup> She was a native San Diegan from an affluent family and admitted, that she “grew up thinking that all Mexicans were lazy people with a care free philosophy that put off doing everything until tomorrow.” In her article, “Mexican Traits,” that appeared in the August 1920 edition of *Survey* magazine, the premier journal of social work in America, she tried to counter Anglo preconceptions that found Mexicans to be lazy thieves and liars:

...the women of our neighborhood carry the double burden of home with its many babies and of work in the fish canneries, whither they go, day or night, at the sound of the whistles... In regard to Mexican men and boys she noted their work in the district’s industries “when these plants are in operation, and some of them work for desperately long stretches...The idling which we so resent is sometimes merely the result of spurts of night work, followed by a few hours of sleep in the adjacent lumber yards.”<sup>42</sup>

Ms. Marston Beardsley was the exception among the Neighborhood House resident workers.<sup>43</sup>

The ebb and flow of Mexicans from Mexico only added to the racial discrimination faced by Chicanos. During the Great Depression the government’s solution to the shrinking job market was the institution of Repatriation Programs. Mexicans were exploited and considered an expendable workforce and no longer considered the backbone of California’s agricultural and other employment industry sectors in need of unskilled or semi-skilled labors. Over one million people of Mexican descent were either forced or pressured to leave the country, approximately

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<sup>40</sup> Kyle E. Ciana, “Revelations of a Reformer: Helen D. Marston Beardsly and Progressive Social Activism” [www.sandiegohistory.org/journal/v50-3/beardsley.pdf](http://www.sandiegohistory.org/journal/v50-3/beardsley.pdf)

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. Years later in an interview regarding the history of San Diego’s Neighborhood House, Helen Marston “spoke with disdain” of those volunteers and staff dedicated to the Americanization of Mexicans, and vehemently separated herself from their company. Instead, Marston proudly recounted the time settlement workers cared for the Mexican twin babies brought to the settlement by their father after their mother had abandoned them. That racial ethnic integration and acceptance was the kind of incident Marston hoped her friends *and* critics would remember. Shelton, “The Neighborhood House of San Diego,” 55, 60. (Point of Clarification, elder/activist Laura Rodriguez, in conversation with Josie S. Talamantez in 1992, 19 was one of children that Marston was referring to, however the mother did not leave she had died and Laura’s father was blind.)

<sup>42</sup> Helen D. Marston, “Mexican Traits,” *Survey* 44 (August 2, 1920), 562.

<sup>43</sup> Kyle E. Ciana, “Revelations of a Reformer: Helen D. Marston Beardsly and Progressive Social Activism” [www.sandiegohistory.org/journal/v50-3/beardsley.pdf](http://www.sandiegohistory.org/journal/v50-3/beardsley.pdf)

60% of those were United States born citizens, violating their basic civil liberties and constitutional rights.<sup>44</sup>

During the first half of the twentieth century racism, discrimination, and segregation remained a constant factor. Segregated schools for Chicano children perpetuated their marginal status throughout the Southwest. In response to this ostracism one Chicano community in San Diego County stood up to fight for the educational rights of their children. Locked out of their school, seventy-five Chicano children went home rather than to a separate building that was built to segregate them from the white children after the school board had approved an Americanization school for them.<sup>45</sup> The 1931 case of *Roberto Alvarez vs the Board of Trustees of Lemon Grove School District*, referred to as the “Lemon Grove Incident” was the first successful desegregation court decision in the history of the United States. Though there was access to equal education in Lemon Grove for Chicano children, schools in San Diego City’s Logan Heights neighborhood remained subject to segregation.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Johnson, Kevin R., "The Forgotten "Repatriation" of Persons of Mexican Ancestry and Lessons for the "War on Terror"" (*Pace Law Review*. Volume 26: Fall 2005 Number 1 *The Fifteenth Annual Dyson Distinguished Lecture*) <http://digitalcommons.pace.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1147&context=plr> quoting Francisco E. Balderrama & Raymond Rodriguez, *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930's* (University of New Mexico Press: 1995) pg 21-22

Manuel H. Cid, Interview by Josie S. Talamantez, (1998; Sacramento, Ca.) discusses his family of six U.S. born citizens and his parents being forced to repatriate to Mexico. He was 16 years old and new nothing of Mexico. He considered himself American and not Mexican. He and his two brothers returned in 1943 to honorably serve in World War II, one of brothers died in the line of duty.

