# “¡EL BARRIO UNIDO JAMÁS SERÁ VENCIDO!:” NEIGHBORHOOD GRASSROOTS ACTIVISM AND COMMUNITY PRESERVATION IN EL PASO, TEXAS”

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A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department

of History

University of Houston

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In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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By

Sandra Ivette Enríquez

May 2016

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**ABSTRACT**

This dissertation chronicles a Mexican American community's struggle for survival amidst late twentieth century urban revitalization. South El Paso, Texas, a one square mile neighborhood along the U.S.-México border, functioned as a city within a city. For over a century, the ethnic Mexican population created a vibrant community and developed an emotional ownership of the Southside. Although socio-economically and politically marginalized, Mexican Americans fought for the preservation of South El Paso, especially during the late 1970s when the most intense waves of urban redevelopment occurred.

The study examines Mexican American grassroots approaches to preserve the neighborhoods of South El Paso, Texas, in the 1960s and 1970s. It argues that the rapid disappearance of the barrio, experience with federal War on Poverty programs, the Chicano Movement of the 1960-1970s, and the community's connections and feelings of ownership of the area led to fights for better housing and the preservation of neighborhood. In order to protect the residential and cultural character of the barrio, but not its poverty, the community of South El Paso employed three methods of activism: by participating in grassroots neighborhood political organizations, staging squatter demonstrations, and engaging in community based cultural preservation projects. Through these different strategies, Mexican Americans in South El Paso brought changes to the barrio and politically empowered the community by challenging the urbanizing visions of city leaders. The efforts essentially showed local, state, and federal power structures that the barrio was not for sale, and that their plight to preserve the area's

residential character needed to be respected, despite the fact that it remained segregated from the rest of the city of El Paso.

The fight to preserve barrios in the 1960s and 1970s allowed Mexican Americans to not only to defend the spaces that were historically meaningful for them, but also served as a stage to exert their citizenship and civil rights. By melding Chicana/o and urban historiographies, this dissertation demonstrates that El Paso and Texas are important battleground sites within the long Chicana/o Movement and broader struggles for civil rights.

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My interest in urban activism and neighborhood preservation began when I was an MA student at the University of Texas at El Paso, UTEP. In my first semester of graduate school, I enrolled in a Public History course that opened my eyes and mind. Yolanda Chávez Leyva, thank you for offering your students an opportunity to learn El Paso history and work in programs such as *Museo Urbano.* Your passion for history and activism has shaped the kind of scholar I want to be. I am very thankful for the continuous help, guidance, and encouragement of Ernesto Chávez. Julia Schivone-

Camacho, the late Maceo Dailey, Sandy McGee Deutsch, Charles Martin, and Jeffrey Shepherd not only were great professors, but they also encouraged me to be the best student I could be, and even listened to my project, plans, and future goals after I was no longer their student. Adam Arenson has been a great mentor and friend. He has given me much advice about urban history, being an accessible historian, and tips on how to be a professional historian. Most of all, I would like to give thanks to the professor who saw my capabilities as an undergraduate student and encouraged me to pursue a graduate degree. Cheryl Martin is one of my biggest supporters and mentors. Thank you for always believing in me and for pushing me to do my very best. I hope that one day I can influence the lives of my students as much as you have mine.

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Melanie Rodríguez, Jaime Ruiz, and Abraham Zamora. I am grateful for having friends and colleagues at the University of Houston like Iván Arteaga, Tracy Butler, Ally Castillo, Jonathan Fairchild, Charlotte Ledain, Guillermo Nakhlé, Allison Robinson, Sandra Smith Davidson, and Charlotte Whatley. I appreciate our lunch breaks, pre-class discussions, hallway catch-ups, GSMA outings, and life talks turned into academic conversations. To my Houston Family—Matt Campbell, John Huntington, Stephanie Weiss, Kristen Williams—you made my graduate career and my life in the Bayou City all the better. I am forever grateful for our hangouts, academic crises, random adventures, concerts, workout sessions, 5K fun runs, life panic sessions, etc. My life at UH would have been much harder without you all.

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## Introduction

In 1913, Soledad Olivas immigrated with her family to El Paso, Texas from Chihuahua City, México. Like many newcomers, her family settled in South El Paso, the city's largest ethnic Mexican neighborhood, a one square mile neighborhood nestled between the city's downtown district and the Rio Grande. Mrs. Olivas arrived in the Southside at the age of four and never left. She attended schools in the barrio—Sacred Heart Catholic School, Aoy Elementary, and Bowie Intermediate School. Living in El Segundo Barrio, Mrs. Olivas witnessed historical events in the area such as prohibition, border contraband, the Great Depression, and the Second World War. Although she lived in impoverished conditions and rented different tenements throughout her life, Soledad Olivas' everyday experiences contributed to a sense of ownership of El Segundo Barrio. She grew up in the neighborhood, she married at Sacred Heart, and she raised her children in the barrio. Although she was not a property owner, her tenancy and connections to neighborhood institutions translated into an emotional ownership of the barrio. It became home.[1]

The attachment to South El Paso and its spaces led Mrs. Olivas to become involved in her community. When War on Poverty programs arrived in El Paso in the 1960s, she joined Project BRAVO (Building Resources and Vocational Opportunities), the city's Community Action Agency. Her involvement in Project BRAVO and a tide of commercialization and industrialization affecting South El Paso in the late 1960s and 1970s led her to join a neighborhood grassroots organization called *La Campaña Pro La*

[1] Soledad Olivas, interview by Cecilia Vega, November 30, 1976, interview no. 251, transcript, Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso, El Paso, TX. Original in Spanish: "así es de que yo me entusiasmé cuando ya vi que se estaba trabanjando por la preservación del Segundo Barrio. Fue cuando yo entré a esta campaña, y es donde he ayudado en lo que yo podia hacer."

*Preservación del Barrio* (The Campaign for the Preservation of the Neighborhood).[2] This organization endeavored to keep the residential essence of the barrio, eradicate the poverty in the area, and celebrate the neighborhood's Mexican American heritage and culture.[3] When asked about her feelings towards *La Campaña,* she expressed that "I became very excited when I witnessed that people were working for the preservation of El Segundo Barrio. That's when I joined. I have been helping them as much as I can."

For years, Soledad Olivas helped the organization in its different efforts to keep the bulldozers from South El Paso. She helped in whichever capacity she could and her age did not stop her from being active. "If I were younger, who knows what I would do," she recalled, "I am very happy with *La Campaña.*"[4] As the fights to preserve South El Paso intensified, Mrs. Olivas did not lose faith in the movement as she believed it was a worthy cause. She stated:

> I will continue fighting. I do not want to be thrown out of the barrio. It would very sad and hard for us. I have been working with *La Campaña* for two years. We have been fighting so much that if we don't achieve anything, it would be disillusioning. We must keep fighting, and God will help us. We need to do something for our kids. I would love for my children to love my Segundo Barrio as much as I do.[5]

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[2] Olivas, interview.

[3] "Manifesto from the Community of South El Paso," ca. 1975 p. 1-5, MEChA Papers, UTEP Chapter, MS251, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections, The University of Texas at El Paso Library.

[4] Olivas, interview.

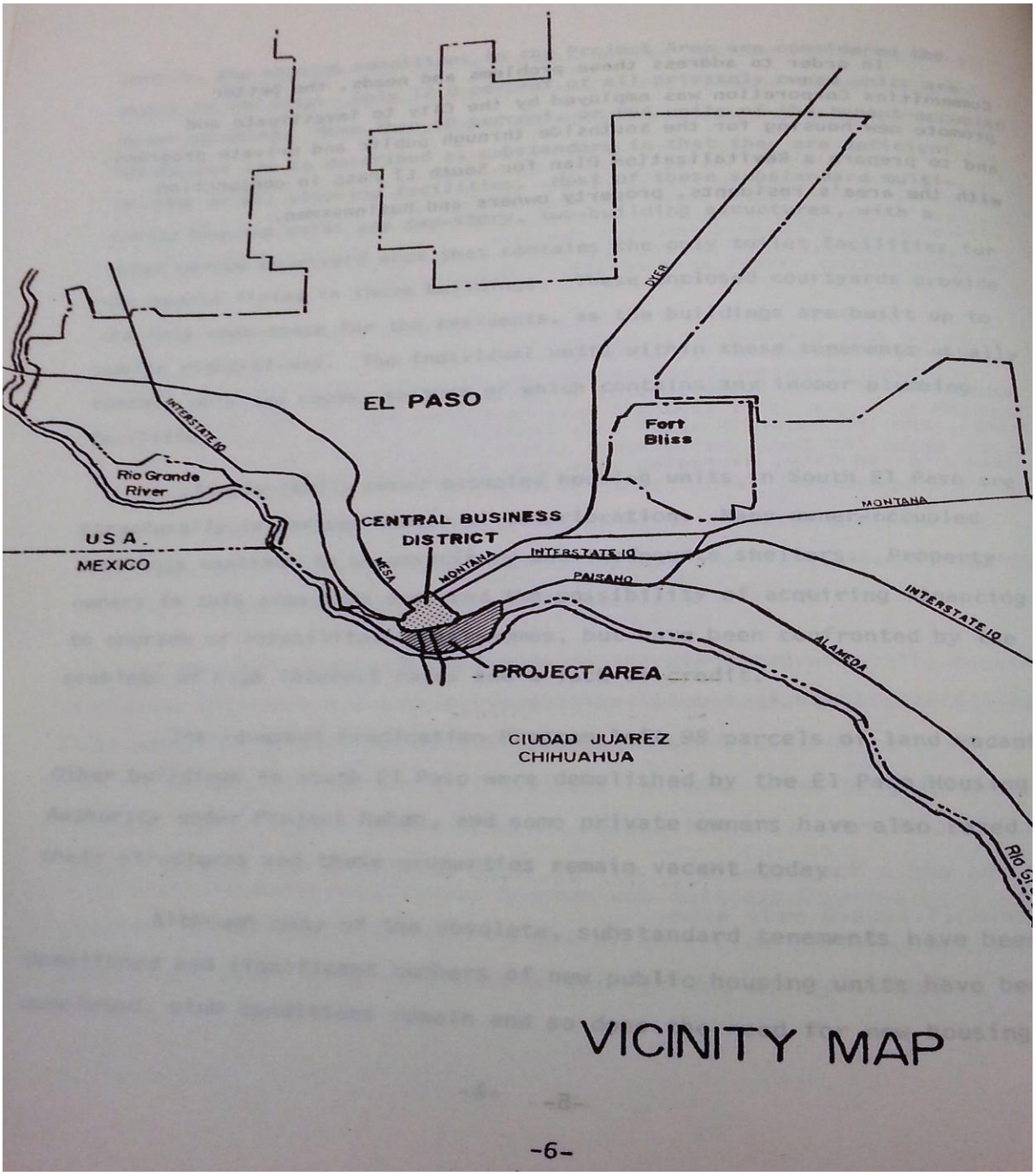
[5] Ibid. Interview in Spanish. Original quote reads: "Sería una cosa muy triste, muy dura para nosotros que después ya más de dos años que estamos aquí—es lo que yo tengo en la Campaña—que hemos estado peleando tanto, tanto, y sería mucha desilución que no lo lográramos si ya no todo, aunque fuera algo. A ver si logramos hacer algo para nuestros hijos. Para mí me gustaría mucho que como yo quiero tanto a mi Segundo Barrio, quiero que mis hijos también lo quieran como lo quiero yo."

The story of Soledad Olivas, a lifelong resident of the Southside, exemplifies the feelings of ownership and pride of an endangered community. South El Paso, Texas—an area historians have called the Ellis Island of the Southwest—became the first stop for many in the Mexican diaspora in the United States in the early twentieth century. Some only stayed briefly, but for many, the neighborhood became a permanent residence. Since its inception, the Southside of El Paso was home to dilapidated brick tenements noted for its lack of amenities, poverty, unsanitary conditions, and high rates of unemployment and crime.[6] For decades, Mexican Americans' lack of political power, absentee landlords, and city leaders' neglect of the area created an untenable situation in the barrios. These conditions made the area an easy target for city redevelopment efforts, despite its historical significance to the Mexican population of the city, region, and nation.

For over a century, the one square mile functioned as a city within a city—a culturally and socially vibrant yet very impoverished ethnic Mexican community where its population found refuge from marginalization and discrimination. Like Mrs. Soledad Olivas, the community of South El Paso developed its own identity, connected with and felt ownership over their urban space, and also created barrio institutions to combat inequities and a lack of upward mobility in El Paso. Repeated urban redevelopment projects throughout twentieth century threatened the life and future of the barrios. Although socio-economically and politically marginalized, Mexican Americans in the Southside fought for the preservation of their neighborhoods—their home—especially during the late 1970s when the most intense waves of urban redevelopment occurred.

[6] "Youth en Acción," grant submitted to the Office of Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Development HEW, Washington, D.C., by the El Paso Boys' Club and Department of Sociology, University of Texas at El Paso, March 15, 1967, Abelardo Delgado Collection MS478, box 3, folder 1, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso Library.

This is a story of a community's struggle for survival and politicization in the face of late twentieth century revitalization.




Map I.1 City of El Paso. Shaded area is the one square mile area of South El Paso. *Revitalization Plan for the South El Paso Project Area*, Prepared by Better Communities Corporation, 1976. American Planning Association -- Texas Chapter: The History of Planning in Texas Project Records, Alexander Architectural Archives, University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.

Mexican American grassroots activism for the preservation of the Southside barrios represented a culmination of a century's worth of racial inequalities and political disenfranchisement in the city of El Paso.[7] Since the arrival of the railroad in the 1880s, El Paso city planners, the Chamber of Commerce, City Council, and local business owners, controlled and shaped the image and development of the city. Over the course of the twentieth century, Anglo politicians and business leaders intentionally and inadvertently, constructed physical boundaries that racialized urban space. These actions segregated and figuratively erased the largest ethnic population of El Paso and effectively constructed a city that obscured the Mexican population. Physical barriers created by postwar urban renewal projects and highway construction prevented ethnic Mexicans from acquiring access to better social, cultural, and economic resources in El Paso. Yet Mexican Americans were not passive victims of urban redevelopment projects in the 1970s. Throughout this period, South El Pasoans protested for better housing and the preservation of barrios, contested plans for urban development, utilized cultural outlets as a means of expressing their point of view, and even challenged urban discrimination through the legal system.

This dissertation examines the rise of grassroots mobilizations and the fights for Chicano/a civil rights in El Paso's Southside barrios. By 1975, the Chicana/o Movement (1965-1975) had lost its national momentum, claiming some victories but also facing losses. For example, the United Farm Workers in California secured the passage of the Agricultural Labor Relations Act, but the end of the Vietnam War brought an end to student militancy and *La Raza Unida* (United Race Party) began to lose its political

[7] A discussion on terminology can be found at the end of the introduction.

appeal in Texas and throughout the Southwest.[8] The movement, however, continued in other localized forms, as activists turned into their neighborhoods and communities to bring social, political, and economic change. In the case of El Paso, the localized concerns revolved around better housing and neighborhood preservation in the gentrifying Southside. Chicana/o mobilization began in South El Paso as a result of city leaders' desire to redevelop the area in the post-World War II years. I argue that the rapid encroachment on the Southside Barrios, the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, and the community's longstanding connections and feelings of ownership of the area led residents to fight for better housing and the preservation of neighborhood. Even though the episodes of localized activism are recently being explored, barrio preservation has not been explored as part of the broader history of the Chicano/a Movement nor the broader struggles for civil rights in the United States.

In order to preserve the residential and cultural character of the barrio, while combatting the effects of its poverty, the community of South El Paso employed three different methods of activism. First, residents formed two neighborhood organizations, *La Campaña Pro La Preservación del Barrio* (The Campaign for the Preservation of the Barrio) and the Chihuahuita Improvement Association (CIA). These groups promoted community control of urban redevelopment decisions and plans, and were vocal advocates for the preservation of the barrio, voicing their political concerns in city hall and to other governmental agencies. Second, Southsiders took radical measures and engaged in visible displays of protest by creating Tent Cities and becoming squatters in

[8] Mario García, *The Chicano Movement: Perspectives from the Twenty-First Century*, (New York: Routledge, 2014), 1-15; Juan Gómez-Quiñones and Irene Vásquez, *Making Aztlán: Ideology and Culture of the Chicana and Chicano Movement, 1966-1977*, (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2014).

properties marked for demolition to dramatize the lack of housing options in the area and to prevent the forces that threatened the residential character of the barrio. Lastly, Mexican Americans participated in community based cultural projects such as mural painting, planting community gardens, and creating community centers to claim ownership and reshape the environment of the barrios while addressing the needs of its residents. Through these different strategies, Mexican Americans in South El Paso brought changes to the area, politically empowered their community, and put forth their own form of urban revitalization that challenged the visions of city leaders. Through these efforts, they showed local, state, and federal power structures that the barrio was not for sale, and that their plight to preserve the area's residential character needed to be respected, despite remaining segregated from the rest of the city of El Paso. Even when the area was heavily depopulated, as the result of urban development policies, South El Paso's neighborhood preservation efforts represent a critical site of activism during the Chicana/o Movement and civil rights mobilizations, as the area survived the tide of urban redevelopment.

The study also focuses on residents' attachment to urban space and identity formation. The dissertation explores how ethnic Mexicans identified with their neighborhoods, institutions, and their living spaces. The vast majority of South El Pasoans were not property owners, they were renters. But their long-time tenancy in the neighborhood and the restriction of mobility Mexican Americans faced in the city allowed Southsiders to develop a sense of emotional ownership over the barrios. In *A Sense of History,* David Glassberg argues "a sense of history and a sense of place are inextricably intertwined; we attach histories to places, and the environmental value we

attach to a place comes largely through the historical associations we have with it."[9] The fight to preserve barrios in the 1970s allowed people of Mexican origin to not only to defend the spaces that were historically meaningful for them, but the barrio also served as the stage for empowerment as residents exerted their citizenship and civil rights. My dissertation emphasizes how the defense of these neighborhoods was crucial for Mexican Americans to gain a political voice in order to fight for equal rights in other social, cultural, and economic areas.

Discussing these episodes of Mexican American urban grassroots activism in El Paso provides an opportunity to examine urban development along the U.S.-México border, providing new insight into local urban politics and the long Civil Rights Movement in the United States. As an urban history, this study delves into issues of hegemony and power structures deployed through urban space (by both Anglo leaders and ethnic Mexicans), and how the city of El Paso was utilized as a stage for racial and social interactions. Examining Southsiders' fight for civil rights, better housing, and community controlled urban redevelopment, I place this struggle within a larger story of urban change and resistance that has largely been told in black and white, and from the vantage point of major cities in the Northeast, Midwest, and far West. Merging urban history and Chicana/o history, this dissertation argues for the ways community organizing against urban redevelopment issues are important facets and continuations of the Chicano Nationalist Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. While the labor, political, and student movements are crucial to the narrative of Chicano/a history, the protection of barrios and urban redevelopment protests were (and continue to be) important phases of the

[9] David Glassberg, *A Sense of History: The Place of the Past in American Life*, (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 8.

movement. This dissertation situates El Paso and Texas as important battleground sites within the long Chicana/o Movement, highlighting the ways in which the protection of Mexican American barrios are important battles for the broader understanding of civil rights.

**Beyond the Community Study**

The barrio has been at the core of the Mexican American experience in the United States and thus, one of the most important areas of study in Chicano/a historiography. 3Some of the first works in the field revolved around community studies, which were particular examinations of ethnic Mexican barrios or historically important cities. Albert Camarillo's *Chicanos in a Changing Society* opened the doors for the social and cultural studies of Mexican American barrios throughout the country, particularly those in Southern California. Camarillo coined the term *barrioization,* the process by which capitalist forces geographically segregated ethnic Mexicans, and how in turn the population of Mexican descent claimed barrios as social and cultural spaces where they interacted in their own Mexican social universe.[10] Along with Camarillo, scholars such as Ricardo Romo and Richard Griswold del Castillo (Los Angeles), as well as Mario T. García (El Paso), shed light on how these spaces allowed populations to create familial networks, in addition to opportunities for identity formation and assimilation.[11] Historians have continued to examine the early history of the barrio, institutions, and the roles that

[10] Albert Camarillo, *Chicanos in a Changing Society: From Mexican Pueblos to American Barrios in Santa Barbara and Southern California,* 1848-1930, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 53.

[11] Ricardo Romo, *East Los Angeles: History of a Barrio*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983); Richard Griswold del Castillo, *The Los Angeles Barrio: A Social History, 1850-1890*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); Mario García, *Desert Immigrants: The Mexicans of El Paso, 1880-1920*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981).

these spaces have had in the lives of Mexican Americans. While the formation and early interactions in these neighborhood spaces are important to understand Mexican American identity and history, oftentimes barrios are overlooked beyond the latter half of the twentieth century.[12] Even when scholars examine ethnic Mexican spaces in the postwar years, the barrio is relegated to the background.[13] While this study will continue to examine barrios as ongoing racialized and classed places, it also seeks to explore barrios as transformative spaces and laboratories for activism as the defense of neighborhoods became important outlets for equality.

While the barrio remained an important part of Mexican American life as the twentieth century progressed, urban revitalization's bulldozers displaced thousands of families across the United States. Barrios are often remembered through their destruction, as evidenced by the narrative of Chávez Ravine, a community evicted to make way for public housing and then Dodgers' Stadium in Los Angeles.[14] Historian Lilia Fernández

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[12] For histories of Mexican American barrios and communities see José Alamillo, *Making Lemonade out of Lemons: Mexican American Labor and Leisure in a California Town, 1880-1960,* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006); Gabriela Arredondo, *Mexican Chicago: Race, Identity, and Nation, 1916-1939*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008); Arnoldo De León, *Ethnicity in the Sunbelt: Mexican Americans in Houston*, (College Station, TX: Texas A&M Press, 1989); Matt García, *A World of its Own: Race, Labor, and Citrus in the Making of Greater Los Angeles, 1900-1970*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Gilbert González, *Labor and Community: Mexican Citrus Worker Villages in a Southern California County, 1900-1950,* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Michael Innis-Jiménez, *Steel Barrio: The Great Mexican Migration to South Chicago, 1915-1940,* (New York: New York University Press, 2013); Stephen J. Pitti, *Devil in the Silicon Valley: Northern California, Race, and Mexican Americans,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); George J. Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican Americans: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Zaragosa Vargas, *Proletarians of the North: A History of Mexican Industrial Workers in Detroit and the Midwest,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

[13] David Montejano, *Quixote's Soldiers: A Local History of the Chicano Movement, 1966-1981*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010); Dionicio Nodín Valdés, *Barrios Norteños: St. Paul and Midwestern Mexican Communities in the Twentieth Century*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000).

[14] For more on Chávez Ravine see John Laslett, *Shameful Victory: The Los Angeles Dodgers, the Red Scare, and the Hidden History of Chavez Ravine,* (Tucson, AZ: 2015); Don Normark, *Chavez Ravine: 1949,* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1999. Eric Avila, "Suburbanizing the City Center: The Dodgers

chronicled the constant displacement of Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans in Chicago to make way for different urban redevelopment projects. Monica Perales' *Smeltertown* related the demise of the barrio near the American Smelting and Refining Company, which displaced about a hundred Mexican Americans also in El Paso by the 1970s. As Fernández, Perales, and others have shown, although many Latina/o communities were eventually dismantled, residents fought vigorously to keep their barrios. Historian Lydia Otero illuminated the ways in which the Mexican American community in Tucson attempted to save a section of the city called "La Calle," through the efforts of La Placita Committee, even when these battles were in vain.[15] While these three works of Chicana/o and Latina/o urban history place their subjects as active agents within urban revitalization, they highlight the demise of the physical space—which was not Mexican American barrios' only fate. Although the disappearance of ethnic neighborhoods is important to our understanding of urban and Chicana/o history, scholars also need to investigate how and why the physical space of the barrio survived processes of urban redevelopment. In the case of El Paso, the Southside still exists (although increasingly gentrified) due to community activism in the mid-1970s and early 1980s. The story of South El Paso then sheds light on ethnic neighborhoods that did not fall victim to the bulldozer.

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Move West," *in Popular Culture at the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

[15] Lilia Fernández, *Brown in the Windy City: Mexicans and Puerto Ricans in the Postwar Chicago,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Monica Perales, *Smeltertown: Making and Remembering a Southwest Border Community,* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Lydia Otero, *La Calle: Spatial Conflicts and Urban Renewal in a Southwest City,* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010).

This dissertation further engages the history of political activism in fundamental ways and seeks to re-frame how we think of the so-called waning years of the Chicana/o Movement. Traditionally, the Chicano/a Movement is composed of four facets—the United Farm Workers Movement, the student movement (often times including the Anti-Vietnam War movement), the land grant movement in New Mexico, and the rise of a third-party electoral politics as evidenced by *La Raza Unida* or United Race Party, a political party that became prominent throughout the Southwest. For decades, scholars have either chronicled these four main themes in the movement or specifically centered their studies on individuals, such as the "Four Horsemen" (César Chávez, Reies López Tijerina, José Ángel Gutiérrez, and Corky González).[16] Focusing only on the National Chicano/a Movement and its 1965-1975 chronology dismisses the importance of local community uprisings that at times brought more changes to communities longing for empowerment. This dissertation joins a number of African American and Chicana/o scholars rethinking the contours of the traditional civil rights movements by expanding the chronology, its geographic scope, as well as the thinking beyond the events that gained national recognition.[17] While the larger Chicana/o Movement is often

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[16] Some works focusing on the traditional Chicana/o Movement include Carlos Muñoz, Jr., *Youth, Identity, Power: The Chicano Movement,* (New York: Verso Books, 1989); *Ernesto* Chávez, *¡Mi Raza Primero!: Nationalism, Identity, and Insurgency in the Chicano Movement in Los Angeles,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Ignacio García, *Chicanismo: The Forging a Militant Ethos,* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1997); Maylei Blackwell, *¡Chicana Power!: Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011); Lorena Oropeza, *¡Raza Sí! ¡Guerra No!: Chicano Protest and Patriotism during the Viet Nam War Era,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Guadalupe San Miguel, *Brown, Not White: School Integration and the Chicano Movement in Houston,* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M Press, 2005); Armando Navarro, *Mexican American Youth Organization: Avant-Garde of the Chicano Movement,* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995).

[17] Jaqueline Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *The Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (March 2005): 1233-1263; Peniel Joseph, "The Black Power Movement: A State of the Field," *Journal of American History* 96, no. 3 (December 2009): 751-776; Thomas Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggles for Civil Rights in the North,* (New York:

characterized by its political, leadership, or geographic shortcomings, the story of El Paso's community organizations show that the movement achieved important successes at the local level. Even though the local episodes in El Paso are not included in the broader history of Civil Rights, barrio activism places El Paso as an important and unique geographic space during the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, and, more broadly, in the urban history of the United States.

El Paso's position on the U.S.-México border makes for a compelling study in the field of borderlands history. Being at the crossroads of two countries, El Paso became an important economic and transportation center at the turn of the twentieth century, which transformed it into the largest city on the U.S.-México border. Even though the experiences of Mexican Americans mirror those of others in ethnic neighborhoods across the country, the border played an important role in the development of the city and its population. Mario García and Monica Perales both argue that the border complicated Mexican Americans' lives and identities every day. In *Desert Immigrants,* Mario García asserted that "class, racial, and cultural divisions are rooted in the particular economic development of El Paso." Furthermore, the proximity to México and the distance from an American population allowed for cultural continuity and change creating a Mexican border culture.[18] In *Smeltertown,* El Paso's position on the border, the need for cheap labor, and a constant influx of people allowed the geographic space of the company town to become a permanent settlement. Perales further argued that "the case of Smeltertown

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Random House, 2009); George Mariscal, *Brown-Eyed Children of the Sun: Lessons from the Chicano Movement, 1965-1975,* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005); Mario T. García, *The Chicano Movement: Perspectives from the Twenty-First Century,* (New York: Routledge, 2014); Marc Rodriguez, *Rethinking the Chicano Movement,* (New York: Routledge, 2014); Carlos Blanton, *A Promising Problem: The New Chicana/o History*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016).

[18] García, *Desert Immigrants,* 8.

thus not only reveals how people created stasis in a place of constant movement, but also how lived experience determined how border dwellers viewed themselves in racial, cultural, and national terms."[19] For South El Pasoans, the border also played a large role as the community sought to establish roots and permanence in the area. The initial substandard conditions speak to city and business leaders' assumed notions that the constant flow of immigrants would never gain permanence.

Following García's and Perales' work, this dissertation explores the ways in which the border influenced the geography and identities of Mexican Americans living in the Southside barrios. South El Paso's position just north of the Rio Grande shaped and affected the development of the neighborhoods, as the barrio was seen as El Paso's front yard for those who crossed the international boundary. It was the border that allowed Mexican Americans to create a community; it was the border that rendered 25,000 people invisible; it was a border dispute that began many redevelopment projects in the latter half of the twentieth century. Southsiders' social, cultural, and economic livelihoods were contingent upon their proximity and accessibility to Ciudad Juárez. It was the power structure of the border in the mid-1970s that pressed South El Pasoans to defend their identities, their spaces, and their city.

What makes South El Paso significant and distinct is the convergence of race, urban crisis, and ethnic nationalism and mobilization in a border setting. Urban historians such as Tom Sugrue, Arnold Hirsch, Robert Self, and Ronald Bayor, among others, have analyzed race and the urban environment primarily through a black-white lens.[20] While

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[19] Monica Perales, *Smeltertown*, 6-7.

[20] Arnold Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago 1940-1960,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Ronald Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta,*

the works are fundamental to our understandings of race, politics, and urban development of cities in the East and West Coast and in the Midwest during the twentieth century, inserting the voices of Mexican Americans in a border urban setting allows scholars to understand important themes in United States history, including discrimination, power and politics, urban redevelopment, and community activism. This dissertation, which examines a community struggle on what may be considered the social, economic, and political fringes of the United States, asserts the central place of these communities to our national history.

The growing body of Latina/o urban history, exemplified by historians Lilia Fernández, Lydia Otero, Andrew Sandoval-Strausz, Michael Innis-Jiménez, among others, look beyond the restrictions of a black-white binary when studying cities, and insert the voices of the fastest growing minority in the United States into the narratives of the urban environment.[21] In particular, Fernández and Sandoval-Strausz in their analysis of Chicago and Dallas respectively, correctly argue that historians need to reinterpret urban history as Latino/as stabilized and saved cities from the "urban crisis" in the latter half of the twentieth century. The story of South El Paso's grassroots organizing adds a new dimension to this discussion. It draws attention to a still undeveloped area of study in urban history, but it also provides another narrative of how Latina/os helped revitalize the decaying core. By engaging in the different urban preservation methods, Southsiders

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(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); Robert Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

[21] Fernández, *Brown in the Windy City*; Andrew Sandoval-Strausz, "The Transnational Origins of a New Urban America," *Journal of Urban History* 101, no. 3 (December 2014): 804-831; Innis-Jiménez, *Steel Barrio*.

saved their own spaces within the city. In addition, the defense of El Paso's Southside barrios helps scholars re-conceptualize our notions of historic preservation, as these movements provide a more organic grassroots approach to a process that often times disregards voices of people of color and functions as a top-down model of preservation.[22]

**Methodology**

I have selected the Southside neighborhoods of El Segundo Barrio and Chihuahuita as sites of study for a variety of reasons. The areas were urban slums from their inception in the early twentieth century, and have been historically Mexican neighborhoods. As a result, city leaders constantly targeted the barrios due to their perceived "backwardness" and hindrance to a "modern" and "American" El Paso. Secondly, the neighborhoods experienced a number of urban revitalization projects for much of their existence, but more aggressively in the late twentieth century. These included the ceding of territory to México as a result of the Chamizal Treaty in 1963, as well as the construction of highways, housing projects, parks, and other public structures. Third, the barrios have retained a strong sense of community as evidenced through neighborhood organizations and activist groups that protested inequalities through various means. El Segundo Barrio and Chihuahuita provide a continuous narrative of authorities historically targeting ethnic Mexican areas in the city, while shedding light on

[22] For works on historic preservation and communities of color see Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995); Ned Kaufman, *Place, Race, and Story: Essays on the Past and Future of Historic Preservation*, (New York: Routledge, 2009); Leland T. Saito, *The Politics of Exclusion: The Failure of Race-neutral Policies in Urban America*, (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009).

the importance of grassroots and community organizing, especially during the decades of social unrest and battles for civil rights throughout the country.

In an attempt to expand conceptions of Chicano/a activism, different engagement strategies (traditional, radical, and modest) will be highlighted in the second part of the dissertation. Like the work of historian Robin Kelley, the study focuses on the varying forms of resistance outside of the scope of large political organizations.[23] Featuring the different strategies also sheds light on important players that are not stressed in stories of movements—in the case of El Paso, this refers to a movement of both youth and the elderly. Lastly, the varying tactics to preserve the South El Paso uncovers important conflicts in the community that essentially led to organizations' ideological differences and methods to address the same problems in the barrios.

In an effort to recover fragmented narratives and information, as community members and neighborhood organizations seldom left written records behind, a variety of archival and other source materials are employed throughout the dissertation. These documents include organization pamphlets, government records, urban impact studies, letters, redevelopment applications, poems, photographs, flyers, and newsletters among other sources. Newspaper articles, while they often ignore the voices of Mexican Americans in the city, provided information on strikes, city council meetings, and a limited degree of voices from the community.

At the core of the project is an oral history component. Several interviews were conducted for the dissertation—five individually and fifteen as part of Texas Christian University's *Civil Rights in Black and Brown Oral History Project.* These oral histories

[23] Robin Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class*, (New York: The Free Press, 1994).

have provided rich narratives of the community's participation in the grassroots struggles for urban preservation, and they illuminate residents' personal experiences with discrimination, feelings of ownership and connection to the barrios. As previously stated, many elderly members in South El Paso mobilized during the period of the 1970s and 1980s. In order to include the voices of the now deceased community activists, I used oral histories conducted during this period, which are archived at the University of Texas at El Paso's Institute of Oral History. Interviews with former city planning employees conducted by American Planning Association—Texas Chapter have also been used throughout the project. These oral histories are housed at the Alexander Architectural Library at the University of Texas at Austin. In order to present a bottom up history, the voices of different participants are incorporated into the study whenever possible, in an attempt for the subjects to narrate their own histories and involvement within the movements.

**Organization**

The dissertation is divided into two sections. Part I, "Contested Visions of the City" explores El Paso's two spatial realities: an Anglo world (consisting of the commercial and political core of the city) and a Mexican barrio that housed over 25,000 people in a one square mile area, making South El Paso a city within a city. Chapter 1 titled "Making an 'All-America City,'" discusses the creation of El Paso's urban identity throughout the twentieth century. Although the city historically had an ethnic Mexican majority, city and business leaders fought tirelessly to create a "bicultural" border city without Mexicans by excluding the majority of the population from politics, society,

history, and El Paso's overall image. The following chapter, "Behind and Beyond the 'Tortilla Curtain'" chronicles a counter-narrative of this American urban identity in the world beyond Paisano Drive, the physical division between Mexican South El Paso and Anglo El Paso. While outsiders saw the area of South El Paso as a "throbbing ingrown toenail" and one of the worst urban slums in the country, residents of the neighborhood lived a different reality. Due to the rigid geographic segregation, Mexican Americans connected to, identified with, created institutions, and developed a sense of ownership and belonging within the barrios of South El Paso. As tensions brewed between the two cities over spatial conflicts and urban redevelopment projects in the late 1960s, Southsiders' connection to and ownership of the barrio fueled the mobilization and efforts to preserve their neighborhood.

Part II titled "Fighting for South El Paso" focuses on the different efforts and political participation of ethnic Mexican activist organizations in controlling preservation efforts in their neighborhoods. Chapter 3, "'Taking Control from Within,'" chronicles the rise of two important grassroots neighborhood organizations: *La Campaña Pro La Preservación del Barrio* (Campaign for the Preservation of the Barrio) and the Chihuahuita Improvement Association (CIA). The two groups formed as a response to aggressive urban redevelopment projects in the area following the devolution of territory to México and two tragedies resulting from the community's substandard conditions. As residents associated and actively engaged with the two groups, Southsiders negotiated their own visions of barrio rehabilitation with city leaders, and adopted different strategies to improve living conditions and protect their barrios from being dismantled. Chapter 4, "*Unidos por los derechos del inquilino*" "(United for the Rights of the

Tenant),” examines four episodes of occupation and resistance in El Segundo Barrio. In each case, residents of South El Paso, Chicana/o neighborhood organizations, and other concerned citizens, took a more radical approach to dramatize the poor conditions and the immediate need of housing in the Southside. As squatters opposed eviction from the area, Mexican Americans exerted their ownership of the barrios and their rights as long time tenants. Chapter 5 titled “‘To Uplift the Spirit of the People’” investigates how residents used a less “conventional” political approach to the preservation of the barrios. By engaging in cultural preservation efforts such as beautification projects, mural paintings, and the creation of community centers, residents of El Segundo Barrio and Chihuahuita claimed dignity, control, and pride in their communities. In addition, these cultural projects addressed the necessities of their barrios while asserting the importance of their heritage through community spaces. The conclusion turns to the legacy of these organizing methods in the 1970s and early 1980s, their repercussions in the barrios and the city overall, and the current state of South El Paso as it awaits major urban redevelopment plans. It is my goal to tackle the negative stereotypical image of the barrios in present day by providing a historic understanding of why people care(d) to preserve blighted areas, as well as advocate for neighborhood preservation alternatives that include citizen participation in the area and are genuinely geared for the betterment of the residents.

The objective of this dissertation is to highlight the many roles and strategies residents and community grassroots groups have used to preserve their neighborhoods, the spaces that protected them from other areas that disenfranchised them. By combining two important fields within United States history—Chicana/o and Urban histories—this

study is an attempt to recover the silenced histories of the largest population group in El Paso. Overall, the project emphasizes the role of Mexican Americans, not as passive victims of urban redevelopment, commercialization and industrialization of the area, and racism, but as agents of change, negotiation, and political empowerment.

**A Note on Terminology**

Due to the transient nature of the ethnic Mexican community in the Southside particularly at the beginning of the twentieth century, I employ different terms to refer to the different groups of Mexican heritage in the area. “Ethnic Mexican” and “population of Mexican descent” are used throughout the study, particularly when referring to the early twentieth century immigrants residing in El Paso. The term “Mexican American” is used to describe postwar residents and also to the communities that mobilized in the late 1960s-1980s. “Chicana/o” is reserved for the activists that identified as such, especially the younger members of *La Campaña Pro La Preservación del Barrio* and other community organizations such as the Mexican American Youth Association (MAYA) and the local chapter of the *Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán* (MEChA). To represent the cohesiveness of barrio identity, “Southsiders” and “South El Pasoans” are utilized to refer to the community as a whole. Although the terms are problematic, I use “white,” “Anglo,” and “Americans” interchangeably throughout the work when referring to the white, non-Spanish surname population in El Paso.

## Chapter One

## Making an "All-America City:" Spatial and Urban Identity Construction in Twentieth Century El Paso

"El Paso, the 'All-America City,' is truly
all-American, as mom's apple pie."
*El Paso Times*, March 4, 1970[1]

In 1976, the Convention and Visitors' Bureau of El Paso, Texas, created a promotional video entitled *El Paso, City by the Rio Grande*, with the goal of encouraging tourism to the city by portraying the area's history from the sixteenth century to the present. The film featured country music Hall of Famer Marty Robbins strumming his guitar and singing his *El Paso City* song as he walked around narrating city stories and emphasizing important sites to visit.[2] Robbins recounted the region's Spanish past, highlighting the tales of *conquistadores* Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca and Juan de Oñate crossing the Rio Grande in 1598, and the Tigua Reservation in the Ysleta del Sur Pueblo in Southeast El Paso. Robbins explained the 1827 Juan Maria Ponce de León settlement, which became downtown El Paso. The singer then chronicled the arrival of Anglos, the United States Army and the settlement of Fort Bliss on the banks of the Rio Grande in 1848. Robbins stopped downtown and declared that "El Paso had its share of bad men in the early days, names like Billy the Kid, Pat Garrett, and John Wesley Hardin, they're all immortalized in the legend of El Paso." Highlighting the city's modern growth, Robbins made stops at the University of Texas at El Paso, the newly built Civic Center, the Wyler

[1] "We're 350,000 All-Americans" ad, *El Paso Times*, March 4, 1970.

[2] Convention and Visitor's Bureau, *El Paso, City by the Rio Grande*, Directed by Jim Rowley, (1976; El Paso, Texas: De Bruyn Advertisement Inc.), in *Texas Archive of the Moving Image* http://www.texasarchive.org/library/index.php?title=El_Paso,_City_by_the_Rio_Grande, accessed November 2, 2015.

Tramway, golf courses, a country club, the mountains, and even showed a tourist group horseback riding through the desert.[3]

Robbins crossed the border into Ciudad Juárez, demonstrating the ease of visiting México for both American and Canadian citizens, and highlighting the city's "international" appeal. Once in Juárez, the sounds of a mariachi band accompanied Anglo tourists, as they ate and drank at a restaurant. Robbins asserted that "a walk along Juárez Avenue is still with the sights and sounds of Old Mexico. With quaint curio shops, street vendors, and the ever present cantina along the way."[4] He concluded his lengthy tour on El Paso's Scenic Drive, a stretch along the southern tip of the Franklin Mountains that provides breathtaking views of the city. He closed the video by stating that:

> The legend of El Paso, a story 400 years in the making. From the Spanish Conquistadors to the Padres who walked the King's Highway, the friendly Indians who were the first residents of Texas. The early settlers, the pony soldiers, gun fighters, and border bandits. To the more than a million people in El Paso and Juarez who live, work, and play here today: that legend is still alive. There's a spirit, a flavor, a zest for life here in the Pass of the North that you won't find anywhere else. So, come on *amigo*, see it for yourself![5]

The fourteen-minute video painted the environment of El Paso—a modern, bicultural, and "international" city. El Paso, according to the video, was one of the most unique places in the United States because of its geographic position on the U.S.-México border. The tourist clip, however, did not highlight the number one characteristic that made the city unique: its 248,000 Mexican Americans, who comprised sixty two percent

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[3] Convention and Visitor's Bureau, *El Paso, City by the Rio Grande*.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

of the city's 400,000 residents at the time.[6] Indeed, the only Mexicans who appeared in the video were those who served Anglo tourists in Juárez's restaurants, shops, and cantinas. The Visitor's Bureau whitewashed the true landscape of the city of El Paso—namely, it concealed the city's substandard barrios, the subordination of ethnic Mexicans throughout the twentieth century, and its repressed Mexican history. From the outside, El Paso seemed to be an American city that happened to be at the crossroads of two nations.

The Visitor's Bureau video depiction of El Paso was emblematic of a century's worth of Anglo El Pasoans' attempts at controlling the urban development of the city. Throughout the twentieth century, city and business leaders utilized discourses of race and power to shape the politics, the physical construction, and the imagined urban identity of the border city. The American leadership devised new ways to set boundaries (physical and symbolic) between the Mexican population and themselves, while creating a racial underclass that limited upward mobility for Mexican Americans. Anglo political and business leaders made Mexican Americans invisible in three ways: by removing, silencing, and controlling the ethnic Mexican population's political voice; by implementing structural and social barriers to enforce geographic segregation; and by creating an urban identity that relied on Mexicans in Ciudad Juárez to appeal to tourists while obscuring the presence of ethnic Mexicans within the city. The history of exclusion that Mexican Americans faced in El Paso became engrained into every aspect of the city. As the community of South El Paso mobilized to preserve their neighborhoods in the 1970s and early 1980s, Southsiders were also fighting the oppressive system that had neglected them throughout the twentieth century.

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[6] Oscar Martínez, *The Chicanos of El Paso: An Assessment of Progress*, (El Paso, TX: Texas Western Press, 1980), 6.

El Paso followed processes of whitewashing like many other parts of the Southwest at the turn of the twentieth century. Historians William Deverell, Lisbeth Hass, and Phoebe Kropp have examined the ways in which Anglos in California invented a white ethnic and cultural identity within the state, while adopting and exploiting elements of Spanish and Mexican pasts of the region.[7] Deverell examines the creation of a white Los Angeles during the period from 1880 to 1940, amidst the city's modernization. Deverell argued "Los Angeles matured, at least in part, by covering up places, people, and histories that those in power found unsettling."[8] Similarly, Phoebe Kropp's *California Vieja* stated that "Anglo entrepreneurs carefully culled choice elements from these visions [Indigenous, Spanish and Mexican pasts], silenced others, and rearranged these pieces into compelling regional narratives that spoke their hopes for the future."[9] El Paso's city leaders followed similar patterns of racial control of the city's urban identity. Its location allowed Anglo city boosters, leaders, and businessmen to sell El Paso as a bicultural city by exoticizing and appropriating the image of Mexican foreign nationals, while ignoring the basic needs of over half of the city's population, many of whom resided in the city's Southside.

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[7] William Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of its Mexican Past,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Lisbeth Haas, *Conquest and Historical Identities in California, 1769-1936,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Phoebe S. Kropp, *California Vieja: Culture and Memory in a Modern American Place*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

[8] Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe*, 7.

[9] Kropp, *California Vieja,* 5.

**Establishing Anglo Political Control**

To understand the political and racial dynamics that led South El Paso's late twentieth century grassroots activism, it is crucial to explore the city's early history and Anglo settlement in the region after the U.S.-México War (1846-1848). The present day area of El Paso County is one of the oldest European settlements in the Southwest, as the first Spanish expedition arrived in 1581. During the Spanish Period (1600s-1821) and the Mexican Period (1821-1848), the area remained fairly isolated, and economically dependent on agriculture, stock raising, and commerce. Although the region had about 8,000 residents prior to the American period, most of the population lived on the southern banks of the Rio Grande, primarily in El Paso del Norte, now Ciudad Juárez, México.[10]

The end of the U.S.-México War in 1848 and the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo brought immediate changes to the region, and with it, the establishment of Anglo control. Just a short year after the end of the war, five Anglo settlements sprung up in the present day area of El Paso—Frontera, El Molino, Franklin, Maggoffinsville, and Concordia. These communities and trading posts brought a moderate increase in the population to the area. The incoming Anglo population did, however, change the social, political, and economic environment, especially when it came into the three settlements in the eastern section. According to historian Oscar J. Martínez, "the newcomers often disregarded local rules and traditions… with little interference from the established Anglo authority." The disruption to the local order would not be the only problem in the area. As in much of the American Southwest, soon

[10] W.H. Timmons, *El Paso: A Borderlands History*, (El Paso, TX: Texas Western Press, 1990), 74.

after the arrival of whites in San Elizario, Socorro, and Ysleta, the Mexican community began losing their communal properties, leading to Mexican subordination.[11]

Conflicts over power and control of the area set the stage for the tensions between Anglos and Mexican Americans that were evident in the twentieth century. Between the years of 1829 and 1831, the area experienced heavy rainfall causing the Rio Grande to shift its course southward, which moved the towns of San Elizario, Socorro, and Ysleta to the northern banks of the river.[12] This environmental change marked the beginning of conflicts between the Mexican population and the arriving Anglos over disputed territories—a pattern that would frame interactions between the two groups for generations to come. When the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo established the Rio Grande River as the international boundary between the two nations, San Elizario, Socorro, and Ysleta were placed under the jurisdiction of the United States, against the wishes of the area's residents. In an attempt to remain a part of México, residents of the three settlements protested the arbitrary naming of the international boundary. The conflict ended when the United States declared the river was the ultimate boundary line.[13] The consequences of this natural disaster marked the beginning of racial tensions between Anglos and Mexicans in the region, as the residents of the area did not welcome their arbitrary nationality and sudden citizenship loss.

The conflicts between the incoming Anglos and *mexicanos* intensified, evidenced in the battle over the public control of the Guadalupe Salt Lakes, about 100 miles east of

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[11] Martínez, *The Chicanos of El Paso*, 7.

[12] Timmons, *El Paso*, 74.

[13] Ibid, 105; Martínez, *The Chicanos of El Paso*, 7.

San Elizario. The community had controlled the salt deposits since the Spanish era, but incoming Anglos understood the value of the salt beds for both personal and business users. In 1877, a violent insurgency ensued when Anglos took a legal claim to the salt lakes and demanded the residents of San Elizario pay for using the salt. Outraged, the *mexicano* community rose up in arms, yet they were ultimately unable to restore Mexican control over the salt lakes. The Salt War led to Mexican social and political disenfranchisement. As a result of the dispute, San Elizario lost its position as the county seat. In the following century, ethnic Mexicans in San Elizario witnessed the development of El Paso from a distance, and the area never regained the social, political, or economic clout it once had in the region.[14]

Racial tensions continued for much of the remainder of the 19th century. During the post-Civil War years, the county seat bounced back and forth between San Elizario and Ysleta, both communities with a majority ethnic Mexican population. The large concentration in both towns meant that the area could still elect persons of Mexican descent to office and exercise some political power. In 1873, the Anglo settlements incorporated, giving birth to the city of El Paso. The following decade, local businessmen took charge to move the county seat from Ysleta to El Paso in order to take full political control of the area. Knowing the repercussions of Anglo mobilization for county governance, the residents of Ysleta called an election in 1883 in hopes of retaining the county seat. In order to win, some of El Paso's elite employed fraudulent tactics to win the election. According to historian W.H. Timmons, the city's civic leaders imported

[14] For more on the San Elizario Salt War, see C. L. Sonnichsen, *The El Paso Salt War* (El Paso: Hertzog, 1961) and Paul Cool, *Salt Warriors: Insurgency on the Rio Grande*, (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2008).

