

¿MI TIERRA, TAMBIÉN? MEXICAN AMERICAN
CIVIL RIGHTS IN FORT WORTH,
1940-1990s

by

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Although this project primarily focuses on four WWII veterans, there were numerous Mexican American men and women throughout the history of Fort Worth who used their talent, time, and energy to ensure all *Mexicanos* had the same opportunities as the Anglo majority. This advocacy continues today and now has the support from the city. Beginning with the Human Relations Commission's attainment of a grant, Fort Worth is actively promoting local Latino culture and pride through public screening of Latino

documentaries, collecting oral history, and creating local history exhibitions. I hope this research will add to the rich Latino history of Fort Worth.

Lastly, to my family who will always be my inspiration to reach for new heights. My parents, Raul and Maria Sanchez willingly shared their experiences growing up in Texas during the Civil Rights Era. They also, along with my sisters and their families listened to me vent as I read about the discrimination and treatment of Mexicans across the Southwest. Thank you to Blanca Ramos, my forever friend who spent numerous hours with me as I researched and wrote and helped make sense of the thoughts and ideas in my head. Most importantly, to my husband Jarrett who contributed in countless ways to the shaping of this work. He not only provided his undivided attention when I needed to “talk things out,” but he also helped me develop my argument in the process. I value his patience and alacrity to encourage me to continue working toward this goal. His support and consistent reminder that I could do it are an invaluable reason for the completion of this project.

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Abstract

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The University of Texas at Arlington, 2016

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This thesis focuses on the city of Fort Worth during the second half of the twentieth-century and provides an analysis for how the struggles of the Mexican American population were shaped by the long history of discrimination throughout Texas and the Southwest, and most importantly highlights the World War II veterans who were the catalysts for change for their growing community. A 1969 Mexican American Leadership Conference not only revealed the divide between the Mexican American Generation and Chicano Generation activists in Fort Worth, but also exposed the misconceptions members of various organizations had about each other. Gilbert Garcia's creation of the Chicano Luncheon, shortly after this chaotic conference led to more unified efforts among community leaders and a realization of the importance of coming together to reach a common goal. Jesse Sandoval's resolute ties to his community and his leadership in the local chapter of the Political Association of Spanish-Speaking Organizations (PASSO) and his willingness to find common ground with both conservative and radical activists prevented frictions between the two groups from completely fracturing this relatively small population of Mexican Americans in Fort Worth.

Sam Garcia's publication of *Community News and Events* ensured the issues pertaining to the Mexican American community and happenings of multiple organizations were available to all of Fort Worth residents, and his publication of the Hispanic Directory advanced the Hispanic economy and encouraged Anglo owned business to begin to cater to the growing Hispanic community. Rufino Mendoza's leadership in the Mexican American Educational Advisory Council and his unwavering dedication to equal educational opportunities forced the school district to make major reforms that have affected generations of Mexican American students in Fort Worth. The worldview of all four of these men was shaped with their involvements in World War II, all four experienced or witnessed inequalities in Fort Worth after the war, all four found the limited post-war opportunities to carve out a place in society for themselves and their families, and all four found themselves working together toward a common goal. This thesis at last tells the story of their journey, and several other men and women in Fort Worth, to educational equality, political inclusion, and upward mobility.

Preface

I was born in Crailsheim, Germany, during the three years of my father's Army assignment. Both of my parents, Raul and Maria Sanchez, were born in Texas and can trace a line of their ancestry to late nineteenth-century Texas. They are both bona fide Americans. However, this did not stop my father's high school counselors from denying him access to accelerated traditional classes or my mother's elementary teachers from hitting her for speaking Spanish. By the time my sisters and I were born in the 1970s and 1980s my parents made the decision to raise us to be Americans...of Mexican descent. We spoke English at home, understood the importance of education, and respected the American flag. Although I can remember moments of discrimination while attending Paschal High School in Fort Worth from fellow students, and in shopping malls in the city, the only real obstacles to my achievement in school that I faced were my own procrastination tendencies. The impetus for this study came from my own desire to learn more about the city I call home and the history of a community that I did not always feel a part of when I was in high school. As an adult I appreciate my connection to both Mexican and American history and more importantly I desire to both learn and teach Mexican American history. Through my research I aim to answer several overarching questions: What struggles did Mexican Americans in Fort Worth experience during the second half of the twentieth-century? Was the path to upward mobility for Mexican Americans in Fort Worth similar to other major Texas cities? How did the experiences of Mexican World War II veterans inform their worldview and their actions back home in Fort Worth? And lastly, who were the major players in the fight for Mexican American civil rights in Fort Worth and in what forms did their activism take place?

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Introduction

“This is just the beginning, we won’t stop here. We [will] make a difference and will continue to fight for civil rights and for a better country for your children and our grandchildren. I pray the Lord to let me do the things that need to be done while I am here so that this world will be a better place...”¹

--Gilbert Garcia, Fort Worth

On July 10, 1990, Texas Congressman Doyle Willis presented Fort Worth businessman and Mexican American community leader Sam Garcia with the “1989 Volunteer of the Year” award at the Chicano Luncheon held at Rudy’s Mexican Cuisine on Carroll Street in Fort Worth.² Nominated by local businesses, community organizations, and civic groups, the decision was made by a mayoral-appointed citizen’s panel. In April 1990, after the honor was decided by the panel, the Texas House of Representatives passed a resolution on the House floor. Willis’ decision to present Garcia with the award at this informal meeting and location demonstrates the importance of the monthly luncheon to these local leaders. Beginning in the early 1970s, a group of men and women met at various Mexican restaurants to discuss the issues facing the Mexican American community in Fort Worth.³ Formed by Gilbert Garcia and Sam Garcia, the Chicano Luncheon initially met on the first Tuesday of every month at noon until 1992 when they changed the venue and structure of their meetings. They then began meeting every Tuesday at La Trinidad Iglesia Metodista Unida in the Northside of Fort Worth. Throughout the last three decades of the twentieth-century, this group of Mexican American community leaders created their own space within a predominantly Anglo city and worked to change the racial barriers that existed for people of Mexican descent in Fort Worth.⁴ According

¹ Samuel Garcia Papers, “Fort Worth Texas 1940,” Series I: Personal Papers, Box 2, Folder 10, Fort Worth Central Library Archives.

² Samuel Garcia Papers, “The State of Texas, The House of Representatives Austin, Texas letter” Series I: Personal Papers, Box 2, Folder 9, Fort Worth Central Library Archives.

³ Samuel Garcia Papers, “Sam Garcia,” Series I: Personal Papers, Box 2, Folder 10, Fort Worth Central Library Archives.

⁴ The term *Mexican American* will be used interchangeably with *Chicano*, *Latino*, and *Hispanic* to describe American citizens of Mexican ancestry. The terms will vary for both stylistic purposes as well as to accurately reflect the evolution in identity throughout the twentieth-century. Mexican immigrants or Mexican nationals will be used to describe non-U.S. citizens from Mexico living and working in the United

to Gilbert Garcia, "We didn't call ourselves anything. We had no chairman. No treasurer. No secretary. We just wanted to sit down and talk and exchange ideas."⁵ Sam Garcia, who co-founded the luncheon, believed that the advocacy for the Hispanic community that began after World War II was starting to bear fruit. The racial barriers that secluded Mexicans in Fort Worth to the Northside and Southside barrios away from decent housing, and without equitable educational and employment opportunities were slowly giving way to more opportunity.⁶

In the early 1970s, after a 1969 Mexican American Leadership Conference attended by community leaders from Fort Worth revealed the absolute need for a unified effort toward the achievement of full civil rights for Mexican Americans, Gilbert Garcia decided there was also a need to create a forum where information could be exchanged between these leaders who were quickly becoming political representatives of a growing community in need of a voice. The Chicano Luncheon provided a place for these residents of Fort Worth to share news and events from the larger organizations they were members of while ensuring the needs of their immediate community were addressed. The move to a new and more formal venue two decades was necessary because it had become an inclusive and well-publicized group. By the late 1980s Chicano Luncheon meetings were announced in both the *Community News and Events* newsletter, published by Sam Garcia and in the *Fort Worth Star Telegram*.

The Chicano Luncheon is not only representative of that generation's leadership strategies, but is also a source of their success. Mexican American leaders of Fort Worth had different causes, but this was one of the places they communicated and joined forces to campaign more effectively. This informal group that led the Fort Worth Mexican American community consisted of several World War II veterans including Sam Garcia, Gilbert Garcia (not

States. I will also use *ethnic Mexicans* or *Mexicans* when discussing both non-citizens and American citizens of Mexican ancestry as a group.

⁵ Gracie Bonds Staples, "Hispanic club alters format for meetings," *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, August 18, 1992.

⁶ *Ibid.*

related), Jesse Sandoval, and Rufino Mendoza, Sr. Their post-WWII advocacy on behalf of the Mexican American community worked to ensure equality in education, housing, political representation, and employment opportunities in Fort Worth, Texas. Without foreseeing the impact of their luncheons, this assembly of Chicano activists forged the path for political, economic, and social mobility for a burgeoning Mexican American population in Fort Worth.

Scholarship regarding Mexican American activism in the twentieth-century presents two convincing arguments: first, that World War II was important in creating a generation of activists, whom scholars have termed “the Mexican American Generation;” and the second, that those activists had a different perspective on the goals and strategies of the movement than both the preceding generation, “the Mexicanist Generation” and the succeeding generations, especially their own children who came of age during the tumultuous decade of the 1960s, “the Chicano Generation.”⁷ This thesis enters that debate by assessing how the Mexican American Generation activists fared in Fort Worth, Texas where the Hispanic population was small, by looking at the lives of these four WWII veterans. Despite the fact that they believed in an incremental approach to gaining civil rights and their causes sometimes overlapped, they led different lives, achieved various levels of material success, and focused their efforts on diverse issues. Both Sam Garcia and Gilbert Garcia were businessmen working toward inclusion in the city’s politics and economy. Mendoza was a civil servant and father of nine children who saw a need to gain educational equality for Mexican American children in Fort Worth ISD. Sandoval was a skilled-laborer, and a working-class father who worked to ensure the city paid attention to the needs of the Mexicans living in the barrios.

⁷ Carlos Kevin Blanton, *George I. Sánchez: The Long Fight for Mexican American Integration*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), Mario T. Garcia, *Mexican Americans Leadership, Ideology & Identity, 1930-1960.*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), George J. Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

The pivotal influence of their service in WWII, which created men who saw themselves as citizens with basic rights and that gave them an opportunity to make more of themselves economically and politically, while important, was only part of the equation. These leaders' ability to integrate their own differences and those of the next generation into a pragmatic movement was equally, if not more, important. While there were conflicts between generations of activists in Fort Worth just as there were in major cities across Texas, those conflicts here did not stifle either side. Indeed, the Mexican American generation adapted and expanded upon the more assertive actions of the Chicano Generation. Their leadership encouraged communication, for example the Chicano Luncheon and the *Community News and Events* newsletter, and it continually welcomed others into the cause, best demonstrated by the many contributions by women in the movement and their willingness to work with other minority communities in the city. Ultimately, looking at the Civil Rights Movement in Fort Worth through the experiences of these four men reveals that generational differences form only part of the story. The rest comes from the valuable interactions, joint ventures, and shared responsibilities between the Mexican American men and women from many different backgrounds who shared the priority of lifting up their own community.

According to Historian Carlos Blanton there were three generations over the course of the twentieth-century, each with distinctive qualities, but with varying levels of influence. Blanton believes the generational model as a method of interpretation helps explain Chicano history more than any other method, and the "historical actors themselves recognized generational differences in ways not dissimilar to the actual historical model."⁸ Although Blanton chooses to work within this generational model he also presents its shortcomings. The most obvious issue is that the heterogeneity of the Mexican American community can be lost when generalizing the actions of an entire generation of activists. However, for this particular research concerning Fort

⁸ Blanton, *George I. Sánchez*, 5.

Worth, using the generational model as a way of understanding the actions and outcomes of the efforts of Sam Garcia, Gilbert Garcia, Jesse Sandoval, and Rufino Mendoza, presents a distinctive story of activism.

Blanton's subject, George I. Sanchez, like the Fort Worth activists, falls into the group who gets the most attention, the Mexican American Generation. These influential men and women were dominant from the 1930s to the 1960s and were impacted by both World Wars and the period of nativism and repatriation that occurred between them. They "stressed patriotism, citizenship, middle-class aspirations, external validation, assimilation to mainstream norms and institutions, less confrontational forms of protest, and a hyphenated ethnic existence."⁹ Their predecessors, the Mexicanist Generation saw themselves as outsiders, they identified as Mexican and "often looked to Mexico for news, business and cultural belonging."¹⁰ Active during the late nineteenth-century to the late 1920s, this group of activists created mutual aid organizations and did not necessarily distinguish themselves between immigrant and citizen. Whether born in Mexico or in the United States they identified as Mexican. The last cohort of the generational model in Blanton's analysis is the Chicano Generation.

The Chicano Generation activism across the Southwest coincided with both the increasing population of Mexican Americans in Fort Worth and the political engagement of that community. The men and women of the Chicano Generation "rejected traditional middle-class norms, sought internal validation, deemphasized assimilation, and abandoned a hyphenated existence for a more culturally nationalistic conceptualization of themselves as a separate race."¹¹ The Mexican American Youth Organization (MAYO) played a major role in the Chicano Movement. This group of young activists consisted of both college graduates and former gang members. MAYO eventually fractured into the Brown Berets, mostly made-up of the former

⁹ Ibid, 4.

¹⁰ Ibid, 4.

¹¹ Ibid, 5.

gang members who believed energies should be spent in the community working for change from the bottom-up, and into La Raza Unida, a third political party who wanted to affect change through the election of representatives who would work toward the advancement of the Chicano race. Joe Marquez and Eddy Herrera are two activists in Fort Worth that followed this philosophy and sought a more confrontational approach to changing the status quo for Mexican Americans in the city. However, their influence was limited.

The most influential leaders in Fort Worth working toward equality and mobility for their community developed their political strategies and organizational ideas during the height of the Mexican American Generation. This generation was not just a transition between the Mexicanist or Immigrant Generation, but rather a pivotal group that possessed “a character of its own, a richness of political struggle, and a deep search for identity.”¹² Not only did the leadership in Fort Worth have the benefits of the attention brought by the Chicano activists to the plight of Mexican Americans in the Southwest, but they also had the means and organizational structures put in place by the Mexican American Generation. By the 1980s, often deemed “The Decade of the Hispanics,” by the news media, there was a well-structured and well-led community of Mexican American activists in various organizations, who created their own spaces and their strategies had become establishments of Fort Worth.

The journey of Mexican immigrants into the United States has a long and rich history. The migration of Mexicans into the United States increased greatly in the early twentieth-century. Mexican immigrants crossed the border seeking employment opportunities and an escape from the chaotic political atmosphere of revolutionary Mexico. The mostly male immigrants entered into a pattern of circulatory migration for the first quarter of the century, coming and going across the border with little resistance from the American government. Initially established in the 1920s through the Department of Labor, the U.S. Border Patrol made

¹²Garcia, *Mexican Americans Leadership*, 19.

the process for entering the United States much more laborious and degrading, including public bathing to ensure immigrants did not carry diseases over the border, long waiting periods, and scrutinized questioning. This change led to less circulatory migration and an increase in permanent residency for many Mexican men and their families.¹³ As Mexicans began to define their lives in the United States, survived the Great Depression Era of massive repatriation, and saw the second generation enter adulthood, they pushed for access to equality in education and housing, lobbied for employment opportunities, and demanded a voice in the political process.

Often thwarted from unifying under a common goal by their own ambitions, the Mexican community struggled toward a path of upward mobility. Mexican American leaders faced elite Anglo leaders of urban spaces pushing back against Mexican progress, and also struggled with an inner battle of becoming American while not all together eliminating one's *Mexicanness*. Historians George Sanchez, David Gutierrez, David Montejano, Guadalupe San Miguel, Jr, and Rodolfo Rosales among others have laid the groundwork of scholarship concerning the internal and external struggles for inclusion for ethnic Mexicans in the Southwestern United States.¹⁴

Aspects of this struggle have been well researched and written about for Los Angeles, Chicago, San Antonio, and Houston. George J. Sanchez discussed the multifaceted path of Mexican immigrants in the early twentieth-century from rural Mexico to urban Los Angeles in his book *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945*. Sanchez argues that the assimilation of Mexicans into American culture was an organic and heterogeneous process. The evolution from Mexican to Mexican American was

¹³ Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 54.

¹⁴ See, Blanton, *George I. Sánchez*, 2015, David G. Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), David Montejano and James H. Sutton Jr. and Sylvia Leal Carvajal Collection, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), David Montejano, *Quixote's Soldiers: A Local History of the Chicano Movement, 1966-1981*, 1 edition (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), Rodolfo Rosales, *The Illusion of Inclusion: The Untold Political Story of San Antonio* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, and Guadalupe San Miguel Jr, *Let All of Them Take Heed: Mexican Americans and the Campaign for Educational Equality in Texas, 1910-1981* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2000).

different depending on the circumstances of the individual or family. The efforts of non-governmental organizations to influence the immigrants to learn English, convert to Protestantism, or stop eating beans and tortillas on a daily basis was thwarted by continued immigration and circulatory migration of ethnic Mexicans.¹⁵ Additionally, the daily discrimination and racism experienced by Mexican immigrants fostered a sense of ambivalence toward any benefits that may have come with citizenship. His analysis of urban spaces in Los Angeles and their impact on how communities developed and evolved over time was groundbreaking for both urban and Mexican American studies.

David Gutierrez's *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity*, explores the political dynamics of growing Mexican American communities in the Southwest. His discussion of the politics within the ethnic Mexican community in the United States adds to Sanchez's analysis in *Becoming Mexican American*. Gutierrez's research demonstrates the struggle for Mexican Americans to achieve upward mobility and acceptance as loyal Americans from the rest of society while at the same time fearing the continuous Mexican immigration in perpetuating the stereotypes held by the dominating Anglo majority. He traces these evolving views of Mexican Americans about the immigrant population. Although there were clear efforts by organizations like LULAC and the American GI forum to combat the Bracero Program and any open immigration legislation, both political and media rhetoric that demonized the Mexican immigrant often led the Mexican American community to see more of their commonalities rather than their differences with the immigrant population.

Historians have challenged the belief that Mexicans were politically inactive prior to the Chicano Movement of the 1960s. Mexicans were agents of change, organizing as early as 1920s, in an effort to gain both a voice and power in urban politics. Beginning with the organization of LULAC in 1929, Latinos had a united activist group who spoke on their behalf,

¹⁵ Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 101.

fought for civil rights and against discrimination. According to Rosales, “The single thread throughout this analysis is how the Chicano community initiated, responded to, and finally adapted to political events and the ensuing political changes (some which they created and some which they confronted).”¹⁶ In his analysis and discussion of San Antonio politics, Rosales traces the post-World War II business led political structure that excluded minorities until the 1980s and 1990s, after which single-member districts opened the opportunities for the political representation of San Antonio to accurately reflect the demographics of the city. However, as his title alludes, Rosales argues that many of these representatives achieved their successes through patronage and a desire by the Anglo dominated cities to quell the noise from the Mexican American communities. Throughout *The Illusion of Inclusion*, Rosales demonstrates the consistent efforts of the Latino community to initiate these changes to the status quo. The changes that occurred in Fort Worth were also initiated and fought by Mexican American community members and found success after single-member districts allowed for the election of Carlos Puente to the Fort Worth ISD Board of Trustees and Louis Zapata to the Fort Worth City Council.

San Miguel discusses the fight for educational equality through litigation and political organization. He highlights the shift in strategy from LULAC’s efforts to encourage Mexicans to learn English as well as become educated and to seek equal treatment for Mexicans who were classified as “white,” to the post-Civil Rights legislations of the 1960s struggle to be identified as minorities deserving of protection and equality under the law. Fort Worth’s Mexican American activists, whose fight began in the early 1970s benefitted from the latter strategy. Like Rosales, San Miguel argues that the Mexican community was not a “sleeping giant,” or a passive citizen waiting for change, but rather, they were active facilitators. Education for Texas Mexicans in early part of the century was reflective of the deliberate neglect of the Anglo run governmental

¹⁶ Rosales, *Illusion of Inclusion*, 180.

structures of the time to address the needs of Mexican American children.¹⁷ For the Mexicans that found their way into public school there was little success due to the English only laws in place and their treatment as an inferior race. Rufino Mendoza, and Sam Garcia were influenced by the efforts of the Mexican American activists in larger cities and emulated many of their strategies including litigation. Indeed, Fort Worth had many community activists who worked to reform *para todo el pueblo mexicano*.

These historians provide context for this study, which focuses on the city of Fort Worth during the second half of the twentieth-century. This thesis provides an analysis for how the struggles of the Mexican American population in Fort Worth were shaped by the long history of discrimination throughout Texas and the Southwest, and most importantly highlights the World War II veterans who were the catalysts for change for their growing community. They were motivated in part by generational conflict. A 1969 Mexican American Leadership Conference, held in Waxahachie just south of Fort Worth, not only revealed the divide between the Mexican American Generation and Chicano Generation activists in Fort Worth, but also exposed the misconceptions members of various organizations had about each other.

The history of Fort Worth began a few decades prior to the arrival of most Mexicans. Forged in the state's frontier strategy, Fort Worth began in the mid-nineteenth-century as a line of ten forts proposed by General William Jenkins Worth, a veteran of the U.S.-Mexico War. The city grew in population and became the county seat in 1860. However, the effects of the Civil War and Reconstruction left the city with few people, and no schools, or general stores.¹⁸ Life returned to Fort Worth with the development of the cattle industry and the West Texas oil boom. The city served as a resting place for cowboys on cattle trails heading to Abilene, Kansas. By the turn of the century, Fort Worth was a well-known city with a booming economy centered on

¹⁷ San Miguel, *Let All of Them Take Heed*, 32-58.

¹⁸ Janet Schmelzer, "FORT WORTH, TX," Texas State Historical Association, last modified June 12, 2010, accessed on April 11, 2015, <https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hdf01>.

railroads and the livestock industry, and continued to thrive during World War I when the United States Army established Camp Bowie to train soldiers. As the cattle trails from Texas came to an end, “hastened by Kansas’ fear of tick-infested Texas cattle...by barbed wire which was slowly strangling the open range,” and the railroads which made cattle drives less necessary, the Northside of Fort Worth established a meat-packing facility.¹⁹ The city owes its survival through the Great Depression to the support from policies of the federal government, the stockyards, continued war industries, building of an Air Force base and airplane factory during World War II.²⁰

The city’s Mexican American history can be traced back to the 1880 census. Four years after the railroad arrived in Fort Worth, fourteen Mexicans appear on the city census records for the first time, the majority are listed as laborers.²¹ Soon after the turn of the century, both the Northside and Southside neighborhoods, where most of the city’s Mexican population reside today, were the locations of two major industries, meat-packing, and steel, respectively. The population of Fort Worth increased from almost 27,000 in 1900 to approximately 280,000 in 1950; however, the Mexican American population did not begin to increase significantly until the late 1970s and early 80s in Fort Worth.²² Data from the Fort Worth ISD planning department shows that in 1969 11 percent of the births were Chicano, a 5 percent increase from 1961. By 1981, 20 percent of all elementary school aged children were Hispanic.²³ The changing demographics of the city occurred after the Chicano movements of the 1960s that led to increased political participation and educational reform in other major Texas urban areas.

¹⁹ J’Neil L Pate, *North of the River: A Brief History of North Fort Worth*, (TCU Press, 1994), ix.

²⁰ Schmelzer, “FORT WORTH, TX.”

²¹ Carlos E. Cuellar, *Stories from the Barrio: A History of Mexican Fort Worth*, (Fort Worth: TCU Press, 2003), 3.

²² Schmelzer, “FORT WORTH, TX.”

²³ Fort Worth ISD Planning Department, “Student Population and Related Statistics,” February 1972, Fort Worth ISD archives.

The individual stories of Fort Worth's activists reflected trends common to the community as a whole. Due to the city's minimal agricultural economy many Mexicans who came from a farming background did not migrate directly to Fort Worth. South and West Texas areas were populated by Mexicans before the border changed in 1836. The railroad and mining industries prompted increased migration into both North Texas and Oklahoma in the decades prior to the Great Depression. After companies began recruiting foreign workers, Pittsburg County, Oklahoma and its surrounding cities became heavily populated by Mexicans.²⁴ Coal production slowed through the Great Depression and by the 1940s the Pittsburg, Oklahoma economy reverted to agriculture. A significant number of those coal mining families, including that of Sam Garcia, found their way to Fort Worth. Garcia initially returned to Oklahoma after World War II, but a transitioning economy offered little opportunity. By the late 1950s, Garcia moved to Fort Worth and quickly established himself as a successful business owner. He then became a central figure in the fight for equal treatment of Mexican Americans in all aspects of society and in ensuring their voice was not only heard, but that the powers that be understood the value of this community. From the early 1980s through the mid-1990s, he published and distributed a newsletter that reached more than 10,000 customers.²⁵ Along with Gilbert Garcia, he created a Hispanic business directory and established the Chicano Luncheon.