<sup>45</sup> Robert R. Alvarez, Jr., "The Lemon Grove Incident The Nation's First Successful Desegregation Court Case" *The Journal of San Diego History* (Spring: 1986) 32, Number 2. Meyer Weinberg states, "...in 1928, San Bernardino had sixteen such schools, Orange County fourteen, Los Angeles County ten, Imperial eight, Kern eight, Ventura four, Riverside two and Santa Barbara two" in Meyer Weinberg, *A Chance to Learn* (Boston: Cambridge University Press, 1977). pp. 155-165. Paul Taylor writing in 1927 states, that in the Imperial Valley, California, Mexican children made up one-third of the population and were separated into Americanization and opportunity classes. "Segregation" he stated "occurs in every town of the Imperial Valley, California," *University of California Publications in Economics, Volume VI, No. 1*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1928) p. 83. Thomas Carter in reviewing the 1930 situation for Mexican children states "...segregation especially in the early grades was regularly recommended and commonly established..." Thomas Carter, *Mexican Americans in School: A History of Educational Neglect* (New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1970) p. 11.

<sup>46</sup> Josie S. Talamantez remembers her father telling of his plight in the 1920's at Sherman Elementary School in Logan Heights. While in the third grade he was placed in the “Mexican Ungraded” classes; he successfully argued

In the 1940's *Barrio Logan* remained a segregated community, a self contained enclave unto itself. The local residents prospered economically during World War II as work was abundant in the shipping, steel, fishing and other industries that surrounded the community. In addition, there were community-owned business such as bakeries, grocery stores, restaurants, night clubs, as well as community services; however, the main business enterprises were owned and operated by non-Chicano residents, such as department and furniture stores, community theatres, fish canneries, steel and ship building companies, and military bases.

World War II marked a tipping point for Chicanos. When the call came to serve the country, over 500,000 Spanish surnamed individuals enlisted, earning thirteen Medals of Honor.<sup>47</sup> At the same time that Chicanos were fighting for their country Chicano youth on the home front were being openly and publically attacked and discriminated against because of how they were dressed. Young Chicanos wearing Zoot suits, the latest fashion of the day, were being openly attacked by the soldiers and sailors for looking and dressing differently.<sup>48</sup>

According to the Los Angeles History Almanac, "Mexican-American men were, disproportionately for their population, well represented in the military... many servicemen with no prior experience with Chicanos and Chicano culture resented seeing so many Chicanos socializing in clothing many considered unpatriotic and extravagant in wartime... United States War Production Board said that they (Mexican Zoot Suiters) wasted materials that should be devoted to the World War II war effort..."<sup>49</sup> The Los Angeles newspapers and wartime

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his case to the Principal of the school to be placed back into the "regular" classes with the Anglo children where he felt he would have a better chance to succeed.

<sup>47</sup> The authors father-in-law, a US born citizen who repatriated with his family in the 1930's, walked with his two brothers (also US citizens) from Zacatecas, Mexico, across the Rio Grande to join the army. Manuel H. Cid interviewed by Josie S. Talamantez, December 1998 in Sacramento, California.

<sup>48</sup> Author Josie S. Talamantez recounting conversations from her mother, Sue A. Talamantez regarding the treatment of her cousins and friends in Logan Heights during the Zoot Suit era.

<sup>49</sup> <http://www.laalmanac.com/history/hi07t.htm>

propaganda described Mexicans as aliens who were invading California, never mind the fact that Chicanos had been in California since before statehood. These factors caused much racial tension between Chicanos and whites.<sup>50</sup> Carey McWilliams described the military attitude toward Chicanos in his book *North From Mexico*:

Marching through the streets of downtown Los Angeles, a mob of several thousand soldiers, sailors, and civilians, proceeded to beat up every Zoot Suiter they could find. Pushing its way into the important motion picture theaters, the mob ordered the management to turn on the house lights and then ran up and down the aisles dragging Mexicans out of their seats. Streetcars were halted while Mexicans, and some Filipinos and Negroes, were jerked from their seats, pushed into the streets and beaten with a sadistic frenzy.<sup>51</sup>