Mexicans from across the border to vote in favor of El Paso as county seat. In addition, some El Pasoans voted several times—whereas only 300 people were registered to vote, 2000 ballots were cast.[15] Ysleta protested the election discrepancies, to no avail. The county seat moved to El Paso in early 1884, resulting in Anglo dominance as well as the control of the direction and development of El Paso. Taking the county seat from Ysleta was the decisive move to take political power from the ethnic Mexican community in the El Paso region.[16] Anglos, however, understood a need to maintain a positive relationship with the Mexican American population, especially as the city hoped to establish commercial and business ties with Ciudad Juárez.[17] After the taking of the county seat, El Paso's political structure never reflected the majority of the population of the city.

These nineteenth century disputes over political and economic control of local resources are crucial to the understanding of El Paso's development in the twentieth century, and how political dislocation contributed to the conditions of El Paso's Southside neighborhoods. When the city incorporated in 1873, the region transformed from a "sleepy" and isolated town to a bustling commercial center. A publication by the El Paso Bureau of Information in 1886 asserted "this city is no doubt destined to become the great commercial and political metropolis of this vast region."[18] Just like the authors

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[15] Timmons, *El Paso*, 175.

[16] Mario T. García, *Desert Immigrants: The Mexicans of El Paso, 1880-1920*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 157.

[17] Border cities have long understood the need to not starkly discriminate their ethnic Mexican populations in fear of losing business ties with México. For more on this subject see Geraldo L. Cavada, *Standing on Common Ground: The Making of a Sunbelt Borderland*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

[18] El Paso Bureau of Information, *The city and county of El Paso, Texas, containing useful and reliable information concerning the future of great metropolis of the Southwest; its resources and advantages for the agriculturist, artisan and capitalist*, (El Paso, TX: Times Publishing Co., 1886), 7. http://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc2.ark:/13960/t7kp8682z, accessed March 1, 2016.

of the El Paso Bureau's pamphlet predicted, the city became the crossroads of the United States and México in a few decades. Seven different railroads connected El Paso to major cities within an approximate 700 mile radius including Los Angeles, Denver, Phoenix, Houston, Dallas, Monterrey and Chihuahua City; El Paso matured into an important satellite of regional, national, and transnational markets.[19] The trains in El Paso became indispensable for the growth of the United States, transported raw materials from northern México and the Southwest to industrial cities in the Midwest and Northeast. The advent of railroads also contributed to the growth of the region as a significant ranching, smelting, and commercial center.[20] This caused an economic and population boom in the region. Between 1880 and 1920, the city grew from 736 to 77,560 people.[21]

El Paso's growing economy needed to tap into a source of cheap and exploitable labor. The city's emergence as a regional metropolis coincided with social turmoil on the other side of the border. During the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), about a million men and women fled from the violence and in hopes of finding better opportunities.[22] Many Mexican immigrants escaping the revolution crossed into the United States in El Paso. Some settled, while others moved on after a few years. The newcomers took jobs in all industries in the city, including manufacturing, construction, smelting, and even domestic work and laundering. According to historian Mario García, "the need by southwestern enterprises for cheap unskilled labor coincided with the availability of

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[19] El Paso Chamber of Commerce, *El Paso Texas… in brief*, (ca. 1968), Chris P. Fox Manuscript Collection, C. L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso Library.

[20] García, *Desert Immigrants*, 9-32; Monica Perales, *Smeltertown: Making and Remembering a Southwest Border* Community, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 21-56.

[21] Martínez, *The Chicanos of El Paso*, 6.

[22] García, *Desert Immigrants*, 4.

Mexican immigrants to produce a class system tainted with racial prejudice."[23] These new corporations and the turmoil in México created a racial and class dynamic that kept the newcomers as an underclass for much of the early twentieth century.

El Paso's infrastructure was not prepared to receive the number of immigrants settling in the area. Businessmen built a number of tenements or *presidios* (prisons) in South El Paso, to house the immigrant families. These structures, already built to substandard levels, became overcrowded with the rapid influx of migrants to the city, and were tucked away between the downtown district and the Rio Grande, removed from the commercial and residential core of El Paso. Conditions in the barrios were unsanitary and disease-ridden as the neighborhoods lacked necessary infrastructure. Life in the barrios and the Mexican population's connection to these particular spaces will be the subject of the following chapter. Thus, the region's capitalist growth and the need for exploitable labor also created one of the worst urban slums in the Southwest. A product of the power structure of the city, the barrios of the Southside were constantly seen as a detriment to the prosperity of El Paso.

Anglo leaders acknowledged the importance of Mexicans not only as an exploitable laboring class, but also as a voting bloc, and employed several tactics use Mexican votes in order to remain politically empowered. Like in many other cities in the United States during this period, bosses and machines ran the political process in El Paso.[24] Since the late 1800s, the control of local politics rested in the hands of the

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[23] García, *Desert Immigrants*, 85.

[24] For more on political machines and city bosses, see Terry Golway, *Machine Made: Tammany Hall and the Creation of Modern American Politics,* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2014); Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Democratic Ring: a group of bankers, businessmen, lawyers, and contractors, all of them Anglos.[25] In order to keep a peaceful relationship with México and the city's ethnic Mexican underclass that labored in the industries, American politicians incorporated ethnic Mexicans into politics. Inclusion in the process, however, did not equate to having a political voice; rather the population of Mexican descent was used as a pawn, manipulated in order to maintain Anglo power.

The Democratic Ring depended on members of the small Mexican middle class to act as liaisons between the white politicians and the Mexican community. Once the middle class brokers delivered the Mexican vote, Anglo leaders rewarded them with minor positions in public services or in lower-tier elected offices such as the district or county clerk's office. In addition, the Ring illegally purchased poll taxes in order to have the Mexican community vote.[26] Although those who opposed the Democratic Ring knew of the fraudulent tactics, El Paso's Republican politicians also followed similar tactics. In order to compete with the Ring, Republicans hosted parties for the ethnic Mexican population and served them alcohol in hopes of obtaining votes for their candidates. Regardless of the attempts to oust the Democratic Ring from power, the group continued to have the support of the Mexican community for several decades.[27]

The economic and political oppression of the population of Mexican descent continued well into the 1930s and 1940s. Although the majority of the city's population was politically exploited, many ethnic Mexicans remained disconnected and received

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[25] García, *Desert Immigrants*, 158.

[26] Judge George Rodríguez, interview by Richard Estrada, July 29, 1975, interview no. 177, transcript, Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso, El Paso, TX.

[27] García, *Desert Immigrants*, 155-171; Timmons, *El Paso*, 191, 205.

little attention from political leaders. Oftentimes ethnic Mexicans saw themselves as temporary residents of El Paso and believed they would return to México once the conflicts associated with the Revolution ended. El Paso's position on the border and the proximity to Ciudad Juárez also bolstered political apathy as the Mexican population remained connected to politics on the other side of the Rio Grande. Others believed that there was no need to become politically engaged since their concerns were rarely addressed by city leaders.[28] As the twentieth century progressed and El Paso's ethnic Mexican population became more permanent, the political system in El Paso remained the same. Despite a successful mobilization of the Mexican American middle class in 1936 to challenge the city registrar's categorization of Mexicans as "colored" on birth and death certificates, Mexican Americans did not gain political clout.[29] During the 1940s and 1950s, newer political machine groups such as the Kingmakers, a conservative group of business elites, and a loose coalition of liberal business owners, union leaders, and professionals, came to prominence and continued to press for the economic priorities for the city.[30] The concerns of business interests such as textile industries, refineries, and

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[28] Throughout his works, Mario García has utilized a generational lens to explain how Mexican identity developed in El Paso. See Mario García, *Mexican Americans, Leadership, Ideology & Identity, 1930-1960*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989). See also Yolanda Chávez Leyva, "'Faithful Hard-Working Mexican Hands:' Mexicana Workers During the Great Depression," *Perspectives in Mexican American Studies* 5 (1995): 63-77.

[29]1936 marked the rise to one of the first political efforts by the Mexican American middle class to fight local, state, and federal power structures for political rights. In October of that year, the City Registrar, Alex Powell, and the Health Officer, Dr. T. J. McCamant, made an announcement that the U.S. Census Bureau ordered that ethnic Mexicans to be registered as "colored" rather than as "white" in official records. The reclassification, however, stemmed from an attempt to lower white infant mortality rates in El Paso. Middle class Mexicans such as Cleofas Calleros, Frank Galvan, among others, challenged the second-class citizenship treatment, and influenced local politics by halting the reclassification. See Mario T. García, "Mexican Americans and the Politics of Citizenship: The Case of El Paso, 1936," *New Mexico Historical Review* 59, no. 2 (April 1984): 187-204.

[30] Mario T. García, *The Making of a Mexican American Mayor: Raymond L. Telles of El Paso*, (El Paso: TX: Texas Western Press, 1998), 44-46; Benjamin Marquez, *Power and Politics in a Chicano*

construction companies mattered, while those of the Mexican American population were altogether ignored.

By the second half of the twentieth century, the population of the city of El Paso grew exponentially, yet the politics of the city remained the same. Between 1950 and 1980, the population grew from 130,485 to 425,124 people. Mexican Americans comprised more than 60 percent of the population.[31] The numbers, however, did not translate into political representation. El Paso would not have a Mexican American mayor until the election of Raymond Telles in 1958, and not again until 1977, when Ray Salazar was elected. While prior to 1883 five Mexican Americans served as County Judges, none would serve until 1990, when Alicia Chacón became the first Mexican American woman to serve as a County Judge in the state of Texas.[32] When it came to the El Paso City Council, no Spanish surnamed person served until 1961, when at least one Mexican American served on the council. In addition, representatives were chosen at large, taking away the political voice of the Southside neighborhoods. The practice continued into the 1980s, when the city moved towards the creation of single member districts, which allowed more representation in city politics for the Mexican American population.[33] For its part, the Chamber of Commerce maintained Anglo leadership until

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*Barrio: A Study of Mobilization Efforts and Community Power in El Paso,* (Lanham, MD: University of America Press, 1985), 21-51.

[31] Martínez, *The Chicanos of El Paso,* 6; Department of Planning, Research and Development, *Population and Housing Trends 1980,* El Paso, Texas, April 1981, Chicano Vertical Files, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso Library.

[32] Alicia Chacón, interview by Sandra I. Enríquez and David Robles, July 25, 2015, video recording, *Civil Rights in Black and Brown Oral History Project,* Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, TX.

[33] Ibid., Fermín Dorado, interview by Sandra I. Enríquez and David Robles, July 24, 2015, video recording, *Civil Rights in Black and Brown Oral History Project,* Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, TX.

1979, when Arnold Peinado became the organization's first Mexican American president.[34]

Despite the permanence of the ethnic Mexican population and the vocal presence of a minority lower middle class, Anglo leaders successfully developed a power structure that erased the voices of Mexican Americans from the political process. City authorities continued to prioritize the needs of the growing industries and capitalize on the accessible and exploitable labor source from across the border. Institutionalized discrimination in the local political system expanded into other areas, and the Mexican American population continued to be marginalized geographically, educationally, and socioeconomically. For over a century, the Anglo power structure created and constantly maintained a rigid system that strategically excluded the Mexican American population from the political process. While Anglos maintained political erasure from El Paso, the growth and development of the city brought other concerns. In order to remain in power, white leaders needed to control the development and expansion of the city.

**The Spatial Development of "American" El Paso**

Throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Anglo city leaders worked to build the infrastructure of a modern American city. Just a few years after the arrival of the railroad, boosters attempted to sell the city to outsiders through a number of publications. In 1886, a group wrote a pamphlet to recruit people to come to the city, as it

[34] Data gathered by Oscar J. Martínez in *The Chicanos of El Paso: An Assessment of Progress*. Table 9 "Spanish Surname Members of the El Paso City Council since 1873," 19, and Table 5 "Mexican American Participation in Leadership Roles, El Paso Chamber of Commerce, 13.

had great promise. The El Paso Bureau of Information described pre-Anglo El Paso as a backwards place that became modernized thanks to the arrival of Americans. For them,

> the population of El Paso County hitherto has not, unfortunately, been of the progressive kind. The Spanish or Mexican Indian race—of whom, until the advent of the railways, four years ago, about ninety-nine hundredths of the population was composed, and of which one-half of it is still composed—has caused the country to progress scarcely a move in the great march of material wealth and improvement, beyond what it was in the days of the Spanish viceroyalty in Mexico, to which it was once subject. Up to that time (1881) this was practically a "terra incognita."[35]

Attitudes of Anglo superiority guided the growth of the city throughout the twentieth century. As El Paso embarked on its development, leaders and boosters disassociated from the area's Mexican past, present, and its future.

Anglo newcomers established their residences and businesses, bringing their own particular ideas of how the city ought to look. These visions quickly altered the architectural and spatial structure of the town core, along with the city's political and racial dynamics. Upon their arrival, the newcomers found that El Paso had "no railroads, no modern improvements, nothing but a few old adobe structures; and the town was almost unworthy of a name."[36] Anglos mobilized to transform the city, demolishing many of the existing structures to make way for modern buildings. In 1883, the one of the first development projects in El Paso took place, changing downtown adobe structures to brick buildings.[37] The *El Paso Times* celebrated this decision and expressed that "the removal of the ancient adobe with all their bad associations [meant] a new life for El

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[35] El Paso Bureau of Information, *The city and county of El Paso, Texas,* 3.

[36] Ibid, 8.

[37] David Dorado Romo, *Ringside Seat to a Revolution: An Underground Cultural History of El Paso and Juárez, 1893-1923,* (El Paso: Cinco Puntos Press, 2005), 217.

Paso."[38] In a few years, the Anglo leaders celebrated the redevelopment of the area to fit their needs and visions. In early El Paso booster publications, city leaders highlighted that "the old adobe buildings are fast giving away to business blocks as substantial and elegant as can be found in Texas." Adobe structures, associated with the Spanish and Mexican past, were replaced with residential properties around the downtown area that "transformed an open common into a beautiful city of comfortable and elegant homes."[39]

The Chamber of Commerce emphasized the material utilized in home building. During the 1910s, brick homes and reinforced concrete buildings symbolized prosperity and advancement in American society. According to the 1917 publication of *El Paso What is it and Why?*, "reinforced concrete (made with El Paso cement) and high grade brick, also made in El Paso, [were] the preferred material in new construction. El Paso [was] known as the 'Reinforced Concrete City,' and this city's buildings [had] no superiors anywhere for beauty or convenience."[40] Utilizing the best materials available in the region positioned the city with other large cities throughout the United States as a modern and progressive community that controlled and cared about its image. Furthermore, El Paso's leaders established that "home made cement and brick of high grade [were] abundant and cheap, and El Pasoans [did not] build wooden houses. Dignity, solidity, and appropriateness prevail[ed] in El Paso's residence districts."[41]

Not featured in the pages of the Chamber of Commerce booklets were the adobe residences of the Southside that comprised a good portion of structures in the city.

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[38] *El Paso Times,* April 14, 1883.

[39] El Paso Bureau of Information, *The city and county of El Paso, Texas,* 9.

[40] El Paso Chamber of Commerce, *El Paso, What is it and Why?,* (El Paso TX, 1917), 11.

[41] Ibid, 38.

Though the publications mentioned adobe buildings in passing, modernity replaced tradition for the sake of progress. The Chamber of Commerce proudly displayed the demolition of adobe shacks and buildings in order to construct the metropolitan center of El Paso. The organization explained that "Thirty five years ago (1882) nothing was to be seen in the area shown in the picture (downtown business district), except a few adobe houses and a lumber yard." The narrative continued by saying that now "El Paso [was] solidly and compactly built, modern and highly developed in every way."[42] The modern world depicted in the booklets was a result of Anglo appropriation of resources and political and economic dominance. While the greatness of El Paso recognized by the Chamber of Commerce created an idea of a paradise, these advertisements about the city's neighborhoods neglected the Mexican population in the city, exposing the conflicting divide between the majority of the population and Anglo residents.

Such affirmative statements about El Paso as a "progressive" city would continue throughout the first decades of the twentieth century. In 1920 another publication of the El Paso Chamber of Commerce entitled *Greater El Paso: The Power House of the Southwest,* commended Mayor Charles Davis' wisdom in "developing a finer El Paso, socially, commercially, educationally, and spiritually."[43] The Chamber of Commerce acted as the instrument in developing the city's personality, resources, and future, and prided itself in doing the "right thing" for the city and citizens of El Paso.[44] The leaders of the organization sold the city to investors, foreigners, and tourists without mentioning

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[42] El Paso Chamber of Commerce, *El Paso, What is it and Why?*, 5.

[43] El Paso Chamber of Commerce, *Greater El Paso: The Power House of the Southwest,* (El Paso, TX, 1920), 4.

[44] Ibid, 13.

its large Mexican population, its main commodity, and the reason for the city's commercial and financial success. For the Anglo leadership of El Paso, progress meant keeping Mexicans contained to the southern neighborhoods, away from the city's from white neighborhoods.

This dissertation explores these Southside neighborhoods along the Rio Grande where the vast majority of the immigrant working class resided. However, not all Mexicans in the city lived in South El Paso—but race and class defined where and how Mexicans lived. In addition to an exploitable working class, the Mexican Revolution displaced a number of Porfirio Díaz supporters who went into exile and settled in the northern section of El Paso. According to Enrique Acevedo, a long-time resident of El Paso, "Mexicans with a lot of money came to live to El Paso and bought properties in Sunset Heights," one of the city's older and most elegant neighborhoods.[45] The exiles came from many cities in México including Chihuahua City, Guadalajara, Torreón, and México City. Most of them settled in the city for a few years while the turmoil occurred, and returned to México after the conflict ended in 1920s. The socioeconomic status of this group allowed them to settle in Anglo neighborhoods such as Sunset Heights, maintain offices in downtown, and become part of the social and political fabric of American El Paso. María Teresa Rojas de Romero, a former resident of Sunset Heights, explained that "only decent Mexican families lived" in the neighborhood.[46]

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[45] Enrique Acevedo, interview by Robert H. Novak, May 17, 1974, interview no. 130, transcript, Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso, El Paso, TX. Interview in Spanish. Original quote: "Despues de 1910, 11, 12, cuando hubo una gran inmigración de mexicanos, muchos con mucho dinero, que se vinieron a El Paso y compraron propiedades en Sunset Heights."

[46] María Teresa Rojas de Romero, interview by Oscar J. Martínez y Ricardo Aguilar, January 13, 1978, interview no. 729, Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso, El Paso, TX. Interview in Spanish. Original quote: "Yo vivía en Sunset. Era un barrio ese de Sunset. Muy simpatico. Vivían puras familias mexicanas decentes.

The respectability of the families afforded them the option to coexist with the Anglo residents of the city for some time. This, however, would not always be the case. Once a small number of ethnic Mexicans gained a lower middle class status and could afford to live in Sunset Heights, the composition of the neighborhood changed. Rojas de Romero explained in her interview that once more Mexicans moved into the area, "*todo se acabó*" or "everything ended." The area's Catholic Church, Holy Family, closed its doors shortly after more ethnic Mexican people moved into the neighborhood.[47] By the 1920s, the tolerance of Sunset Heights disappeared, as Anglos began to move away from the neighborhood. This case provides a window into understanding the relationships between Mexicans and Anglos in El Paso. While affluent exiles resided within the boundaries of Sunset Heights, American families had no problem because the population was "cultured" in comparison to the working class Mexicans in South El Paso. Yet when prominent Mexican families left the area and more middle class Mexicans settled in the neighborhood, Anglo acceptance disappeared as these threatened the social hierarchies of Anglo El Paso.[48]

The prominent area of Sunset Heights, however, was not the only pocket of ethnic Mexican neighborhoods outside South El Paso. Following a historic flood in 1897, a significant population of Mexican descent decided to leave areas close to the banks of the Rio Grande when the storm destroyed their property. In order to avoid constant floods, the community decided to move north and became squatters along the mesa, an elevated flat area in the northern part of the city, on present day Rim Road. Stormsville, as the area

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[47] Rojas de Romero, interview.

[48] García, *Desert Immigrants,*134; Manuel Bernardo Ramírez, "El Pasoans: Life and Society in Mexican El Paso" (PhD diss., University of Mississippi, 2000), 75.

became known, had about 500 residents who lived in adobe homes. Residents built a chapel, *Nuestra Señora de la Luz* (Our Lady of the Light), and even a baseball diamond for the kids to pass the time.[49] The residents paid rent to D. Storms, a lawyer and the owner of the land. Stormsville is a notable community, as the group of squatters resided in north El Paso for almost three decades.

In 1925, the city commissioned the "City Plan of El Paso Texas" or the Kessler Report as it is more commonly known. The plan detailed the potential growth and future plans for the city over the twentieth century and argued that some neighborhoods threatened the prosperity of El Paso. Both South El Paso and Stormsville constituted "special problems" for the authors of the study.[50] As a result, Stormsville suddenly became endangered. In 1928, the city condemned the area based on sanitary reasons, forcing the population to relocate to South El Paso.

The demise of Stormsville came at a promising time for El Paso. The same year that the community was displaced to the Southside, Standard Oil of Texas arrived in the city and gave it an economic boost. As Standard Oil established a number of companies in El Paso including Nichol's Copper Refinery (now Phelps Dodge), one of them, Rim Road Company purchased the now empty Stormsville and transformed it into the "residential showplace of El Paso."[51] This ethnic Mexican pocket was demolished to make way for Rim Road, a neighborhood now known for its affluent residents.

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[49] Chris P. Fox, interview by Leon C. Metz and Ed Hamilton, January 1, 1972, interview no. 19.1, transcript, Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso, El Paso, TX; García, *Desert Immigrants*, 133.

[50] El Paso City Commission, *The City Plan of El Paso*, Texas, 1925, in American Planning Association Papers, Alexander Architectural Library, The University of Texas at Austin, 14.

[51] García, *Desert Immigrants*, 133.

According to Chris P. Fox, a former Sherriff and President of the El Paso Chamber of Commerce, "all those expensive houses up there [Rim Road], those beautiful well-designed homes, came in 1929 and part of 1930" with the demise of Stormsville.[52]As the homes of hundreds of ethnic Mexicans disappeared, so did the city's and the public's memory of the area.

Another pocket of ethnic Mexicans outside South El Paso was the company town in the Northwest fringes of the city created by the American Smelting and Refining Company (ASARCO) to accommodate working men and their families. Smeltertown, or *La Esmelda*, like much of South El Paso, was confined away from the rest of the city, and Mexican workers and their families lived in areas segregated from the Anglo managers and their families. *Esmeltianos*, the residents of the company town, however, did not threaten spatial order of American El Paso in the earlier part of the twentieth century.[53] In the 1940s, however, a series of articles by the *El Paso Herald-Post* brought Smeltertown into the spotlight. The newspaper emphasized the shame that the area brought to El Paso. Even though *Esmeltianos* mobilized and pressed city leaders to address their community's infrastructural needs, authorities planned for the construction of housing projects in the area. Twenty-five years later, the conditions of Smeltertown remained impoverished. The demise of the company town came as a result of a lawsuit by the State of Texas for the violation of the Air Safety Code, which gave the green light for the city

[52] Fox, interview.

[53] For more on ASARCO's company town see Monica Perales, *Smeltertown*.

to ultimately dismantle the community. Although *Esmeltianos* fought and resisted eviction, the community was razed in the 1970s.[54]

**Postwar Revitalization**

The construction of modern infrastructure in the postwar years continued to geographically confine Mexican Americans in the city. From the 1940s on, El Paso engaged in a campaign that targeted areas of Mexican descent through a variety of development projects. One of the first was the planning of a seven-mile highway that became the new northern boundary of the spreading Southside. Paisano Drive (formerly known as Second Street), became the dividing street between the downtown commercial district and the Mexican barrios of South El Paso. [55] Referred to as the "Tortilla Curtain," as the street marks a stark boundary between the Mexican side of town and the rest of the city, the new highway was one of many pretexts offered to clear out areas that business leaders believed compromised the modernization of El Paso. At the time, city authorities attempted to revitalize the downtown district to the "glory days" of the early twentieth century, and removing the Mexican population that spilled over the northern boundary of Second Avenue was a part of the process. Though city officials promoted building the highway to resolve the problems discovered by the Kessler Report decades earlier, such as over-crowding and congested traffic arteries, the construction of Paisano Drive reasserted Anglo control over the main commercial area of El Paso as it reestablished Mexican Americans' restriction of mobility.

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[54] Perales, *Smeltertown*, 225-259.

[55] Paisano is a Spanish word that refers to a person from the same country.

El Paso's Chamber of Commerce was one of the main driving forces in the construction of Paisano Drive. Concerned with the prosperity of the city and businesses in the growing metropolis, the Chamber of Commerce advocated bringing a major highway to where the city began. With the endorsement of the *El Paso Herald-Post,* one of the local newspapers, the organization promoted the highway as a positive project for the progress of the city, and as a necessity to make El Paso a modern American place.[56] Hoping to improve downtown transportation, alleviate traffic congestion, and bring people and tourists to the urban core, the Chamber of Commerce created a special subdivision group called the Chamber of Commerce Highway Committee. The committee adopted a campaign slogan that "What is good for El Paso, is good for all Businessmen in El Paso."[57] This group became a strong lobbying force in city hall as well as the for Texas Highway Department, pressuring local and state entities to choose the site of the highway, secure contracts, acquiring the right-of-way for the area, and purchasing the properties that were in the path of the project.[58]

Construction of Paisano Drive began in 1947 and the final phase of the project concluded in 1953. City leaders settled on the name "Paisano" as it reflected the city's history of immigration and friendliness. In a letter to Mayor Dan Ponder (1947-1949), Chris P. Fox, former Sherriff and Executive Vice President of the Chamber of Commerce, commended the city for choosing the name. "This is a name that should

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[56] Márquez, *Power and Politics*, 64.

[57] Clinton P. Hartman, *A Study of Paisano Drive in El Paso Texas*, (Unpublished seminar paper, Texas Western College, 1951), 8-9 in Marquez, *Power in Politics,* 64.

[58] Letter to Mayor Dan Ponder from D.C. Green, January 3, 1949, and Letter to Judge Victor Gilbert from P.S. Bailey, January 14, 1948; Chris P. Fox Manuscript Collection, C. L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso Library; Márquez, 65.

engender genuine friendliness, because when you stop to think about it "Paisanos" have been traveling that approximate route for many centuries."[59] Ironically, while the name of the newly constructed highway attempted to exemplify "friendliness," the selection of the site on the northern part of South El Paso provided an opportunity to reassert the boundary between the Mexican barrios and the city's American downtown district. Thus, Paisano Drive aided city leaders in continuing to whitewash the geography of El Paso.

In order to make way for Paisano Drive, hundreds of families in the area of South El Paso lost their homes. According to a study of problem areas in El Paso, "at the time Paisano was built it was necessary to condemn almost the entire length of the project."[60] City authorities displaced about 6,000 residents of the area and demolished thousands of properties, most of these considered substandard.[61] Soon after the demolition began, the city's Department of Planning realized that "the [budget] money would not be sufficient as property suddenly took on astounding values."[62] Even though city authorities believed choosing the present site of Paisano would be inexpensive, there was not enough money to compensate the displaced families or help them find other living accommodations in the city. Although Mayor Ponder promised to house the community in trailer camps or army barracks while families found a place to live, he took no action to help uprooted

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[59] Letter to Mayor Dan Ponder from Chris P. Fox, October 2, 1947, Chris P. Fox Manuscript Collection, C. L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso Library.

[60] Robert E. Alexander & Associates, Architects and Planning Consultants, *Selected Areas in El Paso with Problems of Special Planning Significance*, (December 1966), 32, Cleofas Calleros Manuscript Collection, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso Library.

[61] Department of Planning, City of El Paso, *A Short History of South El Paso,* (El Paso, TX, 1967) 32.

[62] Ibid.

residents. Rather than house Southsiders in the trailers, the city sold the temporary homes.[63]

The construction of Paisano Drive proved to be another means of geographically marginalizing the city's Mexican American population. A 1976 redevelopment study of South El Paso established that "the effect of this [Paisano Drive] on South El Paso has been to create a neighborhood with a distinct identity which is socially and physically isolated from the remainder of the city," Paisano became the "Tortilla Curtain," and established a barrier between greater El Paso and the hidden Mexican district "that threatened to spill into it."[64] The highway became a highly trafficked artery that brought more businesses and people into the core of the city. While many local residents and business leaders celebrated the "clean-up" that the construction of Paisano accomplished, the Mexican American population on the other hand, struggled to find affordable housing in the area.[65] The world behind the highway and the effects of the geographic segregation will be the subject of the following chapters.

Highway construction was not the only source of displacement. The Rio Grande continued moving its course between 1852 and 1968, with a major shift in 1864. That radical change of the Rio Grande caused areas of Ciudad Juárez to be physically relocated within U.S. territory as the river moved southwards. For much of the twentieth century, both the Mexican and the American governments attempted to resolve the

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[63] Department of Planning, City of El Paso, *A Short History of South El Paso,* 32.

[64] Better Communities Corporation, *Revitalization for the South El Paso Project Area*, (August 1976), 2, American Planning Association Papers, Alexander Architectural Library, The University of Texas at Austin; Marquez, *Power and Politics*, 66.

[65] Department of Planning, City of El Paso, *A Short History of South El Paso,* 32; Selfa Chew, Yolanda Leyva, Antonio R. López, John Paul Nuño, and Cynthia Renteria, *El Segundo Barrio: Una Historia Viviente.* (El Paso, TX: The University of Texas at El Paso Department of History, 2006), 60.

territorial dispute over the land known as the Chamizal which included a section of South El Paso, and Córdova Island, east of the Southside, which was under the jurisdiction of México. In 1911, an arbitration committee composed of representatives of the two countries and a third member from Canada attempted to settle the dispute. The commission based their decision on the Treaty of 1884, which stated that if the river changed gradually due to erosion, the boundary would move with the river; but if the course of the Rio Grande changed dramatically due to avulsion, the international border would not change. The Mexican and Canadian Members of the committee argued that the river drastically changed its course, and that the area in question belonged to México. The United States, however, disagreed. The 1911 arbitration ended giving jurisdiction of the tract in South El Paso to the United States, while Córdova Island remained in control of México. Over the next decades, governmental officials attempted to solve the dispute, but the conflict remained at a stalemate.[66]

The height of the Cold War pressed President John F. Kennedy to finally resolve the hundred-year-old dispute. On June 30, 1962, President Kennedy and the President of México, Adolfo López Mateos, announced that the two countries would resolve the dispute "without prejudice to their juridical positions [and that they would] take into account the entire history of the track."[67] After the announcement, the presidents named Ambassador to México Thomas Mann and the Mexican Minister of Foreign Relations, Manuel Tello in charge of the settlement. After months of studying a solution, a

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[66] El Paso Chamber of Commerce, "Presidents Meet Today," September 25, 1964, John Middagh Manuscript Collection, C. L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso Library. For more on the Chamizal Dispute see Sheldon B. Liss, *A Century of Disagreement: The Chamizal Conflict, 1864-1964*, (Baltimore: University Press of Washington, D. C., 1965).

[67] El Paso Chamber of Commerce, "Untitled Newsletter" ca. 1964, John Middagh Manuscript Collection, C. L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso Library.

"peaceful agreement" was settled. About 500 acres from the Chamizal Tract in South El Paso would be returned to México, while El Paso would receive the northern part of Córdova Island. To prevent further boundary conflicts, the two countries would take on a project to cement the bed of the Rio Grande and settle the restlessness of the river once and for all. In order for the plans to take place, the United States government would purchase areas of the tract under their jurisdiction and pay the owners adequately for their properties.[68]

While the two countries celebrated the resolution of the Chamizal dispute, the residents themselves met the diplomatic decision with mixed emotions. Some residents of the area accepted the treaty and decided to comply with the federal government, while others refused to abandon their homes and properties.[69] Others, however, mistrusted the amount the federal government would give the residents to buy their properties, feared loss of their citizenship, and believed the treaty was just an attempt at urban renewal. Mrs. Elvira Lacarra, one of the affected area's residents, believed that the money appraised for her property would not be enough to find a home elsewhere. The anxieties of the Mexican American community were fueled by a sudden reduction in their property taxes, which led them to believe taxes were lower to buy properties at a lower cost. Although Ambassador Thomas Mann promised the "little people" of South El Paso that their voices and concerns would be heard before the land was transferred to México,

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[68] The Chamizal Ceremony- September 25th, 1964 Folder 083-2009-004, and Land Transfers Between the US and Mexico Folder 083-2009-005, El Paso County Historical Society.

[69] Letters from Chamizal Residents to Ed Foreman, 1963, Cleofas Calleros Manuscript Collection, C. L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso Library.

those opposing the Chamizal Treaty had to concede the fight.[70] In the end, the over 700 tenement units and 500 single-family homes were demolished, displacing about 5,000 residents from the area. Homeowners were left to find housing along the southern corridor of the city where they could afford property, while renters moved into other parts of South El Paso.[71]

Although neighborhood organizations and individuals protested the resolution, their efforts were unsuccessful and their properties were demolished and given to the Mexican government. The business community, however, celebrated the decisions taken by both governments. For years, parts of Córdova Island had hampered "the natural growth of El Paso," as it prevented the eastward expansion of the city. The location of the island pushed toward the Franklin Mountains in the northern section of the area, which created a bottleneck between the downtown sector and the growing east side of the city.[72] Thus, the Chamizal Treaty provided an opportunity to redevelop the Southside, as México obtained most of the crumbling barrio. In an article, the *El Paso Times*, stated that with the Treaty "many slum dwellings [would] be removed, along with other sub-marginal structures," that would give the city "a beautiful front yard" if the resolution took place. The settlement of the Chamizal would "give El Paso its greatest face-lifting operation in history."[73] Even though the area of the Chamizal did not affect a boundary

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[70] "'Little People' Ask Fair Deal on Chamizal," *El Paso Herald Post*, February 21, 1963.

[71] Better Communities Corporation, *Revitalization for the South El Paso Project Area*, (August 1976), 2, American Planning Association Papers, Alexander Architectural Library, The University of Texas at Austin.

[72] Land Transfers Between the US and Mexico Folder 083-2009-005, El Paso County Historical Society.

[73] *El Paso Times*, September 25, 1964.

between the Mexican and the Anglo sections of the city, the resolution of the Treaty would finally give El Paso and its city leaders an opportunity to redevelop one of the worst sections of the city. As the Chamizal began to depopulate one of the densest Mexican neighborhoods in the city, this allowed an opportunity to begin aggressive redevelopment projects in the following years. These urbanization plans will be explored in detail in the second section of the dissertation.

From 1940 to 1980, El Paso's population expanded from just below 100,000 to over 400,000.[74] This growth necessitated access to land on the fringes of the city. The decade of the 1950s brought the largest territorial expansion. El Paso incorporated over eighty square miles of land through several "gigantic annexations"—Ascarate roughly six miles east of South El Paso (1952); a section of Northeast El Paso, the Upper Valley, and Ysleta (all in 1955).[75] The Ascarate and Ysleta incorporations were met with opposition from the mostly Mexican American residents of the area, as they had refused to join the city of El Paso for years. After protests and even a lawsuit in the United States Supreme Court, the city incorporated roughly 40,000 people and forty-four square miles just in the lower valley alone.[76] The annexation of the new land brought new hopes and fears for city leaders. As El Paso gained its present form, Mexican Americans who attained middle class status were now moving into neighborhoods previously uninhabited by the group.

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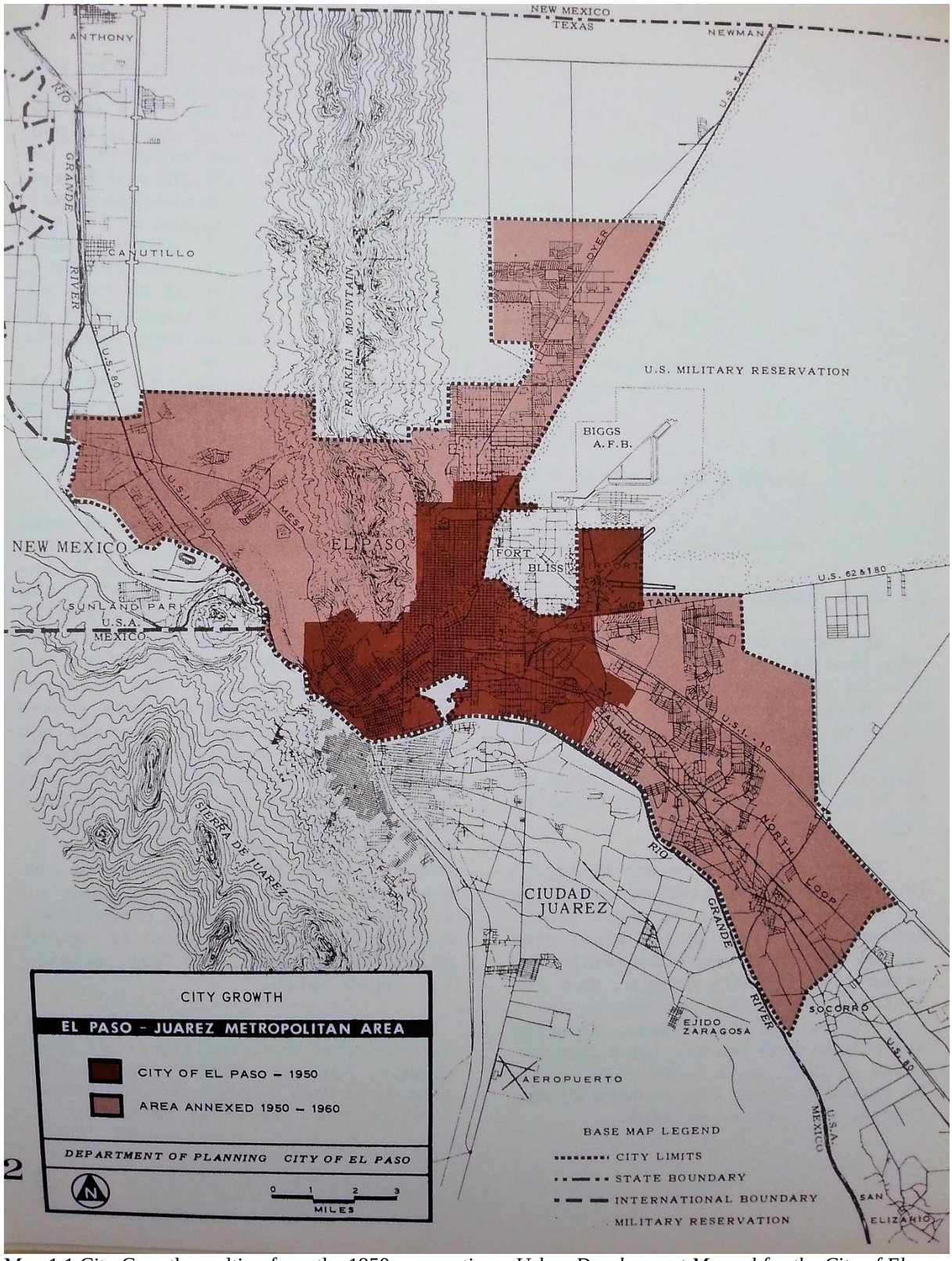
[74] Martínez, *The Chicanos of El Paso,* 6.

[75] El Paso Mutual Savings Association, *Then & Now*, n.d., 12, in Chris P. Fox Manuscript Collection, C. L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso Library.

[76] Ibid, 13; Chacón, interview; Timmons, *El Paso,* 250.




Map 1.1 City Growth resulting from the 1950s annexations. *Urban Development Manual for the City of El Paso: A Handbook for Community Planning*, May 1968. American Planning Association -- Texas Chapter: The History of Planning in Texas Project Records, Alexander Architectural Archives, University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.

When Mexican Americans permanently settled and moved outside South El Paso, it initiated new fears of contact between Anglos and Mexican Americans. Often referred to as "El Paso's special problems," city authorities understood the need to keep ethnic Mexicans away from Anglo neighborhoods. According to a study by the Department of Planning and Development, the city "[had] to check the movement of Mexican families to the northside—this movement [was] jeopardizing large areas which should be protected and rehabilitated."[77] Similar to the worries expressed by the Department of Planning and Development, Mrs. Julia Breck, a candidate for Mayor in 1961, publicly voiced her concerns about Mexican Americans settling in Anglo neighborhoods. During her campaign she explained, "like a little boy in a home, who has his bugs, and rocks, and just plain dirt that make a mess anywhere in the house… these people [ethnic Mexicans] seem to clutter up any area where they settle."[78] Mrs. Breck, further expressed that the Mexican population:

> [were] not a second class people, just because they do not understand our sanitary way of life. They… have to be taught, gradually, to fit our pattern [but] they have a great deal to add to our cold, materialistic, white, straight-lined modern culture. Let's not try to fit the rolly-polly senority [sic] into the Norte Americana senora's [sic] girdle![79]

As the boundaries of El Paso expanded during the second half of the twentieth century, the white power structure struggled to maintain the social and public spheres

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[77] City of El Paso, *Working Notes for a History of South El Paso*, (El Paso, TX: Department of Planning and Development, nd), 7.

[78] Mark and Gertrude Adams, *A Report on Politics in El Paso,* (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard University, 1963), 17.

[79] Ibid.

segregated, relegating ethnic Mexicans to Southern neighborhoods while crafting new physical boundaries that divided the city. Even with the expansion of the city into Ysleta, much of the urban Mexican American population remained living in the Southern portion of the city. As El Paso developed into the 1960s and 1970s, Mexican areas extended south of the newly constructed Interstate 10, which became a new rigid class and race division in the city. Spatial divisions between Anglos and Mexican Americans were constantly constructed, enforced, and reinforced. The restriction of mobility within the city was evident, as Mexican Americans, especially those who were poor, continued to be rigidly segregated within the Southern neighborhoods of the city. As the mechanisms of the Anglo leadership maintained the geographic boundaries between the two worlds, the Mexican American population was physically erased from the modern American El Paso.

**El Paso: The International City**

El Paso owed its existence to its location on the U.S.-México border. The accessibility of cheap labor and raw materials from México, and its centrality to American and Latin American markets made the city a significant industrial, commercial, and transportation hub. El Paso's political, economic, and spatial development would also position the city as an important tourist destination. Through tourism, El Paso leaders endeavored to cultivate its identity as an international gateway—one that played on its location along the border, but also one that erased its Mexican past and population by focusing on the Mexican population beyond the border.

An initial undertaking for El Paso leaders was diminishing the city's "sleepy adobe village" image from the turn of the century. Early on, city boosters engaged in a

strong campaign to sell El Paso and its promising future. Through a number of booklets and pamphlets circulated by the El Paso Bureau of Information and the Chamber of Commerce, El Paso authorities pinpointed several reasons why people from all over the country should settle in El Paso—climate, transportation, agriculture, manufacturing, as well as its commercial advantages. In a booklet published by the Chamber of Commerce in 1910, the authors established that "El Paso offer[ed] the chance to invest your money or your brains, or the strength of your hands to the best advantage, and to live under conditions most favorable for your health and happiness."[80] As the twentieth century progressed, leaders strived to sell El Paso as a cosmopolitan place through similar publications. In the 1910s and 1920s, a series of publications from the Chamber of Commerce proudly showcased the city's "wonderful growth, her stability, and her secure dominance forever in an area equal to all the United States east of the Mississippi River, are given."[81] Through photographs, maps, and brief histories, the Chamber of Commerce advertised El Paso as a town that fit perfectly into the American way of life. While the city's leadership depicted the greatness of El Paso, the books overlooked the Mexican population. With the exception of the "traditional" Mexicans living across the border, El Paso successfully promoted itself as an Anglo town along the border, a paradise where "wise people [came] to El Paso to stay."[82] City leaders and boosters and their mobilizations to attract industries and capital into the region converted El Paso into an

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[80] El Paso Chamber of Commerce, *El Paso: The Story of a City*, (El Paso, TX: El Paso Printing Company, 1910), 45, University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth213964/, accessed March 21, 2016.

[81] El Paso Chamber of Commerce, *El Paso, What is it and Why?*, (El Paso TX: 1917), 1; *Greater El Paso: The Power House of the Southwest.*

[82] El Paso Chamber of Commerce, *El Paso, What is it and Why?*, 37.

important urban oasis in the American Southwest that attracted large numbers of tourists and permanent residents.[83]

While the Chamber of Commerce's publications erased the Mexican laboring force that sustained the economy of the city, Anglo leaders understood that the proximity to México offered an incentive to bring tourism to the area. Since the early 1900s, El Paso was invented as the "gateway to Old México," a stereotype that continued well into the latter half of the century.[84] As a result, city leaders exoticized Ciudad Juárez as a place for American citizens to step into another world without traveling too far. According to a pamphlet from the Chamber of Commerce, tourists would "want to visit this interesting 'foreign land.' Here the visitor encounters a unique blend of ancient and modern."[85] El Paso leaders exploited its twin city's "ancient" image through publications. People in Mexican traditional attire, *sombreros*, mariachis, *señoritas*, donkeys, bullfighting, and even the stereotypical "sleeping Mexican," filled a number of tourist advertisements enticing Americans to visit Ciudad Juárez.[86] Anglo leaders contrasted the exotic "old" and "traditional" México against El Paso as an American city, a modern metropolis on the border.[87]

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[83] Perales, *Smeltertown*, 52-56.

[84] For early border tourism efforts see Perales, *Smeltertown*, 52-56, and García, *Desert Immigrants*, 28-29.

[85] El Paso Sunland Club, "El Paso: Sunshine Playground of the Border," (n.d.), El Paso Public Library Vertical Files.

[86] Ibid.; El Paso Sunland Club, "Now that you're here see and know El Paso," (n.d), El Paso Public Library Vertical Files; "Juarez: Old Mexico, (n.d.), Raul Vasquez Manuscript Collection, Box 15, Folder 5, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Library, University of Texas at Austin.

[87] Perales, *Smeltertown*, 53.

While Ciudad Juárez became profitable for El Paso's tourist industry, the 1960s brought a new energy to the city to strengthen the image of the region. Encouraged by Frank Hildebrand, the executive director of the Texas Tourist Development Agency, the local business community began to capitalize on the city's history to attract visitors. According to Hildebrand, "the El Paso area, mark[ed] the spot where the first white man set foot on what is now the continental United States. It is rich in history and rich in attractions and [was] highly presentable to tourists."[88] Believing that the city failed to exploit El Paso's heritage, the Chamber of Commerce began to strategize how to sell the history of the region. Leaders decided to profit off the region's Spanish past by advertising the area's mission trail, the Pueblo Indian Reservation in Ysleta, and El Paso's "wild west" past.

As the history of the city became a viable outlet for the region's tourist ventures, the representations of El Paso became further whitewashed. Narratives in tourism materials included the histories of the first Spanish settlements in the area, the Tigua Indians' escape after the Pueblo Revolt, the arrival of the first Anglo settlements in the region after the Texas Independence, the U.S. Civil War, and the stories of Billy the Kid and other gunmen who roamed the "dusty streets" of El Paso.[89] Even though these figures and events were important parts of the narratives of the area, Mexican Americans or the history of ethnic Mexicans in El Paso were nowhere to be found. Regardless of omitting its largest ethnic group from the representations of the city, authorities believed that El

[88] "Capitalize on History, Tourist Chief Urges," *El Paso Herald-Post*, June 25, 1965.

[89] "El Paso: A City Founded by Dreams & Adventure" (n.d.), Raul Vasquez Manuscript Collection, Box 15, Folder 5, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Library, University of Texas at Austin.

Paso's heritage was easy to sell to tourists not only from the Southwest and the United States, but also from all over the globe.[90]

Even though capitalizing on El Paso's important history in the Southwest was a priority, leaders found it crucial to bolster the area as a modern American city. "Throughout her history, El Paso has had to battle the reputation of being a sleepy border town. No reputation has been more unjustly applied, for El Paso has never been a sleepy town."[91] This characterization mobilized local authorities to dismantle this image. Leaders explained that El Paso "has worked its way from a cowtown past into a massive Southwest commerce and banking center."[92] In order to convey this idea, leaders with the help of the local Chamber of Commerce, endeavored to erase the region's stereotype as a "small quiet village." Tying together the deep history and the city's current state publications reassured travelers that El Paso's proximity to México had no effect on the city's image as metropolitan and modern. An article in a travel magazine stated that "visitors to El Paso are sometimes surprised to learn that a city so modern has roots so deep in the past."[93] Furthermore, leaders continued to exemplify this perception by writing that in El Paso "contrasts are beautiful: Modern office buildings reach high into the clear Southwestern air, and centuries-old mission bells still call the faithful."[94]

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[90] "E.P. Easy City to Sell Tourists, CC Told," *El Paso Herald-Post,* February 13, 1966; "Tourist Industry Boom Predicted at Southwest Sun Country Meeting," *El Paso Times,* April 24, 1965.