In 1940, twenty-two year old Gilbert Garcia left his home in Brownsville, Texas in search of job opportunities. He began working and living with his uncle Alfredo Garcia, who was a part owner of American Laundry in Fort Worth's Northside.²⁶ The same year, Gilbert Garcia was elected president of a Mexican American social club for young men called Lucky 13. This club and the Gardenia Club, for young Mexican American women, came together to provide opportunities for dances and other social gatherings. At one of these dances, Garcia met his

²⁴Larry O'Dell, "Pittsburg County," Oklahoma Historical Society, last modified in 2009, accessed on March 26, 2016, <http://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=PI016>.

²⁵ Samuel Garcia Papers, "Sam Garcia," Series I: Personal Papers, Box 2, Folder 10, Fort Worth Central Library Archives.

²⁶ Cuellar, *Stories from the Barrio*, 144.

future wife Herlinda (Linda) Balderas. In 1941, Garcia enlisted in the U.S. Army and was stationed in the Pacific for the duration of the war. He returned to Fort Worth and married Linda in 1945. The year following the initial establishment of the American G.I. Forum, Gilbert Garcia began a chapter in Fort Worth to ensure Mexican American veterans received the benefits they were due. Not only did Gilbert work tirelessly around the state to expand the newly formed veterans organization, but he also continued his advocacy all through the second half of the twentieth-century encouraging and helping the Mexican community in Fort Worth become registered voters, keeping them up to date on issues that affected their communities, and working toward finding solutions for the societal problems that prevented Mexican Americans from becoming upwardly mobile. Sam Garcia stated, "I don't think some of the young Hispanics in business and politics may be aware of what Gilbert's done for all of us, but his spirit is there in any success most of us have."²⁷ By the time of his death he was considered a "voice of strength" by the Fort Worth community.²⁸

Seventeen year old Jesse Sandoval received permission from his mother to drop out of Fort Worth's Paschal High School during his senior to join the U. S. Navy in 1943 out of a sense of duty to his country. Upon returning to Fort Worth after the war, he listened to his mother's recommendation that he use his bilingualism and, as his mother believed, his new abilities to demand change based on his contributions to the war to help his community. He quickly witnessed the influence his efforts made to his small Mexican American community in the Linwood neighborhood, just west of downtown, and began to seek out and help create organizations that could positively affect the lives of Mexicans in Fort Worth. Described by his daughter Eva Bonilla as a "quiet and meek man who made waves," Sandoval worked with and served as President of the American G.I. Forum, Viva Kennedy Clubs, and the Political Association of Spanish-Speaking Organizations (PASSO) from their beginnings in Fort Worth.²⁹

²⁷ Jeff Guinn, "Voice of Strength," *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, October 13, 1992.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Eva Bonilla, Personal Interview by author, June 9, 2016.

A resident of the Linwood neighborhood until his death in 2010 and a craftsman in the furniture industry until retirement, Sandoval was an unquestioned leader of his community who was directly affected by the efforts made by himself and his contemporaries.³⁰

Formed in 1971 by Rufino Mendoza Sr., the Mexican American Educational Advisory Committee (MAEAC) served as both a watchdog and activist group to bring equality within the Fort Worth Independent School District.³¹ Mendoza, who was born in Pittsburg, Oklahoma, settled in Fort Worth after the war and became a letter carrier for the U.S. Postal Service. He began his advocacy when his children were not given the same opportunities as Anglo children in the public school system. He became an outspoken proponent of equal opportunities and continued advancement of Mexican Americans in all aspects of society. When he initiated a 1971 lawsuit against Fort Worth ISD, there were only two Hispanic administrators and very few Hispanic teachers employed by the district. By the early 1990s the number of administrators increased into the sixties, and today more than 20 percent of the teachers and administrators are Hispanic including the current superintendent.³² Mendoza's impact on both his family and his community can also be seen in the renaming of a Northside Elementary school in his honor and the success of his children and grandchildren.

The small Mexican American community in Fort Worth benefited from the trail of failures and successes of Chicano activists all over Texas and the Southwest; however, the path for Fort Worth would not have the same stage or the same engaged audience in their fight. Fort Worth did not have someone like San Antonio's Henry B. Gonzalez, an established and well-known Mexican American politician beginning in the 1950s, who publicly criticized and worked against Chicano activists and organizations in the late 1960s and the 1970s. Fort Worth did not have large Mexican student populations who could fight the system through walkouts and

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Rufino Mendoza, Jr., email message to the author, March 24, 2015.

³² "2014-2015 Texas Academic Performance Report," Texas Education Agency, last modified 2016, accessed on June 27, 2016, <https://rptsvr1.tea.texas.gov/perfreport/tapr/2015/srch.html?srch=D>.

protests. Fort Worth did not have a majority Mexican population who could take over city government like Crystal City, Texas. Fort Worth had the formidable Gilbert Garcia, Jesse Sandoval, Rufino Mendoza, and Sam Garcia whose worldviews, determination, and diligence created an environment of civic engagement based on American principles, unified efforts, and long term strategies. The hard work and dedication of these Fort Worth leaders not only positively influenced the small population of Mexican Americans during the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, but also opened opportunities and the ability to advance in society for the Mexican Americans who now make up more than a third of the city.

One last example of the importance of these activists comes from how their own sense of history has allowed the retelling of their stories in this thesis. Sam Garcia was proud of his and his colleagues' successes and wanted the Mexican American community of Fort Worth, and perhaps beyond, to know about these struggles that occurred and all that was done to make life better for people of Mexican descent in this city. The *Sam Garcia Papers: Documenting Hispanic History in Fort Worth* were donated to the Fort Worth Public Library Archives on September 9, 2006. These archived materials, comprised of more than fifty-two linear feet of history, provide a detailed and engaging story of the struggle for first-class citizenship, educational equality, and political inclusion for the Mexican American community in Fort Worth. In addition to Garcia's collection of pamphlets, newspaper clippings, manuscript materials relating to various organizations, and both professional and personal correspondence, this analysis used local newspaper archives, Fort Worth Independent School District archival data, city records, Latino American archives at the Fort Worth Central Library, oral interviews conducted and produced by several universities, as well as personal interviews conducted by the author. In an effort to place the actions of Sam Garcia, Gilbert Garcia, Jesse Sandoval and Rufino Mendoza into the greater context in the struggle for Mexican American upward mobility in post-World War II United States, secondary literature concerning the plight of Mexican Americans beginning during the mass migration of immigrants escaping Revolutionary Mexico

through the efforts of Mexican American activists to gain political power and educational equality for their community during the 1970s and 1980s, is also included in this research.

This work will discuss the difficulties faced by Mexican Americans in Fort Worth to achieve political, educational, and social equality. Chronologically organized, the first chapter covers the conditions of Mexican Americans in Fort Worth and throughout the Southwest prior to and during WWII and the effect of the war on the relationship between both the U.S. and Latin America and the U.S. and its ethnic Mexican community. Sam Garcia, Gilbert Garcia, Rufino Mendoza, and Jesse Sandoval served in the war and came home changed men. The war experience helped alter their worldviews and develop their political philosophies. This first chapter will explore their evolving identities. The chapter continues with the contributions of Mexican Americans after the war in response to the discrimination they received once home. Formed during the late 1940s in Corpus Christi, the American GI Forum quickly gained membership and became a major player in the fight against this discrimination for the Mexican American community. Ethnic Mexicans' experiences during the war both abroad and in the U.S. shaped their post war demands for equality.

Mexican Americans in Fort Worth, before and after World War II, experienced discrimination in housing, segregated schools, little to no political representation in local government, vast inequalities in educational and employment opportunities, and police brutality. Chapter Two looks into the activism taking place in Fort Worth during the Chicano movement of the 1960s to fight against these inequalities. President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty made an appearance in Fort Worth in the form of the Community Action Agency who helped bring needed social services to an often forgotten people. This chapter centers on the November 1969 leadership conference where several of the city's Mexican American leaders, both men and women met to identify the most pertinent issues facing their community and to decide how to combat those problems and looks ahead to how those decisions played out in Fort Worth.

This conference revealed the fracture between the generations that led Gilbert Garcia to establish Chicano Luncheon, a fateful change that created a unified group of men and women who began to work in tandem for the benefit of the city.

Chapter Three focuses on the efforts to create new educational and political opportunities by Mexican Americans. By the early 1970s, Rufino Mendoza established the Mexican American Educational Advisory Council (MAEAC) to work toward equality in Fort Worth Independent School District. Chapter Three discusses his efforts through the judicial system to ensure additional Hispanic teachers and administrators, instituting of bilingual education, and most importantly the designation of Mexicans as a separate ethnic group deserving of protection under various civil rights legislation. Educational reform was paramount for Mexican American community leaders. The struggles to achieve this reform were often reflective of the African American community's battles. The two communities often found success working together or emulating each other's strategies. As Mendoza's more than a decade long fight came to an end, Sam Garcia created a program to combat the high dropout rate of Hispanic students, an issue endemic all over Texas and the Southwest. In addition to his educational activism, Sam Garcia worked toward keeping the Mexican American community of Fort Worth informed of local, state, and national issues impacting their lives. During this time the Chicano Luncheon in addition to a multitude of organizations began to carve out spaces within the Anglo dominated city for the Mexican American community. Chapter Three also examines Sam Garcia and Gilbert Garcia's work in ensuring the voices of his community were heard, properly represented, and unified. Jesse Sandoval's leadership in PASSO and his ability to see the benefits of Chicano activists' methods despite his own adherence to strategies indicative of the Mexican American generation helped keep the small population of Mexicans in Fort Worth from fracturing and impeding progress. Their work supporting the Mexican American people brought upward mobility for the community.

The common thread running through all three chapters are the strategies used by these men who were influenced by their experiences during and immediately after World War II. Studying this group sheds light on a debate surrounding Mexican American activism in the U.S. Although Sam Garcia, Gilbert Garcia, Jesse Sandoval and Rufino Mendoza belonged to the Mexican American generation their engagement in social issues facing Mexican Americans in the city of Fort Worth did not begin in earnest until the end of the 1960s and into the 1970s during the height of the Chicano generation's activism. Like most major cities in Texas, the philosophies of the two generations of activists in Fort Worth caused friction and sometimes impeded the progress toward upward mobility for the Mexican American community; however, the relatively small population of Mexican Americans in the city along with the leadership and diligence of these four World War II veterans led to a more amalgamated group who not only, successfully navigated the majority Anglo city leadership, but also procured their own seats at the table. This research concludes with a discussion of the implications of the political, educational, and social activism of these four World War II veterans on the current Mexican American community in Fort Worth.

Chapter 1: World War II and the Mexican American Community

“...of greater importance has been the loyal toil of countless generations of workers of Mexican extraction in the building of the great country that the United States is today. The seemingly endless railway tracks, the highways, the orchards, the product of the cotton fields year after year, the cornucopia of produce emptying on the tables of the whole nation—all these blessings of bounty could not have been and still would not be possible without their help. More dramatically, the lists of casualties in Bataan or Corregidor, the Far East, and many a shore of the Old Continent read like a telephone directory in any town in the Republic of Mexico.”³³

--Pauline R. Kibbe, 1946

In a letter written in early 1992 to the American G.I. Forum's founder Dr. Hector P. Garcia, Gilbert Garcia wrote, “Never in my wildest thoughts did I dream of returning there, but I was wrong and believe me it was a great experience in more ways than one! Going back to the [baptism] of fire December 7, 1941 was an emotional feeling. Memories of the past flashed before my eyes, but I was thankful I was in a different light.”³⁴ Garcia was referring to his trip to Hawaii to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Just a little over a year before his death, he fulfilled a life-long dream of not only returning to place that helped shape his identity, but also taking his wife, Linda, to see and experience the enchantment of Hawaii. He wrote to Dr. Garcia, with whom he had friendship dating back to 1948, to share his experiences back on the island and to let him know the far reaches, both in time and place of the American G.I. Forum. Gilbert Garcia told Dr. Garcia, “I marched in the parade and want you to know that I wore my American GI Forum cap throughout the entire ceremonies. I was questioned about the cap and that gave me a chance to talk about the organization which

³³ Pauline R. Kibbe. *Latin Americans in Texas*, (Albuquerque: The University of Mexico Press, 1946), xix. Kibbe was a former research assistant to George I. Sanchez and served as an executive secretary to the Good Neighbor Commission.

³⁴ Samuel Garcia Papers, “ALOHA,” Series I: Personal Papers, Box 2, Folder 12, Fort Worth Central Library Archives.

enlightened some veterans.” He continued to say, “I am proud to say that because of my wearing my red and blue cap, I was spotted by some GI Forum veterans from California, New Mexico, Colorado, and other states...I could not resist leaving GI Forum material everywhere I went along with Hispanic Directories. (Linda just knew I would be jailed).”³⁵

The confidence and optimism of this memory contrasts with another recollection of Gilbert Garcia that of what his home was like before the war. Mexican Fort Worth prior to WWII consisted of “a few tree shade barbers...a few tamaleros selling from carts...lots of cantinas and few tree shade mechanics...there were a few beauty operators working out of their homes. No infrastructure or professionals as teachers or attorneys. No industry” and a couple of social clubs “with the only purpose to have dances.”³⁶ Mexicans were a part of the economy in Fort Worth beginning in the late nineteenth-century mostly in unskilled labor. By 1919 a group of Mexicans went on strike alongside Anglos in skilled labor positions at the Home Oil Refining Company. The Mexicans who worked for Hedrick Construction Company at the same plant were demanding 8 hour work days with an increase in hourly wages from 37 cents to 46 cents. The Anglo pipe fitters were looking for an increase from 6 dollars a day to 7.³⁷ A little more than a decade later when the citizens of Fort Worth experienced the bread lines caused by the Great Depression many of these Mexicans working and living in the city were no longer needed or welcomed.

The repatriation sweeps during the Great Depression sent half of the Mexican residents of Fort Worth to Mexico but many returned to the city during the Second World

³⁵ Samuel Garcia Papers, “ALOHA,” Series I: Personal Papers, Box 2, Folder 12, Fort Worth Central Library Archives.

³⁶ Samuel Garcia Papers, “Fort Worth 1940,” Series I: Personal Papers, Box 2, Folder 10, Fort Worth Central Library Archives.

³⁷ “100 Strike On New Refinery For More Pay,” August 2, 1919, *Fort Worth Star Telegram*.

War.³⁸ This was the status quo in Fort Worth for Mexican Americans when Gilbert Garcia arrived in 1940, a small entrepreneurial class of Mexicans, an informal economy catering to their own. These business or people were not welcomed outside of the barrios.³⁹ They lived in the same neighborhoods with unpaved roads, monthly jamaicas (neighborhood festivals), and boys baseball leagues, separate from the Anglo majority. Because of the poll tax, there were only fifty Mexican Americans registered to vote and any needs their community had were not even heard by the city's Anglo leadership.⁴⁰ Garcia came to Fort Worth in 1940 to find work and to attend college. He was turned away from TCU, finding that "no one told me Mexicans could not enroll," and he found difficulty getting hired to do anything other than work as a "ditch digger...[among the] peons."⁴¹ Not only were Mexican American veterans facing discrimination in civilian society, they were also not welcomed into national veteran organizations like the American Legion or Veterans of Foreign Wars.⁴² Despite Mexican Americans war service, there was no evidence of efforts to change the racial norms in Fort Worth from prior to the war.

Gilbert Garcia's service in the U.S. Navy, which had him stationed at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, continued throughout the rest of the war after which he returned home to Fort Worth a different man. He came home and quickly recognized the inequalities and substandard treatments that many had been forced to live with before the war would no longer be good enough. He also believed in his ability to change this second-class citizenship for himself and others around him. For Gilbert Garcia, Dr.

³⁸ Cuellar, *Stories from the Barrio*, 49.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 42-43.

⁴⁰ Marshall Lynam, "GI Forum—It's Hitting Heavy Blows at the Enemy—Prejudice," *Fort Worth Press*, August 19, 1957.

⁴¹ Samuel Garcia Papers, "Fort Worth 1940," Series I: Personal Papers, Box 2, Folder 10, Fort Worth Central Library Archives.

⁴² *Ibid*, See also Juan Gomez-Quiñones, *Chicano Politics: Reality and Promise 1940-1990*, 1 edition (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990), Chapter 2.

Garcia's newly formed American G.I. Forum became a vehicle to increase civic engagement, promote the importance of education, gain funding for better housing conditions, and build relationships with like-minded Mexican American men and women in Fort Worth.

The experiences and struggles of Mexican American Generation activists like Gilbert Garcia in the United States set the stage for local battles that led to a more inclusive and equitable society for people of Mexican descent. Their first-hand knowledge of life during the Great Depression, World War II, and the early Cold War years shaped the world view of these men and women. Mexicans were often scapegoated as a major cause for the hard times of the 1930s in the Southwest.⁴³ For those who avoided the mass deportations of that decade or those who made their way back across the Rio Grande, life in the United States consisted of discriminatory treatment in public spaces, segregated and inferior schools, obstacles to employment outside of manual labor, horrendous housing conditions, and restrictions to mobility within urban spaces.⁴⁴ Although there were efforts to organize and change both working conditions and discrimination in society by mutualistas (mutual aid organizations) and LULAC decades before the Second World War, the war became a watershed moment in Mexican American history.⁴⁵ This chapter will reveal the changing identities of Gilbert Garcia,

⁴³ Francisco E Balderrama and Raymond Rodriguez, *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995). See also, Ray Suarez, *Latino Americans: the 500-Year Legacy That Shaped A Nation*, (Oxford University Press, 2012), 81-84.

⁴⁴ See, Blanton, *George I. Sánchez*, Richard Griswold del Castillo, ed., *World War II and Mexican American Civil Rights*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), Garcia, *Mexican Americans Leadership*, Gomez-Quíñones, *Chicano Politics*, Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, Guadalupe San Miguel Jr, *Let All of Them Take Heed: Mexican Americans and the Campaign for Educational Equality in Texas, 1910-1981* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2000), Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas*, and Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican America*.

⁴⁵ Griswold del Castillo, ed. *World War II and Mexican American Civil Rights*,⁴⁵ Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez, "Introduction," in *Mexican Americans and World War II*, edited by Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), Ronald T Takaki and Mazal Holocaust Collection, *Double Victory: A Multicultural History of America in World War II* (Boston: Little, Brown

Jesse Sandoval, Sam Garcia, and Rufino Mendoza because of their experiences during the war and in the years immediately after. A discussion of the both state and national politics regarding the treatment of the ethnic Mexican community will provide context for those experiences. In addition, this chapter demonstrates the impact of these changing identities on the struggle for civil rights, and the influence of this generation of activists, the Mexican American Generation, whose worldviews not only led them to recognize the need for reforms in society but also feel they had undeniable claims to those reforms.

As Gilbert Garcia learned when he tried to get into TCU prior to the war, the perception by Anglos of ethnic Mexicans in the United States often “conjured up images of the bent figures in a distant cotton field or the swarthy common laborers encountered in the region’s town and cities.” These laborers “were assumed...to be members of a ragged race of inferiors provided by providence to do the region’s most unpleasant work.”⁴⁶ Although these laborers were performing necessary work for the American economy, they were not considered to be a part of American society, even though a large portion of these laborers were not immigrants at all, but rather descendants of some of the first non-native families that settled in Texas and the rest of the Southwest. However, most Anglos, including federal employees reporting on the conditions of labor in the Southwest United States believed that these *Spanish-speaking foreigners*, regardless of their nationalities, would voluntarily return to their homeland once they earned enough money or the work was no longer available. Those who did not return home were

and Co., 2000), Emilio Zamora, *Claiming Rights and Righting Wrongs in Texas: Mexican Workers and Job Politics during World War II*, (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008).

⁴⁶ Griswold del Castillo, *World War II and Mexican American Civil Rights*, 7.

expected to assimilate fully into American society just as other immigrant groups from Europe did in previous generations.⁴⁷

Although Fort Worth's economy was not based in agriculture the availability of low-skilled labor in meat packing plants, steel factories, and railroad industries encouraged Mexican immigrants to migrate from rural communities in both Texas and Oklahoma. Sam Garcia's family immigrated from Quiroga, Michoacán, Mexico to the United States in 1923 when Sam was one month old. Sam's family lived in Pittsburg, Oklahoma where the coal mines offered plentiful but arduous work. Both of Sam's parents died of tuberculosis before he was eight years old. He also contracted the disease and was forced to live in a hospital, the Eastern Oklahoma Tuberculosis Sanatorium in Talihina, Oklahoma, where he spent eighteen hours a day on bed rest for four and half years. Finally at age twelve, Garcia was healed and released under the care of his uncles Bruno and Jesse. After leaving the hospital Garcia attended school for the first time. He could only attend half days, spending the rest of the day working with his uncles on a farm. During the Great Depression the coal mines of Oklahoma became depleted of natural resources and the economy shifted back to an agrarian one. Although large portions of the state were greatly affected by the Dust Bowl by 1935, Pittsburg County, Oklahoma had more than 4,000 farms, with over 53,000 acres of corn and 40,000 acres of cotton planted in 1934.⁴⁸ Garcia's necessity to fulfill his responsibilities to his family resulted in only a fourth grade education. He worked in cotton, corn, and

⁴⁷ibid.

⁴⁸ O'Dell, "Pittsburg County."

wheat fields as a sharecropper where adults earned \$1.50 a day and children earned 50 cents. Garcia's path changed drastically once he was drafted into the Army.⁴⁹

Rufino Mendoza was born in Pittsburg, Oklahoma in 1927 where his father, like Garcia's, worked in the coal mines. After job opportunities began to dwindle in Oklahoma because of the closing of the mines, the family moved to Fort Worth where his father began working for Texas & Pacific Railroad. This rail line came to Fort Worth in the late 1800s, through the efforts of Fort Worth business men who worked to transition the city from a temporary stopover for cattle herds headed north, into a "large meat-packing center rivaling Kansas City and Chicago."⁵⁰ Establishment of a major railroad was the first step. By the 1930s, railroad lines attracted Mexican workers from the surrounding regions, including central Oklahoma. The new arrivals developed a new community or barrio that referred to as El TP, because of its relative location to the Texas Pacific railway yard in West Fort Worth. This was the neighborhood in which the Mendoza family resided until the repatriation sweeps of the Great Depression pressured Mendoza's father to move the family to Mexico.⁵¹

Deportation serves as another important touchpoint for the development of activism among the Mexican American generation. Because of extreme nationwide unemployment during the Great Depression, the general public and government entities at the local, state, and federal levels looked for someone to blame. Mexicans laborers, regardless of their citizenship, were vehemently looked upon as non-American and were singled out as scapegoats for the lack of job opportunities throughout the Southwest. As Mexican Americans stood in the same lines with other out of work Americans to receive

⁴⁹ Sam Garcia Papers, "Sam Garcia Biographical History," Series I: Personal Papers, Box 2, Folder 10, Fort Worth Central Library Archives.

⁵⁰ Pate, *North of the River*, 17.

⁵¹ Cuellár, *Stories from the Barrio*, 191.

welfare benefits during this time period, Mexicans were pressured by Americans to return to Mexico. Roughly half of the 5,000 Mexicans that lived in Fort Worth in the early years of the Great Depression returned to Mexico.⁵² Most of the Mexicans were not formally deported but rather strongly encouraged to head south, often with the help of government funded transportation costs. These laborers and their families were blamed for circumstances completely out of their control and forced into making decisions that often led to taking their American born children away from their homeland. Unable to build a life in Depression era Mexico the Mendoza family returned to Fort Worth in 1935 when Rufino Mendoza was eight years old. After struggling for several years in school because of language barriers that caused him to consistently fall behind the rest of his classmates, Mendoza dropped out of school. He was drafted into the Army in 1945. This service in the military opened new opportunities for Mendoza as it did for Gilbert Garcia.

Gilbert Garcia was born in Brownsville, Texas in 1918. His family tended to vegetables, fruits, and livestock on their small ranch outside of Brownsville. As the eldest child of seven, Garcia felt a responsibility to help his family through the financial hard times of the mid-1930s. He joined the Civilian Conservation Corps and was sent to California to improve national parks and help fight forest fires. Garcia knew he wanted more than what life on a farm in Brownsville could offer. During the Great Depression it was a rarity to find work in any capacity; joining the CCC, a segment of President Roosevelt's New Deal, afforded young Mexican men an opportunity to help their families financially and aided young Mexican American men to define their role and place in American society, outside of the barrios and the labor fields.