In San Diego during the 1940's there were two military bases located along the waterfront, the Marine base was west of the downtown area and the 32<sup>nd</sup> Street Navy base was, and still is, located in Logan Heights. San Diego is considered a military town and young Chicanos wearing Zoot Suits in Logan Heights at this time experienced the same type of racial profiling that was taking place in Los Angeles.<sup>52</sup>

Racism and discrimination faced by Chicanos remained a constant during this timeframe and was overtly, blatantly, and negatively documented in the news media. One case in point was the Los Angeles Sleepy Lagoon case of 1942-43. It became the pinnacle of contention when seventeen Chicano youth were charged with the murder of another Chicano youth. The judge and the prosecution unashamedly publically humiliated and discriminated against the youth and

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Osgerby, Bill (2008). "Understanding the 'Jackpot Market': Media, Marketing, and the Rise of the American Teenager". in Patrick L. Jamieson & Daniel Romer, eds. *The Changing Portrayal of Adolescents in the Media Since 1950*. New York: Oxford University Press US. pp. 31-32.

<sup>50</sup> Solomon, Larry. *Roots of Justice Stories of Organizing in Communities of Color*. New York: Chardon, 1998. Pg 22

<sup>51</sup> Carey McWilliams. *North From Mexico*. Quoted in Richard Griswold del Castillo. The Los Angeles "Zoot Suit Riots" Revisited: *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (Summer, 2000), pp. 367-391.

<sup>52</sup> Author Josie S. Talamantez recounting conversations from her mother, Sue A. Talamantez regarding the treatment of her cousins and friends in Logan Heights during the Zoot Suit era.

denied them their basic human rights of bathing, changing their clothes, or getting haircuts. Even though the case was overturned in 1944, the newspapers sensationalized the trial, encouraging an anti-Mexican atmosphere that perpetuated racist stereotypes of Mexicans being other than law abiding citizens.<sup>53</sup>

The labor needs in United States' industries created the intersection by which Mexicans have been seen as a needed commodity—welcome them when needed and expel them when not needed. The Repatriation program of the 1930's was the quintessential model displacing entire families including many Chicano United States citizens, when the Great Depression hit the country.<sup>54</sup> In 1942 the United States again needed cheap labor, while her men were overseas fighting in World War II, and called upon Mexico to establish the *Bracero* program. The plan for bringing Mexican workers to America through a guest worker program included such provisions as adequate housing and sanitary conditions, freedom from discrimination, and ten percent of wages being set aside in a savings fund payable to the worker upon his return to Mexico. In a few instances, the housing and sanitary conditions were adequate. Mexicans were not free from discrimination and regrettably, none of them saw any of the savings that were withheld from their wages.<sup>55</sup> Between 1942 and 1964 4.6 million Braceros entered the United States.<sup>56</sup>

There were attempts by the State department to end the *Bracero* program in 1946, but employers negotiated its extension well past 1949. In 1951 the program was reconstituted as

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<sup>53</sup> Author Josie S. Talamantez recounting conversations from her mother, Sue A. Talamantez regarding the treatment of her cousins and friends in Logan Heights during the Zoot Suit era.

<sup>54</sup> Philip Martin, *Promise Unfulfilled: Unions, Immigration, and Farm Workers* (Cornell University Press: 2003)

<sup>55</sup> <http://mexicoandamerica.com/LaborPool.html> “The Bracero program ran from 1942 until 1964 when it was discontinued. Attempts were made by the State department to end the Bracero Program in 1946, but employers talked them into extending it until 1949. The program continued past 1949 until it officially ended in 1964. The year in which most Braceros were contracted was 1956 when 445,197 *Braceros* were brought into the United States Government.”