[91] El Paso Convention and Visitors Bureau, "there's a surprise awaiting you in El Paso," *El Paso Tourist & Convention Guide*, (El Paso, Texas, 1977-78), 2, El Paso Public Library, Vertical Files.

[92] "El Paso Texas: Package Tours and Tourist Information," (ca. 1975-1977), El Paso Public Library Vertical Files.

[93] "Spanish Missions and an Indian Market," *TravelHost*, April 2, 1978, 7.

[94] "Discover the Contrasts Of El Paso," *TravelHost*, April 2, 1978, 11.

Although leaders connected to the area's Spanish heritage and Wild West past, the processes of how El Paso became modern and American—erasure of its Mexican influences, mass immigration, industrialization, and exploitation of ethnic Mexicans—were left out of the city narrative.

Amidst the whitewashing, city leaders believed that El Paso's position along the U.S.-México border could not be ignored. *TravelHost,* a tourist magazine, reported in a story that "though El Paso's history is deeply rooted in the legends of the American West, the city's heart has pounded the rhythm of a Latin hearbeat [sic] for over 400 years."[95] In order to strengthen its tourism industry, the city would utilize its biggest weapon—its position on the border and its twin city, Juárez. This time, however, Juárez would not be solely portrayed as a stepping stone to Old México, but rather as an intricate part of El Paso. According to a city board of development officer, Mike Martinez, "Juarez [was] one of the most important drawing cards for tourists and conventioneers coming to El Paso if not the most important. You cannot ignore the fact that El Paso and Juarez are one community… unlike anything else in the western hemisphere."[96] The relationship between the two cities allowed local authorities from both sides of the border to capitalize on the uniqueness and bi-nationality of the area.

In an effort to integrate the economies of the two cities in the 1960s and 1970s, El Paso and Juárez found it beneficial to tie their respective tourist industries. Business and city leaders created a promotional campaign called "The International City," where, figuratively, the dividing line between the two cities became erased. The International

[95] "Discover the Contrasts Of El Paso," *TravelHost,* April 2, 1978, 11.

[96] "Development Board To Use Juarez In EP Ad Campaign," *El Paso Times*, January 17, 1974.

City blended the heritages and cultures of both Juárez and El Paso to show the bonds and linkages between the two cities. In a Chamber of Commerce newsletter, the authors showcased that "in actuality, the ties are stronger than the barriers, and the two cities have become—through centuries of sharing commerce, culture, beliefs, and aspirations—one community with well over 600,000 residents."[97] Furthermore, this binational region then became a melting pot "where Texas cowboy meets the Chihuahua charro."[98]

The International City became a way to promote the largest communities along the U.S.-México border by showcasing the interdependence and diplomacy between the two cities. The Office of Information of the local Chamber of Commerce stated in a newsletter that "most of the residents of these two largest cities on the border have come to feel that they are actually citizens of both cities, or to be more exact, citizens of a community which encompasses two cities in two nations."[99] Leaders on both sides of the border arduously worked to promote Juárez and El Paso as sister cities. Another publication stated that "variety here [in the borderlands] is as dramatic as the meeting of two ways of life: English and Spanish in language, American and Mexican in culture. The blending of the two is a living example of the cooperation and friendliness between two countries."[100] Through advertisements and newsletters, city leaders successfully

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[97] The International City Information Office, Newsletter, March 2, 1964, John Middagh Manuscript Collection, C. L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso Library.

[98] "From Spectacular Desert to Mountains," *El Paso Times*, December 31, 1969.

[99] The International City Information Office, Newsletter, March 2, 1964, John Middagh Manuscript Collection, C. L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso Library.

[100] El Paso Convention and Visitors Bureau, "El Paso Sights and Highlights," n.d., Raul Vasquez papers, Raul Vasquez Manuscript Collection, Box 15, Folder 5, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Library, University of Texas at Austin.

promoted the binational area as one that was not divided by a boundary, exemplifying the constant movement of people, capital, and culture that made the International City exceptional. This image promoted a sense of acceptance and coexistence between the Mexican and American populations.

Although leaders advertised the "cooperation" and "friendliness" between the two border cities, the boundaries between El Paso and Juárez remained highly demarcated. One Chamber of Commerce newsletter, explained that "as cities in distinctly separate nations, El Paso and Juarez preserve their particular characteristics and cultures. This has made the contacts between the people of these two cities richer. For residents of each city have more to give. Particular characteristics are shared without being diluted."[101] Even though there was a perceived harmony between the two cities, tourist materials continued to promote El Paso as a modern metropolis and Ciudad Juárez as its simple southern neighbor. Patronizing images of Mexicans across the border continued as visitor guides and materials publicized Juárez in stereotypical manner. A *TravelHost* magazine stated that the International City was "a city where cowboys in Tony Lama boots, bankers in pinstripe suits, and Mexicans in serapes all mingle."[102] This condescending image of México mirrored the disregard for the Mexican American population in El Paso, a group that was noticeably absent in promotional publications.

The construction of El Paso's urban identity throughout the twentieth century became another tool to assert Anglo superiority and erase the Mexican American majority in the city. Through tourist promotional materials and campaigns, El Paso

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[101] The International City Information Office, "The International City," ca. 1963, John Middagh Papers, C. L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso Library.

[102] "El Paso Celebrates 400th Anniversary," *TravelHost*, March 8, 1981, J-10.

created its identity as an International City and a melting pot of cultures, while in reality the city promoted its American core. El Paso's position along the U.S.-México border allowed city leaders to build a contradictory image of a modern American city with an international flavor by distinguishing itself from the Mexicans across the Rio Grande, and obscuring those who lived within the city's own boundaries and whose very labor contributed to the city's functioning. This rhetoric aided the notion that Mexican Americans, especially those residing in the Southside neighborhoods of the city, did not belong in this carefully crafted American metropolis.

**The All-America City of Contradictions**

The efforts to transform El Paso into a modern American city paid off in the spring of 1970, when the National Municipal League awarded the city its coveted "All-America City" award. The Municipal League, along with *Look Magazine* "granted recognition to communities where intelligent citizen action is completing projects of major benefit" to its residents.[103] After considering over 90 applications, El Paso shared the honor of being one of eleven All-America Cities in 1969, including Kalamazoo, Michigan; Eugene, Oregon; and Springfield, Illinois. In early March, local leaders held an award banquet in El Paso hosted by the Chamber of Commerce and the West Texas Chamber of Commerce. Special guests included the League of Women Voters, U.S. Representative Richard White, and a number of officials from nearby Mexican cities.[104]

This initiative began with the League of Women Voters, a group of local

[103] "1969 All-America" Cities Named," *National Civic Review*, March 1970, 121.

[104] Ibid.; "Winning Cities Get Awards," *National Civic Review*, June 1970, 293.

prominent Anglo women, who first undertook the process in August of 1969. After reading the guidelines for the coveted honor, the organization highly favored applying for the award. According to Mrs. J. Max Quenon, the president of the League, one of the main reasons the organization embarked on the application process was because members believed the award would bring a great opportunity for El Paso. Mrs. Quenon told the *El Paso Herald-Post* that "the All America City award is a coveted honor. Other winning cities have found that it gives a new dimension to their community. A reputation of good citizenship provides impetus for the field of new business, industry, financing, and a challenge to the community to do even better."[105] If the city received the award, El Paso would be presented in a positive light in hopes of potentially bringing businesses and economic development to the bustling metropolis.

The application process got underway fairly quickly. The group considered ten projects that exemplified the city's community involvement for the application. In the end, the organization voted for the Mayor's Youth Opportunity Program, which served as a bridge between the young people of El Paso and City Council, and St. Joseph's Hospital, a master planned hospital to treat the mentally ill as well as substance abuse patients. According to the organization, the members believed that these two projects exemplified El Paso's character, and also believed that the two had the most positive results in the city. When describing the city's socioeconomic character and location, the League of Women Voters confidently defined El Paso as being the "largest U.S. city on the Mexican border, [a] regional trade center with [its] economy centered around cotton, cattle, climate, copper and clothing. A[nd a] major military complex within the city

[105] "Here's How, Why El Paso Won All America Award," *El Paso Herald-Post,* March 3, 1970.

limits."[106] In November of 1969, Mayor Peter de Wetter (1969-1971) and Mrs. John Tullis, the League of Women Voters All-American City application chairwoman, traveled to Philadelphia where they presented the projects that they believed made El Paso an All-America City. The city won the award in February 1970.[107]

City and business leaders welcomed the distinction with open arms. In the days following the award ceremony, the local newspapers reported the great accomplishment to the citizens of El Paso. Both the *El Paso Times* and the *El Paso Herald-Post* adorned their pages with a number of congratulating messages and ads from local businesses and even from leaders from Ciudad Juárez. The ads highlighted the true American character of the city, even though it was located on the U.S.-México border. A full-page advertisement in the *El Paso Times* read: "We're El Paso's people. 350,000 All-Americans working to make El Paso the exciting city it is. We've taken a rough desert and infused it with life, with business, with our dreams. And we've done it with two languages and two cultures. El Paso, the 'All-America City,' is truly all-American, as mom's apple pie. As American as mama's burritos."[108] The All-American celebrations within the city, however, forced the community to look into a major problem in El Paso: its Mexican American Southside neighborhoods and the threats represented to the coveted status.

The National Municipal League and *Look* Magazine established that the reason El Paso won the coveted award was not necessarily the two projects submitted in the

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[106] "Here's How, Why El Paso Won All America Award," *El Paso Herald-Post,* March 3, 1970.

[107] Ibid; "22 Reach All-America Finals," *National Civic Review*, November 1969, 453-454.

[108] "We're 350,000 All-Americans" ad, *El Paso Times,* March 4, 1970.

application, but rather the efforts of the less visible Mexican American community in South El Paso. When the All-America City winners were announced, the co-sponsors reported that one of the city's greatest accomplishments was the "awakening from its long-time apathy toward the living conditions of impoverished Mexican Americans. South-side ghetto problems are being aired in Washington as well, to press the search for needed federal funds."[109] To make matters worse for those pursuing All-America City recognition, *Look* Magazine's article on El Paso focused mostly on the concerns of South El Paso. In addition, four out of the six photographs highlighting the city were of the Southside. *Look* reported that "here [South El Paso], 25,000 Spanish-Speaking U.S. citizens and resident aliens subsist in almost feudal conditions, an average of four families sharing one outdoor toilet."[110]

This was not the first time the conditions of South El Paso had been exposed to a national audience. El Paso's Mexican barrios became the center of the national media on several occasions in the postwar years. Renowned journalist Carey McWilliams wrote in a July 1948 article in the *Nation* about the deplorable conditions of South El Paso neighborhoods. McWilliams, although sensitive to the ethnic Mexican population, did not sugar coat the realities of Southern neighborhoods. During a five day visit, McWilliams observed the poor conditions Mexican Americans lived in, discrepancies in the politics of the city, and the lack of opportunities for social mobility for the minority group.[111] Two years later, George Sessions Perry, a magazine contributor to the *Saturday Evening Post*,

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[109] "1969 All-America" Cities Named," *National Civic Review*, March 1970, 122.

[110] "Problems Of South El Paso Rate As Big Challenge To Whole City," *El Paso Times*, March 4, 1970.

[111] Carey McWilliams, "The El Paso Story," *Nation*, July 1948, 46.

wrote a series of articles entitled "Cities of America," where he featured the bleak conditions and lack of amenities in the Southside barrios, and the menaces these presented for the city of El Paso. Perry reported that authorities were taking measures in eradicating the substandard Southside. In the article, Perry wrote that "the city has already obliterated a noticeable amount of its slum area. This was done by routing Paisano Drive straight through the heart of the slums."[112] Even though McWilliams and Perry brought negative attention to the city, it was not until the awarding of the All-America City title that El Paso's authorities truly mobilized. The fact that the All-America City award could mean much for the business and economic development of the city spurred the de Wetter administration to look into the concerns of South El Paso.

The publicity of the Southside conditions sent a jolt of panic to the city administration, as leaders refused to give El Paso a bad reputation. Following the All-America City award announcement, Mayor de Wetter along with bankers, lawyers, businessmen, and city leaders visited the crumbling South El Paso neighborhoods. Both the *El Paso Times* and the *El Paso Herald-Post* saw the visit as an opportunity to show city residents that the current administration cared about the substandard neighborhoods, as well as to demonstrate the leaders' "willingness" to improve Southside conditions. The *Herald-Post* reported that "citizen involvement is shown by the number of El Paso businessmen who answered Mayor Pete de Wetter's call for a first-hand look see at deplorable tenement conditions in South El Paso."[113] While the local newspapers made an effort to present Mayor de Wetter as an ally of Southside residents, no recent

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[112] George Sessions Perry, "The Cities of America: El Paso," *Saturday Evening Post*, February 4, 1950, 58.

[113] "Needed: 5000 Housing Units Each Year," *El Paso Herald-Post*, March 3, 1970.

administration had listened to the Mexican American plight. Mayor de Wetter ultimately prioritized bringing federal funds to fix the conditions of South El Paso following the mobilization of Southsiders in response to a tenement fire that killed three children in 1967. This tragedy and the emerging movement for better housing and neighborhood preservation will be the subject of Chapter 3.

**In Response to the City's Urban Identity**

On September 16, 1976, renowned poet José Armas read a poem entitled "Yes Sir, El Paso Looks Like A Very Patriotic City" before an audience at the *Sol y Sangre* Chicano Poetry Series in Albuquerque, New Mexico. As Armas read the title of his short piece, the crowd immediately erupted in laughter. In a sarcastic manner, the poem highlighted the ways in which El Paso was a patriotic and American city—countless flags on buildings, commercials with Uncle Sam, and the city's constant reminders that it had achieved the coveted All-America City Award.[114] The mockery and the laughter during the poetry reading debunked the image that El Paso leaders endeavored to create since the incorporation of the city.

For much of the twentieth century, El Paso's leaders created an urban identity that erased the majority of its population. The local ethnic Mexican population navigated a number of mechanisms established by the Anglo power structure. In politics, neighborhoods, and even in the city's tourist identity, Mexican Americans did not have a voice. The lack of socioeconomic and political power limited the community's choices of

[114] José Armas, "Yes Sir, El Paso is a Very Patriotic City," Sol y Sangre: Chicano Poetry Series, September 16, 1976, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM. James B. Wright Collection of Southwestern Native American and Hispanic Music, Interviews and Literary Programs, Box 2, CD 39, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

education, labor, and housing, as Anglos controlled the social, cultural, and economic life of El Paso.

According to population data gathered by the federal census, the total population of El Paso in 1970 was 322,261 people. Ethnic Mexicans comprised 58.12 percent of the population, and more than half lived in the Southern areas and the Lower Valley of El Paso.[115] In the Southside, the de facto segregation experienced by Mexican Americans caused children from the area to attend schools that were one hundred percent Mexican, and inferior compared to those in the more affluent areas of El Paso. An average of about fifteen to twenty percent of South El Paso's population had not completed any schooling. The average number of school years completed in the area were between seven to nine, and only one to five percent of the residents in the southern neighborhoods graduated from college.[116] The ethnic Mexican population did not have many educational opportunities, which reflected the poverty of the area.

Without a proper education, the Mexican population was limited to agricultural, garment, janitorial, industrial, and domestic jobs. Most residents of South El Paso found themselves tied to low-end jobs, obtaining meager wages that could barely support their families. Because most of the jobs in the city were seasonal or transitional, the unemployment rates among the population of Mexican origin were higher than any other group in the city. According to reports from the 1960 census, over fifty percent of males

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[115] U.S. Bureau of the Census *Nineteenth Census of the United States*, 1970, Table 20, "Population of the 100 Largest Urban Places: 1970, (Washington, D.C.); Population data gathered by the City of El Paso, 1972.

[116] Maps showing El Paso's Percentages of College Graduates and School Years Completed, *Alvarado v. El Paso Independent School District*, Albert Armendariz Manuscript Collection, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections, University of Texas at El Paso Library.

in the area were unemployed.[117] Forced to drop out of school, teenagers joined the workforce in hopes of bettering the financial situation of their families. Between the 1960s and 1970s, the average income for residents in South El Paso neighborhoods was $2,978 a year, while the average income of the city as a whole was $5,417.[118] The harsh working conditions and the inadequate wages ethnic Mexicans made in El Paso further marginalized the group, and reinforced isolation from the rest of the city.

The low wages allowed Mexican Americans to afford the cheap housing in the Southern neighborhoods. Residents of South El Paso argued that the "incomes [were] too low to pay for decent privately-owned housing," forcing them to live in substandard tenements that lacked proper plumbing, lighting, space, and ventilation.[119] To put the issues of El Paso's housing in perspective, President Richard Nixon's Urban Advisor, Patrick Moynihan, told the *El Paso Times* that "housing in the Southside rank[ed] with the worst in the nation" when he visited the city in 1970.[120] Though city and national studies identified critical economic problems in the impoverished Mexican barrios, city officials ignored this research, and failed to utilize government money to improve the living conditions of the largest ethnic group in El Paso.

The rigid separation between the Mexican and American worlds in the city, however, did not prevent Mexican Americans from carving their own spaces within the modern American city. South El Paso became a space that, although impoverished,

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[117] Mark and Gertrude Adams, *A Report on Politics in El Paso,* 15-16.

[118] Los Atrevidos, *South El Paso; El Segundo Barrio,* (Boulder, Co: University of Colorado Press, 1971), 15.

[119] Ibid, 3, 15.

[120] "Problems of South El Paso Rate As a Big Challenge to the Whole City," *El Paso Times,* March 4, 1970.

allowed Mexican Americans to establish roots and feel like they belonged in a city where they were largely ignored. After a century's worth of discrimination and exclusion, the geographic confinement and marginalization motivated the community of South El Paso to fight for equality during and in the aftermath of the Chicana/o Movement. Activists and residents contested the destruction of their communities and the displacement of thousands of families, and brought the inequalities of the ethnic Mexican population to the attention of the city.

Winning the All-America City Award exemplified the border city's commitment to its citizens. However, the honor also exposed the exclusion, marginalization, and also the emergence of Mexican American mobilization as threats to El Paso's established racial, political, and spatial hierarchy. As El Paso entered the decade of the 1970s, the city would have to address the growing voice of Mexican Americans, especially as the community became visible through efforts for better housing and community preservation. As the *El Paso Herald-Post* stated, the conditions of South El Paso would be "the challenge for El Paso in the future as it carrie[d] its All America status high."[121]

[121] "Mayor Studies Challenge For City Under New Status," *El Paso Herald-Post*, March 3, 1970.

## Chapter Two

## Behind and Beyond the "Tortilla Curtain:" Community Building and the Power of Place in El Paso's Southside Barrios

"Yes, it is an atmosphere of poverty, but it is gilded
with 18-Karat hope and courage.
*El Paso Times* October 2, 1979[1]

In October 1968, a group of students from the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) took a tour of the city's Southside slums as a requirement for a "Sociology of Poverty" course. Although UTEP is located less than three miles from South El Paso, this was the first time some of the students had ever set foot in the area. Upon their arrival, the students met with Zeke Saidman and Fred Ficken, two Volunteers In Service To America (VISTA) workers, and proceeded to take a tour of the barrio. During the visit, the students observed an environment completely different from the rest of the city—dilapidated tenements, units with no running water, and outdoor privies shared by up to twenty-five families. Many were surprised by the dire poverty and deplorable conditions they witnessed. Olivia Graham, one of the students, shared with the university's newspaper that touring the Southside "[made] you grateful for what you have." Teresa Di Rosa also commented that the barrio conditions were "pathetic" and that she "[couldn't] believe people live like this."[2] The students in Dr. Paul Goodman's sociology course had a first look at poverty, realizing that "the rags-to-riches stories and all the ringing platitudes of the 'get out and work, lift yourself up by your bootstraps—that's the American way,' just don't seem to work in places like south El Paso."[3]

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[1] "Gifts offered to alleviate misery of Chihuahuita," *El Paso Times,* October 2, 1979.

[2] "Students Find EP Slum Conditions Deplorable," *The Prospector,* November 26, 1968.

[3] "South El Pasoans Fight For Better Conditions," *The Prospector,* December 10, 1968.

The reactions of the UTEP sociology class were not unique. In fact, many residents of El Paso and even politicians lived completely unaware of the Southsiders' substandard living conditions. As seen in the previous chapter, city leaders knowledgeable about the conditions in areas like El Segundo Barrio and Chihuahuita capitalized on the substandard and unsanitary conditions and the high crime rates of the neighborhoods to further plan the redevelopment of the Southside. Yet, these efforts never took into consideration the sense of belonging felt among the communities of El Segundo Barrio and Chihuahuita. For South El Pasoans, the Mexican neighborhoods represented more than just poverty—their barrios were also symbols of roots, ownership, and hope. Although most Southsiders rented, their longtime tenancy in the area translated into an emotional ownership of South El Paso. Barrio residents carved their own alternate city within the social, political, and economic "geographic prison" of El Paso. Although segregated and marginalized, people of ethnic Mexican descent created important kinship and familial networks, built and tailored important neighborhood institutions to fit their needs, and found shelter and ownership in geographic spaces of the barrios. The emotional attachment to the spaces and institutions within the Southside gave its residents a sense of empowerment in a city that ignored their presence. Community belonging also gave Southsiders a desire to protect their place within the city, as residents believed that the barrio had the right to exist. Urban historian Dolores Hayden argues in *The Power of Place* that "people make attachments to places that are critical to their well-being or distress."[4] Throughout the decades, Southsiders identified with the segregated spaces of

[4] Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place Urban Landscapes as Public History*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 16. For more on theories on spatial attachment see Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977); Setha Low, *On the Plaza: The Politics of Public Space and Culture*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000); Richard White and

the barrio; the space became "critical" to their lives. This emotional connection to South El Paso thus propelled a strong feeling of unity and claims of community ownership that motivated preservation efforts by neighborhood organizations in the 1970s.

For much of the twentieth century, city redevelopment proposals threatened the existence of South El Paso. Instead of addressing concerns about adequate housing, dilapidated tenements, and providing better housing, city leaders focused on creating a commercial zone through plans such as Project REHAB and the Urban Development and Action Grant, UDAG. Still thousands of ethnic Mexicans navigated the de facto segregated Southside. Many stayed within the boundaries of the barrio for most of their lives. In *Chicanos in a Changing Society*, historian Albert Camarillo argues that since the nineteenth century, ethnic Mexicans became "foreigners in their own cit[ies]" experiencing the social, economic and politically marginalized world the Anglo capitalist system created throughout the Southwest. Amidst these dominating forces, Mexican American communities underwent what Camarillo calls *barrioization*—the process by which ethnic Mexicans became segregated but also created social and cultural spaces within urban enclaves where adaptation and retention of their cultural values became a possibility.[5]

This chapter outlines the geography and history of the barrios of Chihuahuita and El Segundo as they experienced the process of *barrioization* in the middle to late twentieth century. It depicts the places and sites that shaped the lives, identities, and

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John M. Findley, *Power and Place in the North American West*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999).

[5] Albert Camarillo, *Chicanos in a Changing Society: From Mexican Pueblos to American Barrios in Santa Barbara and Southern California, 1848-1930,* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 76.

memories of the ethnic Mexican population in the area. Following the works of historians George J. Sánchez, Dolores Hayden, Monica Perales, José Alamillo, Dionicio Nodín Valdés, and Lydia Otero, the chapter examines the ways in which Southsiders formulated identity and memory within the confines of their communities.[6] Although Mexican Americans had restricted spatial mobility throughout El Paso, segregation influenced the creation of a "city within a city," where residents of Mexican barrios created networks and sites for survival, which in turn socioeconomically and politically uplifted their communities. It is crucial to understand South El Pasoans' attachment to place to recognize the reasons why ethnic Mexicans fought to protect their barrios from redevelopment encroachment as well as why Southsiders refused to abandon their neighborhoods in the 1970s.

## A Brief History and Geography of South El Paso

A brief history and description of the geography of South El Paso's barrios is important to understand the spatial attachment by Southsiders as well as how the postwar period forced South El Pasoans to create their own barrio institutions to make up for the lack of social and public services.[7] The roughly one square mile area is immediately

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[6] See George Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Monica Perales, *Smeltertown: Making and Remembering of a Southwest Border Community*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Jose Alamillo, *Making Lemonade Out of Lemons: Mexican American Labor and Leisure in a California Town*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006); Dionicio Nodín Váldes, *Barrios Norteños: St. Paul and Midwestern Mexican Communities in the Twentieth Century,* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000); Lydia R. Otero *La Calle: Spatial Conflicts and Urban Renewal in a Southwest City,* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010).

[7] For more on the history of South El Paso from the 1880-1940 see Mario T. García, *Desert Immigrants: The Mexicans of El Paso1880-1920*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981), David Dorado Romo, *Ringside Seat to a Revolution: An Underground Cultural History of El Paso and Juárez, 1893-1920*, (El Paso, TX: Cinco Puntos Press, 2005); Manuel Bernardo Ramírez, "El Pasoans: Life and Society in Mexican El Paso, 1920-1945" (PhD diss., University of Mississippi, 2000).

south of Downtown and bounded by Paisano Drive to the north, the Rio Grande to the south, the Santa Fe Railroad yards on the west, and Cotton Street to the east. The area is split into three U.S. Census tracts: 18, 19, and 20.

The origins of South El Paso as a settlement date back to 1818, when the Spanish government gave Ricardo Brusuelas a land grant in present day Chihuahuita to develop a prosperous ranch.[8] For much of the nineteenth century, South El Paso was an agricultural area due to its proximity to the river. At the time that the Rio Grande was established as the boundary between the United States and México as a result of the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the majority of the ethnic Mexican population resided in present day Ciudad Juárez, and east of El Paso in the areas of Ysleta, Socorro, and San Elizario, which had been sites of Spanish missions since the seventeenth century.[9] When the Santa Fe Railroad arrived in 1881, it placed El Paso on the map, making the border city an important economic hub for commerce, industry, agriculture, and transportation in the Southwest. In the span of twenty years, the population of the area grew from 736 people in 1880 to 15,906 by 1900. South El Paso soon became a community that included a small percentage of Chinese, Japanese, and African Americans, with ethnic Mexicans comprising the majority of the population.[10]

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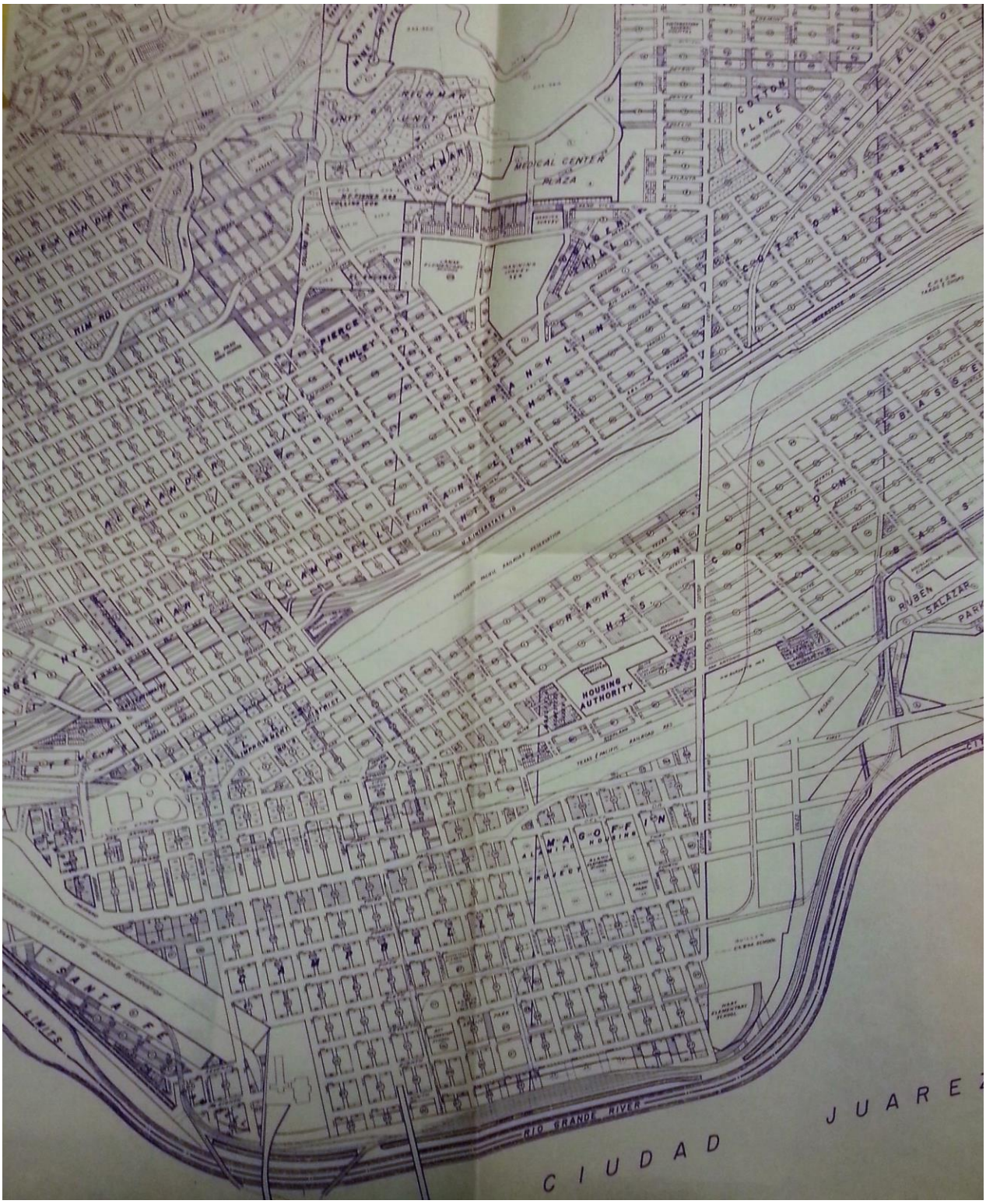
[8] Chihuahuita State Historical Marker booklet, June 12, 2004, El Paso Vertical Files, El Paso Public Library; Kenneth Duane Yeilding, "The Chamizal Dispute: An Exercise in Arbitration, 1845-1945," (PhD diss., Texas Tech University, 1973), 94.

[9] W. H. Timmons, *El Paso: A Borderlands History*, (El Paso, TX: Texas Western Press, 1990), 74.

[10] Martinez, *The Chicanos of El Paso*, 6; David Dorado Romo, *Ringside Seat to a Revolution: An Underground Cultural History of El Paso and Juárez: 1893-1923*, (El Paso, TX: Cinco Puntos Press, 2005), 197-244.




Map 2.1 Downtown and South El Paso after Chamizal Treaty of 1963. El Segundo Barrio is labeled as the Campbell and Magoffin additions. Isolated area in the Southwest corner of the map label as Santa Fe addition is present day Chihuahuita. Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA) Manuscript Collection, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso Library.

The first two decades of the twentieth century witnessed an increased influx of Mexican immigrants due to two things—the constant demand for an exploitable labor caste for the booming industries and the social, political, and economic turmoil of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920). As a result of mass immigration, South El Paso became the cradle of the Mexican diaspora in the United States. Often referred as the "Ellis Island of the Southwest," South El Paso became home to thousands of ethnic Mexicans, who entered through the city. As El Paso's population continued to expand, the vast majority of the new immigrants settled south of Second Avenue, present-day Paisano Drive.[11] Many began calling the area "Chihuahuita" or Little Chihuahua, as most of the immigrants settling in the area came from the Mexican state of Chihuahua.[12]

While immigrants settled into the area, leaders believed that the influx of poor Mexicans into the Southside threatened the image of the newly developing city of El Paso. In 1916, city authorities undertook a "clean up" of South El Paso. Several factors led to this action: the pressures of the spilling violence from across the border, a negative health survey of the barrios, and the growing discriminatory views of low-income Mexicans. El Paso Mayor Tom Lea ordered General John Pershing to clear out parts of the Southside, out of concern that diseases would cross over to the American portion of the city. Demolition squads and health inspectors tore down about 325 shacks and also deloused the area's Mexican population. Resident accounts say that after the clearing of hundreds of structures and homes, the neighborhood looked as if war had struck the area.

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[11] Los Atrevidos, *South El Paso; El Segundo Barrio*, (Boulder, CO: University of Colorado, 1971), 11-12.

[12] In the early part of the twentieth century, the whole area of South El Paso was called Chihuahuita. As the Southside fragmented and the areas became isolated from one another, the name Chihuahuita referred to the southwestern most point of the Southside, west of Santa Fe Street.

The 1916 clean up of South El Paso replaced "germ-infested' adobe homes with cleansed "American made" brick structures.[13]

As hundreds of shacks were demolished because of the 1916 incident, city leaders continued to find it difficult to house the influx of immigrants. In order to accommodate the ethnic Mexican population of South El Paso, business leaders and city authorities built thousands of tenement units scattered throughout the barrios of the Southside.[14] The purpose of the tenements was to house as many immigrant and laboring families as possible regardless of whether or not the units met the proper needs of their residents. The tenements or *presidios* (prisons), as South El Pasoans called these structures, were large boxed two or three story brick buildings with small, common courtyards. Each unit had only two or three rooms with no proper ventilation, no heating, shared outdoor restrooms, and no plumbing or running water.[15] The most famous tenements in the area were six *presidios* nicknamed "*Los Seis Infiernos*" or "the Six Hells," constructed next to each other in the eastern portion of South El Paso on Ochoa Street. For generations, families that lived in the "Six Hells" cleverly refered to the area as "*Los Siete Infiernos"* "because the Seventh hell was having to live there." This particular set of tenements occupied half a block and had a population of more than 800 residents.[16] While these

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[13]*South El Paso; El Segundo Barrio,* 13*;* David Romo, "Whose History: The Politics of Historical Preservation and Urban Removal in El Paso," (http://academics.utep.edu/Default.aspx?tabid=55450), 4; Romo, *Ringside Seat*, 231.

[14] Fred Morales, interview by the author, April 29, 2014, audio recording, El Paso, TX; Salvador Balcorta, interview by Sandra I. Enríquez and David Robles, July 24, 2015, video recording, *Civil Rights in Black and Brown Oral History Project*, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, TX.

[15] *South El Paso; El Segundo Barrio*, 14.

[16] Balcorta, interview. Interview in Spanish. Original quote: "Eran siete infiernos. El séptimo infierno era tener que vivir ahí."

were not optimal living conditions, the rents were affordable for the meager wages ethnic Mexicans made working in the refining, transportation, construction, and the retail industries across the city.[17]

By the 1920s, the square mile comprising South El Paso constituted the most densely populated area in the city. The overpopulation, constant flux of residents, and already substandard conditions of the area brought negative attention from outsiders.[18] In 1925, a study commissioned by the city of El Paso, concluded that the Chihuahuita district "instead of being an eyesore, unhealthful and a disgrace to the city, [could] be and ought to be made a section of exotic charm and special interest to visitors and residents."[19] The Kessler Report, as the study is known, became the blueprint for the area revitalization in South El Paso for the several next decades, as city authorities would petition federal monies for the construction of housing projects, parks, and other amenities.[20] The report, however, never linked the poor living conditions of the area to the actions by landlords and the city itself. Tenement owners, for their part, were absent from their properties. In addition, the profit made by the tenement owners was rarely enough to make repairs to dilapidated units. City authorities built substandard housing for the thousands of immigrants in the previous decade, yet it was never sufficient to absorb the demands of housing a Mexican underclass. As a group of activists by the name of *Los Atrevidos* or The Daring Ones stated in their 1967 study of the Southside "South El Paso

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[17] García, *Desert Immigrants,* 65.

[18] El Paso City Commission, "The City Plan of El Paso, Texas," 1925, in American Planning Association Papers, Alexander Architectural Library, The University of Texas at Austin, 48.

[19] Ibid, 14.

[20] Department of Planning, *A Short History of South El Paso,* (El Paso, TX, October 1967), 23.

soon became recognized as a permanent, although substandard, part of the city—substandard not only in housing, but in all the necessities and conveniences associated with modern urban American life."[21] Unlike other urban settings across the United States, South El Paso was a slum from its inception. This was achieved by the planned development of the area and the city, rather than by a thriving middle class fleeing to the suburbs in the postwar years.[22]

The Kessler Report offered recommendations for city leaders to make changes in South El Paso. In the decade following the publication of the report, El Paso authorities took several strides toward repairing the conditions of the Southside. In 1930, the city passed a Tenement Ordinance and a comprehensive Zoning Ordinance to prevent further blight of the area. As a result, Mayor R. E. Thomason appointed Albert Schwartz, the owner of the Popular Dry Goods store, Cleofas Calleros, a prominent middle class Mexican American activist, architect W.G. Wuehrmann, and Catherine Gorbutt the principal of Aoy School (the first Mexican school), to the South Side Welfare Association Committee. The responsibility of the group was to create a plan to improve social and sanitary conditions in South El Paso. The committee recommended a model tenement that would provide "light, air, plumbing, and bathing facilities." Unfortunately, the group never gathered the support of private investors, and such plans led to the razing

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[21] Los Atrevidos, *South El Paso; El Segundo Barrio,* 14.

[22] Stories of urban renewal for the most part relate declension narratives, where the urban core experiences blight as the political and economic base of the city leaves for the suburbs in the years following World War II. See Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit,* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); Bryant Simon, *Boardwalk of Dreams: Atlantic City and the Fate of Urban America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South,* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

of tenements without any replacement housing.[23] Following the study, the city of El Paso zoned part of Chihuahuita and western Segundo Barrio as sections of light manufacturing, commercial, and multifamily housing, with no plans for new housing construction. Leaders hoped that with the ordinance, industries and commerce would eradicate substandard tenements.[24] Instead of improving the conditions of South El Paso tenements, the studies led to the removal of several *presidios.* In Chihuahuita, for example, the city's first surface water treatment plant constructed in 1943, displaced a number of families from a section of the neighborhood residents called "Las Pompas," or "The Pumps."[25]

While the local changes were not solutions to El Paso's poor housing conditions, the biggest change to South El Paso would come in the form of a federally mandated act: the Wagner-Steagall Housing Act of 1937. This legislation provided federal monies to "assist the several states and their political subdivisions to remedy the unsafe and unsanitary housing conditions and the acute shortage of decent, safe, and sanitary dwellings for families of lower income." The Housing Act also stated that operational decisions about public housing needed to be left in the hands of local government,

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[23] Department of Planning, *A Short History of South El Paso*, 25.

[24] "Chihuahuita gets initial approval for designation as historic area," *El Paso Times,* November 14, 1979; "Youth en Acción," Special Demonstration Grant's Program submitted to the Office of Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Development, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Washington , D.C. Submitted by El Paso Boys' Club and Department of Sociology, University of Texas at El Paso, March 15, 1967, 6, in Abelardo Delgado Papers, C. L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso; City of El Paso, "El Segundo Barrio Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy, February 9, 2010, https://www.elpasotexas.gov/~/media/files/coep/community%20and%20human%20development/elsegundobarrio_neighrevitalizationstrategy.ashx?la=en, 10, accessed September 15, 2015.

[25] Fred Morales, *Dates and Events in Chihuahuita History*, (Self Published, no date), 12, in El Paso Public Library Vertical Files.

leading to the creation of local housing authorities.[26] That same year, the Housing Authority of the City of El Paso (HA) was created, which met with opposition from Southside property owners. Landlords fought the establishment of the HA and public housing because federal monies meant stricter housing codes.[27] Regardless of the disputes, the HA garnered federal funds and built two public housing projects: the Alamito Public Housing Project (1940) and the Tays Public Housing Project (1942), the latter right outside the boundaries of El Segundo Barrio. The two new housing projects provided 349 and 311 units respectively. The Alamito project also included a neighborhood park and a branch of the public library, providing some much needed—if inadequate—recreation venues for the barrio.[28]

Southsiders' restriction of movement within the city became more apparent in the decades following World War II when El Paso expanded in size and its population increased substantially. In 1902, the city's territory consisted of seven square miles. By the late 1960s, El Paso's territory covered over 117 square miles. El Paso reached a population of 97,000 in 1955, with about 55,000 people being of Mexican descent. About half of the city's Mexican American population remained segregated in South El Paso.[29] Substandard housing conditions, poor education levels, high crime rates, gang activity, and great poverty continued to plague the area.

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[26] U.S. Congress, *The United States Housing Act of 1937*, September 1, 1937, 75th Cong., 1st sess., http://archives.financialservices.house.gov/banking/usha1937.pdf, accessed September 15, 2015.

[27] Rodolfo F. Acuña, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*, (New York: Pearson , 2007), 227.

[28] Department of Planning, *A Short History of South El Paso*, 26.

[29] Ibid.

While the same impoverished conditions remained, the postwar years brought some hope to the barrio's residents, as new subdivisions were created in South El Paso such as Cotton Mill and Rio Linda. The neighborhoods built closer to the Rio Grande and the International Boundary, from about 9th Street to Cordova Island, had single family homes, which stood in stark contrast to the rest of the barrio.[30] One of these new constructions, the Rio Linda Subdivision (1946), was located between Rosita, Twelfth, and Thirteenth Streets in the southeastern portion of the barrio. Rio Linda had a number of small single-family homes, with individual parcels of land, private indoor restrooms, water lines and plumbing, and in some cases air conditioning and heating. Although still very poor, the families residing in the new subdivisions were a bit more affluent compared to those living in the *presidios,* given that Rio Linda families owned their properties rather than rented them. People living in the subdivisions understood the differences living in areas closer to the Rio Grande. Felipe Peralta, a long time Southside activist, shared in an interview that his family was "very lucky living in Rio Linda. I joke with my friends and people that know that's where I grew up, that we grew up in the Beverly Hills of South El Paso, because we actually did have homes."[31]

The dream of owning a home in the Mexican barrios did not last for long. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Chamizal Dispute settlement in 1963 affected a portion of the Southside and the Rio Linda and Cotton Mill Subdivisions were part of the

[30] Felipe Peralta, interview by Sandra I. Enríquez and David Robles, July 22, 2015, video recording, *Civil Rights in Black and Brown Oral History Project*, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, TX; J. N. Weems, "Chamizal Regional, City, and Neighborhood Data," Chamizal Archives, Folder 083-2009-002, 21, El Paso County Historical Society.

[31] Peralta, interview.

437 acres ceded to México.[32] To comply with the settlement, The International Boundary and Water Commission purchased and demolished about 741 tenement and 355 owner-occupied single-family dwellings between 1963 and 1966.[33] In addition to the postwar subdivisions, a third of the area of Chihuahuita, including tenements like the Rosarito apartments were lost to the settlement.[34]

Even though the settlement was a necessity for the relations between the United States and México, the residents on the Chamizal land did not view the treaty positively. Residents of the area complained about the unfair prices offered for the properties, as the government paid only for the land, not the house.[35] Many resisted and refused to leave their homes fearing they would not get their properties' worth. Mrs. Elvira Lacarra, a resident of the disputed area told the *El Paso Herald Post* that "we have property here. My father has lived here for many years and has property. If we have to move out, we want fair compensation. We are not looking for a profit."[36] Felipe Peralta's family, for example, was one of the last families to leave the area of Rio Linda. Because the federal government was purchasing their property, the Peraltas expected a large sum of money for their house. However, they received just enough money for their property to be able to purchase a house on Delta Street in South Central El Paso.[37] The diplomatic decision

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[32] "Says Chamizal Payments Low," *El Paso Herald-Post*, January 16, 1965.

[33] Department of Planning, *A Short History of South El Paso*, 37.

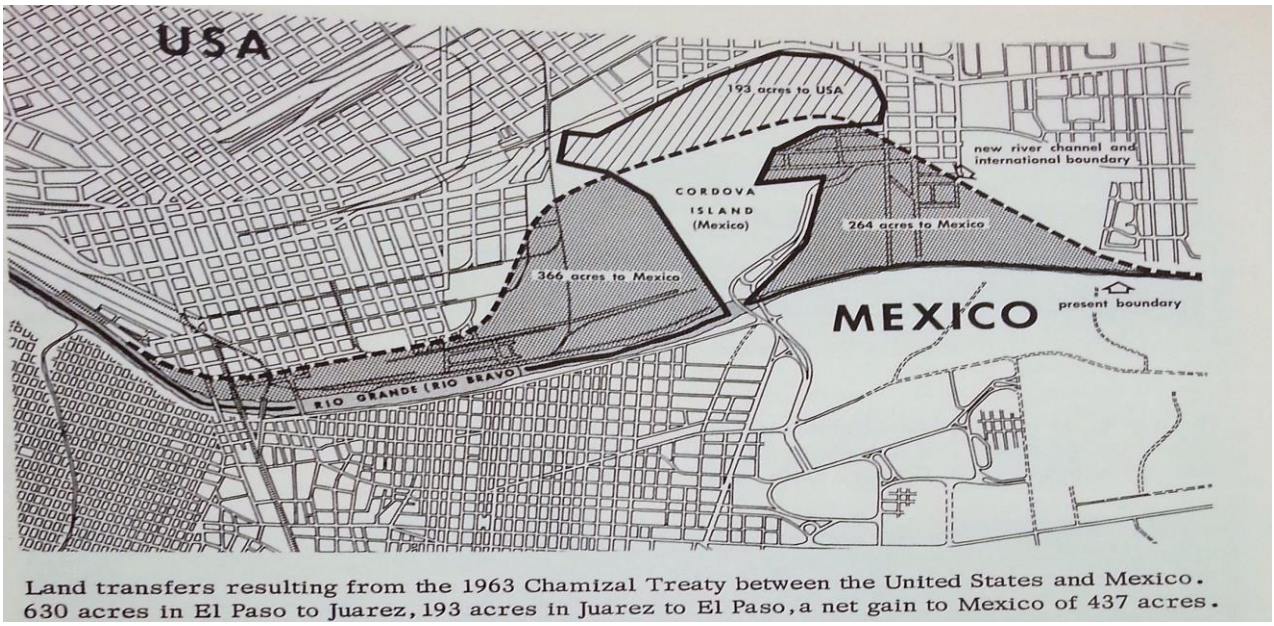
[34] Morales, interview.

[35] "Chamizal Residents Complain," *El Paso Times*, February 24, 1964.

[36] "'Little People' Due To Have Hearing On Chamizal Plan," *El Paso Herald Post*, February 21, 1963.

[37] Peralta, interview.

trumped the wishes of the Chamizal tract families. In the end, the Chamizal Treaty displaced about 4500 people. At the time, no additional housing was built in the Southside due to the 1930 zoning law.[38]




Map 2.2 Area highlighting land transfers from the Chamizal Treaty. Rio Linda Subdivision is in the highlighted area. *Urban Development Manual for the City of El Paso: A Handbook for Community Planning*, May 1968. American Planning Association -- Texas Chapter: The History of Planning in Texas Project Records, Alexander Architectural Archives, University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.

The neglect of the city, the high density of residents, and the poor conditions of the tenement buildings remained the same going into the late twentieth century. By the 1960s, South El Paso became a mixture of dilapidated tenements, commercial structures, warehouses, small industries, and shops that attracted customers from Ciudad Juárez.[39] City authorities understood that mixed and incompatible uses of land in the Southside

[38] "Information on Chamizal Move Ready," *El Paso Herald-Post*, June 9, 1964; City of El Paso, "El Segundo Barrio Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy, February 9, 2010, https://www.elpasotexas.gov/~/media/files/coep/community%20and%20human%20development/elsegundobarrio_neighrevitalizationstrategy.ashx?la=en, 10, accessed September 15, 2015.

[39] "Urban Development Manual for the City of El Paso," prepared by Robert E. Alexander F.A. I. A. & Associates, Architects and Planning Consultants, Los Angeles, California, May 1968, 51, in American Planning Association Papers, Alexander Architectural Library, The University of Texas at Austin.

were a detriment to the area and to El Paso overall. Even with the demolition of homes and tenements close to the Rio Grande following the Chamizal Agreement, a high percentage of substandard housing lingered in South El Paso. The postwar period brought miniscule improvements to the area: landlords made meager renovations such as adding electricity and some plumbing to their properties and the streets and alleys were paved as a result of the election of El Paso's first Mexican American mayor, Raymond Telles (1957-1961). During his tenure as mayor, Telles pressed city council to resolve the problems of the Southside, and even proposed a municipal housing code. His attempts were in vain, however, as the code was defeated in a citywide election.[40] In 1979, the *El Paso Times* reported that "more than 100 Chihuahuita families live in the tenement apartments that are in such state of disrepair that the crumbling, century-old adobe houses nearby are considered luxury housing by comparison."[41]

**Life in the *Presidios***

Born in 1954, activist and local historian Fred Morales grew up in the barrio of Chihuahuita. When asked about the living conditions of his tenement building, he shared that he lived in "a two-room apartment, unfurnished, old" and that his family of five "didn't have any services like water inside or a bathroom inside. All that was outside. It was very crowded, small. No air conditioning or heating was available. No laundry facilities were in the *presidio*. It was a bad scene."[42] In a similar manner, activist Oscar

[40] Department of Planning, *A Short History of South El Paso*, 36.

[41] "Rats and roaches for roommates," *El Paso Times,* August 13, 1979.

[42] Fred Morales, interview by Oscar J. Martínez, August 28, 1975, interview no. 211, transcript, Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso, El Paso, TX.