The United States federal government re-discovered Mexican Americans on the eve of the Second World War and became slightly concerned with their well-being during

⁵² Carlos E. Cuellar, *Stories from the Barrio*, 49.

the war years. With the United States' need to create an amalgamated allied front against the growing axis powers, Mexican Americans and the Mexican government had an unprecedented opportunity to put pressure on the U.S. government to address the disparities in society.⁵³ Although the boom in war related industries propelled many Americans out of the Great Depression, the rewards of these new economic opportunities were not evenly distributed among the masses. War industries across the United States stipulated their racial preferences to the U.S. Employment Service, "‘Americans only,’ ‘Nordics,’ ‘North European stock,’ or ‘Anglo-Saxons.’ African Americans, Italians, and Jews were often specifically excluded by eastern employers, In the West, the list of ‘undesirable types’ included ‘Mexicans.’" Some Texans who may have had difficulty proving their citizenship were accepted in war industries as long as they "looked American."⁵⁴

The exclusion of Mexicans in the Southwest contributed to the labor shortage in these defense industries. The federal government stepped in to not only attempt to solve the labor shortage issues but also because they worried how these discriminatory practices might affect the loyalties of the victims. Just six months after the United States entered into the war, President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8802 establishing the Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) because of pressure from the African American community. Although the FEPC's goals were to bring an end to the discrimination occurring in the defense industries, without a Congressional mandate or an enforcement arm, they could only bring attention to the incidents with hope that public

⁵³ Emilio Zamora, *Claiming Rights and Righting Wrongs in Texas: Mexican Workers and Job Politics during World War II*, (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 136.

⁵⁴ Richard Steele, "The Federal Government Discovers Mexican Americans," in *World War II and Mexican American Civil Rights*, edited by Richard Griswold del Castillo, annotated edition (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 20-21.

pressure many encourage changes in practices. In addition to the FEPC, Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy, whose initial goals prior to the war were to foster trade and to protect American investments in Latin America began to concern itself with security issues and sought methods to appease those who were affected by the racial prejudices in the Southwest.⁵⁵

The available jobs in the booming war industries in Fort Worth as well as employment opportunities created by the steady flow of young men headed to basic training led to an increase of Mexican immigrants into the city. Many returned to the city after being forced south of the border during the Great Depression. However, just because the Immigration and Naturalization Service may have eased their attitudes toward Mexicans, this did not mean that the city was ready to welcome them with open arms. The "Mexican side," of north Main Street in Fort Worth was, "where dirt roads led to rude shacks within clear view of spacious homes and well-manicured lawns on the thoroughfare's west side," an area of town still off limits to Mexicans.⁵⁶

Once the Second World War began, young men with names like Sanchez, Ramos, and Chavez enlisted or were drafted in large numbers into the armed forces from Fort Worth and throughout Texas. Their reasoning for volunteering for service differed greatly. Some men joined because of loyalty to their families or nation, or out of a sense of manhood, others to escape poverty or discrimination, still others out of a desire for an adventure, or to follow older siblings or friends. Rufino Mendoza and Sam Garcia were drafted into service. As they served in both the Pacific and the European theaters, they learned to live closely with other Americans in a manner they had not previously

⁵⁵ Ibid, 21.

⁵⁶ Ty Cashion, *The New Frontier: A Contemporary History of Fort Worth & Tarrant County*, (San Antonio: Historical Publishing Network, 2006), 87.

experienced. The war began to reshape their identities and their place in society. Proportionately, Mexican Americans were both the largest ethnic group represented in the war and were awarded more Medals of Honor; however, their welcome home from fighting against Hitler and his racial superiority ideology was plagued with the all too familiar *No Dogs, No Mexicans* discriminatory treatment in American society and their contributions to the war went virtually unnoticed for decades.⁵⁷ Throughout the United States the rhetoric of defending American freedom and democracy stood in contrast to the authoritarianism and imperialism of the German and Japanese regimes. However, for Mexican Americans in Texas this language was contradicted by the exclusionary and discriminatory treatment they experienced in their everyday world. For G.I.s in Fort Worth and all over Texas the reality of second-class citizenship was not acceptable prior to the war and certainly not after all they sacrificed and fought for during the war.⁵⁸

Salvador Gonzalez, Jr., whose family had immigrated to Fort Worth in 1920, remembered entering a bar in the Northside neighborhood of Fort Worth with other GI friends who were Anglo and was refused service by the Anglo bartender.⁵⁹ Gonzalez was born and raised in Fort Worth, went to school at Alexander Hall Elementary School with only two other Mexican students, then attended junior high for only six months. Gonzalez and his father decided since he had already learned to count, read, and write his time was better spent working. He worked as a paperboy, dishwasher, and fry cook until he joined the Marine Corps in 1945. When he returned to Fort Worth eighteen months later,

⁵⁷ Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez, "Introduction," in *Mexican Americans and World War II*, edited by Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), xvii. Also, see the story of Mexican American Medal of Honor recipient Guy Gabaldon whose heroism was portrayed by an Anglo actor in the Hollywood film *Hell to Eternity*, Ray Suarez, *Latino Americans: the 500-Year Legacy That Shaped A Nation*, (Oxford University Press, 2012), 90-93, 120-122.

⁵⁸ Richard Griswold del Castillo, "The War and Changing Identities: Personal Transformations," in *World War II and Mexican American Civil Rights*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 49-73.

⁵⁹ Manuel García y Griego and Roberto R Calderón. *Más allá del río Bravo: breve historia mexicana del norte de Texas*, 2013, 56.

little had changed. His denial of service at the Northside bar was not the only discrimination he and his wife Maria experienced in Fort Worth. After saving enough money to move out of their “shotgun home” in 1947 they purchased a home in an all Anglo community.⁶⁰ Although housing covenants began losing power during this time in Fort Worth’s history and did not prevent the Gonzalez’ family from purchasing the home, the neighbors began moving out once the Mexicans moved into the community. In the 1950s Maria Gonzalez worked in the finishing room for a Mathis Company, a furniture manufacturer where she experienced frequent verbal abuse leaving her shaken up and in tears by the time she went home. Gonzalez eventually found steady work as a mail carrier for Fort Worth.⁶¹ This type of discrimination in Fort Worth and all over Texas was a normal occurrence and little was done to curtail it until the war years when both the federal government and the State of Texas began to realize its effect on their diplomatic relationship with Mexico.

When the United States and Mexico negotiated the Bracero Program, inviting Mexican nationals to enter the United States to supplement labor on farms throughout the Southwest, the Mexican government excluded Texas from the program due to the extensive reports of discriminatory treatment reported by Mexican nationals, Mexican Americans, and visiting Mexican diplomats and businessmen. Opponents of these conditions and the few Mexican American activists in positions to bring attention to the matter laced their arguments against this treatment with wartime rhetoric. George Sanchez, the president of LULAC (1941-1942), argued in a 1941 letter to the wartime Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs Nelson Rockefeller, that, “‘Mexican’ has become a term of opprobrium...and associated with discriminatory practices in wage scales and

⁶⁰ Cuellar, *Stories from the Barrio*, 24.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

employment procedures, in education, in the exercise of civil rights...In effect many of these people live in a veritable concentration camp.”⁶² Sanchez believed it was necessary for the federal government to create a national Latin American Research and Policy Commission to study these “forgotten people” and to develop policies to improve these conditions. After his initial letter did not receive the attention he believed it deserved, Sanchez sent a follow-up letter in 1942 that stated “These conditions constitute a tremendous drag upon the morale of some two and a half million people in this area. This is a dangerous situation in its effects upon productive manpower and whole-hearted cooperation in the defense effort as well as in the possibilities it presents to subversive elements.”⁶³ In response to Mexico’s exclusion of Texas as part of the Bracero Program because of its cruel treatment of people of Mexican descent, the Texas legislature in 1943 passed the “Caucasian Race Resolution” forbidding any discriminatory treatment of Caucasians in the state. Not only did this resolution lack an enforcement arm but also the definition of Caucasian, used to carefully craft the language of the resolution to not interfere with the Jim Crow Laws of the state, was often decided on by differing local practices. This empty effort by the governor and legislature of Texas to eliminate *Juan Crow* laws did not improve the conditions or experiences of Mexicans in Fort Worth or anywhere in Texas.⁶⁴

George I. Sanchez’ wartime rhetoric to advocate for equality and integration for Mexican Americans in all aspects of society, demonstrates his major role as an activist of the Mexican American generation. His activism was at the center of the social, political,

⁶²Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirror*, 131.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 132.

⁶⁴ Emilio Zamora, “Mexico’s Wartime Intervention on Behalf of Mexicans in the United States,” in *Mexican Americans & World War II*, edited by Rivas-Rodriguez, Maggie, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 221-243.

economic, and most importantly the intellectual issues facing his community. When the United States entered into World War II, Sanchez unsuccessfully attempted to enlist in intelligence positions in the Navy on several occasions. After these efforts did not come to fruition, Sanchez continued the struggle for equality at home. As LULAC president, university professor, and later as chairman or creator of many advocacy groups, Sanchez received and forwarded notes, messages, letters, from Mexican communities complaining about discriminatory treatment. He continuously confronted Anglo leaders who were “practicing or presiding over racial discrimination,” and he spoke at national education conferences, “about the racial segregation of Mexican American children in the schools as doing ‘more harm to Pan-Americanism than a shipload of Nazi agents.’”⁶⁵

During the war the United States’ ideology of Pan-Americanism attempted to build a bridge of cooperation and friendship with Latin America in the Good Neighbor Policy. When Mexico refused to include Texas in the Bracero Program due to the high levels of discriminatory treatment for Mexicans, the Good Neighbor Commission was established in Texas to negotiate an end to the ban. Sanchez’ efforts highlight the sacrifices and successes of Mexican Americans in the war and then the discriminatory treatment they received once they were back on American soil as evidence of the hypocrisy of segregation in the United States. This paradox led to an evolution in identity for people of Mexican ancestry living in the United States and contributing to the war effort both at home and abroad. Raul Morin, World War II veteran and the author of the first book exploring the sacrifices of Mexican Americans in World War II wrote, “Most of us were more than glad to be given the opportunity to serve in the war. It did not matter whether we were looked upon as Mexicans; the war soon made us all genuine

⁶⁵Blanton, *George I. Sánchez*, 79.

Americans, eligible and available immediately to fight and to defend our country, the United States of America.”⁶⁶

Texas Governor Coke Stevenson created the Good Neighbor Commission to placate the Mexican government regarding to the Bracero Program and satisfy the demand from Texas farmers for additional labor during the war by appearing to officially address the problem of racial discrimination against Mexicans. In Texas during the war segregation was a way of life and was “evident among business owners who refused to give service to Mexicans, state officials who maintained separate and unequal schools.”⁶⁷

However, it was not just the need for labor that led to governmental efforts for an egalitarian society for Mexican Americans. The constant war propaganda professing justice and democracy led many in the Mexican community to begin an earnest campaign for acceptance and equality based on those ideals. The “Double V” campaign worked for victory against fascism abroad and victory against racism at home. Mexican American civil rights leaders were “broadening their claims for equal rights at home by becoming Americans abroad.”⁶⁸ This was literally true for some Mexican immigrants in the United States who acquired citizenship after joining the armed services, such as Sam Garcia of Fort Worth.

Garcia’s lack of citizenship did not prevent his being drafted into the Army nor did it make him any less patriotic than his comrades. He served honorably as a medic in Africa, Italy, Southern France, and Hawaii, witnessing first-hand the gruesome aftermath of the United States’ efforts to liberate Europe from German occupation. He was awarded three Bronze Stars for his service in both the European and Pacific theaters. In addition

⁶⁶ Ronald T Takaki and Mazal Holocaust Collection, *Double Victory: A Multicultural History of America in World War II* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 2000), 88.

⁶⁷ Zamora, *Claiming Rights and Righting Wrongs*, 214.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 17. This approach to acquiring civil rights has its roots in the African American community and the NAACP.

to this military recognition, he also became a U.S. citizen through the Second War Powers Act of 1942 that exempted noncitizen service members from several naturalization requirements and a 1944 statute that eliminated proof of lawful entry to the U.S.⁶⁹ Before his service in the war, Sam Garcia was one of those Mexican immigrant laborers vehemently looked upon as non-American who should have returned to Mexico once his services were no longer needed. However his life changed once he was drafted.

Prior to the war, Garcia's life in Oklahoma was defined by his subordinate status as a Mexican laborer. His father, a laborer, died from an infectious disease likely contracted from other laborers with whom he lived in close contact. His uncles were laborers and eventually developed and died from black lung disease as a result of the years working in the mines. This was Garcia's future before his contributions and service to the United States broadened his experiences around the world. According to Garcia, "I didn't know anything about the rest of the world. But I figured there had to be something else to life."⁷⁰ During the war he attended to wounded G.I.s and was a source of healing and aid. He was not assumed to be just an inferior brown face, but an equal, a skilled soldier, trained and ready as a first responder to treat his fellow soldier on the battlefield, "to me, it was the kind of education I'd never had in school...we were just country boys from Oklahoma, We didn't know anything. All we knew was that we were serving our country."⁷¹ His experience in the war "turned out to be the experience that made a difference in my life. If I hadn't gone into the Army, I'd probably have stayed right there in Oklahoma forever like a hermit."⁷² Garcia's years serving the military during World War II

⁶⁹ "Military Naturalization During WWII," U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, last modified September 8, 2015, accessed on May 31, 2016, <https://www.uscis.gov/history-and-genealogy/our-history/agency-history/military-naturalization-during-wwii>.

⁷⁰ Samuel Garcia Papers, "Proud patriot began as illegal immigrant," Series I: Personal Papers, Box 2, Folder 10, Fort Worth Central Library Archives.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

as a man needed for his skills nurtured a desire to continue a life of service as a veteran and activist where he could use his talents for the betterment of his community.⁷³

After the war, he returned to Oklahoma, married, and ran a bar with his uncles until they died of black lung disease. Garcia found some success in owning his own business but he chose to sell the bar to help pay for his wife's medical bills after she too became ill. He then began a career in selling insurance that allowed him to travel throughout North and West Texas. Garcia's wife died shortly after moving to Fort Worth in the late 1950s. According to Garcia, "There was nobody at the funeral but my boss, his secretary and the priest." He was left with very little money but with a desire once again to serve his community Garcia reflected, "If you don't have friends, you don't have nothing. I said you have to belong to something."⁷⁴ Garcia began working in construction and quickly involved himself in organizations and clubs that focused on issues facing the Hispanic community. His parentless childhood and the death of his uncles at young ages left Garcia with little connection to his Mexican culture. He worked to establish new organizations and clubs, and created scholarship funds, which gave him the opportunity to lay down roots in Fort Worth's Mexican community.⁷⁵ He established a construction business in 1958 and quickly became politically aware and involved in issues relevant to the Latino community.

Garcia demonstrated a sense of Pan-Americanism in his political orientation. When *Fort Worth Press* columnist Robert Ruark published an editorial in 1959 stating that, "The compulsion to steal is as ingrained in the Latino as deeply as his love of sun and shade...bribery and corruption are considered a recognized right of office, not a sin

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Samuel Garcia Papers, "Pair to be honored share history of service to FW," Series I: Personal Papers, Box 2, Folder 9.

⁷⁵ Sam Garcia Papers, "Sam Garcia Biographical History," Series I: Personal Papers, Box 2, Folder 10, Fort Worth Central Library Archives.

or even a frivolity,”⁷⁶ Garcia wrote a letter to the editor demanding an apology. He believed this statement to not only be offensive to the Latino community but also detrimental to any efforts by the United States to build a “lasting friendship with all our Latin American friends...all decent Americans should demand an apology from Ruark and the paper which published it.”⁷⁷ This was the beginning of Garcia’s activism. The war had altered his identity. Fort Worth was his new home and Garcia was now becoming politically aware and connected with his ancestry and a desire to be of service.

Like Sam Garcia, Jesse Sandoval’s experience in World War II served as a turning point in his life. Born in Laredo, Texas in 1926, Jesse Sandoval’s family moved to Fort Worth to work for the railroad when he was still an infant. As a resident of Fort Worth since 1927, Jesse was a witness to the changing physical and demographic landscape of the city for most of the twentieth-century. At seventeen years old, a year before graduating from high school, he was granted permission from his parents to join the Navy with the intention of gaining a diploma while in the service. However joining in 1943 in the midst of the war delayed his academic plans until he returned to Fort Worth. He served on the U.S.S. Manley in the Pacific Ocean as a Machinist’s Mate, Third Class. In his three years of active duty, Sandoval earned a Victory Medal, American Campaign Medal, Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal, and six battle stars. Once home, he used benefits of the G.I. Bill to receive training as a welder and went to work at General Dynamics. His career as a welder was cut short due to a deteriorating spine. After receiving treatment at a VA hospital in Temple, Texas, Sandoval found work a couple blocks from his Linwood

⁷⁶ Robert Ruark, “Man With Long Whiskers Ought to Mind Manners,” *Fort Worth Press*, May 19, 1959.

⁷⁷ Samuel Garcia Papers, “Note in regard to Columnist Robert Ruark,” Series II: Organizations: International Good Neighbor Council, Box 1, Folder 1, Fort Worth Central Library Archives.

neighborhood building furniture. He worked as a skilled craftsman until his retirement from Kisabeth Furniture.⁷⁸

Two blocks of the small Linwood neighborhood, just west of downtown Fort Worth, was completely occupied by Mexicans. Sandoval met his wife in this neighborhood, organized a baseball team, and became a voice for its residents. He began his life of service to his community as soon as returned from the war when his mother and mother-in-law encouraged him to help an elderly Mexican woman living in the neighborhood who did not speak English and whose home was torn down by the city. His mother told him that as a bilingual man who fought for his country, he could find solutions to the problems of his small community. He could get the muddy streets of Linwood paved, ensure better communication between the city and the Spanish-speaking Linwood residents, and become an advocate for this small group of Mexicans in Fort Worth who were previously ignored. Sandoval met Gilbert and Sam Garcia in the early years of the G.I. Forum in Fort Worth and served as the second chairman of the organization. When asked by the two to help start a Mexican American Chamber of Commerce, Sandoval declined because not only was he not a business owner but he also did not see a direct benefit for his barrio. He offered his services in continuing to organize the community where Sandoval could fulfill his commitments to the immediate needs of the people.⁷⁹

Although Mendoza did not see the same action as Sandoval or either Garcia did during World War II (he was in basic training when the war ended), his service in the army infantry and his one year deployment in post-war Europe afforded him new opportunities when he returned home. Mendoza and Martina Franco eloped quickly upon his return and started a family. With the help of the G.I. Bill Mendoza attended trade

⁷⁸ Eva Bonilla, Personal Interview by author, June 9, 2016.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

school and in 1951 became one of Fort Worth's first Mexican American U.S. letter carriers.⁸⁰ Even though he never completed high school, his life after the war demonstrated his belief in the value and need of education for both his family and his community. According to his daughter Rebecca, she and her siblings knew the expectation was to finish high school and to attend college. This path was a matter of fact for the Mendoza children, and because of their father's influence they understood that education was a necessary tool for upward mobility.⁸¹

Mendoza's opportunities after the war were available to him because of the G.I. Bill. Signed into law by Roosevelt in 1944, The Service Readjustment Act provided an unprecedented benefits package for the U.S. military. The memories of the U.S. Army forcibly removing the "Bonus Army" from Washington, D.C. after they attempted to collect cash-payments for their promised service certificates in 1932 assisted in getting the bill passed. Support for the bill also came from active lobbying by veterans organizations, and by the fear of a recession after the massive demobilization of the military.⁸² The G.I. Bill's entitlements included access to loans for businesses, farms, and homes at low interest, financial assistance for technical and post-secondary education, unemployment compensation at twenty dollars a week for a year, and job-placement services.⁸³ Most veterans, including Mendoza, took advantage of the educational assistance by way of technical training, and vocational and business schools.

His experiences in the Army and the opportunities afforded to him through his entitlements changed the path for Mendoza, his wife, and his children. He returned home

⁸⁰ Cuellar, *Stories from the Barrio*, 193.

⁸¹ Rebecca Mendoza, Personal Interview with author, March 5, 2015.

⁸² Steven Rosales, "Fighting the Peace at Home: Mexican American Veterans and the 1944 GI Bill of Rights," *Pacific Historical Review* 80, no. 4 (November 2011): 602-603, doi:<http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.uta.edu/10.1525/phr.2011.80.4.597>.

⁸³ *Ibid*, 603.

from Europe not as the kid who was forced to move to his ancestral homeland, but rather as an American man. When faced with unequal treatment that directly impacted his family and community, Mendoza dedicated his time and energy to ensure the rights guaranteed to all Americans regardless of their ancestry were upheld. His activism centered mostly on educational issues and the lack of diversity in other public institutions. Mendoza and his wife Martina raised a family of nine children in whom he instilled a conviction about the centrality of education.

For the G.I. Bill to fully work for Mendoza and other Mexican American veterans, it took the advocacy of the American G.I. Forum. Although the law did not differentiate on the basis of race, the local administration of the benefits and the societal norms of the mid-twentieth-century resulted in an inequitable access to these entitlements. This was a time when “merely being Hispanic definitively disqualified an individual from meaningful social and economic advancement; when being dark skinned and Spanish-surnamed qualitatively dismissed one’s convictions and opinions in public discussion and debate; when being Hispanic diminished or nullified one’s legal rights.”⁸⁴ With the victory over both the Great Depression and the Second World War, the opportunities to achieve personal success and advancement were readily available for many Americans. This was not the case for African Americans or for Mexican Americans. Segregation in schools and in public places was still the norm throughout the United States. Poll taxes and strategic gerrymandering worked to keep minority voices quiet. Homeowners associations and covenant laws ensured Anglo communities would stay Anglo only communities.⁸⁵

Mexican American veterans often found their entitlements delayed or inadequate. World War II veteran Raul Medina stated, “I went and applied for it, and I was starting to

⁸⁴ Henry A.J. Ramos, *The American GI Forum*, (Houston: Arte Publico Press, 1998), ix.

⁸⁵ Pate, *North of the River*, 141.

go to school...but under the G.I. Bill, they paid you not very often. Sometimes it was three, four months before you got your check...and a lot of fellas dropped out of school.”⁸⁶ In addition to check delays, localized administration of the entitlements meant that local discriminatory practices influenced who received benefits. Juan Martinez, Jr. successfully used the G.I. Bill to earn a bachelor’s degree at The University of Texas at El Paso with a geology major and a chemistry minor but when he and his wife moved to California and initially attempted to purchase a home the seller stated he was threatened with a lawsuit if he sold it to “that Mexican.” Martinez stated that, “I used to be an American soldier; now I’m a _____ Mexican who can’t buy houses.”⁸⁷ This was a reality faced by Mexican American veterans throughout the Southwest. These distinguished, loyal Americans, many decorated, were quickly forgotten and forced to continue fighting for not just these entitlements, but also the rights and freedoms in their own nation. This became paramount for Dr. Hector P. Garcia.

Hector P. Garcia served in the European Theatre during World War II and earned the rank of major. Back at home in Corpus Christi, Texas, he was a licensed surgeon, member of the Army Medical Corp, and distinctly aware of the subordinate and forgotten status of his fellow Mexican American veterans. In addition to the G.I. Bill the federal government expanded and increased the budget of the Veterans Administration (VA) to aid returning veterans in their transition back into civilian life. Like the G.I. Bill, access to VA benefits was not as available to minority veterans. While attempting to provide medical services, both physical and mental, to veterans in South Texas he became aware of the complicated world of “bureaucratic red tape of the VA” that Mexican

⁸⁶ Rosales, “Fighting the Peace at Home,” 597.

⁸⁷“Juan Martinez Jr. - VOCES Oral History Project,” accessed March 13, 2016, http://www.lib.utexas.edu/voces/template-stories-indiv.html?work_urn=urn%3Autl%3Awwlatin.515&work_title=Martinez+Jr.%2C+Juan.

American veterans faced. “When coupled with the rampant discrimination that continued to exist in South Texas, Mexican American veterans and indeed much of the Mexican American community suffered from a combination of poor health, lower socioeconomic standing, and social and educational discrimination.”⁸⁸ These conditions, as well as the lack of Mexican American representation on Draft Boards, and the rampant delays in issuing checks, led Dr. Garcia to attend a meeting of veterans that birthed the American G.I. Forum.

Dr. Garcia served as the first president of the veteran’s organization that was propelled into the national spotlight less than a year after the initial meeting. The family of Felix Longoria, who was killed in action in the Philippines, was denied funeral services on the basis of his race and fear by the local chapel owner that the “town’s whites would object.”⁸⁹ With the intervention of Senator Lyndon B. Johnson, Private Longoria was buried at Arlington National Cemetery. Longoria’s status as a slain soldier allowed Dr. Garcia to successfully make this common occurrence of discriminatory treatment in rural Texas towns a matter of national concern.⁹⁰ The first step was enlisting the support of Johnson, a Democratic U.S. Senator from Texas who along with many other Americans “primarily saw this as an antipatriotic act on the part of the mortician.”⁹¹ On the other side, the Texas Dixiecrats and some of the South Texas Anglos’ reactions of support for the funeral home came from their beliefs in local traditions, “the apartheid social milieu that had developed in South Texas over the previous century.”⁹² Once the incident garnered local and national attention, the Mexican American community in the immediate

⁸⁸Rosales, “Fighting the Peace at Home,” 613.