<sup>56</sup> Philip Martin, *Promise Unfulfilled: Unions, Immigration, and Farm Workers* (Cornell University Press: 2003)



farmers argued for the need to maintain cheap labor to work in the agricultural industry. According to Brian F. Smith's *Historical Resources Survey Barrio Logan Community Plan* a large number of immigrants settled in Logan Heights during the era of the *Bracero* program, representing 15% percent of San Diego's Spanish-speaking population.<sup>57</sup> There was also rapid growth in the African American community from 4,143 to 14,904 residents between 1940 and 1950. African American and Mexicans shared their living quarters in Logan Heights as the practice of residential covenants continued to force segregated housing.<sup>58</sup> The African American community successfully challenged racial discrimination and segregation.<sup>59</sup> The records also show that in the mid 1950's, through litigation, all white neighborhoods were opened to people of color.<sup>60</sup> The bonds of housing covenants were finally shattered, at least legally.

*Barrio* Logan remained California's second largest Mexican-American community throughout the 1940's and 50's—home to nearly 20,000 residents. This changed drastically as city zoning laws were changed, shifting Logan Heights from residential to a mixed commercial industry district (referred to as light industry.) The neighborhood immediately experienced an influx of Anglo-owned junkyards and dismantlers. These auto junkyards and auto wrecking centers were set up next to school yards and homes, wherever land was available, creating resentment in the community.

David R. Diaz in his book, *Barrio Urbanism: Chicanos, Planning, and American Cities*, argues that policy trends of planning professionals and developers failed to meet the needs of

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<sup>57</sup> Brian F. Smith, *Historical Resources Survey Barrio Logan Community Plan Area San Diego* (City of San Diego, Planning & Community Investment Community Planning & Urban Form Divisions: September 2009)

<sup>58</sup> <http://www.sandiegonaacp.org/history.htm> *A Brief History of the San Diego NAACP 1917-2007* & Josie S. Talamantez recounting conversations from her mother regarding Dr. Kimbrough, the families dentist and well known African American artist.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid* The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) records indicate that thirty-two legal cases challenging white owned restaurants that discriminated against Blacks and Chicanos were successfully upheld in court.

<sup>60</sup> *ibid*

Chicano communities due to both poverty and racism.<sup>61</sup> Using East Los Angeles, a Chicano section of Los Angeles similar to Logan Heights, he discusses the community's inability to stop the major displacements and social disruptions of urban renewal and freeway constructions, a trend that was happening throughout the southwest targeting Chicano neighborhoods between the 1950's through the 1970's.<sup>62</sup>

Throughout the Southwest, urban *Barrios* proved to be the location of choice for the urban elites who decided where highway routes would be located. Without representation, *Barrios* were effectively attacked by state transportation departments, who had support from the federal highway administration. East Los Angeles suffered the worst from the bureaucratic logic. This *Barrio* had numerous vibrant cohesive neighborhoods that were either eradicated or radically reconstructed with the imposition of five distinct freeway routes.<sup>63</sup>

Raul Homero Villa in his book *Barrio Logos: Space and Place in Urban Chicano*

*Literature and Culture* argues that the effects of landscape, laws, and media are the main points of intercourse and intersection that contribute to the destruction and demolition of the *Barrios*.

He says,

many of the subordinating practices active in contemporary *Barrio* life were already present in nascent form in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. . .three have been historically instrumental in producing the external boundaries of Chicano social space: (1) the physical regulation and constitution of space (via land-use decisions and the built environment); (2) the social control of space (via legal/judicial state apparatuses and police authority); and (3) the ideological control of space (via the interpellation of citizen-subjects through educational and informational apparatuses).<sup>64</sup>

He points out that the concepts Barriozation and Barriology represent the opposite end of the same dichotomy. Barriozation is the formation of residentially and socially segregated Chicano *Barrios* or neighborhoods. *Barriology*, on the other hand, is a "State of Mind" where the cultural practices produced and exercised in the *Barrios* are tended toward positive articulations

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<sup>61</sup> David R. Diaz, *Barrio urbanism: Chicanos, planning and American Cities*, (New York, Routledge: 2005), pg 93,94.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Raul Homero Villa, *Barrio Logos Space and Place in Urban Chicano Literature and Culture*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000) pg5-9

of community consciousness, which contribute to a psychologically and materially sustaining sense of “home” location.<sup>65</sup> This is significant in the case of *Barrio Logan* as many long gone residents continue to feel the connection to the *Barrio* and joined in to support the “Take Over” of the land. Though the *Barrio* is a place that offered a geographical traditional identity, a feeling of being at home, a place that offered some security in the midst of social and economic transition, it was also a place of poverty, crime, illness and despair.