Lozano lived in a tenement on El Paso and Fourth Streets, with minimal accommodations. In an interview he recalled that "we were a large family, a family of nine. We lived in 2 rooms. When we moved in there, the rooms did not have gas lines and no inside water facilities."[43] Juan Hernandez, lived a somewhat different experience, as his family had an extra room in their unit, a true luxury in the barrio. He recalled living in "a three room apartment with the toilets outside, and about fifty people shared the toilets out there. When we were small, I remember I used to sleep with my sister because we only had three beds: one for my parents, one for my three sisters, and one for me and my little sister. We used to sleep in the kitchen right next to the sink and it used to drip all the time."[44] The anecdotes of the three residents of South El Paso provide first-hand accounts of the harsh tenement conditions. The vast majority of the tenements continued to serve the overpopulated Southside area with the same accommodations provided earlier in the century.

Shared outdoor privies and no running water meant that Southsiders did not have places to take a shower or bathe. When historian Oscar Martinez asked Hortencia Villegas, a longtime resident of the barrio how residents showered in the tenements, she responded "in a tub, horse style, except horses bathe in the river and we do it inside of the tub." Having outside faucets was not optimal for many reasons. During the winters, pipes would freeze preventing tenement residents from gathering water. Although residents were proactive by collecting water and saving it inside of the house, Ms. Villegas asserted that with the lack of proper heating, even that water would freeze. Due to the

[43] Oscar Lozano, interview by the author, February 25, 2014, audio recording, El Paso, TX.

[44] Juan Hernandez, interview by Roberto Carrillo, April 26, 1976, interview no. 218, transcript, Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso, El Paso, TX.

scarcity of showers in the premises of the tenements, residents had to collect water from the faucets in the courtyards, put it in an aluminum or metal tub, and carry it to their units. Ms. Villegas was used to the procedure and learned to enjoy it. In her interview, she further explained that "it [was] laborious to throw the water away and all, but you fe[lt] like you are bathing in a bathtub."[45] Others chose to bathe in public baths. The Padilla family, for example, paid a quarter for each member to use public baths.[46]

Beside the lack of modern amenities such as indoor toilets, showers, and plumbing, the community dealt with structural issues as well. Cracked walls, broken windows, and torn screen doors were the norm in the *presidios.* In 1967, Salvador Ramírez and Abelardo Delgado from the Juvenile Delinquency Project (JD Project), organized a panel of Southside residents to discuss housing and bring attention to the need for better housing in hopes of adopting a housing code. Fernando Padilla, one of the speakers, shared at the conference that he continued to move to different apartments in South El Paso to find good housing to raise his seven children. Mr. Padilla stated that in his apartment, "the plaster from the ceiling is falling down on top of us, [and] the last time it rained, water was leaking in gushes."[47] Anita Hernandez, a single mother of four

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[45] Hortencia Villegas, interview by Oscar Martínez, February 27, 1976, interview no. 235, transcript, Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso, El Paso, TX. Interview in Spanish. Original reads: "En una tina al estilo de los caballos, nomás que los caballos se bañan en el río y nosotros a dentro de la tina. Bueno, pero viera qué a gusto, con la tina, con agua. Nomás que es trabajo para tirar el agua y todo eso. Pero haga de cuenta Ud. Que se está bañando en una tina de baño."

[46] Statement by Francisco Padilla (fictitious name) in *South El Paso; El Segundo Barrio*, 17. The authors of the study did not specify why the panelists are identified with fictitious names. Perhaps they hoped to protect the identities of the presenters to avoid retaliation from their landlords.

[47] Statement by Francisco Padilla (fictitious name) in *South El Paso; El Segundo Barrio*, 17.

children, complained about her landlord refusing to paint her unit. Ms. Hernandez stated that "the walls which are peeling off, we can no longer tell what color they are."[48]

Life in the substandard tenements also became dangerous. In the 1967 Southside Housing Conference, Amelia Flores a representative from the Ochoa Street Tenements (*Seis Infiernos*), shared that "in the case of fire there is only one way out because there is only one balcony. All the upstairs tenements have one door leading out, if this door is on fire the people are trapped inside. Since the last fatal fire, we are all afraid."[49] The tenement staircases also threatened the lives of residents. Tomas Atencio shared at the conference that "the stairways which are made of wood are very old and can come down from one moment to the next; and these stairs are used daily by sixteen families, and each time they are used they make all kinds of noises and the nails become a little looser. If they are not fixed soon I assure a fall… maybe a fatal one."[50]

With no proper heat, South El Pasoans continued to use kerosene and gas stoves as their main sources of heat in the winters. Hortencia Villegas shared in her interview that in order to keep her apartment warm she "kept the four flames on and the oven. That is my heater and the two together [stove and oven] do a good job."[51] While there was a necessity to maintain tenement units warm in the winter months, the dearth of heaters, faulty gas lines, and no ventilation threatened the lives of residents. Improper heating would be at the center of substandard conditions in 1967 when a tenement fire killed

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[48] Statement by Anita Hernandez (fictitious name) in *South El Paso; El Segundo Barrio,* 20.

[49] Statement by Amelia Flores (fictitious name) in *South El Paso; El Segundo Barrio,* 18.

[50] Statement by Tomas Atencio (fictitious name) in *South El Paso; El Segundo Barrio,* 19.

[51] Villegas, interview. Interview in Spanish. Original quote: "ah, yo me la llevo con la estufa prendida los cuatro de arriba y el cocedor. Ese es mi calentón y calientan muy bien las cosas."

three children. The unfortunate event sparked the mobilization of the Southside, which will be covered in the following chapter.

As political and business leaders positioned El Paso as a modern, international, and "All-America" city, the conditions of the Southside belied this rhetoric. City authorities began addressing the substandard living conditions in the postwar years by demolishing structures and changing the landscape of South El Paso rather than pressing landlords to renovate their properties. The settlement of the Chamizal Treaty in 1963 as well as the construction of Paisano Drive/U.S. 80 through the northern boundary of the barrios in 1953, displaced hundreds of families to different sectors of the barrio or to other parts of the city. Uprooting of Southsiders due to the two projects provided a clean slate in the neighborhood, encouraging city and business leaders to redevelop the area. During the Chamizal Treaty process, a newspaper reported that "for the first time in 50 years all South El Paso will get an opportunity to receive a facelift."[52] The "facelift" opportunities in the 1960s and 1970s and the community's reaction to the possible destruction of the Southside will be the subject of the subsequent chapters. For much of the twentieth century, Southsiders survived within the limiting conditions of Chihuahuita and El Segundo Barrio. Regardless of the substandard living conditions, Mexican Americans considered the dilapidated square mile as home. The socioeconomic restriction of mobility inspired South El Pasoans to create a positive space, one where they endured the hardships of living in an "All-America" city.

[52] "Erasing the Black Mark," *The Southwest Catholic Register*, April 24, 1964.

**Navigating Segregation and Creating Barrio Institutions**

As renowned Chicano activist and poet Abelardo "Lalo" Delgado stated in an interview, "the barrio is the means by which the city imprisons its shame and separates it from its affluence."[53] While many saw the geographic area of South El Paso as a detriment to the advancement of the city for much of the twentieth century, those who resided within its boundaries had different perceptions and spatial realities. Growing up in the barrio, Oscar Lozano one of the leaders of *La Campaña*, recalled that he and his neighbors lived in a "harsh environment, [and] we had to struggle to make the best of it."[54] Amidst the geographic confinement and rough life circumstances, Southsiders created their own place within El Paso—a place where they confronted socioeconomic obstacles and developed a sense of being and history. In his discussion of "sense of place," historian David Glassberg discusses how people develop emotional ties to places based on childhood memories, social networks, and everyday experiences. Furthermore, he states "the longer we live in a place, the more we are likely to associate local environmental features with memories of our significant life experiences involving family and friends."[55] Although social, political, and economic forces kept Southsiders confined to the barrios, Mexican Americans transformed their "geographic prison" into their alternate city, where residents connected with people that shared similar experiences, and fashioned a sense of agency and empowerment in a city that neglected

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[53] "Donaldo Urioste entrevista a Abelardo Lalo Delgado, *Caracol*, ca. 1976, in Abelardo Delgado Papers, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries, the University of Texas at Austin. Interview in Spanish. Original quote: "El Barrio es el modo de la ciudad de encarcelar su verguenza y apartarla de la afluencia."

[54] Lozano, interview.

[55] David Glassberg, *A Sense of History: The Place of the Past in American Life*, (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 18-19.

them.[56] Experiences in the Southside and the spaces within it allowed Southsiders to develop an emotional and spatial attachment to the barrios.

As exemplified by the UTEP sociology students in the introduction of this chapter, a large percentage of El Pasoans had never set foot in South El Paso. The northern boundary of the Southside, Paisano Drive, was truly the border between the Mexican barrios and American El Paso. Cleverly nicknamed "the Tortilla Curtain" by area residents, crossing Paisano Drive into the Southside led to a world apart from the rest of the city.[57] As the *El Paso Herald-Post* reported, for area residents, "the barrio [was] a special slice of El Paso that spill[ed] over the sights and sounds of two cultures." Despite the low socioeconomic and political status of South El Pasoans, the world south of Paisano Drive was rich with "culture and a sense of community."[58] City authorities justified the segregation of Mexican Americans in South El Paso barrios by noting the connections that Southsiders felt to their neighborhoods. In a study conducted by the Department of Planning, authors explained that "the neighborhood has an advantageous location. It has ready and convenient access to shopping and health services, public transportation, schools and churches, and Juarez where many South El Pasoans have relatives and friends."[59] While the "advantageous location" had some social and

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[56] For more claiming autonomy in segregated and limited spaces see Perales, *Smeltertown,* 58-61; José M. Alamillo, *Making Lemonade out of Lemons: Mexican American Labor and Leisure in a California Town, 1880-1960,* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

[57] Clark S. Knowlton, "Changing Patterns of Segregation and discrimination affecting the Mexican Americans of El Paso," n.d., in Clark S. Knowlton Collection, New Mexico State Archives, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

[58] "The Barrio: Another World," *El Paso Herald-Post,* n.d., in Vertical Files: South El Paso, El Paso Public Library.

[59] Department of Planning, *A Short History of South El Paso*, 36.

recreational sites for the residents of the area, South El Pasoans also worked extensively to carve their own spaces.

Low socioeconomic status contributed to Southsiders' restricted mobility. For decades, people of Mexican descent filled the majority of the low skilled and unskilled jobs in the city. According to historian Oscar J. Martínez, between 1900 and the 1970 over sixty-five percent of the Spanish-speaking population of El Paso was skilled blue-collar and unskilled laborers. Up until 1960, less than 32 percent of the ethnic Mexican population occupied white-collar jobs (the vast majority fell under "low white-collar"). In the 1970s, the number barely increased to thirty five percent.[60] Unemployment rates were higher than those in the rest of the city. Census data from 1960 determined that over fifteen percent of the male population in South El Paso was affected by unemployment.[61] Residents of the areas of Chihuahuita and El Segundo Barrio worked as seasonal agricultural laborers, laundry workers, and domestics. They also worked in local hospitals, schools, or at Fort Bliss as custodians and in cleaning crews, or in one of the many industries the city had such as Farah clothing manufacturing, Peyton meatpacking, or Nichols Copper Smelter (later Phelps Dodge).[62] During the decades of the 1960s and 1970s, Southside families earned about $175 a month, and averaged less than $3000 a

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[60] "Table 2: Occupational Distribution of the El Paso Labor Forces by Surname, 1900-1970," in Oscar J. Martínez, *The Chicanos of El Paso: An Assessment of Progress*, (El Paso, TX: Texas Western Press, 1980), 10.

[61] "Maps of 1960 U.S. Census Data for the City of El Paso Texas, Chicano Vertical Files, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso Libraries.

[62] *El Paso City Directories*, 1960-1980.

year, meanwhile the average annual income for the city was $8200. Eighty six percent of South El Pasoans rented properties, with average monthly rents ranging from $27-$30.[63]

Life in the tenements and poverty served as a unifying factor for many Southside families. As Felipe Peralta expressed, even though South El Paso barrios were low-income communities, "we were all on the same boat."[64] Soledad Olivas, a 67-year-old member of *La Campaña*, recalled her family simply was "accustomed to poverty all the time."[65] The confinement to the Mexican barrios led to Southsiders' lack of awareness of the poverty they lived in. Salvador Balcorta, an activist with the barrio clinic La Fe, had no understanding of the substandard living conditions and hardships around him. Balcorta grew up "not knowing that [there] was a lot of better things, unless you would travel outside to visit [family] who pulled out of the barrio and were now living in better houses."[66] Art Alba's story was very comparable to Salvador Balcorta's Mr. Alba recounted "my dad did not make enough money to really supply enough for us, but as far as the type of life that I had it was, at the time, adequate for me. We grew up without many of the necessities of life, but we learned to accept it."[67] Poet and activist Lalo

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[63] "El Segundo Barrio," *Poder de la Luz*, 1975, in Chicano Vertical Files, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso Libraries; "Manifesto of the Community of South El Paso, ca. 1975, in MEChA Papers, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso Libraries; Clark S. Knowlton, "An Analysis of Certain Selected Social and Cultural Characteristic Involving Juvenile Delinquency and Gang Formation in the Mexican American Slums of South El Paso, ca. 1966, in Clark S. Knowlton Collection, New Mexico State Archives, Santa Fe, New Mexico; Department of Planning, Research and Development, "Redevelopment and Improvement of South El Paso," El Paso, TX, January 1970, El Paso Vertical Files: South El Paso, El Paso Public Library.

[64] Peralta, interview.

[65] Soledad Olivas, interview by Cecilia Vega, November 30, 1976, interview no. 251, transcript, Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso, El Paso, TX. Interview in Spanish. Original quote: "Así es de que pues acostumbrados a la pobreza todo el tiempo."

[66] Balcorta, interview.

[67] Art Alba, interview by Juan Manuel Gonzales, November 16, 1976, interview no. 256, transcript, Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso, El Paso, TX.

Delgado acknowledged this notion stating that "growing up in the barrio gave me a taste of what poverty and deprivation is, and it gave me a sensitive skin to knowing how people suffer. But on the other hand, I saw its happiness, its 'survival skills,' and that is what I capture in my writings."[68] Despite the poverty and substandard living conditions Southsiders dealt with on a daily basis, community members relied on one another and drew from whatever resources they could. Some of the survival skills South El Pasoans attained by experiencing poverty fueled their ability and adaptability to create Southside institutions to meet their needs.

While living conditions were not up to par and spatial segregation affected the socioeconomic and political status of Southsiders, barrio residents said that they were often happy living in the barrio due to the sense of community in it. South El Pasoans never minimized the hardships they faced living in the Mexican barrios; rather, they found different ways to cope with their historical realities that contributed to a sense of place. When asked about his childhood, Fred Morales shared that "even though there was a lot of poverty in Chihuahuita, I was very happy and comfortable. I never complained."[69] The fact that Southside families had similar livelihoods offered them bonding opportunities. Residents formed extended kinship groups with neighbors, and people looked out for one another. "In the barrio, all these people know us," recalled an anonymous woman who volunteered in the 1975 Tent City (Chapter 4). "If we walk over

[68] "Donaldo Urioste entrevista a Abelardo Lalo Delgado," *Caracol*, ca 1976, in Abelardo Delgado Papers, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries, the University of Texas at Austin. Interview in Spanish. Original quote: "Crecer en el barrio me dio un sabor verdadero de lo que es pobreza y depravación, y se formo un cuero mas sensitivo al dolor de la gente. Pero en contraste, vi su alegría, y sus 'survival skills,' y esto por fuerza sobresale cuando escribo."

[69] Morales, interview by the author.

there [people say] 'hey, what are you doing? How have you been?' It's like a family."[70] Juan Hernandez, a former resident of the barrio, recalled his friends were the closest thing he had to relatives and that "it was a good relationship down there in Second Ward."[71] A barrio newsletter related this idea by stating "the people are a homogenous group, one big extended family. We work together, we suffer together, play together and we will struggle together."[72] Barrio neighborliness, a richness of community, and camaraderie eased the many frustrations South El Pasoans dealt with on a daily basis.

In some instances, Southsiders had never been outside of the boundaries of barrio, as many of their resources could be found located within its boundaries. Even though Mexican Americans were geographically confined, city authorities provided certain necessities for the survival of the community.[73] Outsiders established schools, churches, settlement houses, clinics, and daycares to serve the communities of the Southside.[74] In addition, when some Mexican Americans achieved a level of economic mobility, they became an upcoming class of ethnic Mexican merchants, opening a number of businesses such as restaurants, barbershops, movie theaters, and bakeries.[75] These small commercial

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[70] Tent City Volunteers, interview by Oscar J. Martinez, April 2, 1975, Interview no. 202, transcript, Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso, El Paso, TX. Interview in Spanish. Original quote: "Uno aquí [en] su barrio, todo esta gente [nos conoce]. Si caminamos allá:--¡Qhihúbo! ¿Qué andas haciendo? ¿Cómo estás? Haga de cuenta una familia."

[71] Hernandez, interview.

[72] "El Paso: How to Save A Community," *Nuestro,* Vol. 2 No. 9, September 1978. Chicano Vertical Files, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso.

[73] Similar to Smeltertown, city authorities provided basic institutions to keep the community segregated. See Perales, *Smeltertown,* 57-93.

[74] For more on the settlement houses of El Paso and ideas of Americanization, see Vicki Ruiz, "Confronting 'America,'" in *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 33-50.

[75] For more on El Paso's small Mexican lower middle class in the early twentieth century, see Mario García, *Desert Immigrants,* 65-84.

establishments throughout the barrio exemplify how Southsiders built their own city within El Paso. South El Pasoans believed the barrio businesses brought great assets to the area. Felipe Peralta shared that "you could actually spend your whole life there in Segundo Barrio and never really go out. We had the bakeries, we had the groceries, we had movie houses [like] the Colón."[76] Soledad Olivas, who lived in South El Paso for 64 years stated in an interview the "advantages" of living in the barrio were "that we have our daycare, we are close to downtown, we are close to Juárez where we visit our families, we have our clinics, [and] schools for our children."[77] Older residents became very nostalgic when talking about the barrio. In a 1976 interview, Ms. Olivas recalled that when she was young

> El Segundo Barrio was a beautiful thing. There were many stores, Mexican movie theaters. I would go to theaters like El Cristal, El Loreta, El Hidalgo, El Alcazar, which don't exist anymore. There was La Estrella, where artists would come. There were stores and many fruit shops, it was beautiful. In actuality, [barrio elders] are sad because we now see second-hand stores and other shops that don't grab your attention.[78]

Even though some of the barrio features discussed by Ms. Olivas were no longer in existence by the 1970s, the barrio had plenty to offer to its residents; and when a lack of resources existed, Southsiders carved their own establishments to meet their demands and to ensure the survival of their families.

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[76] Peralta, interview.

[77] Olivas, interview. Interview in Spanish. Original quote: "tenemos nuestra guardería, tenemos el centro cerca, tenemos Juárez cerca (tenemos familiares allá), tenemos nuestra clínica, escuelas para nuestros hijos.

[78]Ibid. Interview in Spanish. Original quote: "era el Segundo Barrio una de esas cosas que, para mí, la puedo describir como una cosa hermosa… Había tiendas, había cines mexicanos, Íbamos a los cines en El Cristal, El Loreta, El Hidalgo, El Alcázar, los otros ya no existen—había La Estrella, [a donde] venían artistas… Las tiendas, fruterías. En la actualidad, se nos hace muy triste porque ya vemos únicamente puras segundas y puras cosas que ya no llaman la atención."

Within the confines of South El Paso, ethnic Mexicans could also openly celebrate their roots and heritage through social gatherings such as festivals, church carnivals, *quinceañeras*, and weddings. As in other ethnic Mexican barrios, these celebrations provided important cultural spaces as the communities faced discrimination and segregation outside of the Southside.[79] *Dieciseis de septiembre* or Mexican Independence Day celebrations in the barrio were customary, especially during the earlier part of the twentieth century. One resident remembered, "on the 16th of September we would have a parade in El Segundo. We had floats [and] the girls would dress up as *chinas poblanas* and go on the parade route."[80] On September 15, the Mexican consulate on San Antonio Street, a few blocks north of Paisano Drive, would host the traditional *grito*, which many Southsiders attended to celebrate the holiday.

The exclusion of Mexican culture in Anglo citywide events such as the Sun Bowl Parade led the League United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) to create *Fiesta de las Flores*, or the Festival of Flowers, in 1953. One of the oldest Hispanic festivals in the Southwest, the three-day celebration began in South El Paso on Oregon and Fifth Streets.[81] From its inception, *Fiesta de las Flores* celebrated Mexican culture by having booths that sold traditional food, arts and crafts, hosted performing artists, and most importantly, crowned a young woman as the queen of the celebration, as Mexican

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[79] For more on community celebrations and leisure see José M. Alamillo, *Making Lemonade out of Lemons: Mexican American Labor and Leisure in a California Town, 1880-1960*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006); Matt García, *A World of Its Own: Race, Labor, and Citrus in the Making of Greater Los Angeles, 1900-1970*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

[80] Olivas, interview. Interview in Spanish. Original quote: "Andaba por las calles carros alegóricos. Nosotros estábamos señoritas, aquí tanta muchacha del Segundo Barrio. Nos vestíamos de chinas poblanas y andábamos en el desfile."

[81] "Fiesta de las Flores: Our History," http://fiestadelasflores.org/general-info/history/, accessed September 20, 2015.

American women were completely excluded from the Sun Bowl court. Although the *Fiesta* moved to a different location a few years later, such festivals cultivated to the growth of cultural attachment to the area.

Even though South El Paso was geographically isolated, its proximity to the city core allowed Southsiders to access some parts of the Downtown district. During the postwar years, public transportation services were very limited in areas of the barrio, yet the walking distance attracted many residents to the city center, or *el centro,* to explore different shops, restaurants, and entertainment establishments. Felipe Peralta recalled "going downtown was an all day trip. All we had to do was take the bus or walk to the downtown area."[82] Similarly, Magdaleno Cisneros stated that residents "could travel to downtown without having to pay or use too much public transportation, which is very limited in El Paso."[83] South El Pasoans, especially the youth, enjoyed crossing the "Tortilla Curtain" into the other El Paso. Visiting the downtown district provided an opportunity for residents to escape the hardships of barrio life. "When I was a kid, I would go downtown to watch movies in the different theaters," reminisced Fred Morales. "I also liked to go eat at different restaurants [in the area]."[84] Many residents chanced profiling and harassment by law enforcement officers just to visit the establishments of downtown for their enjoyment. Felipe Peralta recalled that his parents at times feared when he went to *el centro.* Peralta voiced that "we were really sheltered by our families because they knew we would get in a lot of trouble once we got out of there [the barrio]

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[82] Peralta, interview.

[83] Magdaleno Cisneros, interview by Luis Lopez, November 26, 1976, interview no. 279, transcript, Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso, El Paso, TX.

[84] Morales interview by the author. Interview in Spanish. Original quote: "De chiquito me iba 'pal centro a ver las películas en los diferentes cines. Me gustaba ir a comer a diferentes restaurantes."

with the police [and] with the Border Patrol."[85] Homero Galicia, who grew up in an affluent area of El Paso, recalled "when I was a kid and we'd hang around and walk around downtown, the police would come and get you for vagrancy. Mexican kids, we couldn't sit around and just hang around, we'd have to be going places."[86] While the convenience of visiting downtown was a pleasant diversion for Southsiders, it often also reminded them of their place within the racial and social class hierarchy of El Paso.

The proximity to Ciudad Juárez was another advantage to Southsiders. In addition to having the ability to visit family members and connect with their social and cultural roots, the tight budgets of South El Paso families took them across to the other side of the border where basic necessities could be found at cheaper prices. "People with very low economic means could travel to Juárez and buy food stuff which were cheaper in México," shared Magdaleno Cisneros, a barrio activist, in a 1976 interview. Many visited Ciudad Juárez to purchase what they considered luxury items such as meats, sugar, detergents, and other groceries at affordable prices. They also visited doctors and purchased medicine at prices unmatchable to those in the United States.[87] An anonymous volunteer at the 1975 Tent City shared with historian Oscar Martinez that "a lot of us go to Juárez and buy things to [economically] help us."[88] The affordability of groceries and

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[85] Peralta, interview.

[86] Homero Galicia, interview by Sandra I. Enríquez and David Robles, July 7, 2015, video recording, C*ivil Rights in Black and Brown Oral History Project,* Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, TX.

[87] Guillermo Glenn, interview by Sandra I. Enríquez and David Robles, July 16, 2015, video recording, *Civil Rights in Black and Brown Oral History Project*, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, TX; Rafael Valdespino, interview by Jesus Valdespino, April 18, 1976, Interview no. 224, transcript, Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso, El Paso, TX; Villegas, interview.

[88] Tent City Volunteers, interview. Interview in Spanish. Original quote: "mucha gente vamos a Juárez y compramos algo y ya nos ayudamos."

other staples and the proximity to Ciudad Juárez allowed Southsiders to purchase products and other necessities within the financial means of their families.

City authorities proudly argued that South El Paso enjoyed access to many resources. In a 1975 study of El Segundo Barrio, the authors of the investigation stated that South El Paso had an "excellent inventory of community facilities which were widely used." Some of the establishments that city leaders referred to were a multi-purpose community center, three parks, two daycares, five schools, two Catholic churches, the Boys' Club, and access to three hospitals.[89] Barrio residents, on the other hand, believed that the community facilities were not enough to serve the population of South El Paso. The area of Chihuahuita, which had a little more than 1000 residents in 1977, "lacked the standard accrutrements [sic]: without a church, a school, a library, a community center, a food store, or even a neighborhood bar."[90] While the Chihuahuita Improvement Association created a community center in 1981 (Chapter 5), Southsiders claimed public space and built community institutions when city officials neglected their needs or restricted public services to barrio residents.

For years, places like the Boys' Club and the Armijo community centers provided sports and recreational activities for the barrio youth, yet the services by the two institutions were not enough for the residents in South El Paso. Southside residents had minimal park areas and other open spaces, which left children playing in the streets and in parking lots. Teenagers, for their part, claimed the streets of the neighborhoods, where

[89] Office of Urban Coordination, "El Segundo Barrio '75:' A Socioeconomic Analysis of South El Paso, El Paso Texas, 1975. El Paso Vertical Files, El Paso Public Library.

[90] "Chihuahuita: Forgotten But Not Gone," *El Paso Times,* June 20, 1977.

the "rejected youngsters" and gangs hung around street corners to pass the time.[91] Juan Hernández, a former resident of the barrio, recalled that he and his friends "used to hang around in the street corners and everything, not because we were juvenile delinquents, but because we [didn't] want to stay home; because at home there wasn't much to do. So we used to hang around the corners, but not to make delinquent acts."[92] Not all adolescents, however, kept out of trouble like Juan Hernández and his friends. As is the case for many low-income neighborhoods, the Southside was plagued with high crime rates and gang activity. Gangs like the 4Fs, the Lucky 13s, the 7Xs, the Cobras and the Little 9s, roamed South El Paso at night and kept enemy groups and outsiders from entering their territory.

As the gang activity increased in the barrio, the community mobilized to create desperately needed recreational spaces for the youth. In the 1950s, youth organizing efforts came from Sacred Heart, one of the Catholic churches in the barrio.[93] *El Sagrado Corazón*, as Southsiders referred to the church, had served the community of South El Paso since 1892, when Father Carlos Pinto built two churches in El Paso—Sacred Heart for the Mexican Catholics on South Oregon Street and Immaculate Conception for the

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[91] Elizabeth Zinn, "He Begged That Gang Violence End With His Death," *Federal Probation* 23 (September 1959): 25; For more on youth politics, culture, and resistance see Luis Alvarez, *The Power of The Zoot: Youth Culture and Resistance During World War II*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

[92] Hernández, interview.

[93] For the role of the Catholic Church in the barrios see Roberto Treviño, *The Church in the Barrio: Mexican American Ethno-Catholicism in Houston*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Jay P. Dolan and Gilberto M. Hinojosa, *Mexican Americans and the Catholic Church, 1900-1965*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994); Isidro D. Ortiz, "Chicano Urban Politics and the Politics of Reform in the Seventies," *The Western Political Quarterly* 37, no. 4 (December 1984): 564-577.

American Catholics on North El Paso Street.[94] Throughout the twentieth century, Sacred Heart became an important avenue for Southside identity formation and belonging and even provided services to the community beyond its religious functions, such as education and recreational activities.

The arrival of a Jesuit priest to the church in the 1950s changed the lives of Southsiders, especially the youth, for the better. Father Harold J. Rahm arrived in South El Paso in July 1952, engaging in a campaign that no other priest had before. At age thirty-three, he became an assistant pastor to *Sagrado Corazón*, immediately after leaving seminary.[95] Upon his arrival, Father Rahm quickly noticed the poverty and violence that haunted the neighborhoods and how city officials continuously neglected the area. He went to the streets in an attempt to meet the people of the Southside and learn about the immediate problems of the area in hopes of designing solutions for the barrio. Soon enough, he gained the trust and respect of many Southsiders. Father Rahm attained the nickname of "the Bicycle Priest," as he was often seen riding his bicycle around the barrio. Within a year, Father Rahm created a plan to undertake one of the urgent needs of the Southside. He employed a tactic he called "aggressive social work," where he sought out young men, women, and even gang members, and attempted to keep them off the streets by providing recreational pastimes.[96] Our Lady's Youth Center (OLYC) opened in October 1953, in the Sacred Heart Schoolyard, and later moved to the old Knights of

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[94]"History of Sagrado Corazón," http://www.sacredheartelpaso.org/who-we-are/history. Accessed, September 20, 2015.

[95] Elizabeth Zinn, "He Begged," 24.

[96] Ibid, 27.

Columbus building on 501 E. Paisano. After Father Rahm obtained the building, he encouraged barrio teenagers to clean it up and restore it as best as they could.[97]

In a short period of time, Our Lady's Youth Center became the core for South El Paso's youth. Father Rahm rapidly created a number of activities such as sports leagues where teenagers could practice boxing, basketball, baseball, wrestling, weightlifting, and even pool.[98] According to Art Alba, prior to the center, "each one of the neighborhoods or barrios had their own different groups of kids working, playing, and doing all kinds of things together. They had their own clubs, their own activities, their own games." After the creation of OLYC, Mr. Alba shared that "we were able to get together and compete with one another in various types of sports, that before we hadn't actually been able to participate in, such as wrestling, boxing, organized baseball sports, and many other activities."[99] In addition to sports, the OLYC provided tutoring, cultural activities, and a meeting space for the barrio youth.

Father Rahm quickly enlisted the help of several South El Paso adults such as Ventura "Tula" Irrobali, Nino Aguilera, and Lalo Delgado, who became paid employees and community outreach coordinators for the youth. With employees and a board of directors, Father Rahm continued to look for money to upkeep the OLYC but also to hire barrio youth to become coaches and social workers. Felipe Peralta, for example, received a $120 monthly scholarship to attend UTEP, in return for coaching barrio youth in an array of sports.[100] The work of Father Rahm and of those working for Our Lady's Youth

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[97] Zinn, "He Begged," 25.

[98] Antonio Marin, interview by the author, April 28, 2014, audio recording, El Paso, TX.

[99] Alba, interview.

[100] Peralta, interview.

Center paid off, as gang activity decreased in the Southside.[101] Most importantly, spaces like Our Lady Youth Center prepared the youth and the working adults to become future leaders, activists, and social workers in the barrio. Felipe Peralta, Nino Aguilera, and Lalo Delgado for instance brought federal funds to South El Paso from the Juvenile Delinquency Project to alleviate gang activity in the late 1960s (Chapter 3). Through Our Lady Youth Center, Southsiders learned to address the necessities of the barrio and tackle poverty prior to the arrival of War on Poverty monies in El Paso.

The necessities of South El Paso expanded beyond recreation areas. South El Paso lacked hospitals and even ambulance services. As historian Vicki Ruiz stated in her book *From Out of the Shadows*, "for several decades, the only consistent source of social services in Segundo Barrio was the Rose Gregory Houchen Settlement House and its adjacent health clinic and hospital."[102] Since the 1920s, the Freeman Clinic, run by volunteers, provided mothers in South El Paso prenatal care and pediatric services. The Freeman Clinic expanded into the Newark Methodist Maternity Hospital in the 1930s, and broadened its services to infant immunizations, pregnancy exams, and prenatal classes at very affordable costs. [103] While the Newark Hospital offered maternity and infant care until the 1980s, the services were insufficient for the population of South El Paso.

The lack of medical services in the area continued in the postwar years. By the 1960s, only five doctors had offices in South El Paso, the rest were north of Paisano

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[101] Peralta, interview; Marin, interview; Zinn, "He Begged," 27.

[102] Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows*, 35.

[103] Ibid, 36.

Drive. The El Paso County Hospital, Thomason (now the University Medical Center), located four miles to the east of the Southside, often refused barrio residents medical services due to their inability to pay. In addition, South El Pasoans distrusted Thomason, as many believed that "*la gente va a morir ahí*" or "people went there to die."[104] The lack of money to pay for doctor visits and absence of hospitals made residents of South El Paso rely on home remedies or visit Juárez for medical care. In sum, South El Pasoans could not afford or receive proper medical care in the barrios.

In the 1960s, an accident mobilized the community of South El Paso to demand health facilities in the barrio. According to various sources, a five-year-old girl purchased a soda at a store near Armijo Center. While walking with the bottle, she tripped, fell, and cut herself, causing deep wounds to her wrists. The injuries were very serious and community members decided to call an ambulance to transport the girl to Thomason. Unfortunately, the ambulance did not arrive at the scene in time and the young girl passed away en route to the hospital.[105] This accident was not a rare occurrence—in fact, ambulances seldom even came to the barrio.

Tired of not having accessible medical services in the area, residents envisioned the creation of a free barrio clinic.[106] Conceived under the leadership of Nina Cordero and members of the Ochoa Parents Association, Father Rahm Clinic began its services in 1967. The barrio residents, mostly single mothers who "wanted a better life for their

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[104] Galicia, interview.

[105] Balcorta, interview.

[106] Ibid; Glenn, interview; Galicia, interview. A. C. Westover, "La Fe Clinic Services South El Paso," *Borderlands* 15 (1997), http://epcc.libguides.com/content.php?pid=309255&sid=2629661, accessed October 1, 2015.

families and for their kids" began organizing a volunteer clinic in the Southside.[107] With the help of the VISTA Minority Mobilization Program (VISTA-MMP), the clinic provided services in a two-room tenement in the southmost *presidio* in *Los Seis Infiernos*, which belonged to Dr. Manuel Hornedo, the director of City Health.[108] The group of women mobilized to recruit volunteer staff, and soon recruited Dr. Raymond Gardea as the clinic's physician along with a few nurses. When Father Rahm clinic opened its doors, it provided services every week on Wednesday nights. Community members and activists volunteered by distributing informational pamphlets or donating materials. Homero Galicia, the then director of the VISTA-MMP recalled the opening night. "The first night of the clinic, a man from one of the tenements comes. He walked up with a box of gauze and a bottle of alcohol, and he said '*aquí, para la clínica*' ('here, for the clinic)."[109] Father Rahm Clinic was soon overwhelmed by the positive reception in the barrio.

Two years later, Father Rahm Clinic expanded and moved to a new building on Third and Saint Vrain Streets. With the growth of the clinic, the founding group of women continued to push for professionals to provide medical services and for people to write grants and bring in funding to maintain the clinic.[110] By 1970, the clinic received its non-profit 501-c3 status and became the Father Rahm Service Center. That same year, the center received its first grant from the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, in addition to funds from the National Urban Coalition to begin information and referral

[107] Balcorta, interview.

[108] Galicia, interview.

[109] Ibid.

[110] Balcorta, interview.

services. With the grants, the clinic expanded its services and recruited youth outreach workers.[111] As services expanded, mothers demanded family planning counseling. Because the clinic was named after the Jesuit priest, the Catholic Church and older women from the neighborhood opposed the service and urged for the name of the clinic to be changed. In 1973, after a community wide contest, the clinic was renamed *Centro de Salud Familiar La Fe* (Faith Family Health Center).

After surviving its first internal conflict, La Fe increased its presence in the area. Throughout the 1970s, the organization, with the help of barrio residents, remodeled old buildings and expanded its services throughout the Southside.[112] Today, La Fe Clinic continues to provide affordable healthcare to South El Pasoans and has several locations in South El Paso including a community center and a charter school. The clinic exemplifies a successful community controlled institution.

Behind the confinement of the "Tortilla Curtain," Southsiders learned the racial dynamics of El Paso, navigated segregation, carved their own spaces for community uplift, and attempted to create a positive living environment amidst the impoverished conditions. While city authorities only recognized the area as an urban slum, residents of the community saw the area as a survival mechanism and as their home. South El Pasoans created relationships with their neighbors, bonded over their poverty, and found spaces to celebrate their roots. Barrio residents also transformed South El Paso into a place that provided them a sense of belonging in a city that continuously hid their presence. Barrio residents created recreational and social service sites to help improve

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[111] Balcorta, interview; "La Fe's History Timeline: Nuestra Historia," http://www.lafe-ep.org/timeline.php, accessed October 1, 2015.

[112] Balcorta, interview; Glenn, interview; "La Fe's History Timeline."

living conditions in the area when city authorities failed to provide basic needs. The daily experiences of South El Pasoans provided opportunities for identity formation through the urban space they inhabited. Their everyday experiences within the urban spaces generated a sense of ownership of the Southside.

**The Power of Place in South El Paso's Barrios**

When South El Paso became threatened in the 1960s and 1970s through a series of initiatives including Project REHAB and the Urban Development and Action Grant, (UDAG), projects designed to bring federal funds to address the problems of the urban core (discussed in greater detail in the following chapters), community members knew they had to fight for the survival of their barrio, their city within the city. A 1975 newsletter called *El Poder de la Luz* (The Power of Light/Chicano Light and Power) expressed the strong association with place felt among Southsiders:

> The barrio offers a sense of identity, a sense of being and belonging. Outside the barrio, *la Raza* must encounter bad treatment, discrimination and racism in general: the Chicano barrio offers security, a sense of independence from the society that rejects you. Inside the barrio, relationships that reflect the great characteristics of our people develop. The barrio equates a whole community inside a larger community, where the latter one represents a menace to the barrio. This risk causes the bonds of unity to strengthen inside of the barrio to better combat its threatening forces.[113]

For close to a century, the environment in South El Paso became a unique space for the working class Mexican American population. The menace of gentrification united the community and bolstered a sense of pride, a legacy of residence, and desire to preserve the residential character of the barrio, but not its poverty. South El Pasoans believed that

[113] "Soberanía del Barrio" *El Poder de la Luz*, vol. 1 no. 1, El Paso, Texas, November 1975, 9, Chicano Vertical Files, C. L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso Library.

"if the area [South El Paso] is our community, [its loss is] compared to the destruction of our city."[114] The peril of eradicating South El Paso, not only threatened the neighborhood as a physical space, but also threatened the disruption of the cultural and social livelihoods of Southsiders. Mexican Americans residing in the barrio pledged to defend the site that the city created for them over the course of the twentieth century.

After the Chamizal Treaty and the loss of housing units, residents bore witness to the depopulation of their barrio at an alarming rate. In the span of a decade, the population of the South El Paso went from over 25,000 in 1965 to about 8,000 by 1975.[115] As city leaders authored a number of studies in hopes of bettering the conditions of the area, residents shared the same answer when interviewed: they wanted to stay in the barrio. In 1975, an *El Paso Times* story reported that South El Paso residents constantly "argued their neighborhood and its cultural heritage should be preserved."[116] In a city study that same year, El Paso's Office of Urban Coordination conducted a socio-economic study of the area that concluded "it could be generally stated that those residing in South El Paso like their neighborhood… very few residents expressed any dislike of the area."[117] The investigation also concluded that only 19.3 percent would consider

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[114] "El Segundo Barrio: Nosotros Estamos En Lo Justo," *El Poder de la Luz*, vol. 1 no. 1, El Paso, Texas, November 1975, 1. Chicano Vertical Files, C. L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso Library.

[115] James W. Lamare, *An Evaluation of the Tenement Eradication Program of the City of El Paso*, (El Paso, TX: Department of Planning and Research, December 1974). Chicano Vertical Files, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections, The University of Texas at El Paso Library.

[116] "Site Undecided for Southside Housing; 50 to 100 Units Promised By Mayor, *El Paso Times*, June 4, 1975.

[117] Office of Urban Coordination, "El Segundo Barrio '75:' A Socioeconomic Analysis of South El Paso, El Paso Texas, 1975, 17, El Paso Vertical Files, El Paso Public Library.

relocating outside of South El Paso, and that 53.9 percent would accept living in public housing within the confines of the barrio.[118]

Even though the Southside community largely opposed relocation to other parts of the city, leaders had to follow federal regulations. Due to a U.S. Housing and Urban Development requirement, new public housing in the 1970s was to be scattered throughout the city in attempts to desegregate urban areas. Land costs in the Southside were three times higher than in any other place in the city due to its proximity to downtown and the border corridor. [119] High value of land in the barrio along with the HUD law caused city authorities to build public housing in places miles away from the South El Paso. Woodrow Bean, head of the Housing Authority, believed that uprooting people from the Southside and placing them in projects outside the area would "allow poor people an opportunity to see how others live."[120]

The dismantling of South El Paso sparked the mobilization of its residents by heightening a sense of ownership and attachment to space. In the aftermath of the Tenement Eradication Program, a plan credited to have ousted about 6,400 residents from the area within the course of a year, Southside activists wrote a community manifesto and declared "the barrio is slowly being strangled to death, its right to exist as a homogenous community is being denied."[121] Southsiders believed that having lived in the area for

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[118] "S. El Paso Population drops 6,400 Since '70: Tenement Eradication Credited, *El Paso Herald-Post*, October 9, 1975.

[119] "HUD official Says Federal Funds Available for South EP Housing," *El Paso Times*, May 3, 1975; "Tenants: No Place To Go!," *El Paso Times*, April 25, 1977.

[120] "With Ties On Southside—Where do Ousted Tenants Go?" *El Paso Times*, July 12, 1974.

[121] "Manifesto from the Community of South El Paso," ca. 1975, 1, MEChA Papers, UTEP Chapter, MS251, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections, The University of Texas at El Paso Library.

generations entitled them to defend their space within the city of El Paso. In an interview, activist Oscar Lozano reflected that the residents of South El Paso "realized that we were not the owners of the land or properties, most of us were tenants, we rented. But we had done so for years… We [also] thought that we were entitled to decide what the future of El Segundo Barrio should be.[122] Similarly, longtime resident activist Soledad Olivas stated "naturally one has to fight for their barrio. Having lived in it for so long, we believe that we have the right to do so."[123] As citizens of El Paso and longtime residents of the Southside, the ethnic Mexican community of the barrio believed they were entitled to and had the power to choose the future of the neighborhood.

Mexican Americans living in the Southside believed that city leaders and outsiders did not understand the attachment to the neighborhood the community developed over the decades of living in it. As battles to preserve the barrio arose, a number of South El Pasoans explained the personal connection they had to the neighborhood. Hortencia Villegas, a long time barrio resident, shared that "I love the barrio so much, you have no idea. It was here where I opened my eyes, where I learned to play, where I grew up, dated and all. I have too many memories here."[124] Three anonymous Tent City II volunteers shared that they were delighted to live in the barrio as they had lived there their whole lives. Their connection to the Southside was so strong

[122] Lozano, interview.

[123] Olivas, interview. Interview in Spanish. Original quote: "naturalmente tiene uno que pelear por su barrio. Con tanto año de vivir en el, creemos que tenemos un derecho para hacerlo."

[124] Villegas, interview. Interview in Spanish. Original quote: "Mire, yo lo quiero tanto al barrio como usted no tiene idea. Que no ve que aquí, como quien dice, aquí abrí los ojos, aquí fue donde yo empecé a jugar, y después a crecer, a tener novio y todo. Tiene muchos recuerdos."

that they "wished they could sanctify and bless the barrio."[125] The attachment to the barrios of South El Paso fueled the mobilization of Southsiders to protect the neighborhood, the spaces within it, and its sense of community as a means to protect their livelihoods and their cultural heritage.

As redevelopment plans in the 1970s intensified, South El Pasoans continued to assert their right to remain in the area. Barrio residents, as the *El Paso Times* reported, "would rather rebuild and remodel than run away, leaving an abandoned neighborhood behind."[126] Southsiders simply refused to leave. Mrs. Silva, a resident of the area of Chihuahuita explained that "I've had a woman come to my house with papers to buy me out, but I told them no. I don't want to live anywhere but here in Chihuahuita. It's quiet. It's nice."[127] During a community meeting in 1979, Francisca Moreno, another resident of Chihuahuita, rejected the idea of moving into public housing. Ms. Moreno told a translator that "she [was] satisfied living here. It's comfortable, there's no other place like Chihuahuita. She just wants to be here and she won't move unless only going to the grave."[128] Louis Aguilera, a former barrio resident expressed his discontent by writing a letter to the editor of the *El Paso Herald-Post*, during the episode of Tent City II (Chapter 4). In the note, he wrote about his disagreement with city officials ignoring the desires of Southsiders and instead following the requests of commercial ventures. Mr. Aguilera concluded with "(America), you say we like hotdogs, baseball, apple pie and Chevrolet.

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[125] Tent City Volunteers, interview. Interview in Spanish. Original quote: "nosotros queremos consagrar nuestro barrio."

[126] "Gifts offered to alleviate misery of Chihuahuita," *El Paso Times,* October 2, 1979.

[127] "Chihuahuita Struggles Amid Neglect, Decay," *El Paso Times*, June 20, 1977.

[128] "Rats and roaches for roommates," *El Paso Times*, August 13, 1979.

We the people of South El Paso respect your likings, 'why not respect ours?'"[129] The opinions of these particular Southside residents mirrored the desires of a number of families who wished to remain in the barrio.

Aside from leaving the familiarity of the Southside, residents had several other practical concerns. One of them was the cost of living outside the boundaries of South El Paso. As previously mentioned, South El Paso families paid less than $30 a month on average for rent. Fred Alvarez, a landlord whose tenement was condemned under the Tenement Eradication Program was ironically concerned about his tenants. "They paid me $40 a month and now they give the Housing Authority $90. I hope they can afford to eat."[130] Because of the low socio-economic status of South El Pasoans, the vast majority of people could only afford to be relocated to housing projects, even when these had long waitlists. Others protested the lack of low-cost housing in the city. Helen Estrada addressed this issue in an essay circulated around the barrio. Estrada wrote "try finding a landlord in this All American City who will rent to a woman on Welfare with six kids with only $55 to offer for the rent and security deposit."[131] The shortage of housing in the barrio and the costly apartments and homes outside of the area worried Southsiders. The lack of housing options strengthened the desire for South El Pasoans to remain in the barrio.

Another reason Southsiders refused to leave the area was the distance of housing projects from the barrio. During the late 1960s and 1970s, the HA began building housing

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[129] "Thinking Out Loud," *El Paso Herald-Post*, April 30, 1975.

[130] "With Ties On Southside—Where do Ousted Tenants Go?" *El Paso Times*, July 12, 1974.

[131] Helen Estrada, "All American Housing" ca. 1975, Chicano Vertical Files, C. L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso Library.

projects in areas such as Coronado and by the ASARCO Smelter (west), Ysleta, the Lower Valley, and Yarbrough (east) and by the Northeast of town.[132] These new housing projects were often found on the fringes of the city, miles away from the barrio, which concerned South El Pasoans for many reasons. An anonymous Tent City volunteer shared in an interview that Southside residents were "being thrown out to where the coyotes live. Why, are we animals?"[133] In addition, the accessibility of downtown and Ciudad Juárez from South El Paso would not be possible for uprooted residents. "We have our ties on the Southside," a woman told *The El Paso Times*. "I wouldn't know where to buy my food if I had to live in the Eisenhower Project (in Northeast El Paso)."[134] As previously discussed, a large percentage of South El Pasoans did not own cars, making it difficult to navigate the growing city.

Relocated families from the Southside often expressed their nostalgia for the barrio. Juan Hernandez, who moved out of the barrio and into a housing complex, shared his experiences in a 1976 interview. Mr. Hernandez recalled:

> when I barely moved out of the Segundo barrio into the new housing tenements, I was happy. It was a new experience. I thought, well, we might live better over here; so I was very happy. But after a couple of months, I realized it was not as ideal as it was supposed to be. We lived better, but there weren't many relations we could establish over there, because everybody or mostly everybody was interested in money… It was a big difference, because over where I live most of the Chicanos talk English, and they are money oriented.[135]

Juan Hernandez's experience related to the one of J. Manuel Bañales and his family. The Bañales left the Southside because of the Chamizal Settlement. The family settled in a

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[132] Tent City Volunteers, interview; Hernandez, interview.

[133] Tent City Volunteers, interview.

[134] With Ties On Southside—Where do Ousted Tenants Go? *El Paso Times*, July 18, 1974.

[135] Hernandez, interview.

small house in the Altura Heights Addition in Central El Paso. At first, Bañales was surprised by the lack of people in his new neighborhood in comparison to the over crowdedness in South El Paso, but then he and his family felt alone. "In the neighborhood, we felt so alone, so un-used to it, so absolutely foreign," he wrote in a barrio newsletter. "We could not stand it there for quite some time that we would still go to our old church and to our old grocery store back in the barrio. We could not possibly feel any sense of community nor any feeling of belonging to a neighborhood that appeared at all times indifferent to us."[136] Even when Southsiders were able to afford living in a single family home, they knew that they were unwelcomed in other parts of the city.