⁸⁹ Patrick James Carroll, *Felix Longoria’s Wake Bereavement, Racism, and the Rise of Mexican American Activism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 196.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

area along with “most observers in Latin American countries reacted against the inherent racism and ethnocentrism in the funeral director’s refusal.”⁹³ Dr. Garcia and Senator Johnson used their “keen political instincts” to not only shed light on the second-class status of Mexican Americans through the Longoria affair, but also to build a “lasting coalition of Mexican American and liberal Anglo civil rights activists to establish the American G.I. Forum as a nationwide organization and leader in the struggle for Mexican American civil rights.”⁹⁴

Gilbert Garcia’s journey as president of the Fort Worth chapter of the American G.I. Forum began with his enlistment into the U.S. Army. After serving three years in the CCC, Garcia moved to Fort Worth and lived with his uncle Alfredo who owned a laundry business. Instead of waiting to be drafted, Garcia joined the Army in 1941. His Philippines bound ship’s engine malfunctioned and was diverted to the Hawaiian Islands in November 1941. Garcia woke to the sounds of gunfire on Sunday, December 7th. Once he realized it was not a training exercise, he proceeded to shoot at anything and everything in the sky.⁹⁵ Garcia not only survived Pearl Harbor, but he also fought at Midway and four other Pacific battles earning him six battle stars. He returned to Fort Worth in August 1945, married the woman he proposed to prior to joining the Army then attempted to cash-in the rewards promised to him by the nation for which he fought. “Like many young World War II veterans, Garcia hoped to open his own business. Like many young Hispanic veterans, he found it tough to negotiate bank loans and enter the Anglo-dominated business community.”⁹⁶ Garcia was not satisfied with the way things were and

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Cuellar, *Stories from the Barrio*, 143-144.

⁹⁶ Jeff Guinn, “Voice of Strength,” *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, October 13, 1992.

after his first encounter with Dr. Garcia and his American G.I. Forum, Gilbert made a decision to no longer accept this second-class citizenship.

In 1948, Dr. Garcia held a G.I. Forum meeting in the living room of Gilbert and Linda Garcia in Fort Worth. Gilbert Garcia had attended one of the G.I. Forum's first conventions in San Antonio where he met Dr. Garcia and when, "he came home from that convention and he couldn't stop talking about it."⁹⁷ This meeting led to the creation of a Fort Worth chapter and the beginning of Gilbert Garcia's almost fifty year long active involvement in service to his community. Gilbert Garcia also served as State Chairman for three years in which he traveled over 100,000 miles organizing and activating chapters all over the state.⁹⁸ After Gilbert Garcia began spending weekends driving all over the state helping Hispanic veterans get their businesses organized, Mrs. Garcia decided to join his efforts and began a Forum chapter for women. Gilbert Garcia sacrificed his own dry cleaning business because of his commitment to promoting the G.I. Forum.

Gilbert and Linda Garcia and Dr. Garcia travelled the state but were not always welcomed. "There was a time Dr. Garcia went into a restaurant and was told, 'We don't serve Mexicans here.'" He jokingly replied, "That's ok, I just want a hamburger." In this case Hector Garcia used humor to defuse the tension of the moment of being refused service, but did not back down. But there were lots of times when the situation did not end with humor, and "he and Gilbert had to be escorted out of town by police."⁹⁹ Even though they were treated as second-class citizens, Gilbert, Herlinda, and Dr. Garcia did not see themselves as such and continued to challenge everyday practices of segregation even as they traveled the state organizing and supporting American G.I.

⁹⁷ Jeff Guinn, "Voice of Strength," *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, October 13, 1992.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

Forum chapters. These subtle but important stands would have resonated with local Mexican Americans as they journeyed across Texas.

From its title to its policies and procedures, the American G.I. Forum embodied the Mexican American Generation. These were men and women who identified as American and with their World War II contributions and sacrifices as proof, demanded their rights. The Forum emphasized and encouraged education in the Mexican American community, created both state and national initiatives to increase political representation, fought legal battles against school segregation and unconstitutional jury systems, established training programs for unskilled labor, and challenged business to “promote greater accountability to the nation’s Hispanic community.”¹⁰⁰ American systems were at the heart of their efforts. They encouraged Mexican American communities to graduate from high school, seek higher education, pay their poll taxes and to vote.

In its early years, the Forum recognized a lack of education as a primary reason for the treatment of Mexican Americans as second-class citizens. More importantly, the leaders of the Forum attributed the low educational achievement not to a lack of interest in education in the Mexican American community, but rather to the institutional discriminatory practices in the school system; from segregation and inequality in school financing to a lack of cultural and linguistic awareness in performance evaluations. The first focus was in the community organizing back to school drives, conversations about the importance of formal education directly to the parents of children through door-to-door visits, local radio stations, and the distribution of written materials. This advocacy was supported by local business donations, *tamaladas*, and dances to raise funds.¹⁰¹ The successes of the American G.I. Forum were aided by the increase in the Mexican middle-

¹⁰⁰ Ramos, *American GI Forum*, xix.

¹⁰¹ Ramos, *The American GI Forum*, 55-63.

class and the aspiring middle-class who mostly made its membership. They were men and women and families who understood the necessity of education and active reform efforts to aid in the upward mobility of their community. Through these grassroots efforts forumeers found success in both retention and enrollment numbers in Mexican American school-aged children. However, the most complex and rigorous battles occurred in the court systems.¹⁰²

Eight years prior to the historic *Brown v Board of Education* Supreme Court decision that ruled the long-held separate but equal doctrine as unconstitutional, Mexican American activists won a judgment in a U.S. District Court in Texas stating that it was a violation of the Fourteenth Amendment to segregate Mexican American children in public schools on the basis of ethnicity alone. Although the decision in *Delgado v Bastrop* did little to change the everyday practices of local school districts it was a forward step in the fight to end institutional discrimination in public schools for Mexican Americans.¹⁰³

Between the 1950s and 1960s the Forum along with LULAC filed almost a hundred complaints challenging educational inequalities, including school segregation. Tirelessly fought in the court rooms by Forum attorney, Gus Garcia, with the educational theory expertise of University of Texas professor George I. Sanchez and led by Dr. Hector P. Garcia, these foundational efforts in equalizing educational opportunities were instrumental for the upwardly mobile gains made in the 1960s and 1970s.

The population of Mexican-Americans in Fort Worth was vastly less than other Texas cities where the G.I. Forum was drawing attention both statewide and nationally. The existence of the G.I. Forum's Fort Worth chapter reflected Hector Garcia's determination to open chapters wherever a local population called for one, regardless of

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ramos, *The American GI Forum*, 55-57.

the overall size of the Mexican population. By August of 1957, Gilbert Garcia stated the following as evidence of the American G.I. Forum's presence in Fort Worth and their impact on this small Mexican American community: a vast increase in paid poll taxes in the Latino community, more Mexican students prepared for and staying in school, mediations between stores and businesses and Mexican Americans who felt discriminated against, success in getting a Latino hired to the Fort Worth Police Department, and an established Boy Scout Troop for Mexican American youth.¹⁰⁴ The *Fort Worth Star Telegram* reported these successes in a full page article highlighting the work of the American G.I. Forum and Gilbert Garcia, who was featured and interviewed for the article.

Between 1940 and 1956 the rate of Mexican Americans who paid their poll taxes increased 2000 percent, from 50 to more than 1000. Garcia attributed this increase in part to poll drives conducted by the American G.I. Forum. Just like chapters in other major cities, the local chapter of the G.I. Forum believed increased political participation among the Latino community was paramount to ensuring their needs were addressed by the city. Gilbert Garcia's experiences in poll tax and voting drives influenced his leadership in the Viva Kennedy Clubs. He was named chairman of the Fort Worth section of the state organization.¹⁰⁵ The efforts of the Viva Kennedy Clubs and the increase in Latino voters contributed greatly to the success of the Kennedy/Johnson ticket in Texas in the 1960 election.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Marshall Lynam, "GI Forum—It's Hitting Heavy Blows at the Enemy—Prejudice," *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, August 15, 1957.

¹⁰⁵ Samuel Garica Papers, "JFK-LBJ Ticket Gets 'Vivas' Here, Series III: Subject Files-Politics, Box 3, Folder 4.

¹⁰⁶ Brian D. Behnken, *Fighting Their Own Battles: Mexican Americans, African Americans, and the Struggle for Civil Rights in Texas*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 85.

The G.I. Forum in Fort Worth also focused on education. The Forum held yearly back-to-school drives where they distributed school shoes and clothing. These drives also encouraged and motivated Mexican youth to stay in school and educated the community on the value of a high school diploma and pursuing a college education. Garcia believed that without these drives many school-aged kids in the community may have dropped out. Specifically, the Forum was instrumental in encouraging Lucy Caram to follow through on her dreams of becoming a doctor. After her mother died she almost dropped out of high school to help her father financially. Members of the Forum persuaded her to continue her education. She eventually enrolled in pre-med classes at the University of North Texas.¹⁰⁷

Issues of discrimination were also a priority for the American G.I. Forum in Fort Worth. However dealing with these issues prior to the Civil Rights Acts of the 1960s and without the attentive audience created by the aggressive methods of the Chicano Movement meant that many instances of discrimination were not always resolved. Garcia stated that, “when Latin-Americans are barred from stores and businesses strictly because of their race, a committee from the Forum tries to call on the owner and reason with him. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn’t.”¹⁰⁸ Garcia believed in dealing with these issues in a “friendly [and] level-headed manner.”¹⁰⁹ Even though local government was not necessarily on the side of the Latino community in these instances Garcia “doesn’t think it hurts to try.”¹¹⁰

The last two successes of the Forum according to Gilbert Garcia were the hiring of two Hispanic police officers and establishment of a Boy Scout Troop for Mexican

¹⁰⁷ Marshall Lynam, “GI Forum—It’s Hitting Heavy Blows at the Enemy—Prejudice,” *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, August 15, 1957.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

American youth. The first Mexican American police officer hired by the Fort Worth PD was Inez (Chico) Perez. He began his career working with the school district in the first years of integration. Perez worked closely with Mexican American youth when he served as a liaison officer at various schools. Sam Garcia credited him with “helping them [Mexican American students] to become productive members of society,” through his active mentoring.¹¹¹ By the 1980s Perez was a Tarrant County Constable. Juan M. Gonzalez was also hired in 1957 and assigned the Northside neighborhood. Gilbert Garcia established Boy Scout Troop 150 for Mexican American youth. This troop was sponsored by the Fort Worth chapter of the Forum. Garcia believed that the kids in the troop were, “as American as ham and eggs”.¹¹² Garcia’s also attributed much of the improvements in the Mexican American community to the “breakdown of the language barrier,” more Mexicans speaking English at home.

Gilbert Garcia’s assimilationist philosophies and methods in achieving equality and opportunities for upward mobility and his beliefs in what constituted success were about to be challenged by a new wave of activists in Fort Worth who viewed Garcia and his contemporaries as sell-outs who did not speak for the Mexicans still struggling in the barrios . Despite these accusations, his critics recognized Gilbert Garcia’s leadership qualities and his absolute dedication to the Mexican American community rather than in his own personal advancement. The recognition of Garcia’s integrity despite reservations about his approach helped mitigate conflict and guided Fort Worth through the years of the Chicano Movement when the city’s Mexican American leaders struggled to unify.

¹¹¹ Samuel Garcia Papers, *Community News and Events*, March 1984, Series VI: Newspapers, Box 2.

¹¹² Marshall Lynam, “GI Forum—It’s Hitting Heavy Blows at the Enemy—Prejudice,” *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, August 15, 1957.

The contributions of the Mexican American community during World War altered the worldviews of both the soldiers who fought for democracy abroad and for the families at home who contributed to the war effort. The second-class treatment of people of Mexican descent by a nation who professed to symbolize freedom and believed itself to be a pillar of democracy was a contradiction that could no longer continue. Gilbert Garcia, Sam Garcia, Jesse Sandoval and Rufino Mendoza, along with many people of Mexican descent were now not only definitive in their Americanness, but because of their wartime service, they also now had undeniable claims to that status. Over the last two decades the projects concerning the role and status of Mexican Americans during this time has greatly increased. The continued analysis of the contributions of Mexican Americans during this major era allows both scholars and the general public to understand Mexican Americans to not just have been affected by WWII, but also to have effected this seminal moment in U.S. History.

Chapter 2: Mexican American Fort Worth during the Chicano Movement

I,
Of the same name,
Joaquín,
In a country that has wiped out
All my history,
Stifled all my pride,
In a country that has placed a
Different weight of indignity upon my age-old burdened back.
Inferiority is the new load
The Indian has endured and still
Emerged the winner,
The Mestizo must yet overcome,
And the gachupín will just ignore.
I look at myself
And see part of me
Who rejects my father and my mother
And dissolves into the melting pot
To disappear in shame.
I sometimes
Sell my brother out
And reclaim him
For my own when society gives me
Token leadership
In society's own name.
I am Joaquín,¹¹³

--Excerpt from "I am Joaquin," by Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales, 1967

Described as "militant Mexican-Americans" by the *Fort Worth Star Telegram* in July 1970, Chicano Movement activists were rumored to be planning "demonstrations or even violence" in response to continued discriminatory treatment and a lack of dedicated city resources in Mexican communities. According to Reverend Hugo Ruiz of the Brooklyn Heights Baptist Mission in the old T&P neighborhood of Fort Worth, "the older generation remembers how its [the Mexican community] members were treated long ago

¹¹³ Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzalez, "I am Joaquin," in *Mexican American Literature: A Portable Anthology*, edited by Dagoberto Gilb and Ricardo Angel Gilb, (Boston; New York: Bedford/St Martin's, 2016), 63-76.

and they haven't forgotten, but members of the new generation are struggling to find a place in society."¹¹⁴ Looking for their place, these "militants" began to identify with the plights of all their ancestors. Though their families were urbanized in a previous generation, they found common ground as Chicanos with the efforts of Cesar Chavez and the farm workers movement. As a 1970 article put it, they identified with "his California farm workers, and they insist that the total community must begin to recognize the problems and take action to solve them."¹¹⁵ Joe Marquez, a Chicano activist in Fort Worth helped organize and participated in a service held at St. Patrick's Cathedral in downtown Fort Worth on Thanksgiving Day in 1969, where Cesar Chavez spoke to more than 700 people urging them to join the grape boycott. At the time grape sales were down thirty-three percent across the nation but were up twelve percent in Fort Worth.¹¹⁶

According to this article, one of several included in a special edition of the newspaper titled, *The Mexican American in Fort Worth*, "so far they [Mexican Americans] have not pressed for civil rights and equal opportunity with the intensity, organization and leadership which characterized the movement of Negroes in the last two decades."¹¹⁷ G.L. Duarte, editor of the Spanish language newspaper, *El Sol de Texas*, believed the major issue that prevented the Mexican American community from upward mobility was both a fracturing of leadership and a "leadership vacuum."¹¹⁸ Duarte stated that Mexicans who achieve success have the "economic muscle" to help the community but they move out of the barrios and leave those problems behind.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴ "Minority in Quest of Leader," *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, July 26, 1970.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ Doug Clarke, "California Business Assailed by Chavez," *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, November 27, 1969.

¹¹⁷ "Minority in Quest of Leader," *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, July 26, 1970.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Six Anglo interns investigated the conditions of the Mexican American community for a special edition of the *Fort Worth Star Telegram*. The *Star-Telegram's* interest in the plight of Mexican Americans in Fort Worth is evident of both the gains made by the older WWII veteran activists led by Gilbert Garcia in the twenty five years since the end of the war and the national attention the younger Chicano activists brought to the continued inequalities in the lives of Mexicans in the United States. On the one hand, it is remarkable that the newspaper commissioned the piece—on the other hand, they gave the assignment to interns. The Anglo interns, on summer vacation from various universities across Texas and the Midwest, initially attempted to knock on doors in barrios throughout Fort Worth on their own and found residents unwilling to speak freely. They expressed an inability to speak English or just told the interns there were no problems or discrimination issues. The young journalists then recruited several Mexican social workers and members of the Community Action Agency to accompany them. This time the residents were open to answering questions. The final analysis of the problems facing the Mexican American community in Fort Worth, according to these interns, was “related to their own culture”, and their “family ties to tradition and poverty.”¹²⁰ The interns’ stereotypical view of Mexican families and their problems is also evident in their choice of illustration for the front cover, a Mexican man and woman with six young children. The *Star Telegram* also reported that a new and younger generation of Mexicans, who “have adopted the name Chicanos” were now making noise and demanding equal rights.¹²¹

This chapter will discuss both the status of the Mexican community in Fort Worth during the 1960s and 1970s and the efforts of activists to come together toward a

¹²⁰ Jorjanna Price, “La Raza May Be Bridge for Old, New,” *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, July 26, 1970.

¹²¹ Ibid.

common goal, and will demonstrate how the city benefited from the passion and methods of young Chicano and Chicana activists but continued to rely on the experience and leadership of Gilbert Garcia, Sam Garcia, Jesse Sandoval, and Rufino Mendoza. Influenced by the Mexican American Generation's adherence to American ideals and processes, the Chicano Generation pushed back against the preceding activists and stressed the importance of Mexican cultural identity and a separatist ideology. Without the full threat from the era of McCarthyism, the Chicano movement activists boldly regarded themselves as a "conquered people suffering 'internal colonialism'...."¹²² The leaders and participants in this movement were not satisfied with the reforms and successes of their antecedents that opened the doors for opportunities than had previously been possible. Great disparities continued to exist between those of the Mexican community who found success and those whose life in poverty persisted. This was true for the city of Fort Worth. Though rumors abounded about using a more confrontational form of activism with the new wave of civic engagement in Fort Worth, the strategies and methods of the former generation of activists prevailed. During the Chicano Movement Era, Mexican American civil rights activists in Fort Worth, like other major cities in Texas, faced a multitude of issues, and groups of activists emerged to address them, including an active group of women whose achievements in Fort Worth are just beginning to be acknowledged.¹²³

In the fall of 1969, Eddy Herrera, a member of the Community Action Agency (CAA), reported to the *Fort Worth Star Telegram* the state of problems in the city for

¹²² Garcia, *Mexican Americans Leadership*, 300. After WWII, during the early years of the Cold War, Mexican American activists clearly and openly defined themselves as bona fide Americans. Activists fighting for change and inclusion during this time period were often accused of communism. By the late 1960s the Mexican American activists began identifying with their cultural roots even choosing the term Chicano from the Nahuatl word Meshico.

¹²³ *Mujeres Poderosas* exhibit on display at the Fort Worth Central Library Summer 2016, http://fortworthtexas.gov/files/2016SpringBrochure_Final.pdf.

Chicanos. Established through federal funding under President Johnson's War on Poverty in 1964, the CAA worked to provide aid, job training, and adult education to initiate upward mobility for the working and middle class.¹²⁴ The various Community Action Programs (CAP) funded through Johnson's Economic Opportunity Act promoted activism on local levels. The funding was flexible and managed locally, allowing leaders in the CAA like Chicano activists Eddy Herrera and Joe Marquez to decide on the most pertinent issues facing their communities. In the summer of 1968, the CAA led by Marquez funded a field trip for "31 hard-core poverty children."¹²⁵ Ranging in ages from eleven to fifteen the children were taken to Carlsbad Caverns to get a glimpse of the world outside of their ghettos and barrios. On the way to the Caverns, one particular student worried if his "American money" would be accepted at their destination.¹²⁶ The CAA in Fort Worth continued to focus on the poor children of the city. Marquez organized a summer camp for more than 1,400 disadvantaged children in July 1969. Fort Worth became one of fifty cities across the country offering the same program. In addition to their responsibilities with the CAA, both Marquez and Herrera worked with various organizations in the city to find solutions to problems faced by local Mexican Americans.

While working for the Texas Employment Commission (TEC), Eddy Herrera witnessed the discrimination that existed regarding job opportunities and housing. Part of his duties at the TEC were to help find employment and housing for Mexican Americans. Herrera stated, "We had several experiences where the landlord refused to rent to a Mexican-American. One time I called a place on the North Side, and the lady said for us

¹²⁴ Richard M. Flanagan, "Lyndon Johnson, Community Action, and Management of the Administrative State," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 31, no. 4 (December 1, 2001), 585.

¹²⁵ Doug Clarke, "Children of Poverty Pay Visit to Another World," *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, July 29, 1968.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

to come on down. But when I walked up to the door with the couple, the landlady said, 'We just rented it.'¹²⁷ Suspicious of the encounter, Herrera asked a friend to call the same landlady and inquire about the lease. She told his friend that it was available. Marquez stated in the same article that another activist group he was a member of, the United Civic Council, was starting a monthly publication, "El Chicano" to "give Mexican-Americans a true picture of social and economic problems."¹²⁸

By the late 1960s, throughout Texas, Mexican Americans struggled to unify or to decide on a specific course of action to combat the inequality that still existed in American society for people of Mexican descent, despite the many legal victories the previous generation had won. These problems were vast and organizations, made-up of both young and old activists, found it difficult to unify and decide on a single course of action. In November of 1969, members of the Latino community in Fort Worth, including Gilbert Garcia and Jesse Sandoval whose philosophies aligned with the Mexican American Generation and, Eddy Herrera, and Joe Marquez, whose ages would suggest an alignment with the Chicano Generation of activists, attended a 1969 Mexican American Leadership Conference held in Waxahachie, Texas. Organized by Juan A. Gonzalez who attended a similar conference in Dallas, the conference sought to bring together leaders in Fort Worth who could work together to find solutions to most pressing issues for the Mexican American community.

According the report written by Victor H. Vasquez, the purpose of the conference was to identify the most pertinent issues facing the Latino community in Fort Worth and to decide on an action plan to deal with those issues. In preparation for the conference the

¹²⁷ Joanna Slavin, "Chicanos tackle problems," *Fort Worth Press*, August 7, 1969, found in Samuel Garcia Papers, Series VII: Clippings-Hispanic Community Organizations, Box 10, Folder 1.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, This research did not locate issues of El Chicano.

organizers worked to get wide attendance, believing it was imperative to have representation from “all segments of the Mexican American community.”¹²⁹ They noted that previous gatherings failed to include “barrio representatives,” or younger Chicanos. They also wanted “participants from the fields of religion, law, administration, education, and business and militant activists” included in the conference.¹³⁰ With such a wide array of philosophies and backgrounds, the first few hours of the conference were rocky. Arguments about the “vendido” (or sellout) and their self-appointed role or selection by “the system” as representatives of the Latino community almost ended the conference before it accomplished any goals. But conference leaders were able quell tempers and agree on six areas that needed to be discussed. Those areas were: a lack of unity within the Latino community, discrimination in education, police brutality, employment and housing discrimination, and a lack of political power.¹³¹

In the discussion concerning a lack of unity, conference participants identified the *vendido* as the reason for the fracturing of their community. Staying true to the Chicano critique of the American education system, the conference identified the negative portrayal of Mexican culture and the centrality of Americanism in schools and in the media as the foundation of *vendidosim*.¹³² It was believed that once success is found, the Mexican American is then loyal to the “superior ‘Gringo’” and is driven by his or her financial benefits and no longer representative of the Latino community. Chicano activists had grown tired of the *vendido*’s accommodationist approach to their activism. In order to combat this issue, the participants agreed that it was necessary to identify the *vendidos*,

¹²⁹ Samuel Garcia Papers, “Report on Mexican American Leadership Conference,” Series II: Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce, Box 6, Folder 11, Fort Worth Central Library Archives.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

educate the Mexican American community to look beyond a Spanish surname and to become politically aware of who was looking out and working toward the best interest of the Latino people.

Although some participants were defensive during the discussion about the “vendidos” in the Fort Worth community, according to a conference report, “It is [of] some significance that initially all the ‘vendidos’ of Ft. Worth were in Ft. Worth at the time of this discussion and not any were at the conference.”¹³³ Neither Sam Garcia nor Rufino Mendoza were present at the conference. Mendoza likely because he was delivering the mail; however, Sam Garcia could may have been among the list of men believed to be Fort Worth *vendidos*, considering the success of his construction business and because he and his wife purchased a home outside the barrio in 1964.¹³⁴ Though Sam Garcia did not attend the conference, the fact that he acquired a copy of the minutes and annotated them suggests his intense interest in the proceedings. Chicano activists present at the convention did not call out Gilbert Garcia, and his pragmatic approach to civil rights, as a *vendido*. Gilbert Garcia’s influence however is evident in the section of the report that Sam Garcia highlighted and kept for his records. According to the report:

It was further agreed that, if the system refused to acknowledge the citizen involvement of the Mexican-American community, drastic actions to support their requests are inevitable and must be executed. The community is to review itself and attempt to make use of individual skills and ability in various forms of

¹³³ Samuel Garcia Papers, “Report on Mexican American Leadership Conference.” Series II: Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce, Box 6, Folder 11, Fort Worth Central Library Archives.