In the early 1960’s federal urban renewal programs and the desire to connect the nation by freeways impacted many low-income Chicano communities, and *Barrio Logan* was no exception. *Barrio Logan* was split in half by the intrusion of Interstate 5 beginning its South-North trek from the Mexican border to Oregon. The construction of Interstate 5 displaced families and businesses and resulted in the destruction of the Logan.

Many *Barrios* and low-income communities in California and across the nation faced the same fate as *Barrio Logan*. In the 1960’s Urban Renewal Projects and Transportation public policy were not subject to NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act), CEQA (California Environmental Quality Act), or the National Uniform Relocation Act, which today helps to protect communities from the potentially devastating and disruptive impacts caused by major improvement projects.<sup>66</sup> Charles Mariano in his memoirs of Merced, California remembers, “One day it was decided there was going to be a freeway coming through...the Old 99 went straight through 16<sup>th</sup> street, where a bustling..... of stores and bars used to be...the New 99 was going to leap the tracks...three blocks into our neighborhood.” He says to his brother after

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Martin D. Rosen; James Fisher, “Chicano Park and the Chicano Park Murals: *Barrio Logan*, City of San Diego, California” *The Public Historian*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (Autumn, 2001), pp 91-111.

witnessing blocks and blocks of demolished houses, “What about all the people inside the houses? Where did they go?”<sup>67</sup>

With the exception of a few geographic sites, there seemed to be little consideration for the human factor while creating freeways across the nation. One story of intervention is worthy of mention here. In 1960 a Tucson, Arizona urban renewal project, the construction of the Butterfield Express, was proposed. In its path was a Mexican Barrio, two surrounding neighborhoods and the quaint downtown area of the city. Within the *Barrio* there was a small shrine that the community recognized as a religious and historic site called *El Tiradito* (the Wishing Shrine.) The community working with Dr. Jim Griffith, folklorist and professor of the University of Arizona, formed *La Tiradito Foundation* to preserve the integrity of the site. The mysterious miraculous powers of *El Tiradito* are an important part of local lore and culture and residents still make pilgrimages to pray and make offerings. The community working with Dr. Griffith launched a successful nomination to National Register in 1971.<sup>68</sup> The listing of the site on the National Register stopped the east west expressway from destroying the *Barrio* and preserved the traditional main streets of Tucson.<sup>69</sup> Local lore has it that the miraculous powers of the site saved the *Barrio* from destruction.<sup>70</sup>

*Barrio* Logan did not have any miraculous powers to save their community. With the construction of the Interstate 5 in the early 1960’s and the subsequent San Diego Coronado Bay

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<sup>67</sup> Charles Mariano, “Highway 99”, *The Whole Enchilada* (Sacramento, Ca: Minuteman Press, 2009) pgs 36,37. Josie S. Talamantez interview with Charles Mariano 4/30/2010 in Sacramento, California he said his family was never informed that the New 99 route was going to go through the Mexican *Barrio* of Merced, Ca.

<sup>68</sup> Josie Talamantez in conversation with Dr. Griffith while attending the Western State Folklorist regional gathering and cultural resource tour from Tucson, Arizona to Nogales, Mexico, 1997. The historic significance of *La Tiradito* is an event, the area of significance is religion, the cultural significance is Mexican American, the period of significance is 1850, 1874, 1875, 1899 and the historic sub-function is ceremonial. The site is highly acclaimed by the Mexican and non-Mexican community alike.

<sup>69</sup> <http://www.nationalregisterofhistoricplaces.com/az/Pima/state.html>;  
<http://www.hmdb.org/marker.asp?marker=26179> ; <http://www.elindenews.com/features/12-features/207-el-tiradito-shrine-an-ode-to-local-hispanic-folklore>

<sup>70</sup> Josie Talamantez in conversation with Dr. Griffith while attending the Western State Folklorist regional gathering and cultural resource tour from Tucson, Arizona to Nogales, Mexico, 1997.