Families that moved into public housing faced similar situations. In 1975, Nicolas and Maria Caraveo along with their four children moved into the Jackie Robinson public housing in the Coronado Section of the city. For $64 a month, the Caraveos had a unit with three bedrooms, two bathrooms, a living room, and enough closet space for six people. Even though the living arrangements were a vast improvement for the Caraveos they were unhappy living away from the barrio. The family shared with the *El Paso Times* that "the homey atmosphere is not enough to make the culture shock they have been experiencing for three years go away."[137] When asked about her life in South El Paso, Maria Caraveo stated "we would move back there first thing, if we could. And the people there are so much friendlier. We felt more at home there."[138] The experiences

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[136] J. Manuel Bañales, "We remember—El Barrio," *El Poder de la Luz*, vol. 1 no. 1, El Paso, Texas, November 1975, 11, Chicano Vertical Files, C. L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso Library.

[137] "South Side Atmosphere Both Cold, Hot To Residents" *El Paso Times*, March 19, 1978.

[138] Ibid.

faced by the Caraveos were similar to those faced by hundreds of families dispersed throughout the different neighborhoods in El Paso.

Residents who relocated out of South El Paso were often met with hostility, especially those who moved into public housing. Southsiders confronted aggressions and opposition from middle and upper class residents who believed that housing projects would increase crime and lower their property values. In 1980, a conflict arose in the East Side of El Paso due to the construction of a 90-unit housing complex near Vista del Sol and Yarbrough. The *El Paso Times* reported "angry residents have organized to try to stop low-income people from moving into their middle-class to upper-class neighborhood."[139] Residents of the area set meetings to explore the legal possibilities of stopping the construction altogether. Kelly Antwine, a manager of an apartment complex nearby shared with the *El Paso Times* that the low-income newcomers would be "out of place" and that "they don't know the way we live and they don't know the cultural aspects of our community."[140] In addition, the Alderman of the East Side Joe Divis believed that residents of the housing unit should remain in their own neighborhoods in South El Paso and stated that housing project residents "will not take care of their apartments because they lack[ed] the money to do so and because they do not own property."[141] The hostility of this particular situation in East El Paso was a common occurrence as city authorities followed HUD procedures to integrate neighborhoods.

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[139] "Public Housing gets Chilly Welcome Mat," *El Paso Times*, July 6, 1980.

[140] Ibid.

[141] Ibid.

The discrimination in neighborhoods away from South El Paso concerned barrio residents and prevented them from wanting to move away from the area. Nieves Rubio shared with the *El Paso Times* that:

> I'd rather stay [in the Southside] because I don't like to be discriminated against because we are poor. We don't like to be humiliated because we are poor. We have our pride and don't like to be criticized. We don't like to be looked down on and made to feel inferior. [Wealthier people] always say you are a great cook or a great maid… but they won't let you live nearby.[142]

Even in the mostly Mexican area of Ysleta, housing projects and Southsiders were not welcome. Alicia Chacón, the first Chicana judge in a major Texas county recalled that neither the city nor the contractors that built housing projects in Ysleta did evaluations of the impact of housing for residents or new public housing residents. The neglect of the city caused conflicts between old and new residents in the area. Chacón explained that:

> The new residents resented that they had just been moved here arbitrarily and that they had moved from an urban setting where they could readily walk to stores and do everything they needed to do. A lot of them went to their jobs. And when they moved here, they were very well grounded. There was very little public transportation and shopping was not that readily available. So it was a dramatic change for their lifestyle. At the same time, the local people that had been here kind of felt the resentment that, they blamed the new people for problems. They blamed them for the overcrowding of the schools, for the petty crime that began to exist here.[143]

The reactions of El Paso residents to Southsiders moving into the area reflected the social and racial atmosphere in the city. Impoverished Mexican Americans from the barrios were not wanted outside of South El Paso.

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[142] "Public Housing gets Chilly Welcome Mat," *El Paso Times*, July 6, 1980.

[143] Alicia Chacón, interview by Sandra I. Enríquez and David Robles, July 25, 2015, video recording, *Civil Rights in Black and Brown Oral History Project*, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, TX.

Southside children also found problems in the new schools they attended. While barrio schools often times provided a substandard education, students bonded over the fact that the majority of the population was ethnic Mexican. Residents of the Jackie Robinson projects in the Coronado area attended Morehead, an affluent and predominantly Anglo school. Patty Caraveo, who lived in the Robinson projects, often dealt with discrimination from Anglo students. Ms. Caraveo shared with the *El Paso Times* that she and "the other Mexican-American girls from the projects don't mix with the Anglo girls at all." She continued by stating that white students called them "wetbacks, trash pickers, [and] pigs." Outside of the racism and discrimination, Mexican American students living in the projects dealt with other problems in their new schools. In Ysleta, for example, the teachers were accustomed to teaching middle class Anglo and Mexican American students. When students from public housing began attending school in the area, the teachers were not ready to serve the lower income students, as school districts lacked proper bilingual education, resources, curricula, and educators to teach the number of incoming students.[144]

Living in the fringes of El Paso also affected the economic circumstances of former barrio families. In addition to paying higher rents, Southsiders dealt with a higher cost of living in the other areas of the city. South El Pasoans were accustomed to shopping for their groceries in corner stores in the barrio, downtown, or in Juárez where they found cheaper produce and meats. Residents were very aware of financial strain. A barrio resident shared that "there is also a Safeway over there, and there are other stores but they are so expensive. They are there for the Anglos and for the people that have

[144] Chacón, interview.

good jobs and make good money."[145] Maria Caraveo, who lived in the Robinson projects in Coronado, shared that the stores were too far away from her apartment. Mrs. Caraveo missed walking to the grocery store in the barrio and buying meat from butchers. She continued by stating that "here in Coronado, we have to walk a mile to the store. When we get there, it (the meat) is already cut and packaged, and it's either too much or too little. And besides that, it costs too much."[146] The lack of efficient and accessible public transportation and the distance from the barrio and Ciudad Juárez forced uprooted families to buy groceries and other necessities at higher costs. This problem further disrupted the social and economic livelihoods of former Southsiders.

The uprooting of hundreds of South El Pasoans and sending them into other parts of the city caused what psychiatrist Mindy Thompson Fullilove describes as "root shock." Adapted from gardening terms, "root shock" refers to the traumatic reaction to the partial or total destruction of a person's "emotional ecosystem" due to urban renewal projects.[147] Southside activists recognized the difficulties displaced families were experiencing. Daniel Solis, a member of *La Campaña* described that "the uprooting of families is causing other hardships, mainly mental and economical."[148] When historian Oscar Martínez interviewed a group of Tent City volunteers in 1975, one of the

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[145] Tent City Volunteers, interview. Interview in Spanish. Original: "También allá hay Safeway, también allá hay tienda, pero está bien caro. Si es pa' puro Americano, es pa' puras personas que tienen buenos empleos, que ganan buen dinero."

[146] "South Side Atmosphere Both Cold, Hot To Residents" *El Paso Times*, March 19, 1978.

[147] Mindy Thompson Fullilove, *Root Shock: How Tearing Up City Neighborhoods Hurts America and What We Can Do About It*, (New York: One World Ballantine Books, 2005), 11. Fullilove discusses the experiences of uprooted African American families through her work, however, this same emotional distress applies to the Mexican American communities.

[148] Letter from Daniel Solis to potential donors, n.d. in Chicano Vertical Files, C. L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso Library.

anonymous women shared the story of a displaced elderly woman named Angelina, whose tenement on Mesa and Ninth Streets was demolished in 1967. "When Angelina left, she would cry a lot and she would tell her daughters: 'take me to the barrio.' And she would cry, she would come [to the barrio] and cry."[149] Southside activists claimed that city officials ignored the studies showing the emotional and psychological implications of uprooting families. El Paso leaders' disregard of South El Pasoans' wishes to remain in the barrio ignited a large grassroots movement in the area, one where the residents of South El Paso would endeavor to preserve the social and cultural characteristics of the barrio, not its poverty. These battles to save the life of the Southside barrios will be illustrated in the following chapters.

**The Importance of Southside Barrios**

An *El Paso Times* article in 1978, reported that "for as long as anyone can remember, South El Paso has been like a throbbing ingrown toenail—too painful to ignore and any remedy promising to be painful in itself."[150] To outsiders, South El Paso represented one of the worst slums in the country, but to those who resided within its boundaries it was a world of its own. Rafael Valdespino, a barrio activist, shared the thoughts of most Southsiders by asserting that "I think that the community of Segundo Barrio is one of the most beautiful places in the city of El Paso [and even] El Paso County."[151] As exemplified by these two descriptions, El Paso had two spatial realities: a

[149] Tent City Volunteers, interview. Quote reads: "Cuando salió, lloraba mucho y le decía a las muchachas: 'Llévame en el carro a dar una vuelta al barrio.' Y lloraba, venía y lloraba aquí."

[150] "South Of Paisano: Barrio Atmosphere Brings Love, Pain," *El Paso Times*, March 19, 1978.

[151] Valdespino, interview. Interview in Spanish. Original reads: "Yo pienso que la comunidad del Segundo Barrio es uno de los lugares más bonitos de toda la ciudad de El Paso y del Condado de El Paso."

segregated Mexican barrio that became a city within a city, and an Anglo, "All-America City" both in demographic composition and in thought. The latter, saw the barrios as overcrowded, dirty, and a detriment to the development of the region. Despite the substandard living conditions that inhabitants of the Mexican barrios dealt with on a daily basis, Southsiders found ways to make the most out of their experiences. The barrio's history, the institutions, and the spaces within it allowed El Paso's Mexican American community to carve out a sense of belonging in a city that restricted their movement as well as their socioeconomic and political advancement.

As tensions brewed between the two El Pasos over spatial conflicts and urban redevelopment projects, Southsiders' connection to the barrio fueled the need to preserve their neighborhood and home. By exerting their attachment, feelings of ownership, and desire to protect the barrio, Mexican Americans in South El Paso demanded their rights as citizens. The Southside preservation organizations developed in the 1970s along with the community of the area sought to safeguard their livelihoods and culture by defending the residential character of South El Paso. As Manuel Bañuelos stated in *El Poder de La Luz*, "Chicanos want to preserve the barrio because of the concept of community that has been a part of him for so long. This concept has been an overriding factor in the preservation of our culture, our language, and everything that is Chicano. It has been our blood."[152] South El Pasoans needed their community—the space, the people, and its spirit.

[152] J. Manuel Bañales, "We remember—El Barrio," *El Poder de la Luz*, vol. 1 no. 1, El Paso, Texas, November 1975. Chicano Vertical Files, C. L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso Library, 11.

## Chapter 3

## Taking Control from Within: The Rise of Barrio Preservation Organizations in South El Paso

After years of Misery and Filth,
After Years of Broken Promises,
After the Rats, the Cockroaches, the Broken Toilets
After the Slow Death of the People by T.B.
By Malnutrition, Pneumonia, and now
The Fiery Death of Three Children
We Will No Longer Wait.
-Abelardo "Lalo" Delgado[1]

On January 4, 1967, an unventilated gas heater in a *presidio* (tenement) located at 503 South Mesa ignited the bedding of Leticia, Orlando, and Ismael Rosales (4, 7, and 8 years old respectively), asphyxiating them. The community of South El Paso was shocked—but not surprised—that the substandard living conditions and the lack of a housing code claimed the lives of three innocent children. In the days after the tragedy, the *El Paso Herald-Post* reported that "El Paso saw what was to become the first Chicano protest march as almost 1,000 pickets paraded around City Hall angrily demanding housing code enforcement, higher wages, and a slum clearance program."[2] In addition, the community of South El Paso, held prayer groups and candlelight vigils, while the University of Texas at El Paso organized a conference where concerned citizens, academics, and activists discussed the conditions of the Southside and the possible solutions to housing problems in the area.[3] The tragedy in the South Mesa tenement

[1] Abelardo B. Delgado, *Untitled,* ca. 1967-68 in Clark S. Knowlton's *Autobiography of Clark S. Knowlton*, http://clarksknowlton.blogspot.com/2013/12/chapter-thirteen-el-paso-1962-1968-part_801.html, accessed March 18, 2014.

[2] "Seven Fire Code Violations Found, *El Paso Herald-Post,* January 6, 1967; "JD Group Trains Leaders, Sets Protests," *El Paso Herald-Post,* December 31, 1971.

[3] "South E.P. Slums Likely to Blow Up; Area's Woe Voiced," *El Paso Herald-Post,* February 7, 1967.

marked the beginning of an intense fight for better housing. Even though the community's avid efforts to address the substandard conditions of South El Paso commenced in 1967, the fights intensified and ideologies shifted in the mid-1970s as the terrible living conditions in the barrios turned into opportunities for city leaders to renew the area commercially.

In response to aggressive urban redevelopment plans throughout the 1970s, the people of El Segundo Barrio and Chihuahuita formed two neighborhood coalitions—*La Campaña Pro La Preservación del Barrio* and the Chihuahuita Improvement Association (CIA). As residents associated and actively engaged with the two groups, Southsiders negotiated their own visions of barrio rehabilitation with city leaders, and adopted different strategies to improve living conditions and protect their communities from the dismantling of their neighborhoods by city officials. Adopting the Chicana/o Movement ideology of self-determination, Southsiders took matters into their own hands regarding the future of their barrios. Through these organizations, the barrio then provided spaces where the population of Mexican descent could protect their homes, neighborhoods, and their sense of identity rooted in the history of their barrios. In addition, the barrios became sites where the community could demand citizenship rights and socio-economic and political mobility by forcing local, state, and federal urban development agencies to reconsider their policies in order to meet the demands, needs, and priorities of South El Paso.

The battles over better housing and neighborhood preservation coincided with two broad social and political movements: the consolidation of activist ideologies stemming from the War on Poverty and the Chicana/o Movement. As Mexican American urban

mobilizations in South El Paso intensified during the latter half of the 1970s, Southsiders obligated city leaders to petition for federal funds to address the dire situation in the barrios. Historically, the lack of a housing code and the city's defeat of urban renewal on three different occasions kept the city from obtaining federal funds from Housing and Urban Development (HUD).[4] Neighborhood organizations such as *La Campaña* and the CIA gave a political voice to the residents of South El Paso to fight for the safeguarding of the barrios while improving the conditions of the hundreds of dilapidated tenements in the area.

Scholarship on barrio uprooting and neighborhood gentrification oftentimes reflects the hopelessness Mexican Americans and Latina/os across the United States faced as a result of urban decline and redevelopment projects in the latter half of the twentieth century. Works discussing barrios in the postwar years chronicle the displacement of its residents and the eventual dismantling of communities.[5] The story of El Paso's Southside differs insofar as Mexican Americans stopped the redevelopment projects that threatened the survival of the area. In addition, the fights for neighborhood preservation brought positive changes as the organizations pressed local government leaders to bring more housing options to the barrios and fix existing tenements to meet code.

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[4] Ed Hamlyn, interview by Robert Cornish, March 16, 1985, transcript, American Planning Association—Texas Chapter Documents, Box 6, Folder 5, Alexander Architectural Library, University of Texas at Austin.

[5] Monica Perales, *Smeltertown: Making and Remembering a Southwest Border Community*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Lilia Fernández, *Brown in the Windy City: Mexicans and Puerto Ricans in Postwar Chicago*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Lydia R. Otero, *La Calle: Spatial Conflicts and Urban Renewal in a Southwest City*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010).

This chapter chronicles the formation of two neighborhood organizations during South El Paso's most volatile activist period, their experiences advocating against the destruction of their communities, as well as their engagement in urban redevelopment projects in the late 1970s. From rent strikes to attempts to block HUD funds to requesting that historic neighborhood status be applied to the barrio, these groups became a viable political voice for Mexican Americans in the Southside. Efforts by *La Campaña* and the CIA served to express Southsiders' discontent with urban discrimination as the community would no longer be passive to city leaders' neglect.

### *Raising a Political Consciousness in South El Paso*

For much of the twentieth century, El Paso's Mexican population remained politically disenfranchised. The labor exploitation, racial discrimination, and the urban segregation the group faced created a status of second-class citizenship, and Mexicans had minor representation within the county and local offices. In the postwar period, a few middle class Mexican Americans held "token" offices and other leadership positions, while the use of the poll tax limited the voice of those in a lower socioeconomic status.[6] Although El Paso made positive political strides in 1957 with the election of the first Mexican American mayor, Raymond L. Telles, the ethnic Mexican population continued to be both politically and economically marginalized.[7] As political scientist Benjamin Márquez argued in *Power and Politics in a Chicano Barrio*, "the poor Mexican American

[6]"Lists of Poll Tax Payers in El Paso County, Texas, 1963," *Alfredo Chavez Montoya Papers,* Box 4, Folder 24, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM. See also Mario T. García, *The Making of A Mexican American Mayor: Raymond L. Telles of El Paso*, (El Paso, TX: Texas Western Press, 1998), 29.

[7] García, *The Making of A Mexican American Mayor*, 4-5. See also Oscar J. Martínez, *The Chicanos of El Paso: An Assessment of Progress,* (El Paso, TX: Texas Western Press), 1980.

population was effectively excluded from holding public office or from articulating their problems and bringing them to some solution."[8] The arrival of liberal social welfare programs to the border city and the rise of the national and local Chicano Movement brought a political awareness to the ethnic Mexican population, one that would expand in the late 1960s and much of the 1970s.

Although politically and economically marginalized, leaders in South El Paso and neighborhood institutions such as the Boys' Club, Our Lady Youth Center, and Sacred Heart Church provided residents of the barrio with educational, cultural, and recreational services. The implementation of welfare programs during President John F. Kennedy's administration followed by President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty brought new opportunities for community betterment and political organizing. The arrival of national anti-poverty funds created a wide array of organizations where both the older generations and the barrio youth participated within different activities. Programs such as the Juvenile Delinquency Program, Job Corps, Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA), and the local Community Action Agency called Building Resources and Vocational Opportunities (BRAVO), served as some of the first agencies that provided community organizing skills and sparked the political awareness among barrio leaders and residents.

One of the first federal antipoverty programs in the city was the Juvenile Delinquency Project, a 1965 pilot project funded by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW).[9] Under the leadership of social workers Salvador

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[8] Benjamin Marquez, *Power and Politics in a Chicano Barrio: A Study of Mobilization Efforts and Community Power in El Paso*, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985), 1.

[9] The JD Project was funded $75,000 a year for three years. Clark S. Knowlton, *Autobiography of Clark S. Knowlton*, "Chapter 13, El Paso: 1962-1968 Part 2," http://clarksknowlton.blogspot.com/2013/12/chapter-thirteen-el-paso-1962-1968-part_3121.html, accessed March 18, 2014.

Ramírez, Abelardo "Lalo" Delgado, Nino Aguilera, and Felipe Peralta, the main goal of the program was to "create associations so that the four neighborhoods [could] more effectively deal with their social problems, including juvenile delinquency."[10] Barrio youth, however, were already semi-organized through sporting clubs, making the establishment of the project easier.[11] Youth clubs like the Chihuahua Cougars in Chihuahuita, the Sun Devils on Ochoa Street, the Alley Cats on Oregon Street, and the Blue Stars from El Paso Street, became the initial participants in the JD Project.[12] At the beginning, these groups came together to bring "*buena voluntad*" or "good will" to the barrio, and participated in cultural, sports, and celebration activities to keep the youth out of trouble.[13] In 1966, an alliance of the four Southside youth organizations became known as the Mexican American Youth Association, or MAYA.

Although the JD Project and MAYA were a part of the War on Poverty, Lalo Delgado and Sal Ramírez discussed societal injustices and the Chicano Movement with the participating youth. Antonio Marin, the first president of MAYA, recalled in an interview that the adult activists leading the project constantly asked the youth about their feelings and possible resolutions for the barrio. Even though MAYA began with the goal to bring "*buena voluntad*" to the barrio, it soon turned more overtly political by focusing

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[10] "Proposed Program" [Juvenile Delinquency Program Proposal], 1, Clark S. Knowlton Collection, Box 40, Folder 1, New Mexico State Records Center and Archives, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

[11] Antonio Marin, interview by the author, April 28, 2014, audio recording, El Paso, TX.

[12] There seems to be a discrepancy between whether or not these four groups were gang members. Oscar Lozano and Antonio Marin, part of the Blue Stars and Alley Cats respectively, mention these organizations were sports clubs attempting to steer away from gang activity. Scholars like Benjamin Marquez and sociologist Clark S. Knowlton refer to these groups as established gangs in South El Paso.

[13] Marin, interview.

on both local and national issues.[14] The youth were not the only ones noticing the political nature of the organization; the rest of the barrio and even the city began to notice. The *El Paso Herald-Post* reported that the JD Project became "a training ground for leaders of the Chicano Movement" citing their solidarity and involvement with the United Farm Workers' national grape boycott as one of many examples.[15] The members of MAYA were not afraid to use confrontational tactics, which allowed the organization to carry on after the JD Project funds depleted.[16] Many of the activists that participated in neighborhood organizations like Oscar Lozano, Salvador Balcorta, and Fred Morales began their activism through MAYA.

Despite its focus on juvenile delinquency, the organization also provided a political outlet for parents and the larger community of South El Paso. This coalition of intergenerational barrio residents became the Mexican American Committee on Honor and Service, MACHOS. The so-called "parent group" of the JD Project, became an instrumental voice in the barrio. Initially led by José Aguilar, who later became the director of El Paso's Housing Authority, the organization encouraged residents of the area to engage politically in local and barrio affairs, and not wait for traditional welfare programs and city officials to bring about change—a practice that carried through in the 1970s with new barrio organizing. MACHOS exemplified a true barrio grassroots organization, since activists visited tenement buildings, church groups, and schools in

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[14] Marin, interview.

[15] "JD Group Trains Leaders, Sets Protests," *El Paso Herald-Post*, December 31, 1971.

[16] Richard A. Garcia, *Political Ideology: A Comparative Study of Three Chicano Youth Organizations*, (San Francisco, CA: R&E Research Associates, 1977), 66.

order to speak directly to the community.[17] Towards the end of the 1960s when the fights for better housing intensified, MACHOS became one of the leading groups within the movement.

While these organizations inclined more toward barrio urban problems, other War on Poverty entities aided barrio residents through other outlets, especially education. In 1965, the Office of Equal Opportunity created El Paso's main Community Action Agency (CAA), Project BRAVO. This agency led efforts to educate both youth and adults through literacy programs, adult vocational training, and a Head Start program in the barrio.[18] Through the years, BRAVO remained less political than the groups under the apparatus of the JD Project, as the organization did not mobilize to rally the community of South El Paso. While Southsiders benefitted from the service-oriented programs BRAVO provided, many disagreed with the non-political stance of the agency.[19] Regardless of Project BRAVO's position among Southside organizations, vocal barrio preservation advocates like Luis Aguilera and Soledad Olivas began their barrio involvement through the agency.

National anti-poverty programs such as VISTA also served the community of the South El Paso. This program brought services to better the socioeconomic status of poor communities across the country. Traditionally, VISTA trained volunteers (mostly from the East Coast, educated, and middle class whites) to go into poor communities and

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[17] William S. Clayson, *Freedom is Not Enough: The War on Poverty and the Civil Rights Movement in Texas,* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 78.

[18] Ibid, 76.

[19] Ibid, 80. In addition, as the fight for better housing and neighborhood preservation escalate in the mid-1970s, La Campaña and residents of the Southside clashed many times with the ideologies of BRAVO.

organize their residents. In El Paso, VISTA became even more grassroots by recruiting local Mexican American volunteers to work within the barrios rather than bringing outsiders. The VISTA Minority Mobilization Project or MMP, trained Southside leaders through Saul Alinsky community organizing strategies, and in turn, these individuals would go out and train other Mexican Americans in the barrios. [20] Barrio leaders like Fred Morales became involved in VISTA, where he spent part of his early adult years as a volunteer primarily working to improve housing conditions in the Southside.[21] Through his involvement, Morales "got his hands dirty" negotiating with private entities and the government to "lend a helping hand" to the residents of the barrios.[22] His work with VISTA and his earlier student involvement with MAYA shaped his activism in the later years as a leader of the Chihuahuita Improvement Association.

Like in the rest of the nation, anti-poverty programs in El Paso suffered an ill fate once Richard Nixon took office and "de-escalated" the War on Poverty. By the early 1970s, the JD Project and MACHOS ran out of funds. Yet the retreat of federal anti-poverty programs left a long legacy of activism in South El Paso. Through the participation of Southsiders in War on Poverty agencies and projects, leaders gained valuable skills ranging from grant writing and education policy to grassroots organizing methods for the community. LBJ's anti-poverty programs coincided with the rising militancy of the Chicano Movement both nationally and locally.

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[20] Homero Galicia, interview by Sandra I. Enríquez and David Robles, July 21, 2015, video recording, *Civil Rights in Black and Brown Oral History Project*, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, TX.

[21] Fred Morales, interview by Oscar J. Martinez, August 28, 1975, interview no. 211, transcript, Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso, El Paso, TX.

[22] Interview of Fred Morales by the author, April 29, 2014, audio recording, El Paso, TX.

Beyond the active participation of Southsiders in local War on Poverty programs, the national Chicano Movement also created a political consciousness within the residents of the El Paso's barrios. Amidst the Chicana/o mobilization of the late 1960s and early 1970s, the city became a central location within *el movimiento*. Student movements led by MAYA and the Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA) chapter at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) brought changes in the secondary and university spheres of education. In the barrio schools like Bowie High School, MAYA led efforts to eradicate the pervasive "no Spanish rule" and end other discriminatory practices, petitioned school administrators to hire Mexican American teachers, provided resources for students to learn Chicana/o history, and demanded the establishment of bilingual education.[23] Parents, students, and community members organized to bring change to the historically Mexican school of El Paso.

MEChA also, urged UTEP officials to create a Chicano Studies Program. In 1970, faculty, students, and community leaders created *La Mesa Directiva*, a Chicana/o caucus to make the program possible. The committee got to work, and in November of that year, the first Chicano Studies program in Texas was approved by the University Of Texas Board Of Regents and the state Higher Education Coordinating Board.[24] A year later in December 1971, MEChA students took over the UTEP Administration Building, demanding President Joseph Smiley to develop recruitment and affirmative action plans for Chicana/o faculty and staff, as well as encourage intradepartmental collegiality with

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[23] Freddy Morales, interview by Regino Ortega, Jr., April 18, 1975, interview no. 159, transcript, Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso, El Paso, TX.

[24] "Blowout at UT El Paso: View from Parnassus—forty years in the vineyards of the muses," *Newspaper Tree: El Paso's Original News Source,* December 6, 2013. http://newspapertree.com/articles/2013/12/06/blowout-at-ut-el-paso-view-from-parnassus-forty-years-in-the-vineyards-of-the-muses, accessed March 18, 2015.

the Chicano Studies program. After 36 hours of keeping university President Smiley hostage, he and the students reached a mutual agreement. As a result of the student takeover, Smiley agreed to meet their demands.[25]

El Paso was also a site form important national Chicano Movement conversations. In 1967, President Johnson created the Inter-Agency Committee on Mexican American Affairs, led by Vicente T. Ximenes, an activist from the American GI Forum, an organization founded by World War II veterans. The agency's goal was to "assure that Federal programs are reaching the Mexican Americans and providing the assistance they need, and (to) seek out new programs that may be necessary to handle programs that are unique to the Mexican American community."[26] On October 26-28 of that same year, politicians and activists from across the country discussed the problems the Mexican American community faced in a series of Committee Hearings held in El Paso. Many in the Southside believed that El Paso's housing issues would be addressed during the Committee Hearings, however, barrio residents were not invited to the event. Upset that politicians spoke to the "rich, token Mexicans" rather than "talk to the poor," Chicana/o local and national activists organized protests, boycotts, and a rump conference at Sacred Heart Church in El Segundo Barrio.[27] It was during this counter-conference, that locals found an outlet to speak about the housing and urban issues plaguing the community, and heard prominent leaders of the Chicano Movement speak, including Rodolfo "Corky"

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[25] "Blowout at UT El Paso."

[26] Inter-Agency on Mexican American Affairs, Pamphlet, "The Mexican American: A New Focus on Opportunity," 1967-1968. Clark S. Knowlton Papers, Box 43, Folder 19, New Mexico State Records, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

[27] Clayson, *Freedom is Not Enough*, 112-113; Oscar Lozano, interview by author, February 25, 2014, audio recording, El Paso, TX.

Gónzalez, Bert Corona, and Reies López Tijerina. At the rump conference, Antonio Marin observed that many Southsiders were impressed with the Chicano leaders' militancy, himself included. According to the activist, "*la conferencia causó mucho eco*," (the conference caused a lot of echo) in the community.[28] Five years later in 1972, many attendees of the rump conference returned to El Paso for the first national convention of La Raza Unida Party, where activists witnessed the birth of a national Chicana/o political party.[29]

The national Chicana/o Movement resonated with El Paso's Mexican American community and encouraged mobilizations. Antonio Marin, the first president of MAYA, recalled in an interview that his family and a number of South El Paso residents picketed outside labor agencies in El Paso to prevent the hiring of strikebreakers during the UFW *huelga* in Coachella Valley.[30] The local Brown Berets protested against immigration policies that marginalized thousands of ethnic Mexicans in the barrios and in the borderlands.[31] In addition, the city partook in important labor movements such as the Farrah Strike, where many local female garment workers demanded unionization rights.[32]

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[28] Marin, interview.

[29] For more on the 1972 La Raza Unida National Convention in El Paso, see Armando Navarro, *La Raza Unida Party: A Chicano Challenge of the U.S. Two-Party Dictatorship,* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000).

[30] Marin, interview.

[31] Marquez, *Power and Politics in a Chicano Barrio: A Study of Mobilization Efforts and Commiunity Power in El Paso,* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985), 160.

[32]For more on the Farrah Strike see Vicki Ruíz, *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America,* New York: Oxford University Press, 1998, 127-132; Emily Honig, "Women at Farah Revisited: Political Mobilization and its Aftermath Among Chicana Workers in El Paso, Texas, 1972-1992," *Feminist Studies* 22, no. 2 (Summer 1996): 425-452.

For residents and activists of Chihuahuita and El Segundo barrio, the combination of the War on Poverty and *el movimiento* provided them an opportunity to become their own political actors, while finding the voice to demand their concerns as these pertained to the fights for better housing and barrio preservation. This allowed South El Pasoans to adopt different strategies by combining the two movements in order to find the best way to obtain results. These shifts caused a stronger ideology of self-determination, denouncing government help and handouts. From that point, the residents of the two Southside barrios took matters into their own hands to protect their neighborhoods from the constant modernizing desires of city leaders in the 1970s.

### *The Rise of Urban Activism in South El Paso*

Community members and activists credit the 1967 tenement fire as a catalyst for urban activism in the Southside. Following the deaths of the Rosales children, Southsiders demanded that city leaders address the substandard housing conditions the community had faced for generations. The quick mobilization to mourn and protest the tragedy triggered the political participation of thousands of Southsiders that now strived for social and urban change.

While the community became vocal in the weeks and months following the accident, the pleas of the community brought no immediate changes. Tired of seeing no results, the director of the JD Project, Lalo Delgado, decided it was time to act stating that "we have tried every way [to improve barrio housing] we could, without positive

results."[33] In the spring of 1968, in the spirit of César Chávez' 25-day fast earlier that year, Delgado decided he would begin a 40-day fast "to ask God's guidance for the people of El Paso's southside in seeking better housing conditions" for the Chicana/o community. The activist stayed in a tenement room in "*Los Seis Infiernos*" or the "Six Hells," the worst tenement buildings in the Southside. Delgado had seventeen goals for his fast—among these objectives were unifying the barrio, to make community institutions have the mission to serve the needs of South El Paso, for politicians and business owners to address the interests of Mexican Americans in the barrio, and most importantly, for a housing code to be enforced.[34]

Soon, many residents of the Southside were behind Delgado's cause. Every day, the activist had visitors from the barrio who would speak to him, and give him advice and motivation. The community held prayer groups and rosaries in different locations of El Segundo and Chihuahuita to encourage his cause. The *Herald-Post* noted that at times as many as 300 people from the barrio surrounded the activist.[35] Antonio Marin recalled that Delgado also had an entourage of MAYA members called *Los Dorados de MAYA,* who stayed with the youth worker at all times.[36]

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[33] "Faster Visits Wife and Children; Doctor Stops His Chewing Gum," Unknown Newspaper, n.d., in Abelardo Delgado Papers Box 5, Folder 19, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, The University of Texas at Austin.

[34] "Cesar Chavez Encourages EP Faster," and "Vastos fines del Ayuno de 'Lalo' Delgado," Unknown Newspapers, n.d., in Abelardo Delgado Papers Box 5, Folder 19, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, The University of Texas at Austin.

[35]"'Love Is More Powerful Than Violence' Says Youth Worker in 40-Day Fast," *El Paso Herald-Post,* March 28, 1968.

[36] *Los Dorados de MAYA* mimicked *Los Dorados de Pancho Villa,* the personal escorts of the Mexican Revolutionary. Marin, interview.

Although the fast did not reach the publicity of that of César Chávez, Delgado had the support of important Civil Rights activists like Chávez, Vicente Ximenes, and even Texas Senator Ralph Yarbrough and U.S. House Representative Richard C. White.[37] Yet, not everyone agreed with Lalo Delgado's fasting. The people who opposed the gesture believed that the activist would accomplish nothing to change the conditions of the barrio. Regardless of his critics, Abelardo Delgado felt that "his fast ha[d] been successful because of the number of visitors who have claimed enthusiasm over his attempt to make South El Paso residents aware of their housing conditions and to seek to improve them."[38]

Forty days later, Delgado's fast ended on Palm Sunday, with an outside mass in the property of Aoy School, one of the Mexican schools of the barrio. The Spanish service, led by Bishop Sidney Metzger gathered the community of the Southside, and high profile people such as Ximenes and Representative White. During the mass, Bishop Metzger urged people to "not grasp the weapons of war, but rather those of love and prayer so that one day the community could achieve the victory of better life conditions."[39]

While the fast did not achieve the immediate changes Abelardo Delgado hoped for, it still had a great influence for South El Paso Chicana/o residents and activists. For

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[37] "Cesar Chavez Encourages EP Faster;" "'Forget About Fast, Get to Work,' Visitors Tell Abelardo Delgado," *El Paso Herald-Post,* March 29, 1968; Telegram from Vicente Ximenes to Los Dorados de MAYA, April 5, 1968, Abelardo Delgado Papers Box 5, Folder 19, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, The University of Texas at Austin.

[38] "Southsider Ends El Paso Limited Fast," *El Paso Herald-Post,* April 6, 1968.

[39] "El Obispo de El Paso pide se empuñen las Armas del Amor," *El Fronterizo,* April 8, 1968. Article in Spanish. Original quote: "Empuñemos las armas pero no las de la guerra sino las del amor, las de oración para que un día nos levantemos con la victoria de mejores condiciones de vida."

one, community groups such as *Grupo La Fe* (La Fe Group) and *La Unión de Inquilinos* (Tenants Union) formed because of the fast.[40] The latter group would become instrumental in an important barrio squatter protest that will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. As Antonio Marin recalled, this period began a political awareness where "the people gathered in masses and had demonstrations" to protest discrimination in housing but also regarding other forms of societal injustices.[41]

On a larger scale, the mobilization following the Rosales tragedy and the Lalo Delgado fast pressed city leaders to address the concerns of the Southside. Mayor Judson Williams (1963-1969) appointed Delgado and Salvador Ramírez to a city advisory committee to study housing conditions in the area. According to political scientist Benjamin Márquez, this gesture marked "the first time in history, South El Pasoans were sitting on a committee that would make policy recommendations to the city."[42] After much deliberation in city hall between representatives, landlords, and concerned citizens, El Paso adopted the Southern Standard Housing Code, which had the lowest guidelines of the four U.S. housing codes.[43]

The enactment of the code meant new possibilities for Chihuahuita and El Segundo. Since its incorporation, El Paso had not had a housing code, which prevented the city from applying for urban renewal and other federal funds to better the living

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[40] Marin, interview.

[41] Ibid. Interview in Spanish. Original quote: "la gente empezó a apoyar mucho masivamente. La gente salía y se hacían manifestaciones."

[42] Marquez, *Power and Politics,* 100.

[43] "Council Okays New Housing Code," *El Paso Herald-Post,* January 11, 1968; Mark and Gertrude Adams, *A Report on Politics in El Paso,* (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard University, 1963), 5.

conditions of the barrios. With the Southern Standard Housing Code in place, authorities created and brought forth plans that would continue the involvement of barrio residents.[44] Although short-lived, the engagement of Southsiders would intensify their fights for better housing in the coming decade.

### *Rebirth of Barrio Activism: The Rise of La Campaña Pro La Preservación del Barrio*

The first wave of barrio activism ignited urban protests of the latter half of the 1970s in El Paso. The rise of neighborhood preservation efforts and the growth of the Chicano Movement throughout the country encouraged the communities of El Segundo Barrio and Chihuahuita to make their own changes in their barrios rather than wait for city authorities to bring about change. Like in the earlier years, a multigenerational alliance formed between longtime community members, activists, and students. According to activist Oscar Lozano, the mid 1970s marked the emergence of a new passion and energy within the ethnic Mexican community of the barrio, encouraging residents to be active agents regarding the future of both neighborhoods.[45]

Although city authorities turned the residents' early pleas for barrio improvement into attempts to commercialize the area without the voices of the Mexican American community, another tragedy on Easter Sunday of 1973 reawakened an intense fight against substandard housing conditions in South El Paso. On the morning of April 22, a gas leak at a tenement located at 2900 E. San Antonio Street caused an explosion killing

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[44] Although Mayor Judson Williams brought federal funds to construct the Armijo Projects, the implementation of the housing code as well as the tenure of Mayors Peter de Wetter and Bert Williams solidified the city's desire to pursue federal funds. Project REHAB, one of the first federally funded programs to rehabilitate the Southside in the 1970s will be discussed in the following chapter.

[45] Lozano, interview.

seven people and injuring several others.[46] This devastating event caught city leaders by surprise, especially since most redevelopment attempts were dormant in the barrio.[47] Incoming Mayor Fred Hervey (1951-1959 and 1973-1975) was forced to take immediate action to address the Southside. Hervey championed conservative politics and a spirit of free enterprise, tactics that shaped his policies in his second term as mayor.[48] Despite his opposition to social welfare programs, Mayor Hervey understood that he needed to address the problems of El Segundo to prevent other tragedies from happening.

Hervey and the city council agreed to create a seven member Building Safety and Inspection Board, whose responsibility was to assess housing in the barrio and enforce codes.[49] The preliminary study unsurprisingly declared dwellings in the Southside the worst in the city, which gave city officials green light to implement a plan of action. The Tenement Eradication Program, as the plan came to be known, would take place in three stages—public inspection surveys of properties that did not meet the city housing code, recommendation and notice of tenement condemnation, and relocating qualifying tenants into public housing, mostly outside of the barrio.[50] Tenement owners had the opportunity to either bring the building to meet code requirements or choose demolition, yet only a

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[46] "Seven Die in Gas Explosion," *El Paso Times,* April 22, 1973.

[47] Toward the end of his term, Mayor Bert Williams focused his attention on a city lawsuit against the American Smelting and Refining Company (ASARCO). High levels of lead contamination were found in the residents of Smeltertown, a company town on the margins of El Paso, causing the demolition and eventual relocation of ethnic Mexican families to other parts of the city. For more on Smeltertown and ASARCO, see Perales, *Smeltertown*.

[48] Marquez, *Power and Politics,* 156.

[49] Ibid, 157.

[50] "Alderman Explains Tenement Eradication," *El Paso Times,* July 12, 1974. The Tenement Eradication Program would only affect tenements and exclude single-family homes and duplexes.

very small percentage of owners made the necessary repairs.[51] From August of 1973 to September of 1974, more than ninety tenement buildings were razed in El Segundo, displacing about 808 families.[52] As political scientist Benjamin Marquez stated, "inspection, notification, destruction of buildings, and tenant relocation proceeded in rapid succession; the city bureaucracy experienced a [level of] coordination and efficiency unheard of in its history of involvement in the Barrio"[53]

Mayor Hervey's precise and systematic plan hit the community of South El Paso with no mercy. The Tenement Eradication Program targeted the area east of Campbell Street and north of 9th Avenue, roughly about half of El Segundo Barrio.[54] When asked about the demolitions, Rafael Valdespino, a barrio resident and activist, recalled that "[Hervey] did not touch his heart to see how many families were heartbroken because they took their homes from El Segundo Barrio. He just didn't care."[55] Many people from the barrio shared Mr. Valdespino's point of view due to the magnitude of the tenement razing—the neighborhood that for years had been home was disappearing before the residents' eyes.

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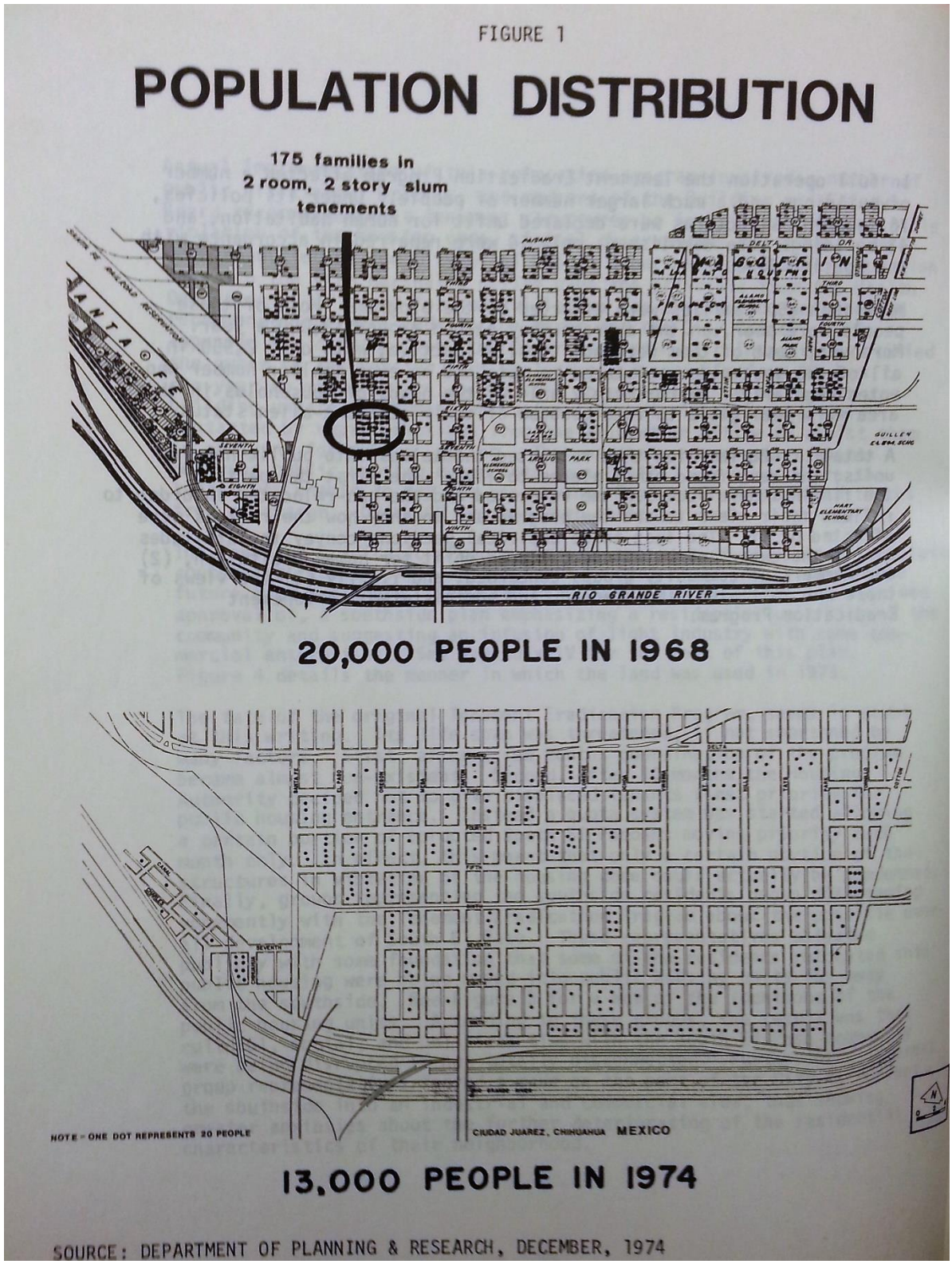
[51] Lozano, Interview.

[52] "Manifesto from the Community of South El Paso," ca. 1975, 1, MEChA Papers, UTEP Chapter, MS251, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections, The University of Texas at El Paso Library.

[53]Marquez, *Power and Politics*, 162-3.

[54] "Alderman Explains Tenement Eradication," *El Paso Times*, July 12, 1974.

[55] Rafael Valdespino Jr., interview by Jesus Valdespino, April 18, 1976, interview no. 224, transcript, Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso, El Paso, TX. Interview in Spanish. Original quote: "Este hombre no se tentó el corazón para ver muchas familias y mucha gente que ha muerto cuando más porque les quitaron sus casas del Segundo Barrio. A él no le interesa."




Map 3.1 Depopulation of South El Paso as a result of the Tenement Eradication Program. James W. Lamare, *An Evaluation of the Tenement Eradication Program of the City of El Paso.* Chicano Vertical Files, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso Library.

Fortunately for the Southside, the program halted at the beginning of 1975. Alderman E.H. Baeza reported to the *El Paso Times* that the Tenement Eradication Program was temporarily suspended "as a result of the critical shortage of low-income housing, a high unemployment rate and the lack of new public housing construction activity."[56] Baeza also mentioned that even though tenement owners were notified about the delay, "it was important to underline that the City of El Paso assume[d] no responsibility for actions of eviction of families taken by the tenement owners on their behalf." Many landowners, as expected, demolished their tenements in hopes of making a profit.[57] The shortage of housing and the inability to afford homes in and out of the barrio made it impossible for uprooted residents of El Segundo to find homes.

Although the temporary interruption of the Tenement Eradication Program seemed like a breath of life for the Southside community, redevelopment projects and zoning changes continued to haunt the area. A new plan called the *1974 South El Paso Plan* now favored the commercialization of the barrio. To the dismay of the Mexican American community who wished to keep the residential and Mexican cultural character of the area, the plan encouraged industries such as clothing or electronic manufacturers with a high employment per square mile to move into the neighborhood. According to the *El Paso Herald-Post,* the plan "call[ed] for possible light industry in two quadrants of the area and industry in a portion bounded by Fifth and Seventh Avenues and St. Vrain and Ochoa Streets."[58] Though the zoning of El Segundo as a whole would not be changed,

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[56] "City Suspends Slum Eradication Because of Public Housing Shortage," *El Paso Times,* January 29, 1975.

[57] Ibid.

[58] "Sweeping Changes Due South El Paso By New Zone Plan," *El Paso Herald-Post,* July 30, 1974.

city authorities reviewed individual properties and projects that applied for a zoning change on a case-by-case basis.[59] This meant that the chances of tenement owners reconstructing apartments would be slim, and that landlords would rather utilize empty lots for commercial purposes.

Residents of South El Paso responded to the drastic changes happening around their communities. In 1974, at the peak of the Tenement Eradication Program and the intensification of what barrio residents called the "systematic destruction of the barrio," a group of Chicana/o activist and community members created an organization called *La Campaña Pro La Preservación del Barrio* or the Campaign for the Preservation of the Barrio.[60] According to Oscar Lozano, one of the group's members, different activists came together at a critical moment to take a direct action approach against plans to destroy the Southside. Some of the active members included Lozano, a former member of MAYA and the Blue Stars club; Carmen Felix, a Project BRAVO English teacher turned South El Paso activist involved in literacy and employment programs; Juan Montes, a UTEP student; Fred Morales, a member of MAYA and VISTA volunteer; Soledad Olivas, a longtime resident of the barrio; and Gabriel Herrera a former member of MACHOS.[61] The organization formed to ensure "that the unique ethnic cultural and religious character of South El Paso not be destroyed to the detriment of its population by economic interests."[62] In order to prevent the administration's neglect of the area, the

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[59] James W. Lamare, *An Evaluation of the Tenement Eradication Program of the City of El Paso,* (El Paso, TX: Department of Planning and Research, December 1974). Chicano Vertical Files, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections, The University of Texas at El Paso Library.

[60] "Manifesto from the Community of South El Paso," 1.

[61] Lozano, interview.

[62] "South Side Group Files Suit," *El Paso Times,* April 12, 1978.

group adopted an ideology of working together as a community, while studying ways in which the residential character of the barrios could be conserved without maintaining its poverty.[63] With this preservationist outlook, citizens of the Southside would not only demand better housing and living conditions, but they would also maintain the ethnic Mexican and cultural ties of their beloved barrio.[64]

After decades of false hopes and broken promises, the energy and desire to preserve the residential character of the Southside spread throughout the community. In a true grassroots effort to organize South El Paso, *La Campaña* activists began an education campaign throughout the barrios. This gesture differed greatly from programs like Project BRAVO, since the new organization focused on advising residents about their rights as Mexican American citizens and longtime residents and tenants, rather than advocating vocational training. Meetings, pamphlets, and even a "Charter of the Rights of the Tenant" informed community members about problems, goals, and solutions for the barrios and its people.[65] Soledad Olivas, a lifelong resident of El Segundo Barrio, stated in an interview that when she found out about the group, she "became very excited that people were working toward the preservation of El Segundo Barrio" and that she joined and helped out as much as she possibly could.[66] Residents of the Southside were not

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[63] Lozano, interview.