¹³⁴ “New Home is Ideal for Couple and Dog,” *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, June 21, 1964. The article lists several couples and families who purchased home in this new neighborhood of Fort Worth.

leadership. It must instill pride and self-dignity in all Mexican-American citizens, but at the same time teach democratic participation as the ideal.¹³⁵

The Chicano activists' influence is also clearly present in the final lines of this section, "If the combination of these tactics fails, there is no time to waste. Action must be taken even if it means resorting to the methods advocated by militant activists."¹³⁶ Once these discussions were settled, the conference moved onto what they understood to be the concern that warranted immediate and forceful attention-the education system in Fort Worth.

The conference participants' critique of the education system indicated the Chicano Generation's desire for a reinterpretation of history that highlighted the positive contributions of Mexicans and the continued oppression of a conquered people. The *Fort Worth Star Telegram* reported in 1970 that "Texas history courses often make Mexican-American children think their ancestors were merely villains at the Alamo who contributed nothing to the state's development."¹³⁷ Young activists in Fort Worth were influenced by Chicana and Chicano students of the 1960s on college campuses throughout the Southwest who began to demand cultural studies classes that would educate and encourage a new sense of identity that moved away from the "'Americans All,' and looked toward the pre-Columbian past and to the indigenous roots of the mestizo."¹³⁸ According to this philosophy, without this education, Mexican Americans would be less likely to find

¹³⁵ Samuel Garcia Papers, "Report on Mexican American Leadership Conference." Series II: Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce, Box 6, Folder 11, Fort Worth Central Library Archives.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Rachel Johnson, "Language Role High in Dropout Problems," *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, July 26, 1970, 5-G.

¹³⁸ Garcia, *Mexican Americans Leadership*, 300-301.

a sense of pride in their cultural backgrounds and would only find success in the acceptance by the Anglo society.

Often channeled toward technical and vocational programs, Mexican American youths' education in urban settings did not make them college or career ready. The system identified Mexican American children as inferior based on intelligence tests that were administered in a non-native language or that did not "relate to the culture in which they have been reared."¹³⁹ This was a common practice throughout the state of Texas and on the minds of the conference participants. The roots of these ideals reached decades prior to the Second World War. University of Texas professor and civil rights activist George I. Sanchez argued in his master's thesis in 1930, and several other subsequent writings that these IQ tests that held non-Anglo races were intellectually inferior had more to do with "poor home environments, language limitations, and improper test conditions" rather than heredity.¹⁴⁰ With or without these tests, school administrators continued to enroll non-Anglo students into vocational or technical classes.

The experiences of my father, Raul Sanchez, provides an example of this common practice. He was born and raised in rural communities and graduated from high school during the height of the Chicano movement. He went to school in an environment that was too lightly populated to segregate based on ethnicity. He excelled in his early years and was scheduled to take trigonometry and English literature, among other advanced classes until his family moved to Plainview, Texas. In this predominately Anglo town his high school counselor told him those were not classes he needed. He was then enrolled in basic math along with welding, and other shop related classes, and

¹³⁹ Samuel Garcia Papers, "Report on Mexican American Leadership Conference." Series II: Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce, Box 6, Folder 11, Fort Worth Central Library Archives.

¹⁴⁰ Blanton, *George I. Sánchez*, 29.

encouraged to participate in the Future Farmers of America campus organization.¹⁴¹

Participants in the conference believed these practices to be a systemic problem that perpetuated the belief that a person of Mexican origin was intellectually inferior.

Conference participants eventually decided upon four steps to combat the issues within the educational system in Fort Worth:

1. A committee should be organized to deal with educational problems confronting the community and to study and make recommendations relating to the interaction of educational procedures and cultural values.
2. The community through this committee must inform school administrators that the Mexican-American child's inability to perform at an adequate level is not necessarily a function of cultural background but is most often a function of weaknesses in the school system which makes it unable to provide for children of different cultural origins.
3. Scholarship funds for promising Mexican-American students should be established.
4. Educated Mexican-Americans should counsel [sic] with and provide an ego ideal for striving Mexican-American students.¹⁴²

The last step demonstrates an effort at inward reflection. The conference acknowledged the role of the social mores of the Mexican American community. After years of little success in achieving higher education, those who had beaten the odds needed to encourage and motivate the community with the goal of creating a sense of raised expectations among the youth. The lack of quality and equitable education for Mexican American youths was seen as the foundation for many issues facing their community. Rufino Mendoza formed the Mexican American Educational Advisory Council (MAEAC) with a group of like-minded parents whose children's educational opportunities were

¹⁴¹ Raul Sanchez, personal interview by author, March 15, 2015.

¹⁴² Samuel Garcia Papers, "Report on Mexican American Leadership Conference." Series II: Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce, Box 6, Folder 11, Fort Worth Central Library Archives.

greatly affected by inequitable schooling from Fort Worth Independent School District. Rather than organizing walk-outs or protests, MAEAC fought via the judiciary and used the local media to bring attention to the matter. The issue of education and the leadership role of Mendoza will be addressed in more detail in the succeeding chapter.

The conference participants believed employment discrimination was a problem that could not be fought directly considering the rationale for not hiring of Mexican Americans was attributed to a lack of a qualified pool of applicants. During WWII discriminatory treatment that persisted in war industries despite efforts from the Fair Employee Practice Commission (FEPC) to curb these practices greatly affected the rate at which Mexican Americans recovered from the Great Depression.¹⁴³ Reporting in 1970, Steve Eames, one of the young journalist working for the *Fort Worth Star Telegram* over the summer, stated that, "...estimates indicate the majority of Mexican-Americans are in low-income jobs, mainly unskilled and semi-skilled jobs. In areas of supervisory, managerial and professional jobs, Mexican Americans are a rarity."¹⁴⁴ Eames also stated that "Mexican nationals (non-citizens of the United States) also cause employment problems for browns [Eames' word choice for *Mexicans*] here."¹⁴⁵ He interviewed Mrs. Mary Lou Lopez, acting director of the Wesley Community Center and Jose (Joe) Marquez, both of whom attended the Mexican American Leadership Conference; they identified a manufacturing plant in Fort Worth that recruited workers in Mexico who worked for lower wages and took jobs that may have been available to Mexican Americans. This issue was not a new one, and had been often addressed by

¹⁴³ Emilio Zamora, *Claiming Rights and Righting Wrongs in Texas: Mexican Workers and Job Politics during World War II*, (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 13.

¹⁴⁴ Steve Eames, "Most Jobs Collared Blue: Education Lack Barrier to Skilled Fields," *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, July 26, 1970, 6-G.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

organizations like the American G.I. Forum. In 1970, the Dallas Office of Immigrants and Naturalization reported capturing “1800 illegal entrants from Mexico in April, more than 400 in May and more than 200 in June in the Fort Worth-Dallas area.”¹⁴⁶

A 1969 report found that Mexicans were severely underrepresented in most job types in the city’s workforce, even in the skilled and professional jobs not affected by migration. There were no Mexicans in almost three hundred city administrative or managerial employees. The city stated that they were not discriminating in their hiring practice but rather hire employees “commensurate with their qualifications,” and Mexicans lacked the education or training for the highly skilled jobs.¹⁴⁷ Although this was the case in many instances, it did not forgive the situations when discrimination was based on the ethnicity of the candidate. Mrs. Lopez believed that some “problems arise in employment because of skin color.” Her sons attended a predominately white school where she was appointed chairman of the PTA. Once word spread among the parents that she was Mexican, Mrs. Lopez was asked to resign. Even though her position was not a paid job it demonstrates the discrimination that existed for Mexicans in any position of responsibility. She stated in the *Star Telegram* article that, “It hurts—deep down it really hurts’...She laughed slightly and added. ‘They can’t tell me to go back where I came from—I’m from here.’”¹⁴⁸ The participants of the leadership conference decided it was necessary to compile a list of “qualified Mexican Americans in the respective fields.”¹⁴⁹ In addition to identifying qualified candidates, training would be made available in areas that are in need of employment, and lastly the conference agreed to place pressure on the

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Samuel Garcia Papers, “Report on Mexican American Leadership Conference.” Series II: Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce, Box 6, Folder 11, Fort Worth Central Library Archives.

Fort Worth community that any rationale for denial of employment based on anything other than the requirements of a particular job is discrimination and would not be tolerated.

The conference also identified police brutality as an issue that needed to be addressed. A common problem like many of the problems confronting the Mexican community, police brutality was not unique for Mexican American urban communities throughout the Southwest.¹⁵⁰ The Brown Berets that grew out of the Mexican American Youth Organization (MAYO) in San Antonio focused on the issue of police brutality by assigning groups of Berets to specific police units. They followed the officers as they policed the barrios in an attempt to prevent any abuse of power. The Berets became so entrenched and connected to the safety of the barrios that community members often called on them rather than the police to deal with problems in their neighborhoods.¹⁵¹

There was not as large a Hispanic community in Fort Worth as there was in places like San Antonio making the conference leaders' plan of action to the prevalent issue of police brutality much more pragmatic than militant. Although there was a small presence of Brown Berets in Fort Worth, they mostly participated in protests and walkouts in Dallas where there was more of a militant activist presence. The actions

¹⁵⁰ Edward J. Escobar, *Race, Police, and the Making of a Political Identity: Mexican Americans and the Los Angeles Police Department, 1900-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999). Escobar explores the long and contentious history between the LAPD and the Mexican American community arguing that over the course of the first half of the twentieth-century the LAPD as well as much of white society believed people of Mexican ancestry to be inherently criminal. He stated that "while many of the old ideas of Mexicans as lazy and stupid persisted, they eventually faded into the background, only to be replaced with the image of the vicious and treacherous gang member." This evolution in perception of an entire race of people can be attributed, he argues, to social scientific theories of why Mexican Americans persisted in a subordinate status in society. Instead of looking toward systemic injustices the social scientists associated "flaws in Mexican American culture" to explain the inability to move up the social ladder. This collection of theories and beliefs about a significant number of people in the city resulted in a long history of conflict between the Mexican American community and the LAPD.

¹⁵¹ Montejano, *Quixote's Soldiers*.

taken by Fort Worth Mexican American activists dealt more with review boards, educating the public about their rights, and reforming the police department through the recruitment of more Hispanic officers and teaching current officers Spanish. A *Dallas Morning News* article published just one year prior to the conference stated that, "Officials here [Fort Worth], suspect that stepped-up criticism of the Fort Worth Police Department represents the opening moves in a campaign by Negro and Mexican-American groups to get a civilian review board...."¹⁵² According to the news article, minority groups in Fort Worth wanted power to take disciplinary action against law enforcement in the event of wrongdoing. A year later at the Mexican American leadership conference members believed that there was also a need for education in the community about the law and their personal liberties. Conference members also desired the use of community members as alert and involved participants in reforming the police force. They also believed it was necessary to hire bilingual officers in areas heavily populated by Spanish speaking citizens.

Without Mexican representation on the Fort Worth police force or bilingual officers, most people in Mexican communities did not see the FWPD as a symbol of security and justice but rather as a symbol for fear and unfairness. This view was most prevalent among the youth who believed that, "a Chicano is lucky to get through high school without getting in trouble with 'la chota' (the law)."¹⁵³ In 1970, there were 647 Fort Worth Police officers and only eleven were Mexican. When stopped by the police, Mexicans were immediately defensive because of a history of intimidation and stop and frisk tactics by the police. Many of the problems that existed between law enforcement

¹⁵² Carl Freund, "Weather Vane," *Dallas Morning News*, December 1, 1968.

¹⁵³ Dave Keltner and Tim Kidd, "Spanish Speakers Find 'Police Blue' Real Color of Law," *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, July 26, 1970, 4-G.

and the Mexican community were due to a lack of communication, both language barriers and a reluctance of the community to report issues or provide information as a witness. Ray Valdez of the Community Action Agency blamed cultural customs for the hesitations to “incriminate another Mexican-American.”¹⁵⁴ He believed that “Mexican-Americans will find and punish the guilty person in their own way, without help from outsiders such as the police.”¹⁵⁵ Police officers found it difficult when the people they dealt with spoke in their native language and feel as though it is “done either to avoid giving information or as a taunt.”¹⁵⁶ In an attempt to ease these issues, the Fort Worth Police Department sent their officers to Spanish language classes at Tarrant County Junior College but found that the vocabulary was not the same used “on the streets,” but they were still “not abandoning the idea of teaching officers ‘street Spanish,’” with the help of the eleven current Mexican American police officers.¹⁵⁷

FYPD was trying to avoid experiences similar to the situation that occurred in Lake Worth on June 6, 1970, just a few miles west of Fort Worth. Two men stepped outside of a wedding reception at a hall to settle an argument with a fist fight. After the manager called to report the incident, several police cars arrived prompting the guests to go outside. Several of the wedding guests were arrested and “roughed up” by the officers.¹⁵⁸ After a police officer sustained a broken foot, sixteen people were charged with “offenses ranging from use of abusive language to interfering with an officer doing his duty.”¹⁵⁹ Although the charges were dropped, the “Mexican American Concerned Citizens” group formed, retained a lawyer, and demanded an investigation into the

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

actions of the Lake Worth Police Department. A grand jury investigated and not only cleared the police officers of any wrongdoing but also praised their actions in dealing with the disruptive crowd of Mexicans. After only four of the sixty witnesses who supported the testimony of the wedding guests were allowed to testify, the Mexican American Concerned Citizens group labeled the grand jury report a “whitewash” and increased the “mistrust between the Mexican community and the established legal process.”¹⁶⁰

In the decades following the conference, the issue of discrimination and underrepresentation among members of law enforcement continued to be a topic of concern for Mexican American activists in Fort Worth. A group of Brown Berets in Fort Worth stormed out of a conference between Hispanic leaders and the police on November 10, 1979. Once the keynote speaker, Assistant U.S. Attorney General Drew Days, began to speak, the twenty Brown Beret members led by Juan Perez, stood up and accused Days of “dropping cases very important” to the Latino community.¹⁶¹ Perez was referring to the death of twelve year-old Santos Rodriguez who was “shot to death while handcuffed in a police patrol car” in Dallas in 1974 and Larry Ortego Lozano who died “from wounds he received while in an Odessa jail.”¹⁶² The officer in the Rodriguez case was convicted of murder and sentenced to five years in prison, and Lozano’s injuries were found to be self-inflicted. According to Perez, the U.S. Justice Department was unsuccessful in getting either case prosecuted in a federal court for civil rights violations. For some members of the Fort Worth community the memory of Ernest Garcia, a twenty-two year old unarmed man, who was shot in his own home by Tarrant

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Robert Mahoney, “Brown Berets protest speaker,” *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, November 11, 1979, found in Samuel Garcia Papers, “20 Protest Police Stand by U.S.,” Series VII: Clippings-Hispanic Community Organizations, Box 10, Folder 3.

¹⁶² Ibid.

County Sheriff's Deputy Vernon Johnson may have still lingered.¹⁶³ Although Johnson was initially indicted for aggravated assault and resigned from duty, less than a month later, a jury acquitted him of all charges and he was rehired by the Sheriff's department.¹⁶⁴ By the mid-1980s the Fort Worth police department had succeeded in hiring additional officers with Spanish surnames; however, Rufino Mendoza, chairman of MAEAC believed it was not enough. "There has been a need for a long time to have more Spanish-surname officers in administrative positions."¹⁶⁵ Mendoza believed there was a need for additional lieutenants, captains, or a deputy chief who were minorities.

The final two problems facing Mexican Americans in Fort Worth according to the conference participants were housing and political power. Regarding housing issues in Fort Worth, the conference resolved that, unlike African Americans, Mexican Americans of financial means did not face any systemic discrimination in living in the neighborhood of their choosing, those among the lower socioeconomic levels suffered severely from poor housing conditions. Prior to World War II there were limited options of where Mexicans could live in Fort Worth and systemic discrimination. J. Pete Zepeda, who became the first Hispanic to serve on the Tarrant County Junior College District Board in 1983, remembered his failed attempts to purchase a house west of North Main in the Northside area of the city just before the war. Hispanics were confined to small barrios because of hostility from Anglo homeowners and neighborhood civic leagues that were created specifically to prevent Hispanics from buying homes. The decades after the war "marked the beginning of a period of expansion of Hispanic neighborhoods," when the predominately Anglo areas west of North Main and in the Diamond Hill area gradually

¹⁶³ "Grand Jury Indicts Deputy for Shooting," *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, October 3, 1953, 18.

¹⁶⁴ "Deputy Acquitted in Shooting Back on Job," *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, October 21, 1953, 30.

¹⁶⁵ Robert Mahoney, "Hispanics want a voice in police administration," *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, July 28, 1986.

opened up to Hispanic buyers and renters.¹⁶⁶ Even the late 1960s in other major cities with a substantially higher population of Mexicans still experienced a clear divide between Anglo and Mexican neighborhoods. In describing San Antonio in the late 1960s, historian David Montejano stated, “My neighborhood was a poor, working-class neighborhood surrounded by poorer neighborhoods on three sides...On the fourth side... was the beginning of the middle class Anglo North Side. The name of the avenue was Culebra, meaning ‘snake,’ a seemingly appropriate name for the line of separation between Anglo and Mexican at the time.”¹⁶⁷

However by the 1960s and 1970s the shoddy housing in Northside built in the 1920s and 1930s, where the majority of Mexicans in Fort Worth could afford homes, had deteriorated badly. In addition, “the social and educational aspects of the environment [were] grossly inferior to those in better communities.”¹⁶⁸ According to the special 1970 edition of the *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, the housing situation among the Mexican community stemmed from their desire to speak Spanish and a handed down tradition of living in poverty that encouraged Mexicans to live and work in their own social circles. This culture of poverty explanation blamed histories of segregation on its sufferers. Poor education and low-waged work finally resulted in “poor housing and sub-standard living conditions for a majority of Mexican-Americans.”¹⁶⁹ This cultural deficiency explanation for the plight of Mexican Americans in Fort Worth was indicative of the perception of Mexicans throughout the Southwest at the time.

¹⁶⁶ Pate, *North of the River*, 141.

¹⁶⁷ Montejano, *Quixote's Soldiers*, 6.

¹⁶⁸ Samuel Garcia Papers, “Report on Mexican American Leadership Conference,” Series II: Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce, Box 6, Folder 11, Fort Worth Central Library Archives.

¹⁶⁹ “Old Traditions And Language Abet Divisions,” *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, July 26, 1970, 2-G.

Arthur Aguirre, an equal opportunity specialist in the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development stated that low-cost housing was an issue throughout the United States due to increased population, the high cost of land and labor, and high interest rates.¹⁷⁰ For instance, in the city's predominantly Mexican Worth Heights neighborhood of Fort Worth, five hundred nineteen homes out of the seven hundred fifty-one total buildings were considered substandard. As Aguirre put it, "a drive through the Mexican-American barrios reveals many houses in various stages of deterioration, crowded together with tiny yards."¹⁷¹ Many of these homes had been built on half lots and new zoning laws prohibited the building of a single family home in these small plots. This prevented Mrs. Romana Gonzales from rebuilding her home after a disastrous fire. After the house was destroyed she was left with an empty lot she could not sell or build on considering the strictly enforced zoning laws.¹⁷²

Those who found financial success in the Anglo dominated city and moved beyond the borders of the barrio, like Sam Garcia, were often labeled as *vendidos* by the Mexican community; however, the alternative was to continue to live in a community of deteriorating, overcrowded homes where the landlords' neglect exacerbated the dire situation. Multiple families often lived in one home, reported by *Star Telegram* as cultural mores, but were more likely due to necessity. Fearing eviction and with the shortage of available and affordable homes to rent, many Mexican tenants were reluctant to place demands on landlords for necessary improvements. Mrs. Delores Meza's home had so much rotten wood the window frames fell out with heavy winds. The landlord's negligible efforts did little to improve the major issues in her home and without a financially feasible

¹⁷⁰ Eileen Nichols, "Money Still Passport to Decent Housing," *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, July 26, 1970, 7-G.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

alternative, Mrs. Meza and her family were left to live in the substandard residence. Landlords were also known to charge by the amount of people in the home and attempt to crowd up to six people per room. Many in the Mexican communities also claimed that their Anglo landlords applied political pressures for their tenants to “support a certain candidate unless they wish to move.”¹⁷³

In an effort to alleviate these major obstacles facing Mexican Americans in Fort Worth the 1969 conference decided on several steps including educating the community on how to apply for federal funding, FHA loans, and pressuring land lords to improve living conditions. By the late 1970s, Sam Garcia began providing “generous support and invaluable service” to the Fort Worth Housing Authority.¹⁷⁴ Both Garcia and Jesse Sandoval were appointed to the Housing Authority and on the city Human Relations Commission. They worked to improve communication and understanding between different cultures and investigated reports of discrimination.¹⁷⁵

In 1970, the American G.I. Forum led by Fort Worth chapter chairman, Gilbert Garcia, began building low cost housing just north of Fort Worth in Haltom City with a grant from the Federal Housing Authority. The grant was made available through the National Housing Act of 1968 that provided rent subsidies for families in need. The Forum Garden apartments, sponsored by the American G.I. Forum, cost more than 2 million dollars and included 168 units for qualified, a community center, playground, and laundry facilities.¹⁷⁶ Initially planned for the Northside community of Fort Worth but thwarted by pressure from Northside Anglo residents, the low cost housing could not be

¹⁷³ Ibid, 8-G.

¹⁷⁴ Samuel Garcia Papers, “City of Fort Worth,” Series I: Personal Papers, Box 2, Folder 9, Fort Worth Central Library Archives.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, and Eva Bonilla, Personal Interview by author, June 9, 2016.

¹⁷⁶ “Ground Broken In Haltom City For Family Housing Complex,” *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, June 7, 1970.

built in the areas that were more advantageous for the Mexican American communities.¹⁷⁷

In addition to the Forum's housing grant, a 1966 project funded by both the federal and local governments worked to improve deteriorating housing in three different predominately Mexican neighborhoods in Fort Worth. The Neighborhood Improvement Program provided \$3500 dollar grants to homeowners whose income was under \$3000 annually. Those with incomes over \$3000 annually were awarded loans with three percent interest paid over twenty years. Although the program successfully prevented the Worth Heights Neighborhood from deteriorating into a slum it could have done more if the Mexican homeowners had not incorrectly feared that with a government grant or loan that their home could be taken from them. Antonio Morales, a member of the Worth Heights Betterment Council stated, "it was never quite explained that they were getting a return for their years as a taxpayer rather than a gift. They were afraid the government would be able to come back later and take the house."¹⁷⁸ In addition to the homes in these neighborhoods, much of the surrounding infrastructure received a facelift. Streets were paved, lit, and parks built.

The 1969 leadership conference also turned to concepts of political power though this discussion was not as lively as the others. According to Victor Vasquez, the conference reporter, this slow discussion occurred because the idea of gaining any real means to have their voice heard within the Anglo dominated political arena was a foreign concept to many of the attendees who were often pressured to support whomever their landlord chose. Although the Second World War became a watershed moment when the

¹⁷⁷ "Barrio Escapes Keyed to Finances," *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, July 26, 1970.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

urbanization of Mexican Americans opened new paths, the city of Fort Worth had still not elected any person of Mexican descent to any position of power, nor did it seem like a possibility on the horizon. It was decided that participation and awareness in the form of voting and taking the time to understand the issues at play, rather than the charisma of the candidates, was necessary to ensure the election of people who accurately represented the Latino community and who had “an interest in it [the Latino community] rather than those who seek its support for personal gain,” the conference also believed that a “Mexican-American candidate elected to office is the highest achievement in political power.”¹⁷⁹ Although the federal government had eliminated the poll tax efforts of the G.I. Forum and PASSO had increased voter turnout and political participation, respectively, their endeavors had yet to achieve an elected representative from the Mexican American community in Fort Worth.

Almost a decade after the conference, Louis J. Zapata became the first Mexican American elected to the city council in 1978. Zapata had not been involved in any of the activist groups because according to him, “they could never get it together.”¹⁸⁰ The election of Zapata was made possible by the city of Fort Worth’s decision to incorporate single member district into their political system. According to Zapata, the Mexican American community in Fort Worth did not have to sue like other major cities, because city leaders did not want to experience the litigation that occurred in Dallas and around Texas, “...they just passed the issue and dealt with it.”¹⁸¹ Prior to returning to Fort Worth to run his campaign, Zapata was on assignment in Mexico for Bell Helicopter as a

¹⁷⁹ Samuel Garcia Papers, “Report on Mexican American Leadership Conference,” Series II: Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce, Box 6, Folder 11, Fort Worth Central Library Archives.