Bridge, 1967-1969, traveling east to west off of the Interstate 5, the neighborhood was bisected for a second time within the decade. More residents were displaced and more residential dwellings were leveled reducing the neighborhood population down to approximately 5,000 residents.<sup>71</sup>

The intrusion of Interstate 5 and the San Diego-Coronado Bay Bridge made it difficult for the residents in *Barrio* Logan to reach the churches and schools on the opposite side of the Interstate 5 and severed the business section from the larger Logan Heights district. The section southwest of the interstate became officially recognize as *Barrio* Logan by the city and county governmental officials and agencies. In an attempt to salvage what was left of the *Barrio*, members of the community began advocating for a park for the remainder of its residents. Discussions with political officials had been on-going since 1967 and many residents in *Barrio* Logan believed that there would be land for a park provided by the City of San Diego.

On April 22, 1970, the formal struggle for a park in *Barrio* Logan began when students from San Diego City College, including Jose Gomez, Josie S. Talamantez, Martha Hurtado, Diane Bolivar, Mike Nava, Patricia Salazar, long-time residents of the neighborhood, along with Ron Trujillo, David Rico, Rosie and Domingo Nuñez and others students in Professor Gil Robledo's Chicano Studies class learned from Mario Solis, *Barrio* Logan resident, that the City of San Diego and the State of California had negotiated a deal for use of the land by the California Highway Patrol. Many other students from surrounding colleges, universities, and

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<sup>71</sup> Martin D. Rosen; James Fisher, "Chicano Park and the Chicano Park Murals: *Barrio* Logan, City of San Diego, California" *The Public Historian*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (Autumn, 2001), pp 91-111. <http://www.jstor.org/pss/3379638> Michael Granerry, "20 Years Later, Span is Loved and Loathed," *Los Angeles Times*, 2 August 1989. Also see Patrick McDonnell, "City Urged to Use Coronado Bridge Tolls for *Barrio* Logan Projects," *Los Angeles Times*, 20 October 1990; Barnett, *Community Murals*, p107. It should also be noted that the Interstate 5 and State Route 75 construction projects of the 1960's were implemented at a time prior to the enactment of NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act), CEQU (California Environmental Quality Act), or the National Uniform Relocation Act, which today helps to protect communities from the potential devastating and disruptive impacts caused by major public improvement projects.

high schools including San Diego State students Rico Bueno, Chunky Sanchez, and others joined families, elders, children and concerned citizens to occupy the land under the approach ramps of the San Diego-Coronado Bay Bridge.<sup>72</sup>

The community had tolerated enough destruction of their *Barrio* and came together to define for themselves what they needed and it was not more police.<sup>73</sup> Their efforts at self-determination would render a park for the betterment of the community. Between 250 and 500 people representing a wide cross-section of the community disrupted grading work that was in progress. They occupied the site for twelve days and demanded that a park be created immediately. To emphasize their point, the occupiers began the work of creating a park by using shovels, pickaxes, hoes and rakes to prepare the ground for the planting of grass, shrubs and flowers.<sup>74</sup>

The action to create a park instead was the defining moment that empowered the community and changed how the residents proceeded in their relationship to the broader community. After the park the residents defined their community to meet their needs, they occupied the Old Neighborhood House and eventually converted it into a Chicano community health clinic, they occupied the Ford Building, in Balboa Park, that eventually led the way for the establishment of the *Centro Cultural de la Raza*, a Chicano and Indigenous arts, culture and heritage, they institutionalized the *Barrio* Station, a youth services organization and they became very involved with local and state politics as it pertained to Chicano issues.

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<sup>72</sup> Josie S. Talamantez conversation with Angie Avila (3/28/11) and Diane Bolivar (3/29/11), many long time residents and students too many names to be mentioned, but not forgotten, stood up that day to fight for the rights of the *Barrio* Logan community to have a park

<sup>73</sup> Marilyn Mulford, Producer; Mario Barrera & Marilyn Mulford Directors, *Chicano Park* (Berkeley: Red Bird Films, 1988)

<sup>74</sup> Los Angeles Times, June 4, 1989; San Diego Tribune, April 23, 1970, April 24, 1970; May 5, 1970, March 4, 1971 and March 28, 1984; May 1, 1970; November 12, 1971; San Diego Union-Tribune, July 24, 1969; November 9, 1969; May 5, 1970; July 1, 1970; July 3, 1970; Brookman, Philip and Guillermo Gomez-Peña, *Made in Aztlan; Centro Cultural De La Raza Fifteenth Anniversary*. (San Diego: Tolteca Publications, 1986)p 20.; Brookman, Philip, "Looking for Alternatives: Notes on Chicano Art, 1960-90,": in Richard Griswold del Castillo, Teresa McKenna and Yvonne Yarbrow-Bejarano, eds. *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation, 1965-1985*. (Los Angeles: Wight Art Gallery and UCLA, 1991) 185-186.