[64] "Picketers Protest 'Barrio' Housing," *El Paso Herald-Post*, March 25, 1975.

[65] Marquez, *Power and Politics*, 176.

[66] Soledad Olivas, interview by Cecilia Vega, November 30, 1976, interview no. 251, transcript, Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso. Interview in Spanish. Original quote: "así que yo me entusiasmé cuando ya vi que se estaba trabajando por la preservación del Segundo Barrio. Fue cuando yo entré a esta campaña, y es donde he ayudado en lo que yo podía hacer."

opposed to the demolition of tenements, but they wanted new housing and wished to remain in the same area. In an interview, activist Oscar Lozano reflected that Southsiders knew that they were not the owners of the properties or the area, but that after decades of renting, the community believed it was entitled to determine the future of South El Paso.[67]

Members of *La Campaña* and the community of the Southside accomplished a number of objectives. For barrio residents, the organization provided opportunities to become politically empowered. Over the course of the late 1970s, the group led South El Paso residents through organized street demonstrations, commercial boycotts, rent strikes, and even supported and guided squatter episodes (which will be discussed in the following chapter). Although many community members advocated *La Campaña's* goals and ideologies, others like Reverend Jesse Muñoz from Our Lady of the Light Church, believed the organization was full of "Communist agitators" and that "the people of the barrio [were] being misled by demagogues."[68] While city authorities and some religious leaders deemed the organization as "rabble-rousers," and some community members were afraid of the radical tactics of the group, many Southside Mexican Americans believed *La Campaña's* approach was the only way left to demand the changes that the neighborhood desperately needed. Three years after the creation of the neighborhood association, an article on the *El Paso Times* reported that "with La Campana's support, southside tenants already have began to assert themselves… and, in some instances,

[67] Lozano, interview.

[68] "South Side Housing Breeds Anger; Factions Clash, And No One Wins," *El Paso Times,* April 26, 1977; "Barrio: Community Control Would End 'Poverty Pimps,'" *El Paso Times,* April 27, 1977.

forcing landlords to capitulate to their demands."[69] For much of the late 1970s, the organization led a number of ethnic Mexicans to claim their citizenship and human rights to housing and community belonging.

### *La Campaña's Grassroots Efforts for Community Preservation*

One of the first efforts *La Campaña* participated in was in the creation of yet another redevelopment plan for South El Paso as Mayor Don Henderson (1975-1977) proposed a study in hopes to better the conditions of the barrios. In 1975, the City of El Paso contracted the Better Communities Corporation (BCC), an urban firm from Woodland Hills, California, directed by native El Pasoan Ray Carrasco.[70] The BCC previously developed plans for barrios in East Los Angeles and Sacramento. Nestor Valencia, Mayor Henderson's executive assistant, told the *El Paso Times* that Carrasco was definitely a qualified man for the job, given his experience as director of HUD in Los Angeles, his experiences redeveloping California barrios, and his ties and familiarity with El Paso.[71]

The goal of the study was to recommend ways to fund barrio rehabilitation projects, initially, without HUD monies. El Paso's inability to obtain federal funds stemmed from the requirement for cities to scatter public housing to "break up the ghettos," which obligated city leaders to spread Mexican Americans to areas outside of

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[69] "Residents Seek Community Control," *El Paso Times,* April 26, 1977.

[70] "South El Paso Housing Plans In Hands Of California," *El Paso Times,* April 23, 1975.

[71] "El Paso Housing Plans In Hands of Californian," *El Paso Times,* 1975.

the barrio—against the wishes of the community of South El Paso.[72] Barrio residents became excited with the idea of potentially finding solutions to the housing shortage in the area. Carmen Felix, a member of *La Campaña* shared the community's enthusiasm for the plan, stating that "we [the organization] were instrumental in bringing Carrasco here to coordinate the plan, and we want to meet with him to give him the correct view of what people want."[73] Having a fellow Chicano plan the study meant a lot to the community given the previous history and wariness of city authorities.

Unlike previous researchers, Carrasco began to have meetings with residents of the Southside. He believed that communication between the city and residents of the barrio was crucial for the development of the area, given the distrust of the community.[74] Shortly after the study began, the firm divided South El Paso into seven different sectors, each represented by a council of residents from the area called *El Concilio del Barrio,* or Barrio Community Council. *El Concilio* represented seven zones—Chihuahuita, Stanton, Sacred Heart, Lydia Patterson, Armijo, Alamito, and El Paseo. Each zone had five representatives, totaling thirty-five elected council people for the study. Some of the participants like Magdaleno Cisneros, Rafael Valdespino, and Soledad Olivas were active members of *La Campaña.*[75] Valdespino, president of *El Concilio*, stated in an interview

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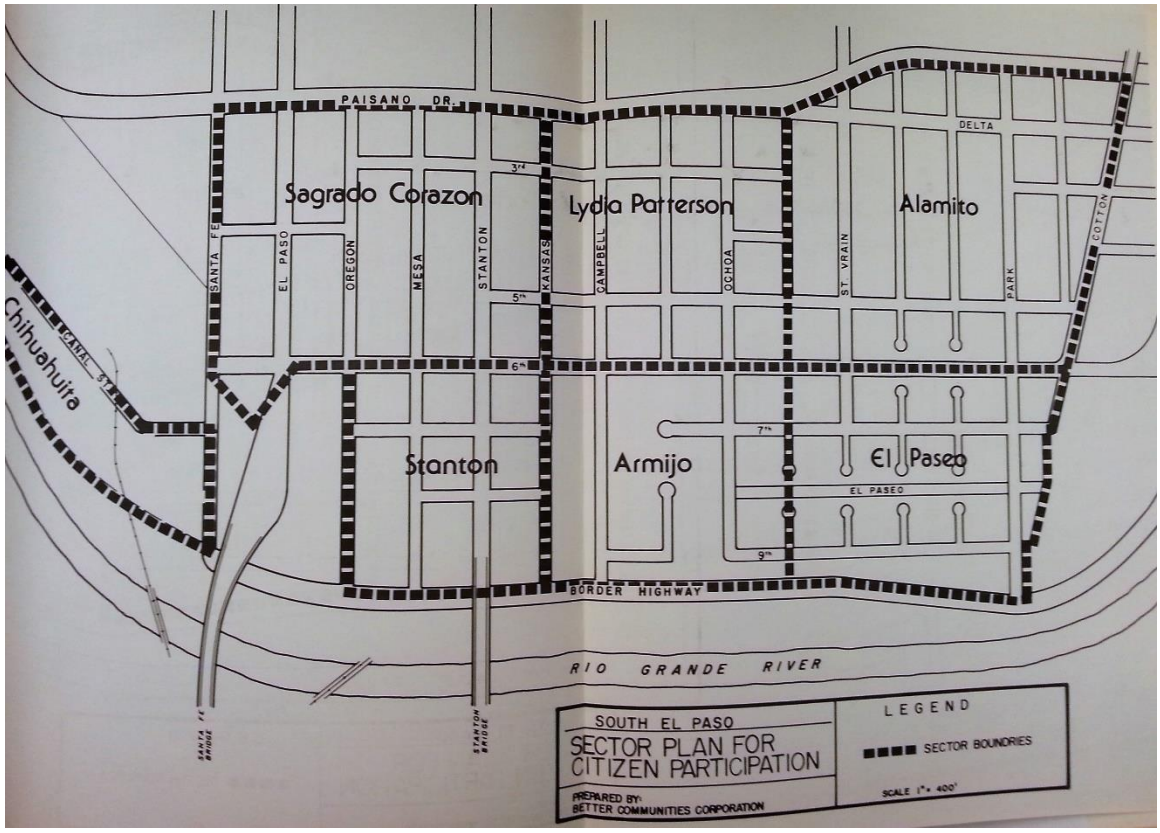
[72] "HUD official Says Federal Funds Available for South EP Housing," *El Paso Times,* May 3, 1975.

[73] "More Housing is Plea," unknown newspaper and date, in El Paso Public Library Vertical Files, South El Paso—La Campaña.

[74] "Southside housing Plan Must Suit Overall Needs," *El Paso Times,* April 4, 1975.

[75] Better Communities Corporation and Department of Planning, Research and Development City of El Paso, Texas, "Revitalization Plan for the South El Paso Project Area," El Paso, Texas, August 1976, 10, American Planning Association—Texas Chapter: The History of Planning in Texas Project Records, Alexander Architectural Archives, University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.

that participants had many goals in mind. Some of these included using empty lots for the construction of public housing, eliminating Savage Oil Company because of its negative impact on the people of the barrio, controlling the expansion of industries such as Wyler and Sunco, beautifying the area, and bringing an affordable public hospital to the barrio.[76] *La Campaña*, had faith that the revitalization program would accomplish its goals and bring much needed housing to the neighborhood.



Map 3.2 The Seven Zones represented in *El Concilio del Barrio*. *Revitalization Plan for the South El Paso Project Area*, Prepared by Better Communities Corporation, 1976. American Planning Association -- Texas Chapter: The History of Planning in Texas Project Records, Alexander Architectural Archives, University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.

As the study of South El Paso progressed, many members of *El Concilio del Barrio* grew disillusioned with the cause. *La Campaña* member Soledad Olivas stated

[76] Valdespino, interview.

that she was disappointed in the organization because community members "were not taken in mind and were kept from voicing our concerns." Mrs. Olivas continued by saying that "everything went for the property owners and not the tenant. It was not convenient for us to be there, we were wasting our time… all promises and nothing was accomplished."[77] Many members shared Soledad Olivas' feelings, that the council favored homeowners in the barrio, rather than the tenants. Disappointed by the course of the BCC study, ten community members, also participants of *La Campaña,* resigned and walked out of a *Concilio* meeting. The names of the people who resigned appeared in the final draft of the study as supporters of the plan without their consent.[78]

Carrasco believed *La Campaña's* dissatisfaction stemmed from the alleged organization's loss of power within the Southside community.[79] Some of the council members also blamed the neighborhood organization for instigating the resignation. Rafael Valdespino, president of *El Concilio,* believed *La Campaña* attempted to dismantle the revitalization plan. The city's federal grants coordinator, Sharleen Hemming, mentioned in a *Times* article that "a lot of people would term La Campana a more radical, militant group. In my opinion, that's true, but there's a place for these groups. They keep you on your toes and many times you can't make progress without

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[77] Olivas, interview. Interview in Spanish. Original quote: "nos decepcionamos porque no nos tomaban en cuenta. Se nos negaba la palabra." "La mayoría iba para el propietario y no para el inquilino…no nos convenía estar allí, ¿qué estábamos haciendo perdiendo tiempo? Era nada más promesas, y promesas, y promesas, y nunca se veía nada."

[78] Better Communities Corporation, "Revitalization Plan for the South El Paso," 10; Letter from La Campaña La Pro Preservación del Barrio to HUD: Re: City of El Paso's UDAG Application: A Community Protest, Chicano Vertical Files, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections, The University of Texas at El Paso Library.

[79] "Discontent Surprises Carrasco," *El Paso Times,* July 17, 1976.

them."[80] Carmen Felix on the other hand, denied Carrasco's and Valdespino's allegations. She told the *El Paso Times* that "we [*La Campaña*] wouldn't have pushed for its creation [redevelopment plan] in the first place. If the council was really doing something to help the barrio, then those people wouldn't have resigned."[81]

Despite the opposition from *La Campaña*, the BCC plan was completed and presented to the City of El Paso in August of 1976. Carrasco's recommendations included making South El Paso a combined area of residential, commercial, and industrial zones.[82] To achieve this plan, the study called for the demolition of a number of tenements, which made the community uncertain about construction of new housing in the area. *La Campaña's* response to the plan was that:

> The sector of Stanton, Sacred Heart, and Chihuahuita, will be drastically de-populated. This means that if we divide the Barrio in two, on the area to the east of Kansas and the other to the west, the people living on the west of Kansas run the risk of having to relocate to the other side. The area where the tenants live will be cleared in order to incorporate the expansion of the commercial area of Stanton and El Paso Streets.[83]

All stages involved federal funding from different agencies requiring long application processes. Carrasco asserted that "high land values in South El Paso will cause some delays and perhaps scrapping some of the programs."[84] The BCC Plan however, would become the blueprints for the future redevelopment of South El Paso. While *La*

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[80] "Segundo Barrio Input Progressing, Grants Coordinator Says," *El Paso Times,* July 23, 1976.

[81] "Enthusiasm For Barrio Revitalization Turns To Disenchantment," *El Paso Times,* July 22, 1976.

[82] Better Communities Corporation, "Revitalization Plan for the South El Paso," 7-9.

[83] *Regeneración Del Barrio,* julio 1976, in Marquez, *Power and Politics,* 175.

[84] "Development Study Urges Keeping South El Paso's Residential Character," *El Paso Times,* May 27, 1976.

*Campaña*'s discontent did not affect the outcome of the study, their resistance marked one of the first instances where the Chicana/o organization voiced their concerns in city hall, and insisted on preserving the barrio exclusively as residential area.

After the participation in the BCC plan, *La Campaña's* role in the community increased. The mass education efforts in the Southside particularly regarding their rights as renters represented one of the first successful mobilizations in the barrio. Leaders of believed that landowners had taken advantage of the housing shortage caused by the Tenement Eradication Program. Many claimed that the razing of tenements caused a rent increase in the barrio, making it difficult for Mexican American families to afford housing. Tenants believed that the increased rents required landlords to bring tenements up to code. One of the organization newsletters circulating the barrio stated that:

> Rent strikes are the only alternative people have. Tenants do not have to depend on deceptive bureaucrats; they [tenants] have to make tenement owners feel the demands directly. If the owner you are renting from continues increasing your rent without your consent and without making the proper repairs, you have the right to strike and not pay rent until the owner remedies the situation.[85]

As owners refused to fix the conditions of the tenements, residents decided to withhold their rent payments.

*La Campaña* staged a number of rent strikes around South El Paso. The first began when the owner of a tenement on S. Santa Fe Street announced the construction of a loading dock on the premises in order to extend a warehouse. Two families decided

[85] "Control de Rentas," *Regeneración Del Barrio*, marzo-abril, 1977, 3-4, Chicano Vertical Files, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections, The University of Texas at El Paso Library. Document in Spanish. Original quote: "Huelgas de renta so la alternativa que la gente tiene, Los inquilinos no tienen que depender de los burócratas farsantes, sino hacer que los terratenientes sientan las demandas directamente. Si el terrateniente al que Ud. Le renta continua aumentando las rentas sin su consentimiento y a la vez se niega hacer las reparaciones adecuadas, Ud tiene el derecho de hacer huelga y no seguir pagándole la renta hasta que el terrateniente remedie la situación.

they would continue to live in the tenement and refused to pay rents, as the construction would change the residential building into a commercial one.[86] The owner, Fernando Villalobos, agreed to stop the construction if the tenants agreed to pay a small rent increase.[87] One of the most successful strikes took place in a tenement building on Virginia and Third Streets owned by A.A. De La Torre. For five months, tenants refused to pay rent to Mr. De La Torre when he refused to address a resident letter demanding the repairs of the building's windows, walls, roof, and plumbing.[88] During the strike, the community held a two-day picket outside his hardware store on South Stanton Street. Unable to evict the residents and pressured by the mobilization of not only his tenants but also the community, he gave in to the residents' demands and replaced the roof and broken windows in the tenement. De La Torre did not collect rents until he made the promised repairs.[89]

*La Campaña* member Oscar Lozano recalled the hard work and struggles of the strikers took several years to come into fruition, yet the efforts made some "slumlords" respond to the repair pleas of the community.[90] Through these fights, the Mexican community of the Southside demanded that it was the responsibility of the owner to make the necessary repairs and ensure that tenants lived in humane conditions. With help and

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[86] "Familias de las Calles El Paso y Santa Fe se mejoran," *Regeneración Del Barrio*, marzo-abril, 1977, 4, Chicano Vertical Files, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections, The University of Texas at El Paso Library.

[87] Marquez, *Power and Politics*, 177.

[88] "Control de Rentas," *Regeneración Del Barrio*, marzo-abril, 1977, 4, Chicano Vertical Files, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections, The University of Texas at El Paso Library.

[89] Lozano, interview; "Residents Seek Community Control," *El Paso Times*, April 26, 1977.

[90] Lozano, interview.

guidance from *La Campaña*, Southside tenants took the "initiative and acted on their own," a different "boots on the ground" strategy from earlier barrio activism.[91]

The success of the rent strikes around the barrio led the leaders of *La Campaña* and the community of the Southside to press authorities for a city-wide rent freeze. The fact that tenement owners increased rents without making repairs to the point that residents could no longer afford to live in the barrio, forced the Chicana/o activists to pressure city leaders to consider a plan of action to keep rent prices from increasing in the Southside. According to Oscar Lozano, the organization did research and found that in conservative Texas, there was an old World War II era statute that said "in emergency situations where there is not enough adequate housing, the state [could] declare an emergency and impose a [state mandated] rent freeze."[92] Members of *La Campaña* believed El Segundo Barrio was in a state of emergency (because of the housing shortage) and that there was a legal precedent to take action. In a pamphlet that circulated in the barrios, *La Campaña* stated: "residents of the Segundo Barrio have pleaded time and time again for the city fathers to act affirmatively on their housing problems. We no longer plead. We demand that a rent control ordinance be implemented immediately."[93]

*La Campaña* began their effort by having people sign a petition, and enlisted the help of the El Paso Legal Aid Society (EPLAS), a non-profit organization that provides legal services and assistance to low-income people.[94] With the support of the community

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[91] "Control de Rentas," *Regeneración Del Barrio*, marzo-abril, 1977, 4, Chicano Vertical Files, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections, The University of Texas at El Paso Library.

[92] Lozano, interview.

[93] *La Campaña* leaflet, n.d., in Marquez, *Power and Politics*, 192.

[94] "Who are we," Texas RioGrande Legal Aid, Inc., http://www.trla.org/about/who-we-are. Accessed March 25, 2015.

and EPLAS, the group lobbied Mayor Don Henderson for action. In March of 1977, the *Herald-Post* reported that about 75 people attended a City Council meeting, holding signs (both in English and Spanish) in support for a rent control ordinance.[95] Carmen Felix, Juan Montes, and Oscar Lozano presented the petition and asked the mayor and council members to consider passing a resolution before the upcoming election. The proposal was "an ordinance which states that no landlord in this city may raise rents from their present level on any structure not meeting with the city housing code requirements," and that the residents of South El Paso wanted "some action preferably before the city elections."[96] Mayor Henderson, did not address the demands of Southsiders. At the meeting, he responded to the community's allegations that his administration had not achieved much for the community of South El Paso by stating that "you can elect somebody else… but those sitting here will not be intimidated."[97] A few weeks later, Don Henderson lost the election to Ray Salazar, the second Mexican American mayor of the city.

The election of Ray Salazar, brought hope to the ethnic Mexican community of South El Paso, and because of his campaign promises, it meant the rent control ordinance was still alive. Salazar researched the possibility of a rent freeze, investigating whether *La Campaña's* state of emergency allegations were correct. However, a rent freeze would

[95] "Barrio group hits rent freeze promises," *El Paso Herald-Post,* March 10, 1977.

[96] "Southside Group Seeks Some Rent Freezes," *El Paso Times,* March 11, 1977.

[97] "Barrio group hits rent freeze promises," *El Paso Herald-Post,* March 10, 1977.

only be temporary, and state law required the approval of Governor Dolph Briscoe to pass the ordinance.[98]

Salazar's efforts to bring forth a rent freeze also raised concerns from landlords and was met with opposition from the El Paso Board of Realtors. In an interview with the *El Paso Times*, Angel Rivas and Norman Haddad asserted that the Board of Realtors and other landlords were prepared to protest in city hall, Austin, and even Washington. In hopes that the City of El Paso did not take the possibility of the rent control to the legal route, barrio property owners decided to reach an agreement. On May 17, 1977, in a meeting behind closed doors, members of *La Campaña,* EPLAS, city officials, and John Kemp, the representative for 90 percent of tenement owners, compromised on a one-year voluntary rent freeze. [99]

Members of *La Campaña* understood that the agreement was a small victory, but they also were very skeptical. To extend its efforts, the organization mobilized its supporters to press city authorities for an actual city-wide ordinance. Israel Galindo, the EPLAS representative of the group, told the *El Paso Times* that "so far, Kemp is perhaps the only one who has attempted to meet the problem. The others (landlords or their representatives) have ignored it."[100] Despite their attempts, city council tabled the ordinance in September of that year. In a heated feud between Mayor Salazar and Southside Chicano/a activists, rent control was deferred "until we're ready to bring it

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[98] "Mayor advised he lacks power to control rent," *El Paso Herald Post,* April 26, 1977; "Tentative 'Cease-Fire' Negotiated Between Barrio Tenants, Landlords," *El Paso Times,* May 17, 1977.

[99] "Barrio property owners freeze rents for one year," *El Paso Herald-Post,* May 17, 1977.

[100] "Tentative 'Cease-Fire' Negotiated Between Barrio Tenants, Landlords," *El Paso Times,* May 17, 1977.

back to council."[101] Oscar Lozano believed that even though the rent control attempt was not successful as expected, it brought attention to the city. Furthermore, the activist concluded that "it helped *La Campaña* gain stature within the community. We were offering viable alternatives to the status quo."[102]

### *South El Paso Redevelopment Hopes and the Fight for Federal Monies*

The tumultuous atmosphere in the Southside necessitated an intervention beyond local governmental authorities. Mayor Salazar maintained his commitment to improving barrio conditions, yet he and his administration knew that the city needed federal funds to undertake the demands of Southsiders. Due to the increasing decline of the city core throughout the United States in the 1970s, the Carter administration adopted a comprehensive urban policy to halt urban decay. One of President Carter's initiatives was the Housing and Community Development program in 1977. Under this plan, the Urban Development and Action Grant (UDAG) "provided a form of government intervention to deal with perceived market imperfections in economically disadvantaged cities."[103] After an application process, UDAG funds would be distributed to city governments, who could apply the monies to solve problems of the urban core. According to historian Tracy Neumann, "observers have described UDAGs as 'private-sector-led version of urban renewal' that won the support from mayors and businesses interests alike because the program made federal funds available for large-scale downtown revitalization

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[101]"Barrio rent control tabled in hot debate," *El Paso Herald-Post,* September 1, 1977.

[102] Lozano, interview.

[103] "Symptoms of Urban Decay Are Present in EP," *El Paso Times,* May 29, 1977.

programs."[104] Mayor Salazar believed the federal funds could solve the conditions of the Southside, and supported the revitalization of the downtown core with UDAG funds. The Mexican American community, however, seized the support of application when plans extended beyond the construction of new housing in the Southside.[105]

Mayor Salazar and Mayor Pro Tem Dan Ponder quickly drafted an application using Ray Carrasco's Better Communities Corporation study as a plan for action.[106] The original application called for 290 new housing units, the rehabilitation of 120 tenements, and the construction of 150 new units outside the barrios.[107] Having to follow HUD requirements, but knowing that land prices in the Southside were the most expensive in the city, leaders knew they had to turn to the business community in order to obtain federal funds. After speaking to people in the Dallas and Washington, D.C. HUD offices, Mayor Salazar learned that private investment could be an advantage to receive federal monies to alleviate housing shortages.[108] The initial response of investors was a positive one. When meeting with Mayor Salazar, developer Al Lemley responded, "show us some land and we'll do the rest."[109] City leaders hoped to request $8.05 million, and although not all business owners supported the UDAG program, the financial community pledged

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[104] Tracy Neumann, "Privatization, Devolution, and Jimmy Carter's National Urban Policy," *Journal of Urban History* 40, no. 2 (2014): 294.

[105] For more on Carter's urban policies and UDAG see Ingrid W. Reed, "The Life and Death of UDAG: An Assessment Based on Eight Projects in Five New Jersey Cities," *Publius* 19, no. 3 (1989): 93-109; Alma H. Young, "Urban Development Action Grants: The New Orleans Experience," *Public Administration Quarterly* 8, no. 1 (Spring 1984): 112-129; Jerry A. Webman, "UDAG: Targeting Urban Economic Development," *Political Science Quarterly* 96, no. 2 (Summer 1981): 189-207.

[106] "City Going Fund Seeking Armed With Housing Plan," *El Paso Times,* May 25, 1977.

[107] "South El Paso Grant Request Going to D.C.," *El Paso Times,* January 31, 1978.

[108] Ibid.

[109] "Businessmen Pledge To Back South EP Housing Project, *El Paso Times,* July 14, 1977.

$39,400,000, almost $5 per every HUD dollar for the project to come to fruition. Nestor Valencia and Mayor Pro Tem Dan Ponder hand delivered the UDAG application to HUD headquarters in Washington, D.C. on January 31, 1978.[110]

While the business community seemed on board for the UDAG plan, the Southside became a battleground over the possible usage of federal funds. When *La Campaña* learned the Salazar administration planned to use the BCC recommendations as a guideline and about a commercial project led by Nestor Valencia, the organization quickly opposed the UDAG application. Valencia, now Federal Grants and Urban Affairs Coordinator, planned a face-lifted shopping area in the Stanton corridor, the street that connected El Paso and Ciudad Juárez.[111] Juan Montes, member of *La Campaña,* stated that the group would have "no qualms about UDAG if all the money went to housing."[112]

Another point of contention for *La Campaña* was the fact that city authorities had no input from Southsiders regarding program strategies and future outcomes for the community. According to UDAG standards, citizen participation was required "with special attention to measures to encourage the statement of views and the submission of proposals by low and moderate-income persons, minorities, and residents of blighted neighborhoods."[113] At a meeting held two days before the submission of the UDAG application, Robert Beltran, a resident of the South El Paso for twenty five years, asked Mayor Salazar why South El Pasoans were excluded from the process. Mr. Beltran said,

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[110] "Merchants react to proposal," *El Paso Herald-Post,* February 6, 1978; "Southside Grant Bid Draws New Support to Gain Steam," *El Paso Herald-Post,* January 30, 1978; "South El Paso Grant Request Going to D.C.," *El Paso Times,* January 31, 1978.

[111] "Merchants react to proposal," *El Paso Herald-Post,* February 6, 1978.

[112] "Southsiders Continue Protest Over Revitalization Plan," *El Paso Times,* February 21, 1978.

[113] Ibid.

"all I keep reading about in the papers is meetings with bankers and businessmen. But these are our lives." Mayor Salazar responded that because of the upcoming January 31 deadline, authorities lacked the time to meet with Southsiders. However, the Mayor asserted that meetings from years prior would be considered for the application.[114]

With future commercialization projects for the Southside and no community participation, *La Campaña* believed that federal funds were another excuse to dismantle the residential character of El Paso's Chicana/o barrios. This time, however, the organization bypassed city authorities and directly targeted federal and regional urban development agencies. Countering the city's application, the organization wrote a six page letter (plus other attached documents) to HUD in an attempt to block El Paso's UDAG proposal.[115] *La Campaña* found support in other barrio groups including the newly formed *Comité Cívico Democrático* (Civic Democratic Committee), MEChA, the American GI Forum, and the Trabajadores Agrícolas del Sur El Paso (Agricultural Workers of South El Paso), among others.

The letter showcased the sophistication of the barrio residents based on their previous and ongoing activism. According to J.C. Hayes, a Dallas HUD official, *La Campaña's* protest letter "was well-written." Hayes believed that "someone ha[d] done a great deal of study" because it was "well put together."[116] *La Campaña* expressed that the organization was "able to obtain a copy of the city's UDAG application only after a week of struggling with city bureaucrats, getting the classic run-around, and finally succeeded

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[114] "Southside El Plan Grant Request Receives Approval," *El Paso Times,* January 30, 1978.

[115] Letter from La Campaña La Pro Preservación del Barrio to HUD: Re: City of El Paso's UDAG Application: A Community Protest, n.d., Chicano Vertical Files, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections, The University of Texas at El Paso Library.

[116] "Southside Grant Proposal Worries City," *El Paso Times,* February 18, 1978.

with threats of legal action."[117] The document detailed several key points the Chicana/o activists believed hindered the application, most importantly that there was no Southside resident participation, as city officials only held one meeting on January 29, two days before the deadline. Additionally, the group noted other matters such as no solid housing construction proposals, attempts to exploit the Mexican American community through the commercialization of the area, historic discrimination in areas planned for Southsiders' relocation, conflict of interest, the resignation of *La Campaña* sympathizers from *El Concilio del Barrio* during the BCC study, the city's failure to adopt rent control, and governmental fraud in El Paso among other conclusions.[118]

The organization also provided propositions for the federal agency regarding possible contributions from the Southside. Some of these alternatives included a community's plan for "its own regeneration," stopping commercial actions that contributed to destruction of the area, funneling HUD and UDAG funds to barrio non-profit organizations, allowing the ability of South El Paso residents to assert their self-determination, and advocating barrio affirmative action to "obtain an overall betterment of housing conditions." After listing their complaints and possible solutions, *La Campaña* openly requested "that HUD reject the UDAG application presented by the City of El Paso."[119] Although HUD representative J.C. Hayes could not state if the letter hampered the application, the document was taken into consideration. Hayes reported to the *El Paso*

[117] Letter from La Campaña La Pro Preservación del Barrio to HUD, 1.

[118] Ibid, 1-6.

[119]Ibid, 6.

*Times* that community protests "in some cases [have] caused the city not to get funds, when these things (complaints) were factual and the city couldn't respond to them."[120]

The actions of *La Campaña* worried both Mayor Salazar and Mayor Pro Tem Ponder, as the two believed the letter jeopardized the city's application. Dan Ponder criticized the Chicana/o group in local newspapers stating that "they [didn't] represent anyone" but themselves, as they were a radical minority in the barrio.[121] Mayor Salazar attempted to do damage control by writing an eleven page letter to the organization where he addressed every point alleged by *La Campaña* and other supporting Southside groups. The Mayor cited public participation in two meetings the week before the application was due (January 24 and 29), and private investor meetings, which outnumbered those of residents of the Southside, to respond to the lack of community engagement. Throughout much of the letter, the Mayor claimed most of *La Campaña's* accusations lacked factual information.[122] In the concluding remarks, Salazar attacked the group by also stating that:

> The majority of the concluding remarks in the letter of protest express La Campaña's general disagreement with the City administration's policies for the development of South El Paso. The opinions stated do not reflect the majority view of the community in general or of South El Paso in particular, but are the dissenting opinions of a minority within a minority.[123]

The Mayor's response letter and the attacks of Dan Ponder in the local newspapers attempted to portray activists and supporters of *La Campaña* as radical, in hopes that the application process continued on track.

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[120] "Southside Grant Proposal Worries City," *El Paso Times*, February 18, 1978.

[121] Ibid; "Revitalization Protest Discounted by Ponder," *El Paso Herald-Post*, February 18, 1978.

[122] "Mayor Rebuts Southside Protest," *El Paso Times*, February 28, 1978; Letter from Mayor Ray Salazar to *La Campaña* and HUD, February 24, 1978, 1-11, Chicano Vertical Files, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections, The University of Texas at El Paso Library.

[123]Ibid., 11.

To the dismay of both Ray Salazar and Dan Ponder, HUD rejected El Paso's initial UDAG application. According to the agency, the application had some "technical flaws" but would be considered for the second round in three months.[124] HUD found three major flaws in the application—an inadequate plan to relocate 450 families to another part of the city, an absence of strong commitment by private investors, and the city's plan of obtaining property in the Southside without the power of eminent domain.[125] Even though lack of citizen participation was not listed as a "major flaw," HUD had a substantial number of citizen complaints, and questioned whether or not city authorities held public meetings to discuss UDAG plans with the residents of South El Paso. Regardless of the weaknesses, the government agency believed that El Paso submitted an "'attractive' plan for restoring commercial and residential buildings on the South Side" and that "the flaws in the plan c[ould] be eliminated."[126]

*La Campaña* took the rejection of the UDAG application as a victory, and prepared for the second application round. As soon as the word came back from Washington, the organization continued its opposition to the redevelopment. Group leaders began having their own gatherings in South El Paso, and asked Mexican Americans to boycott city meetings and proposed their own alternative plan to HUD.[127] The community project requested five points: no commercial expansion in South El Paso in order to preserve the residential character of the barrio, construction on vacant land before demolishing tenements, "voice and vote" for Southsiders regarding barrio

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[124] "Application May Include Survey Info," *El Paso Times,* April 11, 1978.

[125] "Grant flaws pointed out," *El Paso Herald-Post,* May 3, 1978.

[126] Ibid.

[127] "La Campana vows eviction fight," *El Paso Herald-Post,* June 29, 1978.

development decisions, preference for South El Pasoans for new housing, and priority employment for residents of the Southside in redevelopment projects.[128] *La Campaña* also stressed that the city of El Paso needed to conduct an environmental impact study of the area, as well as enforcing a legally binding contract from the private investors in order to ensure the building of housing.[129]

HUD officials promised to work alongside members of *La Campaña* and meet their demands. Whereas the national and regional HUD offices opposed the construction of low-income public housing in the barrio, the housing pleas of the Chicana/o organization and barrio residents made the agency reconsider its policies. Victor Hancock, a Dallas HUD officer, told the *El Paso Times* that he "was convinced if they put massive public assisted housing there [South El Paso] it won't become a slum." He also stated that he "was extremely impressed at the cleanliness and neatness of barrio dwellers," and that he was "convinced it won't become a slum because of the character of those people living in the worst type of conditions."[130] Even though city leaders ignored the housing and barrio preservation plight of South El Paso, *La Campaña* persuaded HUD to support the needs of the community.

### *Fragmentation in the Southside: Chihuahuita Says Yes to UDAG*

The growing animosity between the city and *La Campaña* soon overshadowed the group's victory. A series of arrests and police brutality against members of the

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[128] "Junta de La Comunidad Tocante La Vivienda y El Futuro Del Barrio," ca. May 1978, Chicano Vertical Files, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections, The University of Texas at El Paso Library; "La Campana Stresses Alternative Plan," *El Paso Times,* June 21, 1978.

[129] "La Campana vows eviction fight," *El Paso Herald-Post,* June 29, 1978.

[130] "Officials Counterattack Campana," *El Paso Times,* April 12, 1978.

organization occurred in the weeks following the UDAG application rejection. These instances quickly escalated to a point where HUD became involved in the investigations (this incident will be covered in the next chapter). However, the Chicana/o organization also had to deal with an internal conflict—the fracturing of Chihuahuita residents away from the South El Paso organization.

Feeling neglected by both city officials and *La Campaña*, in 1976 Chihuahuitans, residents of the Southwest corner of South El Paso, created their own community action group, the Chihuahuita Improvement Association (CIA). Led by Fred Morales, a former member and founder of *La Campaña*, the new group endeavored to "bring about a general over-all social, economic, and educational improvement for the barrio of Chihuahuita."[131] As city authorities attempted to cover the mistake of no citizen participation in the first application, residents of Chihuahuita and the CIA became instrumental players in the city obtaining UDAG funds.

Much like the community of South El Paso and the leaders of *La Campaña*, the CIA wanted for the area of Chihuahuita to retain the residential and ethnic Mexican cultural character of the neighborhood. Yet, the CIA differed in organizing tactics from the El Segundo organization. According to Fred Morales, "we [CIA] were more quiet. Our approach was different. [It was] more moderate, and that way we managed to obtain more positive results." Morales and members of the CIA also believed that diplomatic

[131] Chihuahuita Improvement Association, "Chihuahuita Barrio Center," ca. 1979, 1, Chicano Vertical Files, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections, The University of Texas at El Paso Library.

and calm demonstrations did more for the community, while radical tactics alienated potential allies and supporters.[132]

When it came to the UDAG funds, residents of Chihuahuita asserted that *La Campaña* was the voice of opposition, and not representative of the southwest corner of South El Paso. In the month after the UDAG rejection, *La Campaña* was portrayed as a hostile organization. The *Herald-Post* interviewed some Southsiders, where the residents claimed the Chicana/o organization threatened to kick tenants out from their rented apartments. Even though leaders of *La Campaña* were arrested, charged with making terroristic threats, the charges were later dropped (Chapter 4).[133] Morales shared with the *El Paso Herald-Post* that Chihuahuita "want[ed] to choose our own destiny and we don't want to be told what to do by people who profess to socialism and make terroristic threats and spill graffiti on those who do not conform to their thoughts."[134] With the fight for UDAG funds, the community of Chihuahuita refused to be invisible within the larger area of South El Paso.

Because *La Campaña* vowed to boycott city-sponsored meetings regarding UDAG funds, the city now focused on Chihuahuitans as their source of citizen participation, as Chihuahuita pledged their support to the city. In a meeting with city representatives, the community members expressed their concerns regarding redevelopment plans in South El Paso, and seemed satisfied with the new application. The city promised the construction of new public housing in Chihuahuita and appointed

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[132] Morales, interview by the author. Second part of the sentence in Spanish. Original quote: "y así resultamos agarrar más resultados positivos."

[133] "La Campana leaders arrested," *El Paso Herald-Post,* April 7, 1978.

[134] "Barrio tenants back UDAG," *El Paso Herald-Post,* May 4, 1978.

Fred Morales and Lola Cervera as Southside representatives to work hand in hand with the city to develop UDAG plans.[135] Unlike the residents of El Segundo Barrio and members of *La Campaña,* Chihuahuita residents trusted officials and were willing to meet the city "half way" to better the living conditions of the area. Chihuahuitans contended that "if the people in the Second Ward do not want the federal money and the federal help, we here in Chihuahuita will take it."[136]

With the support of Chihuahuita, city leaders attempted to discredit *La Campaña's* image to avoid another HUD rejection. Mayor Pro Tem Dan Ponder, embarked on the common practice to degrade social movements, and shared his thoughts about the organization with several newspapers.[137] Several city council leaders questioned the roots and connections to South El Paso of the members of *La Campaña.* In addition, Ponder continued earlier allegations of *La Campaña* members being "rabble rousers," but in his new accusations focused on the organization's support of undocumented immigrants. Ponder used the Southside's proximity to the border and history of housing newly arrived Mexican immigrants to turn organization members into scapegoats, and asserted that *La Campaña's* supporters were not legally in the country. The Mayor Pro Tem told the *El Paso Journal* that

> 40 to 50 percent of the people down there are illegal aliens from Mexico, and are being harbored and exploited by these subversives [*La Campaña*]. If new housing was built, the illegals couldn't qualify to buy it or move into it because they don't

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[135] "Grant Plans Satisfy Southsiders," *El Paso Times,* May 4, 1978.

[136] Ibid.

[137] For more on discrediting social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, see George Mariscal, *Brown-eyed Children of the Sun: Lessons of the Chicano Movement, 1965-1975,* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005); F. Arturo Rosales, *Testimonio: A Documentary History of the Mexican-American Struggle for Civil Rights,* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 2000); Peniel E. Joseph, *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era,* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

> belong in this country. They would have to clear out and this would deprive these parasites of their main income and support.[138]

Further, Ponder also declared that he would not work on the new UDAG proposal until the "real people" of South El Paso urged city officials for better housing.[139]

Similarly, the *El Paso Times* reported that the radical and confrontational tactics of *La Campaña,* generated intimidation and fear among some residents of South El Paso. Jose Natividad, told the *Times* that people were scared of the organization and were very confused about the revitalization plan. "People feel they could be beat up; they say La Campana are brawlers," stated Mr. Natividad. Natividad also mentioned he was "very interested in finding out what it going on" and that he liked to "be broadminded and hear both sides."[140]

Residents may have distrusted *La Campaña*, but they had even less faith in the government. Nino Aguilera, former director of the Boys' Club, told the *El Paso Times* "he [didn't] believe in violence, but consider[ed] La Campana's goal of better housing in the Barrio a good one." Aguilera continued to show skepticism by stating that "these people from Washington, Los Angeles, Chicago paint things so rosy. The people hear

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[138] "Illegal Aliens Cause UDAG Opposition, *El Paso Journal,* April 1, 1978.

[139] Ibid; El Paso's proximity to the border has been an important laboratory for immigration, immigration restrictions, and national belonging. See Yolanda Chávez Leyva, "Cruzando la Linea: Engendering the History of Border Mexican Children during the Early Twentieth Century." In *Memories and Migrations: Mapping Boricua and Chicana Histories*, edited by Vicki L. Ruiz and John R. Chavez, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 71–92; Eithne Luibheid, "'Looking Like a Lesbian': The Organization of Sexual Monitoring at the United States–Mexican Border," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 8, no. 3 (1998): 477–506; Dennis Bixler-Márquez, "La Preparatoria Bowie versus la Patrulla Fronteriza," *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 30, no. 2 (2005): 157–168.

[140]"Barrio tenants back UDAG," *El Paso Herald-Post,* May 4, 1978.

promises and at the last, nothing is done. I've seen this a lot of times… there is such beautiful talk, but nothing happens."[141]

Regardless of the attacks, *La Campaña* succeeded in its boycotts against UDAG planning sessions. City officials scheduled a meeting at the Lydia Patterson Institute in El Segundo Barrio, but only one barrio resident attended. *La Campaña* alongside a new ally, the *Comité Cívico Democático*, picketed the meetings and handed out flyers urging Southsiders not to attend the meetings, especially since city officials were desperate to get the community to meetings in order to avoid another HUD rejection.[142] Daniel Solis, former member of *La Campaña* and now leader of the *Comité*, expressed the necessity of the boycott to the *El Paso Times.* He stated that the city wanted the community to "come in like burros [donkeys], count them, and put in their applications to send to Dallas and Washington that 500 people participated in the meeting but never listen to them."[143]

After meetings and revisions to the city's original UDAG application, Mayor Ray Salazar was ready to unveil and approve the new proposal. In order to appease South El Paso's demands, the Stanton border corridor shopping redevelopment plan was dropped from the new application. The grant requested $7.9 million from HUD that along with $73 million from private investment, would bring 729 housing units, 100 units for the elderly, a parking garage and hopes for the construction of a large hotel.[144]

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[141] "South Side Community Needs Neighbors' Help," *El Paso Times,* April 2, 1978.

[142] "Boycott Stifles Barrio Meeting," *El Paso Times,* May 5, 1978.

[143] Ibid. Although Daniel Solis no longer formed a part of *La Campaña*, he stated in this same article that he did not participate in the organization not because of differences in ideologies, but because "we see the job is huge. We work in different sectors."

[144] "Final Grant Draft Awaits Scrutiny," *El Paso Times,* May 29, 1978.

While the community of Chihuahuita and the CIA supported the new UDAG application, *La Campaña* continued its opposition to the grant. The Chicana/o organization challenged the UDAG's plan to relocate families outside of the barrios, in addition to the construction of the parking structure and hotel, which *La Campaña* deemed conflicting, as it did not prioritize the true needs of the community: housing. Juan Montes, spokesman for the organization, expressed that "unless the community alternative plan is accepted we [*La Campaña*] will oppose UDAG funding and mobilize to defend our community."[145]

Although *La Campaña* opposed the federal grant, HUD approved El Paso's application, awarding the city $2.3 million, a significant amount less than what officials requested. The awarded funds had to be used to acquire fifteen acres of land in South El Paso, relocate 184 families during the construction of new housing, and build 244 rent subsidized housing units and 64 single housing units. UDAG funds would also be contingent upon the city's commitment from private lenders, developers, and builders for the construction of low-income housing in the Southside.[146] HUD officials stated two main reasons for the cut in funding—the unjustifiable proposal for a parking garage and the fact that the city needed additional land in South El Paso to build housing, which the federal agency pressed the city of El Paso to acquire to make the plans a reality.[147] While city officials failed to bring enough federal monies to improve the living conditions of thousands of ethnic Mexicans in the Southside, city leaders believed that UDAG funds

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[145] "La Campana vows eviction fight," *El Paso Herald-Post,* June 29, 1978.

[146] "New housing is far away for barrio," *El Paso Herald-Post,* July 11, 1978.

[147] "$2.3 million Approved for UDAG in El Paso," *El Paso Herald-Post,* July 10, 1978; "HUD Officials Tell why Request Was Pared Down," *El Paso Herald-Post,* July 12, 1978.

would be crucial in alleviating housing needs. Even though funds alone would not fulfill these goals, many like Juan Provencio, UDAG Director believed, that the leaders had "to keep trying."[148]

***Southsiders Dispute over HUD and Community Development Funds***

Although *La Campaña* and residents of El Segundo Barrio planned an alternative proposal for the community of South El Paso and received the support of HUD, the federal agency stated that no citizen group was eligible to submit a UDAG application, only elected governmental bodies.[149] Seeing that South El Paso needed additional funds to better the living conditions in the barrio, leaders of *La Campaña* knew they needed to take matters into their own hands. The Chicana/o activists designed a new strategy to obtain their own funds: creating a non-profit organization. In 1977, *La Campaña* created a subsidiary group called the Southside Low Income Housing Development Corporation (SLIHDC), which had a president, a board of directors (composed mostly of barrio residents) and ran in a more structured way in comparison to *La Campaña.* According to Oscar Lozano, the main concept of the SLIHDC was "to get families to live in a housing unit to become lifelong owners of that property."[150] Rather than continue the opposition of the UDAG funds for South El Paso, *La Campaña* created a plan to complement the construction of housing in the Southside on their own terms by empowering the community through the new projects.

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[148] "UDAG Grant Will Satisfy Some Goals For EP Goals," *El Paso Times*, July 11, 1978.

[149] "La Campana against grant application," *El Paso Herald-Post*, May 31, 1978.

[150] Lozano, interview.

With the subsidiary group, *La Campaña* could now seek private loans and petition for Community Development Block Grant funds (CDBG)—a more grassroots HUD initiative from the Ford administration and re-conceptualized during the Carter Presidency—which awarded citizen groups money to improve communities across the country without the commercialization aspect of UDAG.[151] In order to receive both private and federal funds, the SLIHDC initiated a program where the community of South El Paso could rehabilitate old tenements, build new housing, and preserve the residential and cultural character of the barrio through an effort of self-help and sweat equity.[152] The organization hired Reyes Cortez, a consultant from the National Council of La Raza, Phillip Mack Caldwell, an architect and urban designer, and Cushing Dolbeare, a Washington, D.C. consultant with previous low-income neighborhood revitalization experience, to advise the community and develop a proposal.

The new venture applied two innovative concepts. First, the SLIHDC aspired to create cooperatives around South El Paso. The non-profit would lend money to a group of people living in a tenement building, then tenants would pay one quarter of their income for rent and share the maintenance, utilities, taxes, and insurance every month, until the residents paid the loan and owned the building. The second concept involved sweat equity, meaning cutting the costs of housing by having residents make repairs and undertake unskilled construction work to improve their living conditions.[153] The SLIHDC also proposed barrio owned and operated "consumer cooperatives" for food and other

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[151] "Community Development Grant Block History," http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/comm_planning/communitydevelopment/programs, accessed April 14, 2015.

[152] "Activist Group Offers South Side 'Self-Help' Plan," *El Paso Times*, December 8, 1978.

[153] Ibid.

necessities. The proposal stated that these co-ops "would provide barrio residents with jobs and an opportunity for advancement in managing these stores."[154] Once the project was finalized, the SLIHDC requested $1 million for the first year of operation and outlined three major goals: acquiring two vacant lots for the construction of twenty-three new housing units, and purchasing and renovating two existing tenements.[155]

In December 1978, the Community Development steering committee recommended that El Paso's city council grant the SLIHDC funds to begin the self-help pilot program. Dave Caylor, the city's director of the CDBG Program commended the SLIHDC for "submitting 'one of the finest, most complete and comprehensive proposals presented,"' exemplifying the approach the Carter administration stressed in order to improve inner city blight.[156] City council granted the non-profit organization a $50,000 planning grant, and a few months later, the El Paso CDBG committee voted to grant $950,000 for the pilot project to begin in the fall of 1979.[157] Although Southsiders and *La Campaña* distrusted the city and the UDAG project, the Chicana/o organization assured leaders that the plan would not interfere with the city's goals for South El Paso.[158]

The support of the SLIHDC plan came at a time when the city's UDAG seemed at a standstill and met community criticism. A few months after the release of federal monies, the redevelopment project awaited the approval of HUD for the construction of

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[154] "Activist Group Offers South Side 'Self-Help' Plan," *El Paso Times,* December 8, 1978.

[155] "Housing Proposal Pushed," *El Paso Herald-Post,* December 5, 1978; "La Campana Housing Plan Praised," *El Paso Times,* December 5, 1978.

[156] "La Campana Housing Plan Praised," *El Paso Times,* December 5, 1978.

[157] "La Campana voted $950,000 For Program," *El Paso Times,* February 7, 1979.