¹⁸⁰ Oral History Interview with Louis Zapata, CMAS 90, Special Collections, University of Texas at Arlington Libraries.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

logistics administrator for a marijuana and poppy fields eradication operation. A team of six Bell Helicopter employees were contracted by the U.S. State Department then “loaned out” to Mexico’s Attorney General Office to “wipe out” the drugs.¹⁸² In the early years of his career with Bell Helicopter he served as a committeeman for United Auto Workers union and later as a committeeman on the negotiating team for Bell Helicopter. During President Ford’s administration, Zapata was the administrative contact for several Bell Helicopter military and government contracts. This led him to have a high-level security clearance since he sometimes knew the president’s schedule seventy-two hours in advance for Ford’s trips to Vail to ski.¹⁸³

Although his successful election to the city council was an achievement for the Mexican American community of Fort Worth, Zapata’s history aligns with the 1969 conference’s warnings about *vendidos*. His campaign was not supported by all of the Chicano groups (he ran against 2 other Hispanic men); however, his campaign slogan, “Vote Zapata,” in red, white, and green, plastered on buses all over the city, convinced many Mexican Americans to cast their vote in his favor.¹⁸⁴ The *Star Telegram* reported that he intended on spending \$8000 on his campaign, the other two Hispanic candidates listed their campaign spending limitations as \$2500 and \$1000.¹⁸⁵ He was re-elected six times. Zapata and “his newly found political clout opened doors that were closed before.”¹⁸⁶ Just after his election, with his help, the city council approved an \$88,000

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Robert Mahoney, “District 2 candidates respond to questions about issues,” Fort Worth Star Telegram, March 20, 1977.

¹⁸⁶ Samuel Garcia Papers, “Mexican American Chamber of Commerce, Fort Worth, Texas, 1977 Annual Directory,” Series II: Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce, Box 6, Folder 10, Fort Worth Central Library Archives.

Minority Procurement Program to help minority business and to encourage growth that had previously been rejected by the City Economic Board.¹⁸⁷

The 1969 conference members, who came from many different walks of life and represented several different civic organizations, had a difficult time finding a unified voice. The impression of the Anglo community a year after the conference, reported by the *Star Telegram* special edition article, was, "So far they have not pressed for civil rights and equal opportunity with the intensity, organization and leadership which characterized the movement of Negroes in the last two decades."¹⁸⁸ According to G.L. Duarte, Fort Worth editor of a Spanish language newspaper, quoted in the same article, "The crux of the problem is a 'total lack of leadership and organization'...Mexican Americans, he said, are splintered into numerous small groups and organizations, each with its own leader." With the hopes of finding a unified path, the participants of the conference decided to engage in role-playing. Members of three prominent Mexican American civic groups, United Civil Council (made-up of Chicano activists), PASSO, and the G.I. Forum were given roles of representing an organization of which they were not members. The goal of the role-playing discussion was how to get a Mexican elected to school board. After a couple rounds of role-playing, it was clear that members of the represented civic organizations had preconceived, inaccurate ideas about the other groups. In the discussion after the role-playing concluded, members of the respective groups shared the misconceptions about their group that was displayed during the role play. According to the conference notes, "it was agreed, however, that loyalty to individual groups, rather than an interest in the betterment of the Mexican-American,

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ "Minority in Quest of Leader," *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, July 26, 1970.

disrupts unity and prohibits loyalty in its truest sense.”¹⁸⁹ The decision was made to encourage participants of individual organizations to help steer their respective groups away from “personal goals” or their own business interests “and direct them towards goals which will improve the Mexican-American community.”¹⁹⁰ As the conference came to an end, this final goal was paramount to achieving success and mobility for Mexican Americans in Fort Worth.

The conference ended on Sunday, November 9, 1969. According to conference reporter Victor H. Vasquez,

The entire conference was a demonstration of newly-founded Mexican-American independence in thought and action. A people that had always used peaceful means of protest were now willing to take any action needed to achieve a goal. The binding together of youth, education, and wisdom of age to better the cause of the Mexican-American community was the achievement of the conference, and hopefully its perpetuation will be the salvation of a people.¹⁹¹

This final statement by Vasquez is indicative of the period in Mexican American history. Gilbert Garcia, Sam Garcia, Jesse Sandoval, and Rufino Mendoza belonged to the older generation of Mexican Americans whose efforts to increase upward mobility of their community worked through American systems and American ideals. Their worldview led them to challenge inequality and discrimination through civic engagement, rather than protests or violence. By the late 1960s, the Chicano Generation was becoming the voice of Mexican Americans. Their worldview was shaped by the Vietnam years and the New Left, and in turn their activism was much more confrontational and critical of the government and society. The conference was a mixture of these varied activists. Not only did the groups not see eye to eye in how to combat the issues facing their community,

¹⁸⁹ Samuel Garcia Papers, “Report on Mexican American Leadership Conference,” Series II: Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce, Box 6, Folder 11, Fort Worth Central Library Archives.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

the many different clubs and organizations that existed made it difficult to work as one unified people to change the status of Mexican Americans in Fort Worth. However, with the guidance of the older generation and their political philosophies along with the ability of the city's Anglo dominated leadership to see writing on the wall through the happenings of major cities in Texas with larger Mexican populations, Fort Worth was headed toward a path that included a more inclusive representation in city leadership for the Mexican American community. As historian Ty Cashion put it, "Such problems, once exposed to public discourse, soon helped consolidate an ascending leadership that achieved rapid progress during the next decade [1970s]."¹⁹²

Although the conference did not identify issues specifically pertaining to women, six of the twenty-nine participants were women. From the very beginning of activism in Fort Worth, women were major players and not excluded from the conversation by leading Mexican American men of city. This continued throughout the second half of the twentieth-century.¹⁹³ The groundwork laid by these women set the stage for a city that

¹⁹² Ty Cashion, *The New Frontier: A Contemporary History of Fort Worth & Tarrant County*, (San Antonio: Historical Publishing Network, 2006), 121.

¹⁹³ Scholarship concerning Latinas has increased greatly over the last two decades largely beginning with Vicki Ruiz's *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives: Mexican Women, Unionization, and the California Food Processing Industry, 1930-1950* in 1987 and *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth Century America* in 1998. Her analysis concerning Latinas as active players in the social evolutions that occurred in U.S. history from their first-hand accounts of immigration, their struggles for rights as workers both before and during the Second World War, to the key roles as civic minded activists throughout post WWII America. David Montejano also devotes attention to the role of Latinas in *Quixote's Soldiers*. He states that Chicanas whether in the Brown Berets or other organizations were not content with their place to the side and demanded to be in leadership roles. Montejano quotes a former Chicana activist frustrated with women who were adhering to the traditional path of finding a man, getting married, then having babies. Rosie Castro stated, "Many times I remember going crazy because these women wanted to be Mrs. so-and-so, you know, Mrs. whatever, and we were the young ones coming up and saying 'screw that shit, be who you are, you got a name.'"¹⁹³ Castro, along with other activist women organized the group and newspaper *El Rebozo* which was written by women, for women, and about issues important to women. Although important for the advancement of women as active members of the movement, rather than just supporters of the men, the newspaper still made concessions to not completely overstep the traditional boundaries for Mexican American women. *El Rebozo*, as discussed by Vicki Ruiz in *From Out of the Shadows*, kept women loyal to the movement and *la causa*. The newspaper was not a platform for feminists to pull away from a male

does not shy away from women in leadership roles. Most recently Dr. Patricia Linares served as the interim superintendent of Fort Worth ISD, for many in the Hispanic community in Fort Worth she was not just the superintendent but rather “*our Latina superintendent*.”¹⁹⁴ During the year she served the majority of leadership positions in city of Fort Worth were occupied by women. A *Fort Worth Star Telegram* article stated, “Now it’s clear why City Council voted this year to disband the 30-year-old Fort Worth Commission on the Status of Women. The status of women is: boss.”¹⁹⁵ Three of these women in leadership positions in Fort Worth are Hispanic and demonstrate the massive strides that not only the Hispanic community has reached but also Hispanic females. The Fort Worth police department recently promoted the first Hispanic female to the rank of Captain, Julia (Hernandez) Swearingen was also the first female to be promoted to Lieutenant in 2011. The Fort Worth Science and History Museum opened an exhibit on March 4, 2016 focusing on twelve Latinas, including Eva Bonilla, daughter of Jesse Sandoval, who like her father has continued to advocate for her Linwood neighborhood. *Mujeres Poderosas: Legacy of Strong Latinas in Fort Worth*, highlights the role these women “play in our society by exploring the cultural and societal experiences that have influenced the strength and tenacity” of the subjects.¹⁹⁶

dominated arena, but rather a place where women took some control within the current establishment. Ruiz’ perspective on the role of women during the tumultuous decades for Mexican Americans goes beyond Montejano’s description of women fighting for leadership roles. Ruiz puts the issues facing women at the forefront of her analysis. Although there were few Mexican American women enrolled in college, many were active participants in the efforts to alter the state of education for *la Raza*, in turn, making mobility within the community more attainable. According to Ruiz, “It was not that they wanted a piece of the ‘American Pie,’ they wanted the freedom to bake their own pan dulce.”¹⁹³

¹⁹⁴ Dr. Patricia Linares, Personal Interview, March 16, 2015.

¹⁹⁵ “Women run Fort Worth, if you haven’t noticed,” *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, online, October 22, 2015.

¹⁹⁶ “Mujeres Poderosas: Legacy of Strong Latinas in Fort Worth,” Fort Worth Science and History Museum, accessed on March 1, 2016, <http://www.fwmuseum.org/mujeres-poderosas>.

Similar to the men who were working toward a more inclusive city, the Latinas of Fort Worth chose endeavors and a methodology indicative of the Mexican American Generation of activists. Before Gilbert's efforts ever appeared in the *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, his wife Linda advertised for Spanish classes, however her name appears as Mrs. Gilbert Garcia. When Gilbert began his chapter of the American G.I. Forum in Fort Worth, Linda began a women's chapter, "We sacrificed a lot, and finally I decided I might as well join him if I couldn't beat him. We had two little boys and we'd just all get in the car on weekends and go with him. I began starting wives' groups for the Forum." Sam Garcia's wife helped organize the Hispanic Debutante Association of Fort Worth whose goal was to encourage Latinas to go to college through the raising of scholarship funds and mentorship during their last few years of high school. Paulina Gasca Valenciano was an early member of the Chicano Luncheon, where she encouraged inviting city leaders to speak to the group, and a staff member of the CAA where she was trained as a social worker. Guillerma Morales was recognized as a "Hispanic of the 80s" at the United Hispanic Organizations of Tarrant County's annual ball in 1984 because of her involvement in raising scholarship funds as the President of the Mexican American College Education fund (MACE) and as an active member of the American G.I. Forum.¹⁹⁷ Eventually acknowledging and encouraging the success and abilities of Latina women provided another layer of activism that supported all the efforts of social changes in Fort Worth.

Just a couple years after the conference, three new developments helped unify the efforts of these Fort Worth leaders and forged the path for upward mobility for the Mexican American community. The first co-founded by Gilbert Garcia and Sam Garcia,

¹⁹⁷ Samuel Garcia Papers, *Community News and Events*, October 1984, Series VI: Newspapers, Box 2.

the Chicano Luncheon allowed for open communication among Fort Worth's Mexican American activist groups and their leaders. This informal group lasted until a few years into the twenty-first-century, and was listed as one of both Gilbert Garcia and Sam Garcia's major contributions to the Chicano community in Fort Worth. The Luncheon came up anytime each of them was honored both during and after their lives. At one point in the late 80s, the Luncheon was "taped and shown at local TV cable system for the benefit of the Fort Worth community in general."¹⁹⁸ The second development was Jesse Sandoval's leadership in PASSO, a non-partisan, but politically active organization that listened and invited both Republican and Democratic participants and both conservative and radical philosophies. The final development was the creation of the Mexican American Educational Advisory Council headed by Mendoza. This formal group was established to challenge the systemic educational issues discussed at the conference. Their more than decade long fight against Fort Worth ISD targeted the root problems that contributed to the state of affairs for Mexican Americans in Fort Worth. The accomplishments of the MAEAC continue to benefit students in Fort Worth Independent School District today.

¹⁹⁸ Samuel Garcia Papers, "Sam Garcia," Series I: Personal Papers, Box 2, Folder 10, Fort Worth Central Library Archives.

Chapter 3: Struggles for Educational Equality and Political Inclusion

“...one of our biggest uphill fights has been in the field of education. I believe that through education, through sending our younger people to colleges, through learning and through efforts of this manner we'll be able to secure the leadership that would be necessary to continue and help the Mexican-Americans to become first-class citizens. We have to continue to fight. The war on poverty has come a long way in helping our people... But even then we've only scratched the surface. We need to continue more and more. We need to make available to our youth...education so that they could become leaders...We definitely need to make great strides in the field of education. I believe that through education we are going to solve our problems.”¹⁹⁹

--Gilbert Garcia, March 3, 1969

While attending Northside High School in Fort Worth in the early 1970s, Rebecca Mendoza, daughter of Rufino, could occasionally be found at the administration building of Fort Worth Independent School District going through their personnel and application files. Rebecca's directive from her father was to look for any records of administrators, teachers, or applicants with Spanish surnames.²⁰⁰ She remembers her father's dedication to improving education for Mexican American children. In May of 1971 Rufino Mendoza was named chairman of the newly formed Mexican American Educational Advisory Council (MAEAC) whose goal was to aggressively work for reforms within Fort Worth ISD.²⁰¹ Mendoza believed his children, as well as all other Latino children were not receiving adequate or equal educational opportunities in the Fort Worth public school system. He was invited to the first meeting of more than sixty concerned citizens by his son, Rufino, Jr. who had become civically engaged through his interactions with Eddy Herrera, a sociology professor at the University of Texas at Arlington, and a participant at

¹⁹⁹ Gilbert Garcia, interviewed by Robert Cuellar, transcript, 3 March 1969, North Texas State University Oral History Collection, Fort Worth, Texas.

²⁰⁰ Rebecca Mendoza, Personal Interview with author, March 5, 2015, Mendoza has just completed her last year (2016) of teaching after a more than forty year career as a middle school teacher at Riverside Middle School in FWISD where there is currently a petition to rename the school in her honor.

²⁰¹ Rufino Mendoza, Jr., email message to author, March 24, 2015.

the Mexican American Leadership Conference. Armed with the information Rebecca retrieved, MAEAC stayed on top of FWISD's hiring practices and their efforts or lack of efforts to increase the number of Hispanic administrators, staff, and faculty. The formation of this local group, with an internal form of advocacy and whose sole focus was the elimination of any discriminatory practices against Mexican American students, whether intentional or through neglect, led to a spectrum of opportunities for the Latino community.

Mexican Americans have received unequal educational opportunities in the Southwestern United States since the 1848 signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo.²⁰² School district officials actively worked throughout the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries to not only segregate children of Mexican origin from their Anglo peers, but also to provide inferior buildings, teachers, and curriculum that did not account for the cultural needs of minority students. Some of these efforts were made specifically to ensure a continued availability of uneducated and submissive laborers.²⁰³ Although inequality continues to exist into the twenty-first-century, Mexican Americans actively worked for change and found success through various methods, including advocacy through community awareness and participation, the passage of new laws, the courts, and by establishing private educational opportunities for Mexican American youth.²⁰⁴

²⁰² Richard Valencia, *Students and the Courts: The Mexican American Legal Struggle for Educational Equality*, (New York: NYU Press, 2010), 7.

²⁰³ Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas*, 178, 191-196.

²⁰⁴ For a longer discussion on the history of Mexican Americans and Education see, Gilbert C. Gonzalez, *Chicano Education in the Era of Segregation*, (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 1990), Guadalupe San Miguel, Jr., *Chicana/o Struggles for Education: Activism in the Community*, (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2013), Guadalupe San Miguel, Jr., *Let All of Them Take Heed: Mexican Americans and the Campaign for Educational Equality in Texas, 1910-1981*, or Richard Valencia, *Students and the Courts: The Mexican American Legal Struggle for Educational Equality*, (New York: NYU Press, 2010).

In addition to the fight for equitable educational opportunities, Mexican American leaders in Fort Worth also worked for political representation that reflected their communities and to become a vocal part of the city leadership throughout the 1970s and 80s. On several occasions they found opportunities to work with other minority leaders in the city and often joined forces to push against the Anglo control of Fort Worth. Considering the differing backgrounds, talents, and skills of Rufino Mendoza, Sam Garcia, Gilbert Garcia, and Jesse Sandoval their activism in the last three decades of the twentieth-century had varying focuses. Mendoza was a blue-collar civil servant and father of nine children. His civic engagement centered on education and the local school district's treatment of Mexican American students. Sam Garcia was a business owner and community volunteer who used his time and organizational skills to mentor youth, promote political awareness, and strengthen the economic power of the Hispanic community. By the 1970s Gilbert Garcia was a recognized and respected leader of the Fort Worth Mexican American community by both the people he represented and by the Anglo city leadership.²⁰⁵ He utilized his position to continuously keep his community and the numerous Mexican American organizations working toward the paramount goal of upward mobility. Sandoval was a skilled laborer and father whose activism centered on issues that directly impacted life in the barrio. He joined racially integrated committees that served as watchdogs to community hospitals and led the local chapter of PASSO to find and elect the local leaders whose goals benefitted the barrios of Fort Worth. This chapter reveals how these four WWII veterans, ordinary men, yet exceptional leaders learned from the revelations of the 1969 leadership conference and led a well-organized and structured Mexican American activist community in Fort Worth. Under the leadership

²⁰⁵ Prior to 1970, Gilbert Garcia is mentioned in the *Fort Worth Star Telegram* on more than 100 occasions suggesting that he was the person chosen by both Mexican Americans and Anglos to question or comment on issues important to the city.

of the Mexican American generation, but with some of the insights and tactics of the Chicano generation, the Fort Worth Hispanic community took on the challenge to successfully fight for equitable education opportunities and to increase Mexican American representation in both city leadership and in the public school system throughout the last few decades of the twentieth-century.

MAEAC attempted to resolve their concerns directly with the school district but ultimately found success through joining forces with a decade long litigation by the African American community in Fort Worth. Mendoza and other six members of the committee including Rufino, Jr. and Eddy Herrera first identified several areas of concern: curriculum and instruction that reflected the awareness of students with multicultural backgrounds, lack of bilingual education, little to no Latino faculty members, insufficient professional development for both staff and faculty, and discriminatory school policies. After meeting with the superintendent and other high level district administrators, MAEAC did not see any significant changes taking place. This led to the first lawsuit against FWISD filed on behalf of Mexican Americans in Fort Worth. With the help of attorney Geoffrey Gay, MAEAC became interveners, or joined an ongoing lawsuit, in the long-standing *Flax v. Potts*, NAACP lawsuit that was seeking an end to segregation in FWISD. This is one clear example of the two minority communities in an urban setting working together. However, due to cultural dissimilarities and racial prejudices, these groups often fought their own battles in other major Texas cities.²⁰⁶

Although there were clear Jim Crow laws in Fort Worth that segregated African Americans in schools and public facilities, discrimination against Mexican Americans in

²⁰⁶ Brian D. Behnken, *Fighting Their Own Battles: Mexican Americans, African Americans, and the Struggle for Civil Rights in Texas*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 11-12.

the city and throughout the country was uneven.²⁰⁷ During World War II, African Americans served in segregated units whereas Mexican American soldiers were often in units and shared living spaces with the Anglo soldiers. Once at home, the two groups continued to experience discrimination unequally. Longtime Northside resident, Raul Duran remembers growing up in post-World War II Fort Worth where public places carried “white” and “colored” signs. His aunts told him that in the 1930s and 40s they (Mexicans) were only allowed to sit in the upper balconies of the Isis Theater on Main Street in Northside with the African Americans but Raul always remembered sitting wherever he wanted.²⁰⁸ Another longtime resident of the Northside community remembered his first day of 7th grade at Elder Middle School. Over the loud speaker the principal told all the Mexican Americans to go to the auditorium where they were instructed to never speak Spanish on campus. A suspension from school followed if they were caught speaking in this foreign language.²⁰⁹ Esperanza Padilla Ayala began working at a church in downtown Fort Worth in the early 1960s. She commuted on a public bus from her neighborhood to and from work. On one particular afternoon Ayala offered an empty seat next to her to a black woman. As soon as the woman sat down, the bus driver stopped the bus and told her she could only sit in the back. Since all the seats in the back were taken she was told to stand. Ayala remembered thinking, “why can’t she sit here, she’s not bothering me, she just another human being.”²¹⁰ In a 1961

²⁰⁷ Discrimination against Mexican Americans was more rampant in South Texas, see Patrick James Carroll, *Felix Longoria’s Wake Bereavement, Racism, and the Rise of Mexican American Activism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003).

²⁰⁸ Raul Duran, interviewed by Moises Acuna-Gurrola, online recording, January 1, 2014, Civil Rights in Black and Brown Oral History Project, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas, <https://crbb.tcu.edu/clips/segregation>.

²⁰⁹ “Lazo Family on Boys’ Club and Speaking Spanish in School,” oral interview on Latino Fort Worth YouTube channel, accessed on July 24, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H5-Dfjn9Rpo>.

²¹⁰ “Esperanza, Padilla Ayala on public transportation in the 1960s,” oral interview on Latino Fort Worth YouTube channel, accessed on July 24, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h1Bzj2JOivc>.

article in the *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, Gilbert Garcia, who at the time was the local campaign manager for gubernatorial candidate, Henry B. Gonzalez, stated that he and several other campaign workers including a “Negro woman” were refused service at a Fort Worth café. The Chinese restaurant manager stated that there was no room; however, there appeared to be several tables available.²¹¹ Sam Garcia recalled avoiding some discrimination in Fort Worth in the late 1950s and early 1960s after people learned he was from Oklahoma and assumed he was Choctaw or Cherokee. Laughingly he stated, “I never told them different.”²¹²

In most major Texas cities the two minority communities were unable to find enough common ground or were in constant political and economic competition; however, Fort Worth was different.²¹³ Fort Worth did not have the long history of local Mexican Americans fighting for whiteness, a strategy used by LULAC and the American G.I. Forum prior to the Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, and that caused resentment from the African American community.²¹⁴ When the small population of Mexican Americans in Fort Worth beginning pushing against systemic discrimination in education and a lack of political representation they found success working with the African American community. Beginning in the late 1950s, the Texas Good Neighbor Commission helped Fort Worth establish a Human Relations Commission that consisted of biracial leadership. In 1962 Gilbert Garcia, as a member of PASSO, became a director of a new integrated group called the Texas Democrat Co-ordinating Organization

²¹¹ “Gonzalez and Negro Refused Café Service,” *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, March 1, 1961.

²¹² Samuel Garcia Papers, “World War II veteran first came to the U.S. as an illegal immigrant,” Personal Papers, Box 2, Folder 6, Fort Worth Central Library Archives

²¹³ See Behnken, *Fighting Their Own Battles*, for a longer discussion on the black-brown tensions in major Texas cities.

²¹⁴ Behnken, *Fighting Their Own Battles*, 24.

composed of “Negroes and Latin Americans.”²¹⁵ Although a 1992 special edition of the *Dallas Morning News* reported that African Americans and Latin Americans did not understand each other or get along and constantly competed for jobs, the Fort Worth Hispanic community more often than not, worked well with the Black community to achieve equal opportunities. Most evident of this cooperation is the united Flax v. Potts lawsuit that led to a school district that actively worked for the improvement of both communities.²¹⁶

In the lawsuit against FWISD, MAEAC specifically sought the following for the Latino community in Fort Worth:

1. Mexican Americans to be defined as a separate ethnic group within the district and therefore deserving of distinctive programs.
2. The employment of a Mexican American assistant superintendent
3. The employment of a Mexican American in the personal [sic] department who has the authority to hire faculty and staff for school campuses.
4. An intensive recruitment campaign to increase the employment of Mexican Americans with an ultimate goal of twelve percent to reflect the percentage of Hispanic students in the district.
5. The designation of a member of the administrative staff of the Board of Education to oversee the implementation of the demanded reforms.
6. The creation of a tri-ethnic citizen’s council to monitor the progress of the five goals in addition to the continued desegregation of the school district.²¹⁷

In addition to the lawsuit, MAEAC made other demands of FWISD. The group wanted to serve as a screening committee to the personnel department to ensure all administrative

²¹⁵ “Integrated Political Group Established,” *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, December 5, 1962, found in Samuel Garcia Papers, Series VII: Clippings-Hispanic Community Organizations, Box 10, Folder 1.