The establishment of a CHP station under the bridge was viewed as an affront to *Barrio Logan*, a community that already had many grievances against local police actions. Furthermore, the proposed CHP station was to be an impressive size, proposing to employ some 195 uniformed personnel and 15 civilian employees and provide parking spaces for 115 cars. “Our neighborhood had already been invaded by the junkyards, the factories and a bridge had even been built through the *Barrio*,” Gomez declared. “The residents were viewed as obstacles that hadn’t gotten of the way of progress...Some of us decided that it was time to put a stop to the destruction and begin to make this place more livable.”<sup>75</sup>

Forming the Chicano Park Steering Committee, the activists demanded that the property be donated to the Mexican-American community as a park in which Chicano culture could be expressed through art. “We are ready to die (to gain the park),” Salvador Roberto “Queso” Torres, a community artist, shouted to a gathering of city and state officials while supporters stamped their feet and shouted “viva la Raza-long live the race.” Twenty-eight year old Jose Gomez echoed this sentiment when he shouted: “The only way anybody is going to take the park away from us is through our blood.” Gomez later recalled: “The students, community members and the others said, ‘If you won’t build a park here, we’ll do it ourselves.’ That’s when the state officials knew we were serious. And the city entered into negotiations.”<sup>76</sup>

Community activists withdrew only after city officials promised negotiations regarding the use of the land in question. San Diego City Councilman Leon Williams, an African-American whose district included *Barrio Logan*, assured the neighborhood residents that they would have a city park under the Coronado Bridge. The City of San Diego, through the efforts of

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<sup>75</sup> Marilyn Mulford, Producer; Mario Barrera & Marilyn Mulford Directors, *Chicano Park* (Berkeley: Red Bird Films, 1988)

<sup>76</sup> Los Angeles Times, June 4, 1989; San Diego Tribune, April 23, 1970, April 24, 1970; May 5, 1970, March 4, 1971 and March 28, 1984; May 1, 1970; November 12, 1971; San Diego Union-Tribune, July 24, 1969; November 9, 1969; May 5, 1970; July 1, 1970; July 3, 1970;

community spokeswoman Angie Avila, Rico Bueno, Mike Nava, Jose Gomez and others, finally negotiated a settlement with the Chicano Federation, a consortium of various community groups, and the Chicano Park Steering Committee that required the city to exchange city-owned land for the disputed state land. The city then built a 4.5-acre park (later expanded to a total of 7.4 acres) on the acquired land bounded by Logan Avenue and National Avenue.<sup>77</sup>

The creation of “the park” was a critical moment in the history of the *Barrio Logan* community. Victor Ochoa, mural coordinator in Chicano Park- from 1974 to 1979, recalled: “What I still remember is that there were bulldozers out there. And women and children made human chains around the bulldozers and they stopped the construction work. Then they actually took over to flatten it out, to plant nopales, magueys and flowers. And there was a telephone pole there, where the Chicano flag was raised.” One of the park’s original muralists, Mario Torero, linked the park to Chicano identity: “We can’t think of Chicanos in San Diego without thinking of Chicano Park. It is the main evidence, the open book of our culture, energy and determination as a people, one of the main proofs of our existence.”<sup>78</sup>

Ramon “Chunky” Sanchez, composer and singer of *Chicano Park Samba*, said, “There was an energy that’s hard to describe-when you see your people struggling for something positive, and it’s very inspiring. We have to show our youth the value of what we did. The park was brought about by sacrifice and it demonstrates what a community can do when they stick together and make it happen.” Another artist, Raul Jaquez stated: “The Park is our pearl, and the community is our oyster. A pearl is not born in a comfortable zone. An oyster creates a pearl through great irritation. That’s how our pearl was born.” For those involved in its establishment,

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<sup>77</sup> San Diego Union, April 23, 1988; Angie Avila interviewed by Dr. Jim Fisher (Sacramento; 3/13/1996)

<sup>78</sup> Victor Ochoa interview by Dr. Jim Fisher (San Diego: 3/10/1996; Mario “Torero” Acevedo interview by Dr. Jim Fisher (San Diego: 3/10/1996.