[158] "Housing Proposal Pushed," *El Paso Herald-Post,* December 5, 1978.

low-income housing in an already poor area.[159] Finally, in March 1979, the city of El Paso received federal approval to build subsidized housing in the Southside, and released funds to begin the plans for the UDAG project.[160] Another delay in the plan came in the form of more protests by the Southside community and *La Campaña*. South El Pasoans were very skeptical and believed that the relocation money allotted for displaced families and barrio homeowners would not be enough to find new properties and apartments to lease. In a very heated meeting, community members confronted Tony Reyes, the El Paso UDAG coordinator. Salvador Acosta, a barrio homeowner, stated that in refusing to allot the sufficient relocation monies, the city was "violating human rights," and "punishing people who are poor, [and] who don't have education to fight you."[161]

*La Campaña* also stated that UDAG local officials overlooked sixteen vacant lots and tenement buildings that could prevent the relocation of several families. The Chicano/a organization found an opportunity to present an alternative plan to prevent uprooting when HUD officials scheduled a visit to El Paso in June 1979. During this time, city councilmen, HA and City Planning Commission representatives, UDAG developers, and members of *La Campaña* gave a tour to the HUD visitors and pointed to vacant lots and condemned tenements. The federal agency sided with Southsiders. Johnnie Hartsfield, representative of the Washington HUD office, ordered Tony Reyes to amend the UDAG application and survey whether or not *La Campaña's* idea of building on empty lots and tenements was a possibility. Ms. Hartsfield also stated that HUD did

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[159] "Waiver May Be Behind Grant Delay," *El Paso Times,* December 8, 1978.

[160] "UDAG building to begin," *El Paso Herald-Post,* March 7, 1979.

[161] "Relocation official meets South Side resistance," *El Paso Times,* May 5, 1979.

not "like relocation anymore," and that "it was nothing but a glorified urban renewal project" that turned out to be costly and very time consuming.[162] The pressures from Southsiders and HUD forced local UDAG developers to reconsider the activists' relocation plan. As city councilman Fonseca stated to the *El Paso Times*, the city had no choice but to comply, otherwise "the UDAG program [would be] dead in El Paso."[163]

Unfortunately, the victories of the Chicana/o activists in El Segundo Barrio came at the cost of the barrio of Chihuahuita. Chihuahuitans believed that all they received were *cacahuates* or peanuts, compared to the city funds *La Campaña* and El Segundo Barrio obtained for their redevelopment projects. Residents of the barrio feared a conspiracy between *La Campaña* and the El Paso Legal Aid Society to "destroy Chihuahuita."[164] While community members set efforts to fund a park and a community center through Paso Del Norte Development Corporation, the local office of the Economic Development Administration (EDA), and expressed their community needs at CD Steering Committee meetings, Chihuahuitans believed that ultimately *La Campaña* obtained the funds and attention. In a press conference held in the barrio, the community established that "La Campana has schools, churches and stores, while Chihuahuita is always left out, when it comes to getting money for these things." Furthermore, the community wanted "the political and economic discrimination against Chihuahuita by the

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[162] "'New land an alternative to uprooting,'" *El Paso Times,* July 6, 1979.

[163] "Council to consider relocation plan," *El Paso Herald-Post,* Jun 25, 1979.

[164] "Chihuahuita residents fear conspiracy," *El Paso Herald-Post,* November 9, 1979.

El Paso Legal Aid Society and La Campana to end."[165] All the community wanted was "their fair share of funding."[166]

Chihuahuitans also believed that *La Campaña* attempted to control the funds and fate of their barrio. In an interview, Fred Morales stated that Chihuahuitans believed activists in the Second Ward "wanted to control us. They want to dictate what funds we get. They want to decide what's best for us. Our voices didn't matter or count."[167] The barrio of Chihuahuita decided it was time for their community to become more vocal in the Southside and in city council. Morales reflected the community's feelings in an interview stating that "we felt we had our right to determine our own destiny, because we lived there, *y ellos no* (and not them [El Segundo activists]). [168]

The CIA and the barrio of Chihuahuita decided that the best solution for their community was to petition for the thirteen-acre area of Chihuahuita to become independent from El Segundo Barrio by being designated a Neighborhood Strategy Area (NSA). NSAs were areas in El Paso where federal funds could be utilized. If the neighborhood gained this designation, Chihuahuita would be a separate entity from South El Paso, and would become eligible to obtain urban development block grants without competing with *La Campaña*.[169] Although the barrio requested to be a separate NSA earlier that year, HUD denied the designation due to the area's small size; however the South El Paso NSA was renamed the South El Paso-Chihuahuita Neighborhood Strategy

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[165] "Chihuahuita residents fear conspiracy," *El Paso Herald-Post,* November 9, 1979.

[166] Morales, interview by the author.

[167] Ibid.

[168] Ibid.

[169] "Chihuahuita seeks special designation," *El Paso Herald-Post,* November 21, 1979.

Area "hoping the residents would be satisfied with having their neighborhood name [in] the southside title.[170]

The new strategy for an NSA came about when members of *La Campaña* wrote to the regional office of the Economic Development Administration, to cut funds from the Paso Del Norte Development Corporation (EPNDC), an EDA non-profit organization providing funds for Chihuahuita's Apartment Rehabilitation Demonstration Project. Members of *La Campaña* believed that the EPNDC was an obstruction to SLIHDC plans and funds, and that the organization's board "was made up of people who were 'poverty group jumping' for their own advantage."[171] The Chicana/o organization succeeded in their lobbying efforts, when the EDA cut EPNDC funds at the end of 1979.[172] In a true "eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth" approach, CIA leaders Fred Morales and Mario Padilla also petitioned the CD Steering Committee to deny funds already allotted for the SLIHDC, in hopes that the separate NSA and funds from the SLIHDC would bring improvements to the barrio of Chihuahuita.[173]

The feud between the Chicana/o group *La Campaña* and the more conservative CIA, continued for much of the remainder of 1979. CIA leaders and over thirty Chihuahuitans unexpectedly attended a CD Steering Committee meeting, where releasing $500,000 to the SLIHDC was on the agenda. Amidst signs that read "La Campana, Chihuahuita's No. 1 Enemy" and "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," the CIA demanded an immediate answer to the community's separate NSA request. At the

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[170] "Separate designation refused for the area," *El Paso Herald-Post,* February 24, 1979.

[171] "Development group refuses Chihuahuita request," *El Paso Herald-Post,* November 22, 1979.

[172] "Development Agency's Funds, Office Gone," *El Paso Times,* December 1, 1979.

[173] "Chihuahuita seeks special designation," *El Paso Herald-Post,* November 21, 1979

meeting, Fred Morales stated that "La Campana's motive for blocking the Chihuahuita Project [was because] they are trying to seize control of the Chihuahuita area." Carmen Felix, representative of the SLIHDC and *La Campaña*, quickly denied the allegations, stating that the organizations were not against the housing rehabilitation program but rather the El Paso Del Norte Corporation.[174] After hours of verbal confrontation, half of the members of the Steering Committee and about twenty Chihuahuitans left the meeting. A debate ensued again when funds for the SLIHDC were discussed at the meeting. Leaders of Chihuahuita believed there were not enough members present to pass the motion. When Fred Morales brought up the issue of Chihuahuita's NSA designation, the committee refused, stating that the designation petition was not on the agenda. The explanation angered the remaining community members, who ultimately stormed out of the meeting.[175]

Although the CD Steering Committee refused an answer at the time of the meeting, the members promised the Community of Chihuahuita to be on the agenda for the following meeting. However, the head of the Steering Committee, Henry Neil, stated to local newspapers that the chances of Chihuahuita becoming its own NSA, and blocking SLIHDC funds would be slim to none. Neil stated that "the separate status would not allocate them [Chihuahuita] any more money, [because] for practical purposes they are already considered a separate area" due to the geographical separation from the rest of South El Paso. Furthermore, Neil declared that neither he nor the Steering

[174] "Development group refuses Chihuahuita request," *El Paso Herald-Post,* November 22, 1979.

[175] Ibid.; "South Side development associations wage verbal war over housing funds," *El Paso Times,* November 22, 1979.

Committee opposed Chihuahuita as an independent NSA, but that there was a large possibility that HUD would deny the area once again.[176]

Two weeks after the Chihuahuita storm out, the CD Steering Committee voted to study the thirteen-acre area of South El Paso with "an eye toward designating Chihuahuita a Neighborhood Strategy Area."[177] Understanding that this was the first step toward obtaining improvement funds for Chihuahuita, Morales told the *El Paso Times* that if the city granted the designation and funds, two projects would be set—a park and a neighborhood center. At the meeting, Morales also showed plans for "a Chihuahuita commercial center, to include a café, laundry, bakery, beauty and barber shops, a curio shop, medical offices and a pedestrian promenade."[178] Despite the promise for the study of the area, the CIA continued pressing the city for the NSA. Morales stated that after the squabbles with *La Campaña,* the community wanted the separate NSA so "we won't be fighting for funding with other neighborhoods. Just look at us separately, target specific money for our area, and everything will be solved."[179] Although the CIA sought to stop the polarization of the two organizations and the barrios, the separate NSA was never approved for the community of Chihuahuita.[180]

Despite the opposition of the CIA, *La Campaña* emerged victorious when it came to obtaining Community Development funds for El Segundo Barrio. Aside from the CD

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[176] "Chihuahuita seeks special designation," *El Paso Herald-Post,* November 21, 1979.

[177] "Chihuahuita under microscope again: Funding designation to be eyed," *El Paso Times,* December 7, 1979.

[178] Ibid.

[179] Morales, interview by the author.

[180] Ibid; "Panel promises Chihuahuita consideration," *El Paso Herald-Post,* December 7, 1979.

committee awarding the $500,000 for their pilot program, El Paso City Council approved the release of the funds and the SLIHDC plan to build and rehabilitate housing units by using adobe. According to Carmen Felix, SLIHDC believed the adobe project would not only help the revitalization of the area, but "a way that our people will also learn" about building energy efficient housing.[181] The SLIHDC project architect, Phillip Mack Caldwell mirrored Felix's views and expressed that "he knew of no place in the United States where tenants formulated and directed construction planning and used energy-efficient adobe for housing a central city neighborhood."[182] City Council had initial concerns regarding the building materials due to HUD regulations. However, Caldwell and Felix assured city leaders that the federal government was studying the use of adobe. The project passed in a four to two vote, with construction set to begin on March 1, 1980, and to be completed within a year.[183]

The city's lack of funds and the mobilization of the CIA forced city leaders to trim funds from *La Campaña* to give to Chihuahuita. In April of 1980, the Chicana/o organization and the SLIHDC had their budget for their adobe housing pilot project reduced to give the barrio of Chihuahuita a $150,000 pool, and to build a clinic in El Paso's Lower Valley.[184] City councilman Orlando Fonseca met with Chicana/o activists and about fifty residents of El Segundo at the headquarters of *La Campaña*, where he stated he was outvoted by the council. Amongst an angry audience, Fonseca cited two reasons for the cut—unspent money by the SLIHDC's housing pilot and the "bad

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[181] "City Council approves adobe housing project," *El Paso Herald-Post,* December 12, 1979.

[182] Ibid.

[183] Ibid.

[184] "Chihuahuita pool back in city plans," *El Paso Herald-Post,* April 2, 1980.

reputation" *La Campaña* had garnered in the last years. [185] Leaders of the Chicana/o group and Southsiders reacted quickly to the news. The organization claimed that zoning problems and other red tape delayed the construction a few weeks, but that the building of new units was programmed for mid-May. Carmen Felix and Juan Montes also stated that the UDAG program had yet to build any housing. Felix accused Fonseca and city council of "playing 'political games' by forcing different poor neighborhoods to compete for funding." Juan Montes charged city leaders with prioritizing the needs of white El Pasoans as he pinpointed a downtown revitalization project called Old Town, which Chihuahuita supported. In an interview with the *El Paso Times*, Montes stated "the Old Town project was aimed at bringing a luxury hotel to El Paso, where Chicanos would get jobs 'carrying suitcases for *gabachos* (Anglos)."[186] Sympathetic to their concerns, Fonseca encouraged Southsiders to attend the final city council meeting in hopes that leaders might reconsider the funding cut.

A few days later, residents of El Segundo Barrio and leaders of *La Campaña* filled City Hall. Amidst picket signs, banners, and shouts of "vivienda" or "housing," Southsiders voiced their discontent. Council leaders allowed residents of South El Paso to speak before the meeting, where the majority spoke highly of *La Campaña* and the housing plan.[187] After listening to the community members, Mayor Pro Tem Polly Harris passed a motion to cut funding, and was immediately verbally attacked as Southsiders called her "*Bruja*" ("Witch"). Despite the support of the barrio, city council voted five to

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[185] "Housing cut angers Southsiders," *El Paso Times*, April 3, 1980.

[186] Ibid.

[187] "Police escort aldermen after Southside 'no' vote," *El Paso Herald-Post*, April 9, 1980.

one to discontinue funding for the SLIHDC, significantly reducing the total $1.4 million CD grant to $567,000, eliminating any chance of building the adobe housing project.[188] Police escorted council members through a back door, fearing Southsiders' retaliation. The community of South El Paso and *La Campaña* mobilized and attempted to overturn the city's decision with no positive results.[189]

With CD housing funds cut for the SLIHDC, it was up to the city's UDAG funds to bring housing to the barrio. *La Campaña* filed a complaint with HUD, petitioning the federal agency to monitor El Paso's City Development Block Grants office, deny Chihuahuita being designated an independent NSA, and cut funds to build a community pool for Chihuahuitans, because housing was more pressing.[190] Unfortunately, HUD commended the local CDBG in its response to *La Campaña.* The Chicana/o organization filed several objection letters to HUD, including a fifty-page complaint, all in vain.[191] The city, failed to complete the UDAG proposed housing on time. As the Ronald Reagan administration cut the budget for HUD, the federal agency was forced to freeze UDAG funds, and collect El Paso's unused $1.8 million in September 1981.[192] Like in other cities across the United States, UDAG failed to resolve blight in El Paso. However, the

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[188] "Police escort aldermen after Southside 'no' vote," *El Paso Herald-Post,* April 9, 1980.

[189] Letter from Steering Committee Chairman Reuben Steinberg to Members of City Council, April 7, 1980, Chicano Vertical Files, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections, The University of Texas at El Paso Library; Letter from SLIHDC Chief Administrative Officer Victor Vega to City of El Paso and Aldermen, ca. April 1980, Chicano Vertical Files, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections, The University of Texas at El Paso Library; SLIHDC Address to City Council, April 8, 1980, Chicano Vertical Files, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections, The University of Texas at El Paso Library.

[190] "Administrative Complaint re 1980 CDBG of the City of El Paso," filed by Raza Advocates for Social Change, July 1980, in Marquez, *Power and Politics,* 210.

[191] Marquez, *Power and Politics,* 210-211.

[192] "HUD Takes Money Back," *El Paso Herald-Post,* September 9, 1981.

SLIHDC's petition for CDBG funds allowed a victory insofar as the Southside community was not solely relying on redevelopment monies from the local authorities. Even with UDAG funds taken from the city, the non-profit still had funds to carry out some of its projects.

Even though *La Campaña* disbanded after the volatile period of 1974-1981, the SLIHDC continues to hold an important role in the barrio. The non-profit managed to build and revitalize several properties around El Segundo Barrio, some even made out of adobe as planned in the 1970s.[193] The SLIHDC continued its goal of providing long time tenants the opportunity of becoming homeowners within the boundaries of the barrio.

Twenty years after the creation of the non-profit organization, El Paso agencies continued to commend the work of Carmen Felix, and the SLIHDC. Rose García, the executive director of the El Paso Collaborative for Affordable Housing told the *Herald-Post* that she admired the group especially the organization's community-based values that are "difficult to build in a high-density historic neighborhood." She continued to express high regard for the group by mentioning the uniqueness of the organization because "no one else is doing what they're doing with their kind of methodology."[194] Even though in recent years the Southside Low Income Housing Developing Corporation has retreated from public view and from political mobilization, the non-profit continues to provide housing for low-income ethnic Mexican families and own a number of properties in El Segundo Barrio.[195]

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[193] "Housing group helps build dreams for families in South El Paso," *El Paso Herald-Post*, October 9, 1997.

[194] Ibid.

[195] Lozano, interview.

### *Chihuahuita Improvement Association Preservation Efforts*

While *La Campaña's* vocal preservation efforts declined shortly after the cut of CDBG funds in El Segundo Barrio, the Chihuahuita Improvement Association continued its development programs well into the 1990s. When the CIA formed in 1976, the group managed to bring some changes to the community including paving the streets and cleaning the barrio. The association also petitioned the city to bring a bus route to the area, and have police surveillance in the neighborhood to control the "party animals" that crossed the border and disturbed barrio peace.[196]

At the time *La Campaña* obtained the support of the CD Steering Committee, the CIA demanded CDBG funds for the community of Chihuahuita. In a series of meetings with Henry Neil, the CDBG director, residents urged city authorities to "bring [Chihuahuita] to the 20th century and tag it with a positive identity."[197] The needs of the community ranged from better housing to the historical preservation of the area and halting the expansion of the Border Highway through the neighborhood. According to Fred Morales, the community of Chihuahuita worked with Henry Neil bringing definite changes to the barrio. Morales stated that the CDBG meetings successfully created a master plan for the barrio that demanded:

> More homes to be built, rehabilitation of existing homes. We wanted an economic business strip where we could have a bakery, a laundromat, or things for tourists. We wanted a greenhouse. We wanted to establish the [permanent] route for the Border Highway. Finally, we did attain the master plan. Basically the city follows that plan. This means that leaders are in our favor, that the preservation of the

[196] Morales, interview by the author.

[197] "Barrio voices development ideas," *El Paso Times*, December 25, 1979.

> barrio is a priority, and that non-residential ventures will be halted in residential zoned areas[198]

Besides the master plan, the CIA obtained CDBG funds to build a community center and an adjacent park, which will be the subject of Chapter 5.

Much like in El Segundo Barrio, tenement buildings needed to be refurbished throughout Chihuahuita. Amidst the funding conflicts with *La Campaña*, the CIA lost the support of the Paso Del Norte Development Corporation, essentially dooming a tenement rehabilitation project planned for the barrio. The CIA, however, found an all non-profit organization that helped funnel CD funds to better housing conditions in the area. The new group, *Los Exes de la Bowie* or the Bowie High School Alumni Group, was a group formed in early 1980 "as a more progressive alternative to the older, more traditional Bowie Alumni Association." The group consisted of Bowie High School graduates who "have strong emotional ties to South El Paso."[199] The main goal of *Los Exes* was to show the community, tenement owners, and city leaders that refurbishing tenements could be done at reasonable prices.

Prior to *La Campaña's* lobbying to defund the Paso Del Norte Development Corporation, Judge Enrique Peña donated two tenements on the corner of Seventh Street and Canal Road. At the time, the CIA and the PDNDC wished to bring the structures up to housing code standards and refurbish them with "indoor bathrooms, fixing electrical

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[198] Morales, interview by the author. Interview is in both English and Spanish. Original quote: "Queríamos mas casas fincados [sic], o rehabilitation of existing homes. Queríamos un economic business strip donde podian obtener una panadería, un laundromat o cosas así para los turistas. Queríamos un greenhouse. Y queríamos arreglar eso del Border Highway, 'pa dónde se iba ir. Y todo eso se hizo por fin. Conseguimos el master plan. Y básicamente ya la ciudad se queda a ese plan. Que está a favor de nosotros, que va preservar el barrio, que va parar cosas que no es residencial en lo que es zoned residential."

[199] "Restoration becomes Chihuahuita test," *El Paso Times,* November 16, 1980.

wiring problems, and correcting other problems."[200] When the EDA cut monies from the PDNDC, the redevelopment of the two tenements was put on hold. In order to take a "small but significant stride toward helping improve South El Paso housing conditions in a mutual embrace with people of the barrio," *Los Exes* members Candelario Mena, Carlos "El Chachis" Torres, Raul Gonzales, Dora Macias, and Bobby Cordova, sponsored the tenement rehabilitation program, utilizing the same plans the CIA and the PDNDC gathered a year earlier.[201] *Los Exes* petitioned for Community Development money, obtaining $87,500 for the project. In addition, families that lived in the tenement would be prioritized to return and live in the refurbished apartments. Meanwhile, *Los Exes* encouraged the affected Chihuahuitans to move in with family members, and promised to expedite the process for their sake.[202]

Construction began in 1981 and rehabilitation took four months to complete. *Los Exes* served as the contractors for the project, and Chihuahuitans helped as laborers. Fred Morales recalled that he, like many other community members, helped by "evening the ground, removing old doors and windows," among other things.[203] In June of 1981, the pilot project turned the previously decaying structures into "the pride of the barrio."[204] For the first time in the history of Chihuahuita, a tenement building that according to Henry Neil, the CD director, "previously violated every housing code that the city had on

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[200] "Tenements donated for rehabilitation," *El Paso Times,* October 18, 1979.

[201] "Restoration becomes Chihuahuita test," *El Paso Times,* November 16, 1980.

[202] "Bowie alumni remodel tenement," *El Paso Herald-Post,* January 24, 1981.

[203] Morales, interview by the autor. Interview in Spanish. Original quote: "hasta anduve con un tractor sacando y aplanando la tierra. Andaba quitando puertas y ventanas viejas.

[204] "Pride of the barrio: Modernized apartment sparkles in Chihuahuita," *El Paso Times,* June 26, 1981.

the books," now gave a glimmer of hope for residents. At the open house celebration, the *Herald-Post* reported that "the glow that emanated from the crowd at the opening of the rehabilitated tenement at Seventh and Canal streets was contagious."[205] Judge Peña was also present at the celebration and said that the project was "a classic example of what people can do when they put their minds together for the best of the community," and that he hoped the tenement "stands as a monument to this community."[206]

At the open house, city council representative Fonseca was approached by an elderly woman residing across the street from the renovated tenement, and asked "when are they going to fix this one up like that one?" The success of *Los Exes* forced city leaders to find capital to refurbish tenements around South El Paso's barrios.[207] The rehabilitation program also encouraged other tenement owners to refurbish their own units to improve the living conditions of their tenants. In 1984, Ken Halla, a tenement owner, renovated four *presidios* in Chihuahuita. After the work of *Los Exes* and Mr. Halla, the majority of the tenements in the area were up to code.[208] *Los Exes de la Bowie* continues to do non-profit work around South and South Central El Paso. Throughout the years, the organization has rehabilitated several properties around El Paso, some even in Chihuahuita and El Segundo Barrio.[209]

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[205] "Renovated tenement thrills crowd," *El Paso Herald-Post,* June 25, 1981.

[206] "Pride of the barrio: Modernized apartment sparkles in Chihuahuita," *El Paso Times,* June 26, 1981.

[207] Ibid.

[208] Morales interview by the author; Fred Morales, "Dates and Events in Chihuahuita History," (self-published, no date), Vertical Files, El Paso Public Library.

[209] Morales, interview by the author; "Groups helping to revitalize historic area," *El Paso Times,* July 6, 1992.

### *The Legacy of Neighborhood Preservation Organizations in South El Paso*

When asked about the significance of *La Campaña,* Chicano activist Oscar Lozano recalled that of the successes of the organization:

> to an extent we were able to stand the tide of gentrification. If it hadn't been for the efforts of *La Campaña* and other groups, by now El Segundo Barrio would have been gentrified. Instead, in the aftermath of *La Campaña,* you see a building spree, especially east of Kansas Street, where Housing Authority began to build housing units. This is good because it stopped gentrification and brought more people into the area. I think the whole Segundo Barrio was empowered by the activities of *La Campaña*. *La Campaña* gave a new voice, a new vision for the people. *La Campaña* encouraged this strength that the community had from within, and to use this strength for themselves and fight for the barrio.[210]

Fred Morales similarly explained the importance of the CIA, stating that:

> if the association hadn't formed, everything would be the same, nothing would have been done. We began to garner respect and recognition—people knew who we were. The people [of Chihuahuita] began to feel proud of their barrio, they had more of an identity. They felt they were part of a positive movement that would bring good results. People had more faith that things could be achieved. Before [the CIA formed] barrio interest was dead. Before, the community did not care about their conditions, they accepted it as if it were the norm.[211]

Oscar Lozano's and Fred Morales' assessments of their work provide an understanding of the importance of neighborhood organizing in South El Paso. The late 1960s marked the beginning of a social revolution in the Southside, one where the communities of El Segundo and Chihuahuita would no longer be passive to urban neglect and spatial changes around them. For the first time in the history of El Paso, the

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[210] Lozano, interview.

[211] Morales, interview by the author. Interview in Spanish. Original quote: "Si no se hubiera formado el association, hubiera seguido igual, no se hubiera hecho nada. Ya comenzamos a agarrar respeto y reconocimiento. Y ya todos estaban sabiendo quien éramos. La gente comenzó a sentirse más orgulloso [sic], ya tenía más identity. Y ya ellos se sentían que eran parte de un movimiento positivo que iba a traer buenos resultados. La gente tenía más fe, que si se podían hacer más cosas. Hasta que después nosotros comenzamos estaba muerto, no había interés. Como que no les preocupaba a la gente antes como vivían, lo aceptaban como si fuera la norma.

marginalized ethnic Mexican community had a massive political awakening mostly in reaction to the Chicana/o Movement and the threats to the survival of their communities.

The political and social uprising in South El Paso, especially in the late 1970s and early 1980s, stemmed from a long legacy of activism in part by not only *el movimiento* in the city and throughout the United States, but also from the participation of Southsiders in War on Poverty programs. Activists and community members learned about grassroots organizing, grant and letter writing, among other important skills that were applied in their fights for community preservation. Leaders and members of both *La Campaña* and the CIA were products of earlier mobilizations, some were even college educated. Their experiences in earlier activism and the worsening conditions of the barrios caused the communities of Chihuahuita and El Segundo to focus their energy on bettering housing conditions. Rent strikes, countless meetings in city hall, engaging and voicing their concerns in El Paso's urban renewal projects, building and refurbishing tenement buildings, and demanding a Historic District status, all exemplify the Chicana/o Movement concept of self-determination, while encouraging residents to challenge urban, social, political, and economic inequalities. Their tireless efforts resulted in changes for the communities, as residents of South El Paso pressured local, state, and national agencies to bend to their demands, as evidenced by the residents' calls to bring federal monies such as UDAG and CBDG funds to revitalize the neighborhoods.

The case studies of Chihuahuita and El Segundo Barrio provide a window to understand the critical situation regarding housing and community preservation in the ethnic Mexican neighborhoods of South El Paso. Although the CIA and *La Campaña* shared and envisioned similar goals for their barrios, the plight for housing and limited

funds caused South El Paso to split into two factions. The two organizations also shed light on the different strategies that the ethnic Mexican community took in order to better their living conditions. Although ideological differences, conflicts of personalities, and actions by the city pinned the two neighborhood groups as enemies, the radical tactics of *La Campaña* and the diplomatic approach of the CIA won significant victories for their respective communities.

The legacies of *La Campaña* and the CIA remain to the present day not only in the refurbished tenements, new housing units, and preserved residential areas of South El Paso, but also in new neighborhood organizations that continue to value community, strength, and the history of the barrios. Although the struggle to stop commercialization and gentrification continues, especially now that El Paso is revitalizing its Downtown district, groups like the Chihuahuita Neighborhood Association and the Southside Neighborhood Association understand that the historically Chicana/o and Mexican American communities in South El Paso need to be fought for and defended. The two organizations continue to pursue the ideals initiated by both *La Campaña* and the CIA in the late 1970s.

## Chapter Four

### *Unidos por los derechos del inquilino*: Occupation, Resistance, and the Fight for Tenant and Citizenship Rights in El Segundo Barrio, 1970-1980

The Plight of the Tenant—
winter approaches and he is faced
with evictions and no place to go…
'No Hay Vivienda'—is the cry of the barrio[1]

On November 25, 1976, eight families illegally living in a condemned tenement building at 306 S. Tays Street gathered for a modest celebration they called "*un día de gracias*" in honor of Thanksgiving Day. The holiday could not come at a better time. Earlier that week, a court order dismissed a complaint filed against the families, buying them more time to defend the South El Paso tenement building from demolition. An anonymous tenant told the *El Paso Times* that the squatter families were thankful "for just living with some shelter," and prayed to "God not to be thrown out."[2]

The squatter families of 306 S. Tays were not the first group to illegally occupy tenements marked for demolition in El Segundo Barrio. In fact, this practice functioned as a means to protest the destruction of the neighborhood throughout the 1970s. As El Paso city officials and business leaders prioritized urban redevelopment that favored the industrialization and commercialization of the area, residents found limited housing within their community. Demolition of tenements and rising rents created a housing crisis, as detailed in the previous chapter. While many saw squatting as an opportunity for political and social activism fueled by the Chicana/o Movement, some Southside families

[1] "Regeneración Del Barrio," Newsletter of La Campaña Pro La Preservación del Barrio, March-April 1977, Chicano Vertical Files, C. L. Sonnichsen Special Collections, The University of Texas at El Paso Library.

[2] "'Squatter' Families Plan Normal Day of Sharing," *El Paso Times*, November 25, 1976.

had no other choice. Whatever the reasons behind their symbolic form of resistance, residents of El Segundo Barrio took matters into their own hands by protecting their rented homes and neighborhood through direct action by becoming squatters.

This chapter examines four episodes of occupation and resistance in the Second Ward—Tent City (1971), Tent City II (1975), *La Colectiva de la South Tays* (1976-1980), and the Mesa Street Occupation (1978). In each case, residents of South El Paso, Chicana/o neighborhood organizations, and other concerned citizens dramatized the plight of housing in the Southside.[3] The tenants not only opposed eviction and the planned gentrification of the area, but their radical demonstrations also brought the desperate housing conditions to the attention of the city. As the threat of demolition loomed, the feelings of ownership and the connections Southsiders felt to the barrio prompted Mexican Americans to stand their ground based on their rights as long time tenants of the barrio and citizens of El Paso.

This chapter contends that the creation of tent cities and occupation of tenements marked for demolition was an important tools to preserve the barrio. Looking at the episodes provides a window into the multigenerational participation in activist efforts and claims to citizenship rights through the urban setting. Squatter experiences in South El Paso also show a strengthening of a collective barrio identity. This chapter will not only recover the long history of radical resistance in the barrio, but will also situate such episodes within the context of Chicana/o and urban activism, by expanding our understanding of *el movimiento* and the broader struggles for civil rights.

[3] I use "dramatized" because it was a term used by squatters and activists.

Used as a tool for citizen rights throughout the world, shantytowns and squatter communities are often associated with the Third World or countries undergoing a process of reconstruction. Some examples in scholarship tend to focus on cases in Brazil, India, and post-World War II France, among other countries.[4] In the United States, scholars have begun to examine episodes of squatters and tent cities in relation to the national squatting campaigns led by the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) in the 1980s and more recently in connection to the faltering economy and the recent housing crisis.[5] El Paso's episodes provide earlier examples of squatter resistance. Protesters in El Segundo used this method to bring attention to their housing plight, but also as an effort to maintain the residential character of the barrio. Southsiders fought for their citizen, human, and civil rights, criticized the housing shortage within the barrio; used the Chicana/o Movement concept of self-determination to create housing spaces within El Segundo; and united for the preservation of their neighborhoods as longtime residents of the area.

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[4] For more on global squatting, see Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums*, (London: Verso, 2006); Brodwyn Fisher, *A Poverty of Rights: Citizenship and Inequality in Twentieth-Century Rio de Janeiro*, (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010); James Holson, *Insurgent Citizenship: Disjunctions of Democracy and Modernity in Brazil*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009); Minayo Nasiali, "Citizens, Squatters, and Asocials: The Right to Housing and the Politics of Difference in Post-Liberation France." *The American Historical Review* 119, no. 2 (2014): 434-459; Robert Neuwirth, *Shadow Cities: A Billion Squatters, A New Urban World*, (New York: Routledge, 2005).

[5] Scholarship on squatting as a form of resistance in the United States is very limited. See John Atlas, *Seeds of Change: The Story of ACORN, America's Most Controversial Antipoverty Community Group*, (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2010); Hannah Dobbz, *Nine-Tenths of the Law: Poverty and Resistance in the United States*, (Chico, CA: AK Press, 2012); Anders Corr, *No Trespassing!: Squatting, Rent Strikes, and Land Struggles Worldwide*, (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1999). A few examples of current and recent episodes of squatting and tent cities include Dignity Village in Oregon, Denver Tent City, *Colonias* along the U.S./México Border (specifically in Texas), Tent Cities in the Seattle, WA area, and Transition Park in Camden, New Jersey. See Zoe Loftus-Farren, "Tent Cities: An Interim Solution to Homelessness and Affordable Housing Shortages in the United States, *California Law Review* 99 (2011): 1037-1081.

**Tent City on Seventh and Florence, October 1971**

In comparison to the rest of the country, El Paso was a latecomer to federally funded Urban Renewal programs. As discussed in the previous chapter, the lack of a housing code prevented city authorities from applying for urban development funds. It was not until the leadership of Mayors Peter de Wetter (1969-1971) and Bert Williams (1971-1973) that the city petitioned the federal government for grants geared toward city improvements and building housing units. During the first years of the 1970s, roughly $80 million came to El Paso—$21 million dollars specifically for improvements in El Segundo Barrio.[6] At this time, the two mayors enacted housing codes and began constructing some housing projects in and out of the barrio through Project Rehab. This program sponsored by Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), aimed at rehabilitating deteriorating housing in cities across the country.[7]

The plans to build housing and redevelop the Southside, however, brought many difficulties. According to Mexican American activist Hector Rodarte, one of the reasons for the lack of housing was "the fault of the Housing Authority, because for years the administration never cared about the poor. They never thought that the community would need more money [to build housing]."[8] According to Rodarte, the El Paso Housing Authority (HA) ignored the pleas of area residents to better the living conditions of

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[6] Benjamin Marquez, *Power and Politics in a Chicano Barrio: A Study of Mobilization Efforts and Community Power in El Paso*, (Lanham, MD: University of America Press), 115.

[7] Ibid, 123; El Paso Urban Coalition and Housing Authority, August 5, 1970 Special Meeting Minutes, 2-4, Alfredo Chavez Montoya Papers, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

[8] Hector Rodarte, interview by Cesar Caballero, November 29, 1971, interview no. 57, transcript, Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso, El Paso, TX. Interview in Spanish. Original quote: "le podemos decir es echar la culpa a la Housing Authority, porque por varios años tuvo allí una administración que le importaba poco el pobre…pero nunca pensaron de que algún día se iba a necesitar más dinero."

tenements for decades, making the housing market deplorable and extremely limited. After years of neglect, the sudden spotlight on El Segundo's housing problems marked the beginning of direct action activism and resistance in the barrio.

Between 1970 and 1971, several tenement owners evicted residents from their properties, offering a variety of motives and explanations. While some tenements were not targeted by Project Rehab, landlords utilized the urban redevelopment opportunity to demolish rather than rehabilitate their tenements in hopes of making larger profits from their properties. In *Los Seis Infiernos* or the Six Hells, the goal of Project Rehab was to rehabilitate what many Southsiders called "the worst tenements in El Segundo Barrio."[9] For months, the city Housing Authority faced difficulties relocating the families of *Los Seis Infiernos*, finally, transferring tenants into new units by the spring of 1971. Unlike other cases in the barrio, those who were relocated for the sake of Project Rehab were guaranteed housing. As an article in the *El Paso Times* reported "replacement housing for low income families is the responsibility of the federal government, [even if it was] moving at its own tortuous pace."[10] The city's struggle to house residents of *Los Seis Infiernos* marked the beginning of housing conflicts and shortages throughout the decade of the 1970s.

The problems intensified that summer, as more tenement owners delivered eviction notices to their tenants. In May and June of 1971, families from 511½ South Oregon and 1417 E. Second Street received eviction notices from their respective

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[9] Oscar Lozano interview by the author, February 25, 2014, audio recording, El Paso, TX; Interview with Antonio Marin, April 28, 2014. El Paso, Texas.

[10] "El Paso Is Losing Ground In Attempt To Solve Low-Income Housing Problem," *El Paso Times*, October 28, 1971.

landlords. Although Project Rehab was still underway, Bert William's administration focused on enforcing a rigid and strict housing code that endangered many of the barrio's tenements. As a result, many tenement owners saw an opportunity to demolish their properties in hopes of larger profits. The land value of South El Paso was one of the highest in the city due to its proximity to both Downtown and the international boundary. In addition, with the signing of the Chamizal Treaty in 1963, much of the property in El Segundo Barrio according to tenement owners was "too valuable for low-income housing."[11]

This "new found value" inspired ideas for the development of the barrio. Hector Rodarte, a spokesman for the evicted families, stated that tenement owners "prefer[ed] to make more money, [to make] parking lots, warehouses, or [use land] for other commercial reasons."[12] Similarly, the *El Paso Times* reported that "the cost of remodeling or repairing the ancient tenements, many built around the turn of the century, to meet housing code standards would necessitate the raising of rents beyond the reach of most tenant families."[13] Rather than fixing up and bringing the two tenements up to minimum housing code standards, owners used demolition as the ultimate solution, allowing for the development of a commercial area.

Alarmed by the plans of tenement owners and the dismal public housing and other dwelling options within the boundaries of the barrio, tenants began protesting and

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[11] "El Paso Is Losing Ground In Attempt to Solve Low-Income Housing Problem," *El Paso Times,* October 28, 1971.

[12] Rodarte, interview. Interview in Spanish. Original quote: "El dueño prefiere hacer más dinero, usándolo de lote de estacionamiento, bodega, o [sic] otras razones comerciales."

[13] "El Paso Is Losing Ground In Attempt to Solve Low-Income Housing Problem," *El Paso Times,* October 28, 1971.

threatening to set up tents in the streets. Residents facing eviction in South El Paso told the *El Paso Herald-Post* that they were making this "proclaimed 'sacrifice' to call attention to the fact that the current city administration [was] ignoring their needs."[14] The tenants from the two buildings organized under the *Union de Inquilinos* or Tenants' Union. This group, with the help of Mexican American Committee for Honor and Service (MACHOS), began protesting outside city hall, organized marches, and picketed the homes of city officials in hopes that the city would condemn the two tenements. The affected residents wished for authorities to pass an urban referral, where the tenements would be condemned by the city, not private action, allowing displaced residents to be on a public housing priority list. A spokesman of the Tenants' Union told the *El Paso Herald-Post* that "in condemning the tenement the families w[ould] have priority to have a home in the low-income housing projects. [Tenants] want[ed] [Carlos] Bombach [El Paso's Public Inspector Officer] to condemn the properties at 1417 E. Second and 511 ½ S. Oregon or else we shall continue to picket his home."[15] Protesters urged Carlos Bombach to negotiate with landlords to delay demolition and allowed the families to stay in the dwellings for an additional six months while they found new suitable places to live. However, residents did have to continue paying rent. [16]

Unfortunately, the compromise with the tenants did not last. Residents stopped paying rent due to the poor living conditions in the tenements, thus breaking the agreement. Mayor Bert Williams attempted to defuse the situation by writing to the

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[14] "Tenants Picket Home of El Paso Building Official," *El Paso Times,* September 19, 1971; "Residents Facing Eviction Threaten 'Tent-In,'" *El Paso Herald-Post,* August 20, 1971.

[15] Carlos Bombach was El Paso's Public Inspection Director at the time. "Tenants Picket Home of El Paso Building Official," *El Paso Times,* September 19, 1971.

[16] "Tenement Residents Seek Aid," *El Paso Times,* October 1, 1971.

Housing Authority. In his letter, Williams noted that the city was contemplating giving the area of El Segundo Barrio government priority for public housing. In addition, the Mayor decided to halt temporarily the enforcement of the housing code and negotiated with owners to delay future evictions. While this move by Williams briefly put some eviction cases on hold, ultimately as an article in the *El Paso Times* reported, "owners ha[d] every legal right to tear down the tenements and to use the land for any other authorized use they s[aw] fit."[17]

Although tenants and the Chicana/o organizations fought tirelessly for a few months, residents from 511½ South Oregon still faced eviction. In May 1971, the Omega Realty Corporation of El Paso, the owners of the tenement, served the first eviction notice, giving residents ninety days to find housing. In August, a court hearing with Justice of the Peace Brunson Moore granted tenants a sixty-day extension.

As the end of the period approached, Odell Holmes, a lawyer representing the Omega Realty Corp, filed a lawsuit to remove the remaining families from the premises. According to Justice of the Peace Moore, "the law was followed" and "it [was] not a question of a family being kicked out."[18] On October 4, 1971, a deputy carried the final eviction notice to the occupants signed by Justice of the Peace Brunson Moore ordering them to abandon the three-story tenement building. Some tenants offered to continue paying rent while they found a new place to live and even appealed to the court to prevent the eviction. The court turned down the petition and the owners gave tenants ten

[17] "Tenement Residents Seek Aid," *El Paso Times,* October 1, 1971; "El Paso Is Losing Ground In Attempt To Solve Low-Income Housing Problem," *El Paso Times,* October 28, 1971.

[18] "Tent Dwellers Refuse to Move," *El Paso Times,* October 25, 1971.

days to leave.[19] Left with no other alternative, the families living in the 511½ South Oregon were displaced. Because this was a private action uprooting, families did not qualify for relocation money nor could be on a priority list for government housing.[20]

Of the evicted twenty-two families, four found no housing options and were left in the streets. *La Union de Inquilinos,* MACHOS, and other community organizations, helped the four Mexican American families stage a Tent City on Florence and Seventh streets as they had threatened to do in the months prior. Along with the cooperation of Fort Bliss Military personnel, the organizations set up tents on a vacant lot owned by the Lydia Patterson Institute (LPI).[21] The LPI, a non-profit education agency of the United Methodist Church, allowed the families to occupy their property until the squatters "found acceptable lodging."[22] The evicted families and Chicano/a organizations worked in solidarity to create clear cause and purpose. The goals of Tent City were two-fold: 1) to put a freeze on future evictions and 2) in case of such freeze not taking place, to place future evicted families on a priority list for public housing prior to their displacement.[23] What seemed as a last resort option quickly became a channel for Mexican American community activism and a direct demonstration of the housing shortage plight that many families of South El Paso faced.

For two weeks, the four families endured living out of tents and dealt with unusual rain and "an unseasonal cold spell" for the month of October in El Paso. Mayor

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[19] "Families Are Evicted," *El Paso Times,* October 23, 1971.

[20] "Tent City Dwellers Housed," *El Paso Herald-Post,* November 3, 1971.

[21] "Tenement Evictions Injunctions Discussed at Meeting," *El Paso Times,* October 24, 1971.

[22] "Tent Dwellers Refuse to Move," *El Paso Herald-Post*, October 25, 1971.

[23] Ibid.

Williams met with the families and offered them living arrangements in a tenement, yet the dwellers rejected his proposition with optimism that their dramatization would gain momentum.[24] About thirty squatters ranging from the ages of one month to fifty-one years lived in the space. The residents of Tent City were Juan Macias, a construction worker, along with his wife Maria and their eleven children; Miguel Garcia, his wife Esther and their six children; Salvador Acosta, his wife Maria and their three children; and Juana Castro, a widow, and her three children.[25] Even though it was risky to live in the tents under the given circumstances, the squatters made an agreement that no one would leave until they all found appropriate housing for their families, stating that if "one stays, all stay."[26]

In just a short time, the news about Tent City spread throughout the community of El Segundo and the city of El Paso. Soon, different items and monetary donations came to the squatters. Fort Bliss sent army blankets, food, and empty cots. A group named Hands Across the Border donated disposable diapers for the young children. Dorothy Brownlow, the director of the El Paso Chapter of the American Red Cross took sandwiches, doughnuts, and cartons of milk to feed the families.[27] Aside from their continuous moral support, *La Union de Inquilinos* donated $125. City officials and local newspapers encouraged El Pasoans to give money, food, and clothing to the families, and

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[24] "Four Families Are Moved to New Homes," *El Paso Times,* November 3, 1971.

[25] "Tent Dwellers Refuse to Move," *El Paso Herald-Post,* October 25, 1971.

[26] "4 Families Refuse to Leave Tents," *El Paso Herald-Post,* October 27, 1971.

[27] "Tenement Evictions Injunctions Discussed at Meeting," *El Paso Times,* October 24, 1971; "Tent Dwellers Refuse to Move," *El Paso Herald-Post,* October 25, 1971.

drop these items off with the El Paso Police and Fire Departments. The agencies then would be in charge of picking up and delivering donations to the Tent City.[28]

Other groups helped squatter families on the ground. Hector Rodarte, a MACHOS spokesman and representative of the families, stated that the Boys Club also supported the squatters during bad weather days, especially by allowing the families to use the gym overnight when it was too cold for people to be out on the streets.[29] Chicana/o Student groups from the University of Texas at El Paso stayed some nights in the tents to make sure nothing happened to the families. The groups also helped by bringing food and other necessities to the families. Furthermore, Rodarte asserted that although not many people came to Tent City to see what was happening, the solidarity of El Segundo Barrio came about at a moment that unity and cooperation was needed to find resolutions for their living conditions. Rodarte encouraged barrio people to cooperate by stating that "there was an interest for this problem to be remedied, but the *union de inquilinos* could not do it alone. We need everyone's help, and I mean everyone, even [gavachos] [sic]."[30]

Religious institutions also played a role during the Tent City episode. The involvement ranged from private monetary donations from Reverends Noe Gonzales and Conrado Soltero, to more active roles.[31] The Lydia Patterson Institute not only provided the space for the demonstration to take place, but they also became one of the largest

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[28] "Tenement Evictions Injunctions Discussed at Meeting," *El Paso Times,* October 24, 1971.

[29] Rodarte, interview.

[30] Ibid. Interview in Spanish. Original quote: "Pero si hay interés de que este problema se remedia, no lo va hacer la unión de inquilinos solo, sino que necesitan ayuda de todos. Y digo todos." Interviewer: "¿Inclusive el gavacho? [sic]" Rodarte: "Inclusive, también." Gabacho refers to a white American, non-Spanish speaking person.

[31] "Tenement Evictions Injunctions Discussed at Meeting," *El Paso Times,* October 24, 1971.

advocate groups for the families. The executive board of the LPI stated that the members wanted to "further implore to local, state, and federal authorities as well as individual citizens to take note both of the critical shortage of acceptable housing and the urgent need for acceptable housing by many people in El Paso and then to resolve to alleviate this condition."[32] In addition, Reverend Noe Gonzales spoke for the Institute expressing that "an attempt would be made to involve the United Methodist Church on a national level for further help with the housing problem."[33] The Catholic Church was also involved in the squatters' struggle. On the evening of Monday, October 25, the El Paso Catholic Diocese helped organize an event on the grounds of Tent City. In support of the families, concerned clergymen of various denominations held an interfaith service for the squatters and the community of El Segundo Barrio.[34] The ceremony was an attempt to "bring City and County officials together Tuesday for an emergency meeting."[35]

Tent City squatters however, did not accept everyone's benevolence. Two local chapters of national charity organizations—The Red Cross and the Salvation Army—offered the dwellers of Tent City some help by providing shelter; however, the families turned the organizations down. The reasoning behind this decision was that "families in the Southside [were] looking for a permanent solution to the housing project, and that the efforts by these organizations [were] only temporary."[36] Hector Rodarte of MACHOS voiced the sentiments of the Tent City dwellers by telling the *Herald-Post* that "sure, the

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[32] "Tent Dwellers Refuse to Move," *El Paso Herald-Post*, October 25, 1971.

[33] "Tenement Evictions Injunctions Discussed at Meeting," *El Paso Times,* October 24, 1971.

[34] "Tent Dwellers Refuse to Move," *El Paso Herald-Post*, October 25, 1971.

[35] "Tenement Evictions Injunctions Discussed at Meeting," *El Paso Times,* October 24, 1971.

[36] "Tent Dwellers Refuse to Move," *El Paso Herald-Post*, October 25, 1971.

families are helped for one month or so, but what happens after that?" He continued by saying "where are the other 200 families we know are to be evicted in weeks to follow going to go?"[37] Mrs. Wilfried Hunter from the Salvation Army told the *El Paso Herald Post* that the charity wanted to help the squatters, by bringing food and clothing to Tent City, but that they could not do so under tent living conditions. Although the dwellers refused the invitation to live in the 4630 E. Paisano shelter, Mrs. Hunter kept the offer open for the families.[38]

Through Tent City, squatter families and supporters demanded that city officials resolve the housing problems El Segundo Barrio faced for over half a century. The dwellers, with the support of many local organizations, held several meetings in Armijo Center and City Hall to discuss the future of Tent City and the Southside as a whole. Members of different groups including *La Union de Inquilinos,* MACHOS, Volunteers In Service To America (VISTA), League of Women Voters, American Jewish Committee and National Council of Jewish Women, and the Urban Coalition among others, showed support for the tenants. Meetings included discussions on priority housing for evicted families, eviction freezes through legal injunctions, and future development plans for El Segundo.[39] At an Armijo Center meeting on October 24 attended by more than 100 people, City Alderman Hector Becomo recognized that the city's priorities "were wrong." Beatrice Hirsch, who called the meeting to order, reminded the assembly of El Paso's coveted All-America City award, and that city officials needed to do something

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[37] "Tent Dwellers Refuse to Move," *El Paso Herald-Post*, October 25, 1971.

[38] Ibid.

[39] "Tenement Evictions Injunctions Discussed at Meeting," *El Paso Times,* October 24, 1971.

about the housing crisis.[40] Little by little, Tent City dwellers attracting the city's attention to create a solution for El Segundo Barrio.