²¹⁶ For a longer discussion of the Fort Worth African American communities struggle to integrate the city’s schools, their accommodationist approach, and their working relationship with the Mexican American community see, Cannon, Tina Nicole. “Cowtown and the Color Line: Desegregating Fort Worth’s Public Schools.” PhD diss., Texas Christian University, 2009. The two minority groups supported each other through the decades long lawsuit but in 1989 MAEAC believed their needs were met while the African American community continued to struggle with FWISD. <https://repository.tcu.edu/handle/116099117/4129>

²¹⁷ Rufino Mendoza, Jr., email message to author, March 24, 2015.

appointments to campuses received cultural sensitivity training prior to taking their post. They also sought quarterly access to the superintendent to discuss the needs or complaints of the Mexican community. Any school with a fifty percent or more population of Hispanic students, according to MAEAC needed a Mexican principal, as well as Mexican administrators. The School Board was asked to open an investigation into the high drop-out rate of Mexican students and to establish a magnet school in the heavily Mexican American populated Northside area of Fort Worth. Lastly, MAEAC required all school correspondence to be available in Spanish and for the School Board to include the Hispanic community in increasing and improving bilingual education opportunities. These aggressive demands demonstrate how the efforts in Fort Worth were similar to other major cities throughout the Southwest.

Throughout Texas, Mexican Americans were not passive citizens who accepted inequalities in the education of their youth. Nor was the underachievement of Mexican origin youth due to a lack of educational value present in their culture, but rather was attributed to the inferior educational practices of school districts across the Southwestern United States.²¹⁸ Mexican Americans played an active role in both community organizing and in judicial efforts to change these inequalities. Mexican American activists refused to accept subpar education for their communities. Men and women fought tirelessly using various methods to achieve their aims including, “contestation, advocacy, and alternative forms of education.”²¹⁹ These efforts splintered off into multiple measures, all with the end goal of improving education for their children. Activists all over Texas sought the

²¹⁸ The arguments in both Guadalupe San Miguel Jr.'s *Chicana/o Struggles for Education: Activism in the Community* and Richard Valencia's *Chicano Students and the Courts: The Mexican American Legal Struggle for Education Equality* debunk a pervasive myth of Mexican Americans as passive citizens who undervalued education.

²¹⁹ Guadalupe San Miguel, Jr., *Chicana/o Struggles for Education: Activism in the Community*. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2013), 139.

implementation of bilingual educational programs to develop children who could maintain their own language and culture while absorbing another. The activism in the Mexican American community highlights the value that Latinos placed on a proper education and reveals their ability to see the increased opportunities in mobility that education opened. Although one reason for the underachievement of Mexican youths is insufficient parental involvement in the Mexican American community, this is not evidence of devaluing education as a culture, but rather due to the discriminatory or inhospitable treatment received by parents from public schools and the lack of culturally sensitive or aware curriculum.²²⁰ Historians have emphasized the active role people from all walks of life played in this fight. Rufino Mendoza and MAEAC is perfect example of a blue-collar, family man taking on a major school district for the sake of both his own children and the rest of the Mexican American community.²²¹

MAEAC's decision to sue the school district is indicative of the methods used by Mexican American generation activists and demonstrates the value placed on education by this community. These judicial efforts that began as early as 1925 in Texas were sometimes successful in changing the discriminatory practices of both individual school districts and statutory legislative decisions. One of the most influential cases in Texas, *Cisneros v. Corpus Christi Independent School District*, in 1970 led to the recognition of Mexican Americans as an "identifiable ethnic group" and therefore entitled to equal protection under the law. This decision was instrumental in the success of future litigation including the decisions made in Fort Worth.²²²

²²⁰ For a longer discussion of this argument see, Valencia, *Chicano Students and the Courts*.

²²¹ San Miguel, Jr., *Chicana/o Struggles for Education*, 142.

²²² Valencia, *Chicano Students and the Courts*, 307.

MAEAC's legal battle spanned an entire decade. Fort Worth ISD's superintendent voiced his frustrations with MAEAC when he stated that the district was "making definite progress" in the hiring of Mexican-Americans but that "the trouble is *they* want it done tomorrow" (emphasis added).²²³ Lyndon Rogers, spokesman for MAEAC believed that the promises made by FWISD were vague and that the committee "did not feel the administration has acted in good faith in accomplishing the goals of equal and quality education for Mexican-Americans."²²⁴ He also stated that FWISD knew exactly what needed to be done to remedy the issues. The members of MAEAC had reiterated their demands when they first became interveners in the lawsuit in 1972, again in 1974, 1976, and just the previous summer. Regarding the continued underrepresentation of Latino faculty and staff, the superintendent cited the lack of Latinos completing college as the reason for the slow rise in the employment of Mexican Americans.²²⁵ In November of 1979, MAEAC rejected a settlement with the district. The FWISD panel proposed increasing the number of Hispanic teachers to ten percent. Mendoza stated, "We're already 16.5 percent of the population. Even if they increase employment to 10 percent, within three years our population will be at 20 percent and we'll still be way behind."²²⁶ In March of 1980, the *Dallas Morning News* reported that the lawsuit was a "waiting game," with both MAEAC and FWISD waiting for an answer from the other.²²⁷ Mendoza offered his "bottom line proposal" that included "hiring Hispanics to make up 12 percent of the staff, being considered a separate ethnic group, naming an assistant superintendent to monitor the program and to report to the judge, hiring a Mexican-American personnel

²²³ Barbara Clark, "FW minority plan cited," *Dallas Morning News*, October 14, 1978.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

²²⁶ Barbara Clark, "Mexican-American committee rejects FW Panel's proposal," *Dallas Morning News*, November 4, 1979.

²²⁷ Barbara Clark, "Desegregation case sparks waiting game," *Dallas Morning News*, March, 1, 1980.

officer and offering magnet programs in North Side schools.”²²⁸ Mendoza was a local leader working within established systems to negotiate the most advantageous outcome for his community. His conservative or pragmatic approach utilized the city’s newspapers to keep the public aware of the actions of the superintendent rather than through walk-outs or protests.²²⁹

The first victory of the lawsuit against the school district came just a few months later when the U.S. District Judge Eldon Mahon ruled that Hispanics should be treated as a separate ethnic group. Also, in August of 1980, Eugene Gutierrez was named as an associate superintendent for non-instructional services by the FWISD superintendent. Although in his role he would only oversee groups like building maintenance and security rather than teachers or administrators, it was a step forward. He was previously a deputy superintendent for financial services in Chicago, and served as a controller for districts in California. In his first visit to FWISD he was welcomed by MAEAC. Mendoza was quoted in the *Dallas Morning News*, “All along the personnel office said they couldn’t find Mexican-Americans, not just teachers, but administrators. This just goes to show you they are there.”²³⁰ After these two victories, Mendoza began pressuring administration and school board members to actively work toward reducing dropout rates and increasing the test scores of Hispanic students. “If Anglos had 60,000 students and lost 30,000 of them, they’d say they have a problem. If we have 400 students at North Side High School and lose 200 of them, we have a problem.”²³¹ Mendoza also stated that the Hispanic students who graduated were not educated or trained well enough to compete for jobs or

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ For a longer discussion on conservative or pragmatic approaches to civil rights see, Tomiko Brown-Nagin, *Courage to Dissent: Atlanta and the Long History of the Civil Rights Movement*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

²³⁰ Barbara Clark, “Gutierrez went into Chicago job with eyes open,” *Dallas Morning News*, August 27, 1980.

²³¹ Barbara Clark. “Hispanic fights for better schools.” *Dallas Morning News*, September 27, 1981.

continue into higher education. He attributed these problems to teachers and administrators placing Hispanic students in basic or vocational courses rather than challenging them with higher academic level classes because they did not expect the students to “excel or even succeed,” and the forced testing of students who are not proficient in English.²³² Mendoza wanted the district to help remedy these issues by reaching into the community and educating parents on how to motivate their children.

The final victory of MAEAC’s lawsuit against the school district occurred in 1981 when the Fort Worth Division of the United States District Court ordered FWISD to make a series of significant changes in an attempt to “remediate the effects of years of discrimination which was found to be part of a dual school system. By its order on December 26, 1981, the Court found that Hispanic students had been victimized by this segregationist approach to education.”²³³ The “Mendoza lawsuit” was instrumental in changing the systemic inequality and the societal norms for a growing Hispanic community.²³⁴ A second lawsuit filed in 1991 concerning elections and representation for the School Board led to the election of the first female of Hispanic origin, Racheal Newman, to the Board of Trustees. Before the initial lawsuit was concluded, the activism of Mendoza and MAEAC led to the creation of a medical program at Northside High School and an increase in the employment of Latino faculty and administration. Although the MAEAC was groundbreaking in judicially challenging the school district for the Fort Worth community, it did not completely solve the educational inequality that existed and continued into the following decades.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Rufino Mendoza, Jr., email message to author, March 24, 2015.

²³⁴ Cuellár, *Stories from the Barrio*, 193.

Hispanic dropout rates continued to exceed the rates of other groups while Hispanic participation in school activities fell short. By 1980, Hispanics made up over 22 percent of the total first graders for a total of 1,231 students in Fort Worth ISD but only 10 percent of the senior class or 393 seniors. In that same year there were 2,326 white students in first grade and 2,129 white seniors. The black students only dropped from 1,833 to 1,284.²³⁵ In other words, Hispanic students were overwhelmingly not completing twelve years of school. Not only were many not graduating, those who were in school were not participating in extra-curricular activities or excelling in academics. Throughout the 1970s, Northside High School, which was heavily populated by Hispanic students, had very few National Honor Society members with Spanish surnames, one in 1970, and zero in 1971 through 1974. By 1979 when more than 50 percent of the school was Hispanic only seven out of the twenty-four National Honor Society members had Spanish surnames.²³⁶ In the yearbook for 1970, the Future Teachers of America Society had only one Latina member while the Future Homemakers of America was half Latina. Northside's Student Council only had one Hispanic member in 1970 and by 1979 less than twenty percent of the student council was Hispanic, a vast underrepresentation of the student body.

One of the goals of MAEAC was to increase the number of Hispanic faculty and staff. Throughout the 1970s there were only a handful of faculty members at Northside High School with Spanish surnames.²³⁷ According to Rebecca Mendoza, the school district stated that Hispanics were not applying for teaching jobs because they were not going to college.²³⁸ Hispanic students not going to college in Fort Worth was reflective of

²³⁵ Fort Worth ISD archives, "Student Population and Related Statistics."

²³⁶ Fort Worth ISD archives, Northside High School yearbooks.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Rebecca Mendoza, interviewed by the author, March 23, 2015.

Hispanic students nationwide. Although the number of Latino undergraduate enrollments across the country has increased since the 1970s, as of 1997 only 8.6 percent of college students were of Hispanic ancestry, and more than half of them were enrolled in community colleges.²³⁹ This directly affects the amount of educated and successful role models in schools and in political leadership positions that would reflect the Latino community. Many Mexican American youth were unable to visualize themselves beyond their own barrios. By the 1980s the lawsuit filed by the MAEAC along with the passing of a bilingual education bill in the Texas legislature opened opportunities to succeed in school to the Mexican American community.²⁴⁰ However, the increase in gang violence and in the high school dropout rate for Mexican Americans in Fort Worth continued to make educational success, social mobility, and political participation difficult among the Latino community in the 1980s.

Identifying the continued uphill battle necessary for success in school for Mexican Americans, Sam Garcia became overwhelmingly involved in a great number of community organizations eventually leading to his Volunteer of the Year award in 1989, awarded to him by a mayoral-appointed committee of organizational leaders. He not only volunteered as a mentor at Meacham Middle School located in the Northside area, but also became involved in Project "YO SOY," Youth Organized to Serve Our Youth. The mentorship project focused its attention in four predominantly Hispanic neighborhoods of Fort Worth: Northside, Riverside, Meacham, and Diamond Hill and was a joint venture between the city and the school district. "YO SOY" initially aimed to identify the problems with the way gang violence was handled, improve the neighborhood image, involve local business, identify the resources need to solve the problems, and to support the opening

²³⁹ San Miguel Jr, *Chicana/o Struggles for Education*, 13.

²⁴⁰ San Miguel Jr, *Let All of Them Take Heed*, 195-209.

of a treatment center for those addicted to inhalants.²⁴¹ The project was funded by a local donation the first year of \$1200, the second year they received \$520 and \$500 the third year from the cities special gift fund.²⁴² Due to a lack of funding the project did not last beyond the mid-1980s. In 1986, the *Fort Worth Star Telegram* reported the high school drop-outs were still a major issue for Fort Worth ISD. Rufino Mendoza is quoted as saying “I haven’t seen that much progress or effect in the Fort Worth Independent School District. We have met and met for at least three years on these concerns.”²⁴³ Although high school drop-outs were not all Mexican American it was still this ethnicity that had the highest percentages.²⁴⁴

Even though Mendoza’s efforts with MAEAC and Sam Garcia’s participation in Project “YO SOY” did not solve every problem for Hispanics in Fort Worth they certainly improved educational opportunities and achieved some of the goals set forth during the 1969 leadership conference. The legacy of that conference continued with the determination of Sam Garcia and Gilbert Garcia to increase political awareness and participation among the Latino community. Jesse Sandoval used his role as leader of his neighborhood to ensure city resources were available and city leadership were held accountable. Mendoza, Gilbert Garcia, and Sam Garcia utilized the *Community News and Events* newsletter (edited and distributed by Sam Garcia) to communicate educational issues, activities of Hispanic organizations, and actions by city government major employers, respectively. The newsletter also highlighted achievements and progress made by Hispanic individuals or organizations. The significant increase during

²⁴¹ Fort Worth Public Records, “Informal Report to City Council Members,” March 8, 1984.

²⁴² Fort Worth Public Records, “Ordinance 9315,” February 12, 1985.

²⁴³ Lori Chandler, “Solutions sought in school dropouts,” *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, October 23, 1986.

²⁴⁴ Fort Worth ISD archives, “Student Population and Related Statistics.”

the last three decades of the twentieth-century in all four of these Hispanic men, as well as several other Hispanic men and women's appearance in the city's major newspaper, the *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, is evidence of their realization in becoming a recognized and important group for the success of the city.

Sam Garcia's efforts on behalf of Fort Worth Hispanics were multifaceted. He involved himself in educational, political, and economic issues that he believed affected Mexican American lives. He wielded his pen using his own success and community standing to be an advocate for the Latino Fort Worth. He published his own monthly newsletter for the Hispanic community, *Community News and Events*, circulated letters calling for political action, corresponded with congressman, senators, and even the governor if necessary to ensure the needs of his community were met. In a letter dated June 16, 1983, Garcia wrote Texas Governor Mark White urging him to consider a fellow community leader, Ruben D. Olivarez, to be appointed to the proposed Education Commission. In the fall of 1982, Garcia stated "Your Presence is Needed and Your Voice Should Be Heard! Speak Out Against Dividing the Southside Mexican-American Worth Heights Community"²⁴⁵ Garcia was concerned with Mexican Americans losing their ability to elect someone who would work for the needs of their community. In a letter addressed to "The Voice of the People," Garcia urged the support of the bill introduced by Congressman Jim Wright which would call for federal funding to assist in the cost of educating "alien children."²⁴⁶ Sam Garcia was an exceptional leader in the Latino community in Fort Worth and may have been identified as one of the Mexican American Leadership Conference's "vendidos" considering his success as a business owner and

²⁴⁵ Samuel Garcia Papers, "City Redistricting of Single Member Council District," Series I: Personal Papers, Box 1, Folder 2.

²⁴⁶ Sam Garcia, "Voices of the People," *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, September 28, 1983.

his choice to live outside of the barrios; however, his continued effort for the betterment of the Latino community as a whole after he achieved success in business demonstrates his commitment and desire to increase Mexican American education, social mobility, and political participation.

Jesse Sandoval's unquestioned commitment to his community, his leadership as the first president of the Political Association of Spanish-Speaking Organizations PASSO in Tarrant County (Fort Worth), and as a representative of the working-class, he helped bridge the divide between the established Mexican American leadership of the city and the *Mexicanos* still struggling in the barrio. The success of the Viva Kennedy Clubs in mobilizing a significant number of Mexican American voters to impact the 1960 election of John F. Kennedy to the presidency led to the creation of organizations that focused on political activities at the local, state, and federal levels. Consisting initially of G.I. Forum members who recognized a need to get more involved in politics, PASSO worked alongside established organizations to increase Latino voters and to help fight against the poll tax. PASSO gained more political clout and recognition after their successful efforts in Crystal City, Texas where it swept all five city council seats and several other major roles in city government in the 1963 elections.²⁴⁷ Although Fort Worth at the point did not have a large enough Mexican American population to match the success of Crystal City, PASSO played a role in local elections beginning in the mid-1960s and into the 1970s. Jesse Sandoval's daughter Eva Bonilla remembers working the PASSO meetings as a high school student, where candidates were invited to speak to the organization's members and explain their intentions regarding the Mexican American community.

²⁴⁷ For more on the creation of PASSO and their success in Crystal City see, Carlos Blanton, *George I. Sanchez*, 218-221, or Jose Angel Gutierrez, *Making Chicano Militant: Lessons from Cristal* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1998).

PASSO leaders and members held forums to decide on which candidates, amendments, and propositions to endorse and support, then Bonilla made “cheat sheets” for voters using a mimeograph machine with their decisions. The PASSO members and the candidates invited to speak at the PASSO screenings came from both sides of the aisle. These memos were then distributed throughout the community who trusted the decisions made by Sandoval and PASSO.²⁴⁸

Both Sandoval and Gilbert Garcia believed the organization should be independent and not attached to any particular political group. Garcia stated in 1964 that, “Members in this area feel there shouldn’t be a PASSO tie-up with liberals, conservatives, unions, Democrats, or Republicans.”²⁴⁹ The Fort Worth chapter of PASSO aimed to be more inclusive of all community members including African Americans. In an article announcing an appreciation dinner in honor of Sandoval’s leadership in PASSO, Sandoval stated that the organization will be work “in banding together for political action the minority groups of Negroes....”²⁵⁰ Sandoval served in multiple cross-cultural committees and organizations that could directly improve the daily lives of Mexican Americans in Fort Worth.

Sandoval not only led PASSO in its first years in Fort Worth, he continued to serve in various leadership positions of organizations throughout the 1960s and 70s. He was appointed as the first Mexican American Democratic Chair for Tarrant County, he marched with Cesar Chavez to the state capitol in support of the farm workers movement, served on the Human Relations, the Housing Authority, and Housing Standards Commissions, and served the longest term during the 1970s as the President

²⁴⁸ Eva Bonilla, Personal Interview, June 9, 2016

²⁴⁹ “Avoids Tie to Labor,” *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, April 12, 1964.

²⁵⁰ “Local Unit Of PASO Sets Fete,” *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, November 14, 1965.

of the Mutualista de San Jose.²⁵¹ He represented west Fort Worth on the Community Consumer Advisory Council for the new hospital district. On this council, made up of 33 multi-cultural representatives from all areas of Fort Worth, Sandoval and Rufino Mendoza, who represented the Northside of the city, communicated the community's concerns to hospital district officials and served as a watchdog ensuring the addressing of those concerns. At the first meeting of the council, William Taylor, a representative of Peter Smith Hospital stated, "We're not perfect. We have a ways to go...Where we need to improve we need input from the people of this county to tell us what we need to do...We need you very badly to bring to our attention things that we don't see and we don't hear."²⁵² This was Sandoval and Mendoza's duty to the Mexican American people of their barrios, to make certain voices were heard and to find solutions to problems.

It is evident that in the years after the Mexican American Leadership Conference the many organizations representing Chicano Fort Worth and their various leaders found methods to work together toward a common goal, the upward mobility of their community. In addition to the MAEAC, the Chicano Luncheon was formed just after the conference where community leaders openly declared a need to unify. The group chose to meet during lunch initially once a month "in order to inform the Hispanic community about health, politics, discrimination, job opportunities and in general any issue or concern that may impact the Hispanic community," and by the early nineties they meet weekly.²⁵³ They hosted guest speakers including candidates for local offices, representatives from national organizations or state offices. The Luncheon of September 10, 1985 was Tony

²⁵¹ Mutualistas or mutual aid societies were community based groups created to aid in sundry difficulties.

²⁵² "Watchdogs Begin Look at Hospitals," *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, May 24, 1973.

²⁵³ Samuel Garcia Papers, "Sam Garcia," Series I: Personal Papers, Box 2, Folder 10, Fort Worth Central Library Archives.

Morales from the Parole Board in Austin. The announcement for the meeting *Community News and Events* read, "Good turn out last month of 80 person; let's make it 100 this time. There will be many announcements to keep you informed of community activities."²⁵⁴

By the 1980s, several groups began joining forces to either raise money for scholarships, cultural awareness, or to demand needed reforms. Even though several local creations like MAEAC, Chicano Luncheon, *Community News and Events* newsletter, Mexican American Chamber of Commerce, and the Hispanic Business Directory kept the Fort Worth Mexican American community informed and unified in their upward trajectory, the well-established national organizations like LULAC and the American G.I. Forum, also aided this community's efforts throughout the last few decades of the twentieth-century. Both organizations had local chapters that kept the Fort Worth community informed of national issues affecting the Latino community. They also promoted cultural awareness through parades or celebrations. The G.I. Forum hosted a Posada, a traditional Catholic and Hispanic Christmas event. The December 1984 *La Voz Del American G.I. Forum* news bulletin stated, "Many youngsters have never witnessed a Posada and would be enriched by seeing this enactment of the journey of Joseph and Mary on that day long ago."²⁵⁵

The legacy of the 1969 leadership conference continued in the 1980s with Sam Garcia *Community News and Events* newsletter in. The publication ran for more than a decade and had a circulation of more than 10,000 homes and businesses and actively

²⁵⁴ Samuel Garcia Papers, *Community News and Events*, August 1985, Series VI: Newspapers, Box 2.

²⁵⁵ Samuel Garcia Papers, "La Voz Del," Series II: Organizations, American G.I. Forum, Box 1, Folder 1.

worked to keep the Hispanic community aware of issues important to their lives and unified working toward a common goal. The January 1984 edition listed the monthly meeting times of more than a dozen Hispanic organizations including the Chicano Luncheon, Mexican American Democrats, La Hispana Business & Professional Women's Club, LULAC Council 601, American G.I. Forum, I.M.A.G.E., among several others demonstrating an active and informed group of Hispanic men and women in Fort Worth. The March 1984 issue announced an upcoming meeting to organize a "Council" made of "Hispanic leaders (both men and women) of different groups and organizations." The announcement listed five goals for this future council:

- A. An 'Action Organization" that will handle specific matters pertinent to the Hispanic community. This will not be yet another organization but rather a unification of existing organization structured to better address employment, education, politics, and social injustices.
- B. An organization to assist with problems encountered by individuals in the community.
- C. An organization to provide a workable and better network of communication between all Hispanic organizations and individuals.
- D. An organization to enhance the understanding and cooperation among all of the Hispanic organizations and individuals.
- E. An organization that will endeavor to establish more recognition and potential for the Hispanic community by working together and speaking as 'one.'²⁵⁶

Fort Worth's Hispanic leaders were continuing to find ways to be an amalgamated group for the benefit of the entire community.

The articles, announcements, and detailed descriptions of any issues related to the Hispanic human capital of major employers in Fort Worth, not only kept the members of the community aware, but it also ensured those employers consistently upheld acceptable standards or felt the public pressure until the maladies were remedied. The

²⁵⁶ Samuel Garcia Papers, *Community News and Events*, March 1984, Series VI: Newspapers, Box 2.

lawsuit filed by MAEAC against the discriminatory practices of FWISD, a major employer of the city, opened up opportunities for students with bilingual education, and treatment of Mexicans as a separate ethnic minority protected by numerous legislation from the previous several decades. The lawsuit also opened opportunities for Hispanic employees through the requirement of the school district to continue to increase the number of Hispanic administrators and teachers. Throughout the 1980s, the *Community News and Events* newsletter continuously held FWISD officials' feet to the fire. Garcia periodically reported staff and student demographics as well as any dialogue between MAEAC and FWISD. In a letter printed in the newsletter in the March 1985 issue, Mendoza addressed Superintendent Candoli and the members of the board of trustees after a negative report was issued by the Texas Education Agency (TEA), stating,

I have received numerous telephone calls during this school year and many more these past four days, from parents as concerned as I, about the educational achievement of their children. Parents that are concerned about discipline at their schools, the attitude of some teachers, their child's motivation, ambition, frustration, lack of interest and the low expectations some teachers have of the students.

Let me reiterate at this point that criticism or expressed concern of any school does not pertain to all of the teachers nor to all of the administrators. If this inaccuracy is done, we forget the tireless endeavors and the sincere blood, sweat, and tears put forth by a majority of our educators.

Nevertheless, it is obvious that if we are to continue toward the attainment of an educational system that is second to none; the school board must address not only T.E.A.'s findings, but also all data pertaining to poor scholastic achievement, high drop-out rates, low expectations, insensitivity to students and parents, lack of cultural awareness, discipline and the resultant suspensions or other punishments.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁷ Samuel Garcia Papers, *Community News and Events*, March 1985, Series VI: Newspapers, Box 2.