Chicano Park had a decidedly revelatory effect and their commitment to its “place” in the community of *Barrio* Logan should not be underestimated.<sup>79</sup>

The history of Chicano people in the United States began with the clash of cultures after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. Even though Mexicans had been rooted in New Mexico since mid 1500’s, when the Spanish and their Mexican Indians servants arrived and settled into their separate enclaves, long before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock, it was the sale of northern Mexico that rendered Mexicans as Chicanos. The history of Chicanos in the Southwestern United States is marred by experiences of racism, discrimination and segregation.

The historical narrative of California’s culture clashes and the affects of adverse public policies on Chicanos set the stage that led the Chicano community of *Barrio* Logan to stand up for themselves, and defy the powers that be to build their own park, Chicano Park. The history provides legitimate support to designate the site as a national landmark.

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<sup>79</sup> Los Angeles Times, June 4, 1989; San Diego Tribune, April 23, 1970, April 24, 1970; May 5, 1970, March 4, 1971 and March 28, 1984; May 1, 1970; November 12, 1971; San Diego Union-Tribune, July 24, 1969; November 9, 1969; May 5, 1970; July 1, 1970; July 3, 1970; March 3, 1971; Brookman, Philip and Guillermo Gomez-Peña, *Made in Aztlan; Centro Cultural De La Raza Fifteenth Anniversary*. (San Diego: Tolteca Publications, 1986)p 20.; Brookman, Philip, “Looking for Alternatives: Notes on Chicano Art, 1960-90;” in Richard Griswold del Castillo, Teresa McKenna and Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano, eds. *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation, 1965-1985*. (Los Angeles: Wight Art Gallery and UCLA, 1991) 185-186. Larry Weigel interview by Dr. Jim Fisher January 23 & 24, 1996. Explanatory Note: Jose Gomez died in January, 1985. On the occasion of the 15<sup>th</sup> Chicano Park celebration, Laura Rodriguez said of Gomez: “We have to honor Jose Gomez today because he said he would never leave this *Barrio*. We must not think of his death, but of his life. He wanted a good quality life for all of us. And he is still alive today in all of our lives...He was a complex person-quiet, humble, yet very proud.” San Diego Union, April 21, 1985. Gomez himself explained his deep commitment to the *Barrio* this way: “My grandmother came here in 1900. My mother was born here, and so was I. Everyone knows me here. I can walk into any store, without any ID, and get a check cashed. There aren’t too many places in San Diego where you can do that. Despite all of the junk, it’s [*Barrio* Logan] my home and I’m comfortable in it. A lot of people feel like I do.” Doubtless, people like Laura Rodriguez. In September, 1994, Laura Rodriguez died. She too experienced the park profoundly. At 84 years of age, in the last year of her life, she insisted on going to Chicano Park every night in her wheelchair to commune with the bridge and its murals, absorbing their power and conviction. Ms. Rodriguez, who had placed her body in front of a bulldozer during the park takeover in April, 1970, served as inspiration for the building of what is now the Laura Rodriguez Family Health Center—the Old Neighborhood House (initially an Americanization Settlement House established in the 1920’s) located at 1801 National Avenue, taken over by the Chicano community activist fall 1970. In 1991, she was named a “Point of Light” for her community service by President George Bush. To her *Barrio*, she was known as “the woman who was always wearing a scarf, always preparing tamales for clinic fund-raisers, always fighting for her people.” Today a new elementary school is named in her honor and Ms. Rodriguez’s image is also honored by a mural on a bridge column near Caesar Chavez Parkway and Logan Avenue. “Laura is the fruit of our land .... [and] this is her shine,” stated Mario Torero, the designer and painter of Ms. Rodriguez’s mural—“Chicano Park” video: 1988; *San Diego Union-Tribune*, April 20, 1995; Pitti 1988:245.