Even though judgments were already made in the lawsuit against FWISD, MAEAC and Garcia's publication ensured that the school district continued to be held accountable for providing a quality education to all students.

Outside of education, the newsletter also held other major Fort Worth employers accountable for their hiring and firing practices. Sam Garcia declared in an early 1985 issue that the "City of Fort Worth Affirmative Action Program is still not effective."²⁵⁸ During the previous year "so many...Hispanic employees were leaving the employment of the city..." and the city was not hiring additional Hispanics. After the newsletter published this information in the October 1984 issue, several Hispanic groups and leaders including Gilbert Garcia, Sam Garcia, and Rufino Mendoza met with city leadership to voice their concerns. According to the newsletter, slow progress was made but that it was not enough, "The city workforce is about 5,000 people, all of which are paid with city tax money," but the statistics of Hispanic employees demonstrated the need for major improvement: "less than 1% in top level management or one person...2% in professional level positions, 8% Hispanics employed as compared to 13%/14% population ratio...also a grave concern when top department management fill a position by just personally selecting a person to fill the job vacancy."²⁵⁹ The problem was no longer a lack of qualified candidates as it was in the late 60s and 70s, but rather a lack of urgency on the part of the city to hire Hispanics. However, the article cited a few positive advances, the promotion of ten Hispanics from fire fighters to fire engineers, the promotion of both Ralph and Eduardo Mendoza (sons of Rufino) to sergeant, and the appointment of a few Hispanics as city attorneys. The article ends by saying, "The small positive signs are welcome by the Hispanic community, but the City Manager and his

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

staff will need to continue to work with those Hispanic community leaders to ensure that progress will be fore [forth, sic] coming.”²⁶⁰

Sam Garcia used his newsletter to call attention to Fort Worth major employer, The Miller Brewing Company’s discriminatory practices in 1985. His tactics were reminiscent of the American G.I. Forum’s five year boycott of Coors. During the 1970s, the G.I. Forum sponsored a nationwide boycott of Adolph Coors Company of Golden, Colorado due to their discriminatory hiring practices. Throughout the 1970s, The Forumeer, the official publication of the G.I. Forum, were littered with “Don’t Buy Coors” ads. In the May 1973 issue it states, “...THE FORUMEER urges Chicanos all over American to continue to boycott Coors Beer until this matter is settled,” it goes on to clarify their purpose, “Do not misunderstand us, we are not against the practice of drinking beer (quite the contrary!) but drink any other kind (there must be at least 500 different kinds brewed in America) and you will contribute toward bringing Coors to its senses.”²⁶¹ Five years after the G.I. Forum’s end to the boycott of Coors, the Fort Worth Hispanic community found their own beer company to challenge. Reported in a fall 1985 issue of *Community News and Events*, two Hispanic men were laid off from the Miller Brewing Company of Fort Worth. The incident was investigated by the EEOC who stated that both of the men’s performance evaluations were “better than or equal to ten other chemists.”²⁶² The men were told, “you just got picked,” as the reason they were laid off. The article ended with a veiled statement directed to the Miller Brewing Company, “Hopefully such practices are not what employees can expect, and civil suits and beer

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ University of Texas at Arlington Archives, “EEOC to Investigate Coors Beer,” The Forumeer, May 1973.

²⁶² Samuel Garcia Papers, *Community News and Events*, December 1985, Series VI: Newspapers, Box 2.

boycotts will not become the order of the day.”²⁶³ Miller seems to have taken Coors’ lead, who became an active participant in the Hispanic agenda through its contributions to Hispanic scholarships, sponsoring of G.I. Forum conventions, and helping Hispanic businesses, in ensuring an amicable relationship with the Hispanic community. By the end of 1985, Miller was a co-sponsor of an art exhibit at the Fort Worth Science and History Museum entitled, “Images of the Mexican Revolution.”²⁶⁴ These types of head on battles “served the essential consciousness-building function” for urban Chicanos that Cesar Chavez’s movements served for rural Chicanos.²⁶⁵ Although the Fort Worth Hispanic community did not file a suit against the Miller Brewing Company or lead a boycott, the lessons of the past and successes of Chicano movement activists, allowed for the level-headed and pragmatic Hispanic leaders of Fort Worth to use their established structures to apply enough public pressure to a major employer to come to an agreeable decision.

In addition to keeping the public informed about possible discrimination in major Fort Worth employers, the *Community News and Events* newsletter not only kept the Hispanic community informed about elected officials and upcoming elections, but Sam Garcia also used the platform to voice which candidates he believed would better serve their community. In the October 1984 issue, the newsletter states:

-VOTE-
YOU’VE GOT IT – USE IT!!
VOTES MEAN FREEDOM
VOTES MEAN EQUALITY
VOTES MEAN FIRST-CLASS CITIZENSHIP
VOTES MEAN BETTER SCHOOLS, JOBS, HOUSING
VOTE TO WIN YOUR RIGHTS

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Julius Karash, “Firms courting Hispanic consumers,” *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, December 1, 1985.

²⁶⁵ Ramos, *The American GI Forum*, 111.

SU VOTE ES SU VOS Y SU PODER [sic]! ²⁶⁶

Acting as a political power broker, Garcia went on to give detailed information about the process of voting and made the following recommendation: "To all the registered voters that this newsletter reaches, as your friend, I Sam Garcia would like to ask for your support in voting for the following...all of these candidates are highly qualified and would voice and plan policies that would govern us with the interest and general welfare of all people"²⁶⁷ Garcia continued to keep his readership informed once candidates took office in regards to both positive and negative actions. In the December 1985 issue, readers were encouraged to remember the actions of Judge Rufus Adcock, who was about to take office, of his recent removal all black and Hispanic jurors from a case he was prosecuting. The article states, "He gave no reason for his actions...the official court record will not lie or explain away such misconduct and clearly shoes that racial and ethnic discrimination is a part of Mr. Adcock's mentality. Voters should remember...."²⁶⁸

On the other hand, Fort Worth Congressman Jim Wright was often positively recognized for his actions on behalf of the Hispanic community. Gilbert and Linda Garcia were a part of his original steering committee in the 1950s when Wright first ran for Congress. Wright honored the couple at a 1985 fundraiser in Fort Worth, he often thanked Linda for encouraging him learn to speak Spanish which he believed to be valuable advice.

As the Hispanic community grew and systemic discrimination within the city began to subside, the adoption of single member district voting opened doors for a more inclusive body of representatives in all aspects of city leadership. Born and raised in Fort Worth, Louis J. Zapata was the first Hispanic city councilman, elected in 1977 for District

²⁶⁶ Samuel Garcia Papers, *Community News and Events*, October 1984, Series VI: Newspapers, Box 2.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Samuel Garcia Papers, *Community News and Events*, December 1985, Series VI: Newspapers, Box 2.

2. His historic election the city council drew, "The largest crowd of Hispanics ever to assemble at city hall...."²⁶⁹ He was re-elected for six times until he was defeated by Carlos Puente in 1991. Prior to his election to city council, Carlos Puente was the first Hispanic to serve on the board of trustees for the FWISD beginning in 1978. Appointed to the Tarrant County Junior College District Board in 1983 and re-elected twice, J. Pete Zepeda was a resident of Fort Worth dating back to 1915 when he arrived via covered wagon. He grew up in Northside Fort Worth and attended Texas Wesleyan College during the Great Depression. Ralph Mendoza, son of Rufino became the first Hispanic lieutenant in the Fort Worth Police Department in 1987. *Community News and Events* newsletter announced the promotion stating, "Such a promotion is one of the most significant things to happen to the Fort Worth Police Department, as well as the Fort Worth Hispanic community."²⁷⁰

These successful appointments of Mexican Americans to representative positions across the city demonstrated strides the Latino community made after the introduction of single-member districts to city government.²⁷¹ The root of these successes can be attributed directly to both the battle fought by Mendoza and MAEAC to achieve better educational opportunities for the Hispanic community in Fort Worth and the availability of improved job opportunities.²⁷² The latter was made possible because of the establishment of the Mexican American Chamber of Commerce in 1973, another example of this community's successful efforts in unification. Gilbert Garcia tried to start a Mexican American Chamber of Commerce in the 1950s but did not have a large enough support system to sustain his efforts. However, after leaders in the community began to

²⁶⁹ Cuellar, *Stories from the Barrio*, 190.

²⁷⁰ Samuel Garcia Papers, *Community News and Events*, June 1987, Series VI: Newspapers, Box 2.

²⁷¹ Pate, *North of the River*, 147.

²⁷² *Ibid.*

work together they garnered support from Hispanic business owners all over the city. In December 1973, J. Pete Zepeda, with Gilbert Garcia's assistance, invited over a hundred minority-owned businessmen to a dinner at Raul Jimenez's restaurant.²⁷³ The Fort Worth Mexican American Chamber of Commerce was the fourth of its kind in the state of Texas.²⁷⁴

The first administration elected Dick Salinas to represent the Chamber as President with J. Pete Zepeda as President-Elect, and Ron Fernandes as Vice-President. The goals of the organization reflected the conservative nature of Chambers of Commerce in general; however, many of the goals still aligned with the discussions and needs that were identified just a few years before at the 1969 conference:

1. Assist existing business and encourage qualified person to enter the business and professional fields.
2. Serve as resource persons in the community.
3. Identify specific areas and needs for new businesses.
4. Serve as an agent of impact in the community by assuming leadership roles in the community.
5. Support projects and causes that will encourage you to enter business and professional fields.
6. Secure resources and conduct seminars to fit our specific needs.²⁷⁵

In an interview with the *Fort Worth Star Telegram* about the creation of the Chamber, Dick Salinas stated, "It's important to have several civic organizations working toward the same goal."²⁷⁶ The Mexican American Chamber of Commerce changed its name in the early 80s to the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and eventually included non-Minority owned businesses who sought to cater to the Hispanic community.

²⁷³ Samuel Garcia Papers, "Mexican American Chamber of Commerce, Fort Worth, Texas, 1977 Annual Directory," Series II: Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce, Box 6, Folder 10, Fort Worth Central Library Archives.

²⁷⁴ Pate, *North of the River*, 148.

²⁷⁵ Samuel Garcia Papers, "Mexican American Chamber of Commerce, Fort Worth, Texas, 1977 Annual Directory," Series II: Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce, Box 6, Folder 10, Fort Worth Central Library Archives.

²⁷⁶ "Mexican-Americans Meet to Form C of C," *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, December 6, 1973.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Gilbert Garcia, Sam Garcia, Jesse Sandoval, and Rufino Mendoza continued to use their established structures and their pragmatic ideology to successfully challenge the public education system in Fort Worth that traditionally left out the needs of the Mexican American community and to enter the Anglo majority business and city leadership. These successes were abetted by the public stage that Sam Garcia's newsletter afforded the community and their consistent dedication to working together. By the mid-1980s Gilbert Garcia was the chairman of the United Hispanic Organizations of Tarrant County that hosted an annual banquet that not only honored "Hispanics of the 80s" but also gave out an "Amigo Especial Award" to an Anglo who had demonstrated a dedication to the Hispanic community. The 1984 banquet recognized Sam Garcia, Rufino Mendoza, Sr., Louis Zapata, and Guillerma Morales. Dr. Carl Candoli, the superintendent of FWISD was the recipient of the *Amigo Especial*.²⁷⁷ The milestones and continued opportunities for upward mobility in the Hispanic community of Fort Worth can be directly attributed to the leadership of Gilbert Garcia, Sam Garcia, Jesse Sandoval, and Rufino Mendoza.

²⁷⁷ Samuel Garcia Papers, *Community News and Events*, October 1984, Series VI: Newspapers, Box 2.

Conclusion

Gilbert left a legacy of accomplishments in the Mexican Community. At every meeting of the American G.I. Forum, LULAC, and the Chicano Luncheon which he founded three decades ago, whenever the name of Gilbert Garcia is mentioned it is always surrounded with an aura of respect, gratitude and widespread admiration of those present. Gilbert's departure has left a huge empty space not only in the life of his family but in the whole Mexican Community, where he was an admired and respected leader.²⁷⁸

--March, 18, 1993

When Gilbert Garcia, Sam Garcia, Jesse Sandoval, and Rufino Mendoza returned to the United States after the Second World War and acclimated themselves back to civilian life, little had changed at home. They were different, but life for Mexican Americans continued to consist of discriminatory treatment in public spaces, in equality in schools, little to no political representation, and unequitable access to employment and upward mobility. These men made a decision to no longer settle for second-class citizenship. They gained access to the benefits they were entitled to as veterans and began a life of service to their communities. All four men believed the path to equitable treatment in all aspects of society was through established American systems and newly formed Mexican American organizations. They created local chapters of the American G.I. Forum that initially aimed to ensure all Mexican American veterans had access to their military benefits then shifted focus to the mobilization of the community in paying poll taxes, voting, and recognizing the value of education for their children. They took an active role in national elections through the Viva Kennedy Clubs that developed into PASSO where they continued to influence local elections. They studied the conditions of their communities, aided families in obtaining available resources, and served as a bridge

²⁷⁸ "To dear Linda...", Samuel Garcia Papers, Series I: Personal Papers, Box 2, Folder 12, Fort Worth Central Library Archives. A letter from Buddy and Angye, friends of the Garcia's, written to Linda Garcia after Gilbert's death.

for those impeded because of a language barrier. Gilbert Garcia and Jesse Sandoval participated in a fruitful leadership conference that revealed the divide between both the Mexican American generation activists and the Chicano generation, as well as the social class divisions of men who had found success in the community and those still struggling in the barrios. The conference participants worked to identify six major issues that needed to be addressed to increase opportunities for upward mobility in the Mexican American community of Fort Worth. Although Sam Garcia was not present at the conference and likely considered one of the *vendidos* of Fort Worth, his copy of the conference report is annotated and was kept in his own records then donated to the Fort Worth Central Library almost forty years later, demonstrating his dedication to the Mexican American community and his desire to make certain the history of what was accomplished and discussed was told.

Within a couple of years of the Mexican American Leadership Conference, Gilbert Garcia and Sam Garcia co-founded the Chicano Luncheon. In this predominately Anglo city, Mexican American men and women carved out a place to come together on a monthly basis to keep lines of communication open between various organizations, to work as a unified group to improve their communities and increase political representation, and to make sure the Anglo leadership of the city paid attention to this burgeoning population. The Chicano Luncheon met on Tuesdays at noon making it almost impossible for the working-class Chicanos to participate regularly; however, activists and community leaders like Jesse Sandoval stayed informed through their meetings with other organizations. Although Sandoval may not have attended the Chicano Luncheon regularly he on occasion missed a day's pay to serve in leadership roles with the Human Relations, Housing Authority, and Housing Standards Commission demonstrating Sandoval's devotion to his community. In addition to the Chicano

Luncheon, Sam Garcia began editing and publishing the *Community News and Events* newsletter that kept Mexican Americans in Fort Worth informed of various meetings and issues relevant to their community. The decisions and updates from the Mexican American Educational Advisory Committee regarding their lawsuit against Fort Worth ISD appeared on several occasions in the newsletter. Rufino Mendoza consistently held the leadership in Fort Worth ISD accountable to their promises and made certain the entire city knew what was happening in the district. When Fort Worth Mexican American leaders decided that changes needed to be made in the school district they did not emulate the Los Angeles or Crystal City walkouts but rather worked through strategies within American systems. Even though the worldview of these four men was steeped within the philosophies of the Mexican American Generation, their disposition toward those in the city who desired to emulate the Chicano activists, who were making gains in major cities, allowed the small population of Latinos and Latinas in Fort Worth to stay a united group all working toward the increased upward mobility of their people.

In the latter part of the twentieth-century and into recent times, the population of Mexicans and Mexican Americans in Texas, specifically in North Texas has increased making the region the sixth largest Hispanic metropolitan area in the United States.²⁷⁹ Scholarship concerning the path to inclusion for this important community is necessary to highlight the struggle and to ensure continued inclusion and upward mobility. This thesis has added to the handful of scholarly research on the Fort Worth Mexican American community and could be expanded to include a comparative analysis with the other major city in the metroplex, Dallas. Mexican American activism in Dallas was more radical than

²⁷⁹ Street et al., "Hispanic Population in Select U.S. Metropolitan Areas, 2010." Pew Research Center's Hispanic Trends Project, last modified in 2010, accessed April 11, 2015, <http://www.pewhispanic.org/hispanic-population-in-select-u-s-metropolitan-areas/>.

Fort Worth. This is evident by a 1963 sit-in of a Mexican restaurant, El Fenix that was the city's only remaining segregated downtown lunch counter, by a working class multiracial group, or a 1973 riot that occurred at a memorial march for 12 year-old Santos Rodriguez who was killed by the Dallas Police Department.²⁸⁰ There was also a much larger and active Brown Beret presence in Dallas. The answer to why each city dealt with civil rights issues differently may have simply been because of the relative size of the Mexican American population in Fort Worth and Dallas. However it may have more to do with the relationships between the Anglo and Mexican American leadership in each city or how each city's government responded to the changing times. More research could answer these questions.

Additional research on the inclusion of women in the Fort Worth struggle for Mexican American civil rights as well as the coalition with the African American community could also aid in expanding this thesis. Women were present at the 1969 leadership conference that decided on the most pertinent issues facing the Latino community and in meetings of the Chicano Luncheon from the beginning, where the Fort Worth Mexican American leadership communed. A group of strong Fort Worth women were just recently acknowledged in the *Mujeres Poderosas* exhibit presented by the city's Human Relations Commission and is just one of their projects in the last couple of years that is celebrating Latino Americans in Fort Worth. There is also an active effort to highlight the experiences of both African Americans and Mexican Americans in Texas for Civil Rights through Texas Christian University's oral history project, "Civil Rights in Black and Brown." These oral histories and the ones conducted by the Latino Fort Worth

²⁸⁰ Max Krochmal, "Chicano Labor and Multiracial Politics in Post-World War II Texas: Two Case Studies," in *Life and Labor in the New South*, ed Robert H. Zieger (University Press of Florida, 2012), and "Marchers Loot, Burn in Dallas, July 29, 1973, *Fort Worth Star Telegram*.

project could be used to not only compare experiences of each minority group but also further explore how these two communities interacted with each other in Fort Worth. Historian Brian Behnken argues that the two groups in Texas had two different struggles and dealt with them separately; however his examples from Fort Worth are limited.²⁸¹

The Mexican American community has continued to make strides in the last two decades in Fort Worth. The massive obstacles and systemic discrimination that prevented the upward mobility of people of Mexican descent have lessened. There is Mexican American representation all over the city who, in their positions, are actively working for the betterment of Latinos and Latinas. The current superintendent of FWISD is Dr. Kent Scribner whose mother is Mexican. Before becoming superintendent in Fort Worth he served on President Barak Obama's White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics. After the 2014 State Board of Education approval for the teaching of special topics in history, Jacinto Ramos, Jr, the current president of the FWISD Board of Trustees, has successfully advocated the teaching of Latino American studies classes at any of the FWISD high schools. The appointment of both of these men surpasses the lofty goals set forth by MAEAC more than forty years ago. Rufino Mendoza, Jr.'s position as the current Executive Director of Employee Relations for FWISD can also be seen as the achievement of a goal that MAEAC could not foresee.

The city of Fort Worth and its future belongs to Mexican Americans just as much as it belongs to Anglos. To answer the question used in the title of this thesis, Yes, this land is your land too. The entire city is available for people of any ethnicity, however as the city's Hispanic population grows with the increasing number of Mexican immigrants, the Northside and Southside neighborhoods have continued to be the entry point into the

²⁸¹ Behnken, *Fighting Their Own Battles*.

city and have stayed predominantly Latino. Whether because of the location of relatives and desires to live near each other, or the availability of businesses that cater to the Hispanic population, or simply because the homes are less expensive, Mexicans in Fort Worth are still mostly segregated. Housing covenants and employment discriminations that would keep Mexicans in the barrio and in labor only positions are now against the law yet due to their immigrant status many Mexicans are stuck in the same neighborhoods and in low paying jobs, limiting the opportunities for their Mexican American children. Massive changes have also occurred in demographics in FWISD. While the city continues to be an Anglo majority at 42 percent with a Hispanic population of 34 percent, FWISD is 11 percent Anglo and 63 percent Hispanic.²⁸² These are glaring and alarming statistics that demonstrate the rate that Anglo parents are choosing home, private, and religious based schooling that does not require the completion of high-stakes testing, over the public schools whose teachers and principals are held accountable for the results of tests that demotivate students and take away classroom autonomy from teachers. These are all major issues that need a new generations of activists, with the dedication and leadership of Rufino, Gilbert, Jesse and Sam, to find solutions and to ensure a continued upward trajectory for the Mexican American community of Fort Worth.

When Rufino Mendoza, Sr. died in 1992, “The funeral procession was miles long. Few people remembered seeing so many flowers and so many mourners at one funeral—a fitting tribute to a man who loved and cared deeply for his family and his community.”²⁸³ In 1998, FWISD renamed Denver Avenue Elementary school to Rufino Mendoza, Sr. Elementary School in honor of his dedication and advocacy for quality education for the

²⁸² “2014-2015 Texas Academic Performance Report,” Texas Education Agency, last modified 2016, accessed on June 27, 2016, <https://rptsvr1.tea.texas.gov/perfreport/tapr/2015/srch.html?srch=D>.

²⁸³ Cuellár, *Stories from the Barrio*, 193.

Hispanic community. At Gilbert Garcia's funeral in March of 1993, a friend of his, Tony Morales, stated that a "giant has fallen in the Mexican community." On Thursday, February 29, 1996, The Advisory Board of the Fort Worth SER Jobs for Progress, Inc. and Senator Mike Moncrief formally dedicated a newly built center, The Gilbert Garcia Learning Center in honor of, "a long time community activist," who "was always concerned with the Hispanic youth...promoted education and helped several organizations form scholarship programs." Jesse Sandoval's activism began because of the lack of paved roads and effective communication between Mexican residents of his Linwood neighborhood and the city. When he died on March 8, 2010 he was the Captain of the Citizens on Patrol and the current president of the Linwood Neighborhood Association actively fighting against increasing gentrification on behalf of his community. Just two years after he died the Linwood Park was renamed Jesse D. Sandoval Park in honor of a man who, "who fought to preserve the modest but tight-knit neighborhood through floods, a major tornado, and — most recently — the incursions of developers."²⁸⁴ His legacy lives on through his children including his daughter Eva Bonilla who is currently serving as the President of the Linwood Neighborhood Association. Sam Garcia lived until he was 91 years old. When he died on June 12, 2014, he was remembered as a "pillar of good leadership," who "never made it past fourth grade, but...raised more than \$500,000 for other people's kids to go to school." Sergio De Leon, a Tarrant County Justice of the Peace for Precinct 5, who met Sam when De Leon was a young college student and used Sam's office as a quiet place to study with a typewriter for his homework, stated, "He was a very giving individual and his contribution will be felt for many years to come, through the very people helped...in the thousands, from members

²⁸⁴ "Looming Over Linwood," Fort Worth Weekly, last modified in 2016, accessed on June 15, 2009, <http://www.fweekly.com/2012/11/28/looming-over-linwood/>.

of government to your aspiring students.” The *Sam Garcia Papers: Documenting Hispanic History in Fort Worth* located at the Fort Worth Central Library Archives not only greatly informed this research but will forever preserve all the tremendous, tireless, and fruitful efforts of a generation of Mexican American activists.

Gilbert Garcia’s creation of the Chicano Luncheon, shortly after the chaotic 1969 conference led to more unified efforts among community leaders and a realization of the importance of coming together to reach a common goal. Jesse Sandoval’s unyielding ties to his community and his leadership in the local chapter of the PASSO and his willingness to find common ground with both conservative and radical activists prevented frictions between the two groups from completely fracturing this relatively small population of Mexican Americans in Fort Worth. Sam Garcia’s publication of *Community News and Events* ensured that issues pertaining to the Mexican American community and happenings of multiple organizations were available to all of Fort Worth residents, and his publication of the Hispanic Directory advanced the Hispanic economy and encouraged Anglo owned business to begin to cater to the growing Hispanic community.²⁸⁵ Rufino Mendoza’s leadership in MAEAC and his unwavering dedication to equal educational opportunities forced the school district to make major reforms that have affected generations of Mexican American students in Fort Worth. The worldview of all four of these men was shaped with their involvements in World War II, all four experienced or witnessed inequalities in Fort Worth after the war, all four found the limited post-war opportunities to carve out a place in society for themselves and their families, and all four found themselves working together toward a common goal. This

²⁸⁵ Samuel Garcia Papers, “Circulation up for directory of Hispanics,” Series I: Personal Papers, Box 1, Folder 6, Fort Worth Central Library Archives.

thesis at last tells the story of their journey, and several other men and women in Fort Worth, to educational equality, political inclusion, and upward mobility.

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