The pressure on city officials to tend to dwellers' demands came at last when eight regional representatives from the Dallas HUD office visited El Paso to study the future of the city's urban improvements and public housing. The *Herald-Post* reported that "the team [was] to review El Paso's Plans in order to certify the city for federal programs in the future."[41] Although city officials felt the need to house Tent City dwellers in tenements during the visit, the families refused. At a city council meeting, Mayor Williams promised that he would let HUD officials meet the squatters and activists so the agency could hear complaints about the housing crisis in El Paso. In addition, Williams offered to let members of MACHOS and the Boys Club inspect four housing units and apartments to place the families in homes once and for all.[42] This seemed promising for the squatter families, yet they were reluctant to accept the offers. Victor Navarrete of the Boys Club stated on behalf of the dwellers that "if there [was] a public housing vacancy or if the apartments offered [were] better than what the families had before then the families [would] move out of the tents. Otherwise they [will] stay."[43] Before a city council meeting attended by over 200 people, Mayor Williams even mentioned that he would consider sidetracking some HUD regulations by requesting that the El Paso's Housing Authority office keep five to seven public housing units empty at

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[40] "Tenement Evictions Injunctions Discussed at Meeting," *El Paso Times,* October 24, 1971.

[41] "4 Families Refuse to Leave Tents," *El Paso Herald-Post,* October 27, 1971.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid.

all times to house people evicted through private action.[44] Mayor Bert Williams also promised the squatters, activists, and supporting groups that he would review a statement with ten requests geared toward bettering the housing crisis and the community of El Segundo Barrio.[45]

On November 3, 1971, two weeks after the establishment of Tent City, city officials moved the squatters from the lot into apartments. Members of the organizations helping Tent City dwellers along with Relocation Office staff and city personnel refurbished the units, made necessary repairs, and helped the families move into their new homes.[46] Juana Castro, a 51-year-old widow and her children were moved into an apartment personally located by Mayor Williams. The Macias, Garcias, and Acostas were moved into tenements owned by Chamber of Commerce president Ted Karam at 1417 E. Second Street.[47] Due to the housing shortage, families had to agree to move into the already condemned building "with an agreement that they [could] remain until February," when the tenement was scheduled for demolition. Although newspaper accounts and officials portrayed the housing crisis as under control, this was only the beginning. The temporary solution to this longstanding dispute would be a point of contention between

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[44] "4 Families Refuse to Leave Tents," *El Paso Herald-Post,* October 27, 1971.

[45] Rodarte, interview.

[46] "Four Families Are Moved To New Homes," *El Paso Times,* November 3, 1971; "Tent City Dwellers Housed," *El Paso Herald-Post,* November 3, 1971.

[47] "Four Families Are Moved To New Homes," *El Paso Times,* November 3, 1971. The *El Paso Times* reported that the families moved into 1417½ E. Second Street, while the *El Paso Herald-Post* stated squatters moved into 1417 E. Second Street. Either way, the two tenement buildings were condemned since June 1971. Residents of these tenements were the people that protested and picketed outside Carlos Bombach's home.

the ethnic Mexican population in El Segundo and city officials for the duration of the decade.

In the end, Tent City residents won miniscule victories. The *El Paso Times* reported that "recent picketing of officials' homes by evicted tenement families and pitching of tents near Armigo [sic] Park has pointed up part of the problem but has had a doubtful effect on the solution. The primary objective of the demonstrations and possibly the only success has been the focus of public awareness [on] at least one aspect of the discouraging situation." At last, city leaders were confronted with the realities of El Segundo Barrio and realized the housing question could no longer be ignored or postponed. Portions of Project Rehab continued, and some evictions were either delayed or halted altogether. Mayor Williams also directly responded to tenants and the community of South El Paso. At a city council meeting, the mayor outlined a plan of action including studying the possibility of creating an emergency relocation center for future evictions, providing an emergency rent fund, offering HA trailer homes to help the relocation of families, establishing bridge talks between HUD officials and Chicana/o Southside organizations, and creating a plan to remedy housing shortages.[48] Aware of the conditions in El Segundo, Congressman Richard White wrote a letter to U.S. Secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development George Romney in hopes of obtaining emergency assistance to provide housing for the people of South El Paso, where the Congressman exposed the "desperate and urgent conditions" of the barrio.[49]

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[48] "4 Families Refuse to Leave Tents," *El Paso Herald-Post,* October 27, 1971.

[49] "White Tells of Crisis In Housing," *El Paso Times,* October 29, 1971.

Tent City pressed city officials to consider many urban redevelopment strategies and push the construction of government housing, even if it were outside of South El Paso.

The 1971 Tent City became a model for future squatter activism in the barrio. Even though few victories were won, residents of the Southside continued fighting for the same rights Tent City dwellers fought for in the years prior. Using this first Tent City as a reference, Mexican American protests for tenant and citizenship rights evolved during the decade of the 1970s in South El Paso. The next episodes marked shifts in community activism, adding barrio preservation and protection of citizen and human rights of ethnic Mexicans in El Paso to the struggles for affordable and acceptable housing.

**Tent City II on Ochoa and Fourth, April 1975**

The tragic fire on Easter Sunday of 1973 (discussed in Chapter 3) reawakened an intense fight against substandard housing conditions in South El Paso. In response to the accident, Mayor Fred Hervey's administration (1973-1975) instituted the Tenement Eradication Program—an aggressive and systematic plan that resulted in the razing of hundreds of substandard tenement buildings and uprooted 808 families from South El Paso.[50] The rapid disappearance of the barrio and the inability to find affordable living arrangements in and out of the Southside sparked a crisis that inspired the community's mobilization to demand housing. Subsequently, *La Campaña Pro La Preservación del Barrio* formed to combat the desperate situation in the area.

One of the first mobilizations by *La Campaña* was the creation of Tent City II. Knowing that the continued razings would leave people on the streets, *La Campaña* and

[50] "Manifesto from the Community of South El Paso," ca. 1975, 1, MEChA Papers, UTEP Chapter, MS251, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections, The University of Texas at El Paso Library.

its supporters created a plan to counterattack the Tenement Eradication Program. The organization stated that "time and time again, [they had] seen city officials being used to carry out the whims of avaricious business interests who violate[d] the basic human rights for the sake of more greed."[51] The group adopted an ideology that favored conserving the residential character of the area. Through preservation methods, people of the Southside protested for better housing while underscoring the need to maintain the Mexican ethnic and cultural character of the barrios.

Oscar Lozano, an active member of *La Campaña* stated that the Tenement Eradication Program caused "many tenants to be evicted through no fault of their own… and left out in the streets." This emergency in El Segundo Barrio generated a political mobilization of Chicana/o activists and residents to demand that city authorities address the barrio's housing shortage.[52] Tired of attending meetings in which their pleas were ignored, members of *La Campaña* decided to take direct action and wrote a manifesto in the name of the community of South El Paso. In the document, the organization declared the establishment of a second Tent City, by stating that:

> The turn of events have forced us to relegate our efforts to this type of action. We want to dramatize, once more, the gravity of the nature of our problem to the city in hope that some pressure will fall upon our city fathers. The collective action of the Southside residents has produced nothing; it is hoped that the collective pressure from El Pasoans, especially ex-barrio residents will bring about a resolution to our problems. Our cause is your cause.[53]

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[51] "Manifesto from the Community of South El Paso," 2.

[52] Lozano, interview.

[53] "Manifesto from the Community of South El Paso," 4.

Although Project Rehab promised to convert the infamous *Seis Infiernos* into improved housing, this site was now the home to some "public housing units, dilapidated private dwellings, and rubble strewn empty lots."[54] To make a point that city authorities and tenement owners were unwilling to build housing on the empty lots, on March 20, 1975, activists set up tents on Fourth Avenue and Ochoa on the former lot of the Six Hells tenements. The *El Paso Herald-Post* reported that squatters set up six tents, "some ragged," in the dusty lot.[55] With the help of *La Campaña,* fifty people—including evicted families and activists—decided to demonstrate the lack of housing for a second time. The group of squatters ranged from children, one of them a newborn, to middle aged and elderly women.[56] Oscar Lozano, recalled that "*Campaña* members and sympathizers moved into the tents and decided to establish residence there as a way to show the need for housing and as a way of protesting previous promises the city had made about replacing those torn tenements with actual new housing."[57]

Similar to the first Tent City, Tent City II squatters dealt with many weather difficulties. During the spring months, El Paso experiences dust storms due to rising temperatures and its arid desert environment. On Wednesday, March 26, squatters endured a dust storm with wind gusts reaching a speed of sixty-one miles per hour. The inclement weather caused two of the tents to fall down while residents and volunteers fought to hold down the other four.[58] The extreme weather discouraged some families

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[54] "Tent City Residents Protest 'Destruction,' *El Paso Times,* March 21, 1975.

[55] "Picketers Protest 'Barrio' Housing," *El Paso Herald-Post,* March 25, 1975.

[56] "Tent City Residents Protest 'Destruction,' *El Paso Times,* March 21, 1975; Tent City Volunteers, interview by Oscar J. Martinez, April 2, 1975, interview no. 202, transcript, Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso, El Paso, TX.

[57] Lozano, interview.

[58] Picture Caption, *El Paso Times,* March 27, 1975; Tent City Volunteers, interview.

from continuing to live in the tents, yet others continued to protest. A group of elderly women working as volunteers in the Tent City expressed the worries of many dwellers by stating that "well, many adults can handle [the weather and living conditions]. But what about the kids? There is a woman with a fifteen day old baby girl in the tents!"[59]

The Hervey administration had done nothing to help the residents or address their concerns. Weather conditions continued concerning many Tent City II squatters, and yet the Mexican American families remained and stood for preservation of the barrio—even if living in the tents could risk their health. A few city council members and other community leaders suggested moving the squatters into public housing units, but Tent City II dwellers refused because these were outside El Segundo. For Carmen Felix, a spokesperson of *La Campaña*, the "attempts to relocate residents in public housing miles away from 'El Segundo' [were] not welcomed by [Tent City II] residents because they want[ed] to keep their cultural identity and practices intact." She also mentioned to the *El Paso Times* that residents "[Didn't] like the conditions they're living in, but they [didn't] want to be taken to Ysleta or Coronado."[60]

The dwellers of Tent City II believed that the Hervey administration was ignoring their pleas for political reasons. A Tent City volunteer expressed that city leaders "had their plans [for El Segundo] already made. They are treating us like animals, just discriminating against us all."[61] In an interview, Soledad Olivas, a *La Campaña* member,

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[59] Tent City Volunteers, interview. Interview in Spanish. Original quote: "Póngale, no de grande puede aguantar, ¿pero los niños? Mire, aquí en las carpas está una señora—oígalo bien—con una niña que tiene 15 días de nacida."

[60] "Tent City Residents Protest 'Destruction,' *El Paso Times*, March 21, 1975

[61] Tent City Volunteers, interview.

said that "we have met with the mayor, but he has treated us bad plenty of times."[62] Even with little to no support from the city and Mayor Hervey, residents continued to fight for their cause. The squatters simply wanted the Hervey administration and city council to "stop passing the bucket" to the next group of leaders and solve the housing crisis once and for all.[63]

The efforts of Tent City II did not receive as much media and community attention in comparison to the first Tent City. The majority of volunteers came from the barrio itself and the student community at the University of Texas at El Paso. The tents had a central cooking and eating area, where many elderly women volunteered as cooks for the squatters. Three anonymous volunteers described how they showed up to the tents at nine in the morning, and would go home at nine in the evening after cooking dinner daily.[64] Church officials and people living in tenements neighboring the tents also helped the squatters as much as possible. The latter group allowed squatters and volunteers to use their private restrooms. A volunteer explained that "many people had been really nice to us. People from everywhere had come [to the tents] and cooperated."[65]

The lack of attention from the city administration or the media, however, did not stop dwellers and volunteers from working intensely to publicize their cause. Pamphlets began circulating around the barrio informing fellow residents about the dangers coming to El Segundo and the efforts by organizations and activists to preserve the barrio. In

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[62] Soledad Olivas, interview by Cecilia Vega, November 30, 1976, interview no. 251, transcript, Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso, El Paso, TX. Interview in Spanish. Original quote: "Porque cuando hemos ido a hablar con el mayor, muchas de las veces nos ha tradado [sic] mal."

[63] "Manifesto from the Community of South El Paso," 3.

[64] Tent City Volunteers, interview.

[65] Ibid.

addition, volunteers took turns watching the tents and picketing outside local government offices.[66] *La Campaña* member Soledad Olivas recalled her experience as a volunteer and stated that "sometimes they would go with posters, protesting down the streets. [They] would go to the court and speak to people outside."[67] On Monday, March 24, members of *La Campaña,* Tent City II dwellers, and volunteers picketed outside the El Paso Department of Planning. The protesters "accuse[d] the leaders of the department as irresponsible and inhumane." Picketers pleaded with the Department of Planning to stop their unjust actions that were destroying El Segundo. [68] The squatter demonstration and pickets unfortunately were in vain. Mayor Hervey never officially addressed the plight of the residents of Tent City II.

Tent City II lasted at least two weeks, and again the largest victory was the exposure of the problems in El Segundo Barrio.[69] Unlike Bert Williams, Hervey did not visit the residents of Tent City II. Perhaps this was due to Mayor Hervey's lack of interest in the addressing the true needs of the community of El Segundo since he favored the commercialization and industrialization of the area. Or it may be the fact that he was not going up for reelection once his term ended. Political scientist Benjamin Marquez, who briefly mentions Tent City II in his book, suggested that *La Campaña'*s failed

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[66] Tent City Volunteers, interview. I have not found a definite end date for the demonstration. In the interview, one of the anonymous volunteers mentioned she had been working since the beginning, for about two weeks at the time of the interview.

[67]Olivas, interview. Interview in Spanish. Original quote: "A veces nos íbamos con los cartelones, anduvimos por las calles. Íbamos enfrente de la corte a hablar con las personas."

[68] "Conclusiones—Ciudad De Carpas," March 26, 1975, MEChA Papers, UTEP Chapter, MS251, C.S. Sonnichsen Special Collections, The University of Texas at El Paso Library. Document is in Spanish. Original quote: "Nosotros llamamos a esto irresponsabilidad y accusamos [sic] de inhumanos a los dirijentes [sic] de este departamento."

[69] Tent City Volunteers, interview.

demonstration was due to the organization's recent formation and because they came late into the situation.[70] Whatever the reasons for its failure, *La Campaña* would continue its fight for housing and the preservation of El Segundo Barrio. As Soledad Olivas, an elderly yet very active *La Campaña* member explained, "I really like all the enthusiasm of the people involved, because I see that they have also suffered a lot. But we keep on insisting."[71] In the following demonstrations, the group changed strategies and became more radical in their approach. Tent City II resonated in the minds of El Segundo Barrio residents and activists in the following years.

### *La Colectiva de la 306 S. Tays*, October 1976-1980

*La Campaña* was in its formative phase at the time of Tent City II. A year later, the organization became the voice of the barrio. The next two city administrations, Don Henderson (1975-1977) and Ray Salazar (1977-1979), focused their energy on obtaining federal funds for urban renewal in the Southside. The projects, however, called for the industrialization and commercialization of areas within the barrio.[72] As discussed in the previous chapter, *La Campaña* opposed and questioned the decisions to change the residential character of the barrio by both Henderson's and Salazar's administrations.

Shortly after the formation of *La Campaña*, the organization's battles became multifaceted. While fighting against the proposed developments in their community, the

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[70] Marquez, *Power and Politics*, 167.

[71] Soledad Olivas, interview. Interview in Spanish. Original quote: "Allí estuvimos nosotros todo ese tiempo hasta que se levantó las carpas y seguimos trabajando. Y a mí me ha gustado mucho todo este entusiasmo de todas estas personas, porque veo yo que ellos también… pues se ha sufrido bastante. Pero nosotros seguimos de todos modos insistiendo."

[72] Lozano, interview.

group also supported and counseled a number of squatter demonstrations in the Southside. Encouraged by the Chicana/o Movement and its ideology of "self-determination," *La Campaña* became a radical group compared to other groups that had previously formed in the barrio. The organization adopted philosophies from the national Chicana/o Movement and Emiliano Zapata's agrarian movement during the Mexican Revolution, and adopted the creed of "the barrio belongs to those who live in it."[73] *La Campaña* believed that adequate housing was not only a citizenship right, but also a basic human right. [74] In the latter half of the 1970s, Mexican American tenant struggles in the Southside became a fight of property rights versus human rights. In their fight, the Chicana/o group also recruited the help of the El Paso Legal Assistance Society, and educated residents of El Segundo about the rights of tenants. The strengthening of *La Campaña* and the group's efforts to inform Southside residents about their rights as tenants signaled the beginning of many hostile fights with city leaders. As the *El Paso Times* noted "the inquilino (barrio tenement dweller) became more vocal with the support of La Campaña."[75]

The third, more radicalized phase of squatter protests began in 1976. In October of that year, tenement owner Isidore Sandoval sold his property at 306 S. Tays to Moor Park Joint Venture, a business group from San Diego California. Oscar Lozano recalled that the new owner quickly made plans to demolish the building in order to construct a

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[73] Lozano, interview. During the Mexican Revolution, Emiliano Zapata fought for the rights of peasants to own land. He is known for the philosophy of *Tierra y Libertad* or "Land and Liberty." During the demonstrations of *La Campaña*, painted signs with the slogan were found in the occupied properties.

[74] "Regeneración del Barrio," December 1977. Chicano Vertical Files, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections, The University of Texas at El Paso Library.

[75] "Residents Seek Community Control," *El Paso Times*, April 26, 1977.

frozen poultry warehouse.[76] The property was a ten-apartment dwelling with an adjacent car lot. At the time of the sale, ten families were residing in the tenement. In September, Mr. Sandoval gave a written notice, telling his tenants the building needed to be evacuated within thirty days. He also mentioned that tenants could stay until they found another place to live, under the condition that residents continued paying their own water bills.[77]

Eight of the families left the tenement by October, although the families struggled to find housing in the allotted time. Two families, however, remained in the property as they were unable to find affordable dwellings in the barrio. As families vacated 306 S. Tays, six new families that had not found housing moved into the empty apartments. About thirty people began to live illegally in the building, not paying rent to either Isidore Sandoval or Moor Park Joint Venture group. [78] *La Campaña* fully supported the tenants' struggle, and set up a headquarters office in the building in order to keep the squatters from being intimidated.[79]

The radical occupation of the 306 S. Tays tenement soon gained the attention of the media. Squatters and leaders of *La Campaña* viewed this as an opportunity to expose their plight. Some of the women squatters were interviewed by the *El Paso Times*, and shared the realities of their lives. Maria Elena Gonzalez was the head of one of two families that lived in the tenement prior to the sale of the property. Mrs. Gonzalez had

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[76] Lozano, interview.

[77] "Family Refusing to Be Evicted," *El Paso Times*, November 6, 1976.

[78] Ibid.

[79] "South EP 'Squatters' Struggle to Remain in Tenement Homes," *El Paso Times*, November 12, 1976.

four children—three boys of school age and a ten-month-old baby. Although she tried finding low-income housing within the barrio, she and her family had no luck. When Mrs. Gonzalez tried to find apartments, they were beyond her means, and landlords also turned her down because of her children.[80] She remained in the tenements because she had no other place to go. When interviewed by the *El Paso Times* she stated "If they want me to leave, they should find me housing. I can't move out into the street with my children."[81] Ramona Garcia, another squatter, shared the same sentiments. A mother of four children, one of them a one-month-old daughter, she saw the vacancies as an opportunity to keep her children off the streets. Mrs. Garcia stated, "we're not doing anything wrong. It's not our fault we can't find housing." Garcia also said that the families now trespassing on the property were left with no other alternative and that they refused to be homeless.[82] Arturo Vasquez, a member of *La Campaña*, asserted that "hopefully this [manifestation] [would] demonstrate to the city that they just [hadn't] been able to cope with the housing shortage problem. This type of action might become more frequent in the future as housing becomes more scarce."[83] Squatters, activists and community members were willing to risk it all in order to resolve this decade long struggle. *La Campaña* leader Oscar Lozano stated that trespassers agreed that they were "going to risk arrest, we're going to risk whatever comes. We're willing to do it."[84]

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[80] "Family Refusing to Be Evicted," *El Paso Times*, November 6, 1976.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Ibid.

[84] Lozano, interview.

Even though previous squatter demonstrations showed solidarity between tenants, activists, and other supporters, the 306 Tays Occupation exhibited an especially strong sense of familial unity. Richard T. Rodríguez argues in *Next of Kin* that "the family is a crucial symbol and organizing principle that by and large frames the history of Mexican Americans in the United States.[85] Basing their activism and unity on this cultural tradition, the squatters created a Tenants' Collective, which operated as an extended family. Through *la colectiva*, residents at 306 S. Tays would come together to look after one another, keep up and improve the tenement, and make decisions about the property. According to Oscar Lozano, the families agreed on "doing things together as a group and as a community."[86] Part of the formation of the Tenants' Collective was to "unify the struggle against eviction and also fix up the place, keep it clean, and to take care of each other's children."[87] In addition to the cultivation of a familial bond, squatters began making decisions as a group. One of the first agreements was to utilize rent money to make improvements in the tenements. Although no rent had been paid since October 1976, each family agreed to at least contribute fifteen dollars a month for maintenance and repairs.[88] A *La Campaña* newsletter reported that "the families had been bettering the property by building restrooms with access to hot water, and converted the car lot into a

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[85] Richard T. Rodríguez, *Next of Kin: The Family in Chicano/a Cultural Politics,* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 2.

[86] Lozano, interview.

[87] "South EP 'Squatters' Struggle to Remain in Tenement Homes," *El Paso Times,* November 12, 1976.

[88] "Officials Support Tenants," *El Paso Times,* May 10, 1977.

park."[89] Other repairs included fixing doors and windows, painting woodwork, and the installation of several sets of swings for the children. The newsletter also stated that this tenant cooperation "was a beautiful example for the rest of the barrio to follow."[90]

Little by little, the squatters made the appropriated tenement building feel like "home." The squatter men took turns securing the premises so the families could live their regular lives while the children played in the dirt yard in their newly constructed playground. Even though the tenants feared eviction and arrests, families kept living their normal lives.[91] Not only were the residents investing their money to make improvements, but they also claimed the space with painted signs of resistance. The signs included "Tierra y Libertad" (Land and Liberty), "El Barrio Debe Ser De Quienes Viven En El" (The Barrio Belongs to Those Who Live In It), "Welcome to my home. This is my land. There is no housing, it is too cold for tents," "We Will Not Move," and the iconic eagle from the United Farm Workers Movement.[92] Amidst the "No Trespassing" and "Private" signage posted by landowners, the squatters stood their ground with messages of unity.

Even though the squatters pooled rent money for improvements, monthly utility expenses became a burden. However, when the residents asked for the help of the community, people from within and outside the barrio aided the tenant struggle. *La*

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[89] "Regeneración del Barrio," March-April 1977, Chicano Vertical Files, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections, The University of Texas at El Paso Library. Document in Spanish. Original quote: "[Las familias] hacen las decisiones en común. Las familias van mejorando la vivienda. Poniendo baños con agua caliente, convertir lote de carros en parque."

[90] "Eight Barrio Families Planning Last Stand," *El Paso Times,* February 4, 1977; "Regeneración del Barrio," March-April 1977. Document in Spanish. Original quote: "Un bonito ejemplo para el resto del barrio."

[91] "Abundance of talk covered housing ills in South Side," *El Paso Times,* December 27, 1979.

[92] Ibid.; "Officials Support Tenants," *El Paso Times,* May 10, 1977; "EP Tenement Issue Left In Legal Limbo," *El Paso Times,* February 3, 1977.

*Campaña* mobilized within El Segundo requesting materials needed for the maintenance of the building. The Chicana/o organization asked for construction supplies such as tools, screen doors, door fixtures, roofing materials, tile, shower fixtures, cement and sand, gas stoves, windowpanes, and trashcans.[93] The Chicano Studies Program at the University of Texas at El Paso joined the fight as well. In a memorandum, the program invited Chicana/o faculty, staff, and students to participate, assuring them that "donations [would] go towards the expense of maintaining a worthy cause."[94] Community members of El Segundo provided monetary and material donations, and volunteered their time for pickets and protests.[95] Above all though, the Tenants' Collective at 306 S. Tays wanted the solidarity and support from El Segundo and the community of El Paso. The squatters encouraged the barrio to take the same measures, "for the good of everyone."[96]

In prior squatter demonstrations, tenants and tenement owners met in the courts, but *La Colectiva de la Tays* was the first squatter demonstration that extensively utilized the court system to demand their rights as tenants and as citizens. As soon as the squatters occupied the tenement at 306 S. Tays, a battle of property rights versus tenant, citizen, and human rights began. *La Campaña* recruited the help of attorneys from the El Paso Legal Assistance Society (EPLAS) to counter the legal defense of Moor Park Joint Venture. The first legal conflict began on November 5, 1976, roughly a month after the

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[93] "Materials Needed Now for Maintenance of Tenant's Strike," *La Campaña* flyer, n.d., Chicano Vertical Files, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections, The University of Texas at El Paso Library.

[94] "Memorandum to All Chicano Faculty and Students, From Chicano Studies Program," November 18. 1976, Chicano Vertical Files, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections, The University of Texas at El Paso Library.

[95] "Regeneración del Barrio," December 1977; "Dispute Goes to the Streets, (Picture Caption)," *El Paso Times,* September 9, 1977.

[96] "Regeneración del Barrio," December 1977.

occupation of the building. Andrew Guevara, the lawyer representing Moor Park Joint Venture, called the El Paso Police Department to remove the squatters from the property. Although the "police confronted the tenants and told them to leave, [the tenants] wouldn't do it willingly."[97] When the squatters refused to leave the premises, Guevara filed legal complaints against the eight trespassing families. On November 22, the trespassers reported to court, with a number of supporters from all over the barrio. At the hearing, Justice of the Peace Jesus Hernandez ruled in favor of the tenants, due to the fact that representatives from Moor Park did not attend. In addition, Justice of the Peace Hernandez dismissed evictions proceedings against two families because the two were allowed to remain in the property by the former owner Isidore Sandoval, and thus were not breaking the law.[98]

To the squatters, this dismissal was just "a skirmish in a longer struggle for their rights, and other goals."[99] *La Campaña* also claimed the verdict "a victory for the tenant in general." In a newsletter named *La Regeneración del Barrio,* the organization informed residents of the barrio that:

> Sure [it is] a small and temporary but important victory. This victory is important because it demonstrates that with unity, tenants can survive and better their living conditions. It also demonstrates to the rest of the Barrio that the tenement owner is not omnipotent. It demonstrates that the Barrio can do better when it sets its mind to it.[100]

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[97] "Family Refusing to Be Evicted," *El Paso Times,* November 6, 1976.

[98] "Regeneración del Barrio," December 1977; "South El Paso Nearing Close of 1976 With Hope Dimmed By Housing, Violence," *El Paso Times,* December 5, 1976.

[99] "'Squatter' Families Plan Normal Day of Sharing," *El Paso Times,* November 25, 1976.

[100] "Regeneración del Barrio," December 1977. Document in Spanish. Original quote: "Esta ha sido una victoria para el inquilino en general; cierto una victoria chica y temporia [sic] pero importante. Importante porque esta victoria demuestra que uniéndose el inquilino, el puede sobrevenir [sic] y mejorar su situación. Le demuestra al resto del Barrio que el terrateniente no es todo poderoso, demuestra que el Barrio puede cuando quiere.

The article on *La Regeneración del Barrio* also signaled the beginning of many battles. The authors established that they would prepare and combat future injustices of tenement owners.[101]

Leaders of *La Campaña* were right in using the time to prepare for the fights ahead. On February 3, 1977, Guevara was supposed to attend a city council meeting in which he would petition an eviction order from city authorities, but the representative of Moor Park called prior to the meeting to remove his name from the agenda.[102] With the development, the squatters of 306 S. Tays won another round by default. The *El Paso Times* reported that "with the tenants determined to stand their ground, the city committed to construction before demolition, and Moor Park apparently reluctant to resort to physical eviction, the matter appears at an impasse."[103]

The next few months were difficult for Moor Park Joint Venture to overturn the legal decisions that favored the squatter families. *La Campaña* was fully aware of the rights of the tenant and the legalities behind evictions. With this said, members of the organization worked tirelessly to protect the identities of the trespassers. The reason behind this was because "the other six families, having moved in after the sale, could be charged with criminal trespass, a misdemeanor punishable by a fine, but only if Moor Park [could] determine the names of the heads of household involved."[104] *La Campaña* and its supporting volunteers vigilantly protected the identities and anonymity of the

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[101] "Regeneración del Barrio," December 1977.

[102] "EP Tenement Issue Left In Legal Limbo," *El Paso Times,* February 3, 1977. Also on the minutes of the City Council Meeting, February 3, 1977.

[103] "EP Tenement Issue Left In Legal Limbo," *El Paso Times,* February 3, 1977.

[104] Ibid.

squatters. Andrew Guevara acknowledged in an *El Paso Times* interview that "the occupants barricaded themselves in the premises and rejected efforts by peace officers to serve notices." Oscar Lozano and Juan Montes, two leaders of *La Campaña,* risked their own arrests in order to prevent sheriff's deputies from entering the premises and finding the names of the heads of household.[105] The only local agency that knew the identities of the squatter families was the Southern Union Gas Company because the company needed their names in order to provide service. However, Southern Union could not make the names of their subscribers public unless they had a court order to do so.[106] The tenants and members of *La Campaña* succeeded in guarding the anonymity of the trespassing families. Although by law evictions needed to be addressed to the squatters, Moor Park Joint Venture continued pressing the court system to remove the families from their property.

On May 9, 1977, Andrew Guevara and Carmen Felix, a leader of *La Campaña,* met in the attorney's office. During the meeting, Guevara informed Felix that his client, Moor Park, instructed him to "proceed with blanket eviction processes" against the "illegal trespassers."[107] The following day, Carmen Felix and members of *La Campaña* invited several city officials to discuss the tenants' struggles. On May 10, newly elected Mayor Ray Salazar, alderman Dan Ponder, and city executive Jim Kirby visited the squatters and leaders of *La Campaña* at the tenement.[108] Alderman Ponder gave legitimacy to the tenant cause stating that "[city officials had] to stop the eviction before

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[105] "EP Officials Support Tenants," *El Paso Times,* May 10, 1977.

[106] "EP Tenement Issue Left In Legal Limbo," *El Paso Times,* February 3, 1977.

[107] "EP Officials Support Tenants," *El Paso Times,* May 10, 1977.

[108] Ibid.

[they did] anything else. All [he knew they could] do [was] call Sullivan (Sheriff) and ask him to call off his wolves for a week or two until [he could] check this out."[109] This was one of the first times that city authorities favored the tenants over the interests of businesses and commerce. With the support of Mayor Salazar, Alderman Ponder, and city executive Kirby, the Tenants' Collective was gaining momentum.

Despite the support of city officials, Andrew Guevara moved forward with the instructions of his client. During the last week of May 1977, a sheriff's deputy served eight eviction notices to the squatters of 306 S. Tays. The squatter families resisted the eviction notices and failed to show up in court. On June 1, Justice of the Peace Jesus Hernandez ruled against the tenants and gave the eight families five days to leave the property. It seemed like the almost yearlong struggle would come to an end. Justice Hernandez directed Sheriff Mike Sullivan to evict the families, but the Sheriff refused to follow the Justice of the Peace's order.[110] Israel Galindo, the legal representative for the squatter families however, found flaws in the delivery of the eviction notices, and asked Justice of the Peace Hernandez to reconsider the eviction judgments based on the unlawful distribution. According to the EPLAS attorney, one eviction was served but left by a window, while the other six notices bore no names. By law, eviction notices must address the person(s) to be removed from property, and these must also be hand delivered.[111]

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[109] "EP Officials Support Tenants," *El Paso Times,* May 10, 1977.

[110] "Eviction Reversal No Real Victory for Residents," *El Paso Times,* June 18, 1978.

[111] "Attorney For South EP Squatters Argues Eviction Notices Improper," *El Paso Times,* June 3, 1977. According to a court appeal document, the document was addressed to "John Doe and all other occupants." *AGUIRRE v. MOOR PARK INV. CO*., 570 S.W.2d 103 (1978), Court of Civil Appeals of Texas, El Paso., July 19, 1978, accessed June 15, 2014.

Representatives of Moor Park Joint Venture obtained a *writ of mandamus* from Judge George Rodriguez ordering Sheriff Sullivan to evict the squatters at 306 S. Tays.[112] Notice of the *mandamus* "was given to the occupants by posting a notice on the doors of the apartments."[113] As the squatters found out they would be evicted once and for all, tenant Carlos Aguirre, resident of apartment number four, appealed to the Court of Appeals of the City of El Paso. On June 14, 1978, Associate Justice Max N. Osborn overturned the mandate that ordered the eviction.[114] Although Justice Osborn's decision was a victory for the tenants, Susan Munder, the EPLAS attorney representing the families, admitted "it [was] no permanent victory" and that she was unsure of what the owner would do.[115] Although Moor Park Joint Venture attempted to have a rehearing, it was denied in August of 1978.[116]

The hostile fight between squatters and Moor Park caused the owners of the property to reconsider the conflict. Since the summer of 1977, the investment group had considered selling the property to the squatters. During a meeting with Andrew Guevara, *La Campaña* members mentioned "they [were] at a position to purchase the property and need[ed] time to present a proposal."[117] Guevara reported to the *El Paso Times* that "the owner would postpone plans to evict the 'illegal trespassers' at 306 S. Tays for a week to

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[112] *Writ of mandamus* by definition is "an order from a court to an inferior government official ordering the government official to properly fulfill their official duties or correct an abuse of discretion." http://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/mandamus, accessed June 15, 2014.

[113] *AGUIRRE v. MOOR PARK INV. CO*., http://www.leagle.com/decision/1978673570SW2d103_1644.xml/AGUIRRE%20v.%20MOOR%20PARK%20INV.%20CO, accessed June 15, 2014.

[114] "Eviction Refusal No Real Victory for Residents," *El Paso Times*, June 18, 1978.

[115] Ibid.

[116] *AGUIRRE v. MOOR PARK INV. CO*.

[117] "EP Officials Support Tenants," *El Paso Times*, May 10, 1977.

give La Campaña, [and] the Tenants' Union time to offer a proposal to buy the property." The price tag for the property would be $80,000.[118] Oscar Lozano, mentioned that *La Campaña*'s likelihood of obtaining the money was in the hands of a local bank, but that the prospects looked favorable.[119] The possibility of purchasing the building was postponed due to the legal battles the two parties faced. Eventually leaders of *La Campaña* convinced Moor Park to sell the property to the squatters after the legal battles. The purchase was made through the organization's subsidiary group, the Southside Low-Income Housing Development Corporation (SLIHDC), a non-profit 401c3, directed by residents of El Segundo Barrio (see Chapter 3).[120]

By 1980, the Tenants' Collective and the SLIHDC obtained money from private investors and the federal government to rehabilitate the 306 S. Tays tenements to proper housing standards. Once the building was renovated, residents of the Southside could apply to live in the apartments. Applicants for the apartments had to:

1. Be a person of low-income;
2. Live in areas of El Segundo Barrio;
3. Reside in a substandard dwelling;
4. Be willing to participate in the Mutual Help Program;
5. Be willing to live with and participate in the Tenants' Union.[121]

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[118] "EP Officials Support Tenants," *El Paso Times,* May 10, 1977.

[119] Ibid.

[120] Lozano, interview.

[121] "La Corporación De Vivienda Del Segundo Barrio, Aviso—Historia de la vivienda 306 Tays," Chicano Vertical Files, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections, The University of Texas at El Paso Library. Document in Spanish. Original quote: "1. Ser de bajos ingresos; 2. Residir en el [áreas] del Segundo Barrio; 3. Residir en viviendas inadecuadas; 4. Que están dispuestos a participar en el programa de Ayuda Mutua; 5. Que estén dispuestos a vivir y participar en Colectiva de Inquilinos.

The Tenants' Collective continued the maintenance and the administration of the property. Although the tenement only had ten units, it became one of several low-income dwellings controlled by the residents of El Segundo Barrio.[122]

For four years, *La Colectiva* and *La Campaña* faced many legal battles, repression, and even arrests. Even with all the obstacles the squatters faced, the group endured as they fought for one of the most basic citizen and human rights: housing. A flyer about the history of 306 S. Tays best summarized the Mexican American tenants' struggle, stating that "with the determination and firmness of people, the fight became fruitful."[123] The tenement building still stands to this day and is in full use. The property remains under the ownership of the SLIHDC.[124]

**Mesa and Fifth Occupation, 1978**

In January of 1978, *La Campaña* initiated another occupation. The radical tactics of residents and community supporters, the power of the owner, and *La Campaña's* opposition to an urban renewal plan created a hostile fight that led to violence and fights in the courts. The events that led to the tenant occupation began with an electronics and curio shop. Enrique Mejia, a small businessman and the owner of Aquarius Gift Shop on 213 South Mesa, wanted to move his downtown business farther into El Segundo. In an *El Paso Herald-Post* article, Mejia said that he "had the ambition for many years to own a piece of property to have [his] own building," since the current building he occupied

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[122] "City Council Approves Adobe Housing Project," *El Paso Herald-Post,* December 12, 1979.

[123] "La Corporación De Vivienda Del Segundo Barrio, Aviso—Historia de la vivienda 306 Tays." Document in Spanish. Original quote: "Pero con la determinación y firmeza de la gente dio fruto al fruto."

[124] Lozano, interview.

was not his.[125] The opportunity came when Mejia purchased the property at the corner of South Mesa and Fifth Streets, across from Sacred Heart Church Gym. According to Chicano activist Oscar Lozano, people in the barrio believed that he wanted to relocate to appeal to the shoppers on both sides of the border.[126] When Mejia purchased the building at 620 S. Mesa Street, families were evicted and forced to move. Once the tenants of the building moved out, Mejia planned to raze the building and construct his shop and an adjacent warehouse.[127]

As soon as leaders of *La Campaña* learned about the plans for the building, the group decided to intervene and occupy the tenement. In late January 1978, the group broke the locks and took over the property. The *El Paso Herald-Post* reported "La Campana occupied the building to dramatize the housing plight of South El Paso with increased use of the area for commercial and industrial purposes and fewer residences."[128] The building had units on both sides, which were rented by *La Campaña* to families unable to find apartments in the barrio.[129] In the front of the tenement, a large unit that had previously been a grocery store became the new headquarters of the organization and a small community center.[130] The organization allowed two families to live in the property—Isidra Bejar Molinar, a mother of three, and a mother of five

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[125] "Campana returns to building," *El Paso Herald-Post*, April 27, 1978.

[126] Lozano, interview.

[127] "La Campana readers arrested," *El Paso Herald-Post*, April 7, 1978.

[128] Ibid.

[129] "Police Arrest 7 more from La Campana," *El Paso-Herald Post*, April 7, 1978.

[130] Lozano, interview.

children who wished to remain unidentified.[131] Much like the tenements at 306 S. Tays, residents appropriated the building to serve their needs. The families created a Tenants' Collective to improve the conditions of the building and to support each other as an extended family.[132] They also utilized the walls as a means of protests, painting an eagle resembling the United Farm Workers logo with a building in the middle, and a banner that read "*El barrio es de quienes viven en el*."[133]

Unlike the Moor Park Joint Venture, Enrique Mejia would do whatever it took to get rid of the "communists" that occupied his building, even resorting to violence. Mejia first employed the court system, having two expensive court proceedings to evict the squatters, with no positive result.[134] The owner hired Attorney Ruben Urrutia and gave him power of attorney to evict the squatter families and demolish the building. The attorney, however, failed to do so because of alleged threats from *La Campaña.* Mejia then hired Sheldon Quinn, giving him the same powers of attorney. Quinn was arrested for carrying a weapon without permit, thus voiding the contract with Mejia.[135] Lozano recalled Mejia being adamant to get the two Mexican American families and *La Campaña* out of the property. According to the activist, Mejia contracted an individual

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[131] "La Campana leaders arrested," *El Paso Herald-Post,* April 7, 1978.

[132] "Activist Group Claims Repression," *The Prospector,* April 14, 1978.

[133] "La Campana vows eviction fight," *El Paso Herald-Post,* June 29, 1978.

[134] "Campana returns to building," *El Paso Herald-Post,* April 27, 1978.

[135] Ibid.

that attempted firebombing the tenement.[136] In an interview with the *Herald-Post*, Mejia stated that he believed politicians were supporting the "communist squatters."[137]

Regardless of Enrique Mejia's beliefs, the climate in South El Paso's neighborhood preservation fights turned into the harassment of the squatter families. Unlike in previous episodes, squatters at Mesa and Fifth experienced violence and harassment from El Paso Police Officers. As discussed in Chapter 3, *La Campaña* presented some information to HUD against the city's UDAG application, which resulted in its rejection. According to Lozano, *La Campaña* activists believed the group and families were singled out because of the blocked UDAG proposal.[138] Shortly after the HUD rejection, police officers allegedly vandalized and continuously monitored the tenements on Fifth and Mesa. Over the course of a week, law enforcement targeted *La Campaña* leaders and the tenement squatters leading to a series of arrests. On the night of April 5, Oscar Lozano and Juan Montes, leaders of *La Campaña*, were arrested on charges for failing to identify themselves while drinking on the sidewalk.[139] Carmen Felix, another leader of the group, told the *El Paso Herald-Post* that two cops whom the organization had never seen before detained Montes and Lozano, raising questions about harassment from city officials.[140] Two days later, Montes, Lozano, and Felix were arrested on charges of terrorizing two families in El Segundo Barrio and for criminal

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[136] Lozano, interview.

[137] "Campana returns to building," *El Paso Herald-Post*, April 27, 1978.

[138] Lozano, interview.

[139] "La Campana won't be Prosecuted," *El Paso Times*, April 13, 1978; "Activist Group Claims Repression," *The Prospector*, April 14, 1978.

[140] "Police arrest 7 more from La Campana," *El Paso Herald-Post*, April 8, 1978.

trespass.[141] Police officers searched and detained the three leaders after two women reported that members of *La Campaña* threatened them to leave their rented properties. Mrs. Felipe Hernandez gave a statement to the police that "they told [her] they didn't care if [she] was legally renting the house, that the Campana was responsible for everything that went on in the barrio, not the landowners." She also reported that *La Campaña* gave her an ultimatum to leave the premise by Friday, April 7, at 8 AM, or "they would come and throw [her family] out."[142]

Following the arrests of Carmen Felix, Oscar Lozano, and Juan Montes, three squatter families and members working in the headquarters of *La Campaña* on Mesa and Fifth were evicted on April 7, 1978. Lozano recalled the day of the eviction stating that "an army of cops and hired movers came in and they took out [their] furniture, [their] stuff, [their] printing press, and threw it out on the street."[143] The furniture and other belongings of Isidra Molinar were also removed by sheriff's deputies and placed outside the property, forcing her and her three children to sleep on the sidewalk.[144] Out of solidarity, members of *La Campaña* spent the night outside of the tenements. At 5:30 on Saturday morning, officers arrived at the building and arrested Isidra Molinar, along with *La Campaña* members Magdaleno Cisneros, Oscar Lozano, Carlos Fraire Aceves, Jose Borunda, and Juan and Jose Montes. The seven were charged with "violation of a city code for obstructing a passageway (the sidewalk) and for placing articles on the

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[141] "Charges Dismissed on Seven Activists," *El Paso Times,* April 9, 1978.

[142] "La Campana leaders arrested," *El Paso Herald-Post,* April 7, 1978.

[143] Lozano, interview.

[144] "Charges Dismissed on Seven Activists," *El Paso Times,* April 9, 1978.

sidewalk."[145] The arrests took place with an overwhelming use of force, with officers using rifles and dogs.[146] The seven were detained in the El Paso County Jail for twelve hours before appearing before Municipal Court Judge Glen Sutherland.

Judge Sutherland released the members of *La Campaña* on the basis that there was a misunderstanding between City Prosecutor H. Davidson Smith and the arresting officers. Rather than giving the squatters and members a period of 48 hours to move the furniture and belongings as instructed, officers failed to follow orders. In addition, the "complaint against the seven was defective because it was not they who had placed the furniture on the sidewalk, but rather the sheriff's deputies." Brothers Juan and Jose Montes told the *El Paso Times* that the two informed the officers about the 48-hour period, but that the officers ignored them.[147] Charges of the terroristic threats, failure to identify, and criminal trespass were dismissed the following days. According to County Attorney George Rodriguez there was not "enough information to continue with the cases" and the city had "problems with probable cause" to charge *La Campaña* with the crimes.[148]

The arrests of the squatters and the members of *La Campaña* appeared to validate *La Campaña's* claims of police harassment and intimidation by city leaders. The activist group stated "that the police [were] harassing them on instructions from Mayor Ray Zalazar [sic] whom they say is angry about losing an $8 million federal urban

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[145] "Police arrest 7 more from La Campana," *El Paso Herald-Post,* April 8, 1978.

[146] "South Side Groups Files Suit," *El Paso Times,* April 12, 1978.

[147] "Charges Dismissed on Seven Activists," *El Paso Times,* April 9, 1978.

[148] "La Campana Won't Be Prosecuted," *El Paso Times,* April 13, 1978.

development grant to which La Campana put up opposition."[149] The leaders of the organization began distributing flyers around the barrio summoning residents to protest in mass. In the mimeographed sheet, the organization called for residents to go to Fifth and Mesa, and take water, food, and moral support. *La Campaña* asserted that "if the people of the South Side come to Fifth and Mesa in mass we will be able to prevent the destruction of this tenement and, in the long run, the destruction of the South Side."[150]

The organization began a campaign to end police brutality, and called out Mayor Ray Salazar and Mayor Pro Tem Dan Ponder as the "culprits" behind the intimidation. The UTEP chapter of *Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán* (MEChA), partner of *La Campaña,* begged El Paso Police Chief William Rodriguez to "halt the 'fascist tactics' before they spur an outbreak of violence within the barrio."[151] MEChA spokesperson, Raul "Bullet" Olivares, also demanded "that the evicted families from the Fifth and Mesa Tenants' Collective be allowed to return to their homes," because "having a roof over your head is not a privilege, it's a right."[152] Although city leaders and law enforcement used fear tactics to keep *La Campaña* and the squatters out of the tenement, the end goal was to re-occupy the tenement.

City leaders denied being involved in the harassment claimed by *La Campaña.* In several articles in the *El Paso Herald-Post* and the *El Paso Times,* Mayor Salazar said the allegations against him were incorrect, and that he never instructed police officers to

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[149] "Charges Dismissed on Seven Activists," *El Paso Times,* April 9, 1978.

[150] "La Campana attacks 'harassment,'" *El Paso Herald-Post,* April 10, 1978.

[151] "Activist group claims repression," *The Prospect,* April 14, 1978.

[152] Ibid.

harass or arrest members of the neighborhood organization.[153] In a press conference after a City Council meeting, council members Polly Harris, Dan Ponder, and Richard Wagner claimed *La Campaña's* allegations were "unforgiveable."[154] Mayor Pro Tem Ponder considered the accusations of the group to be "quite a compliment," and called the protesters "rabble rousers and subversives."[155]At the same press conference, Mayor Salazar said that *La Campaña* was "making statements that [were] unfounded and that neither th[e] city council nor the police department were out to harass them."[156] *La Campaña's* publicity on the intimidation charges even reached the HUD regional office in Dallas, as the City of El Paso sought to reapply for UDAG funds. Victor Hancock, the regional HUD official, wanted to remain informed about the issue, and said that the city should let all interested parties voice their opinions on the new UDAG proposal.[157]

Even with city leaders denying any involvement with police harassment and intimidation, *La Campaña* planned to take matters into the federal court, filing a civil rights claim against the city.[158] The participation of the El Paso Legal Assistance Society during the Tays occupation and the victories the attorneys helped the organization obtain, perhaps threatened Mayor Salazar's future urban renewal. In a letter to the El Paso Legal Aid Society and to Congress, the mayor accused EPLAS of violating regulations of the Legal Services Corp by assisting *La Campaña,* especially in its protest against the UDAG

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[153] "La Campana attacks 'harassment,'" *El Paso Herald-Post,* April 10, 1978.

[154] "Officials Counterattack Campana," *El Paso Times,* April 12, 1978.

[155] Ibid.

[156] Ibid.

[157] Ibid.

[158] "South Side Groups Files Suit," *El Paso Times,* April 12, 1978.

proposal. Mayor Salazar said that regulations stated "no funds made available may be used to influence federal, executive or administrative order or 'legislation' at the federal, state or local level."[159] Furthermore, Mayor Salazar cited that several articles in both the *El Paso Times* and the *El Paso-Herald Post* documented EPLAS' involvement in the lobbying efforts against the UDAG. He also claimed that his administration "received reports that the Legal Assistance Society ha[d] used some of its funds to support La Campana activities."[160] Mayor Salazar's accusations likely forced *La Campaña* members to act as their own legal defense team.

*La Campaña* filed their civil rights lawsuit against the City of El Paso in federal court on April 11, 1978. Isidra Molinar, her minor child Brenda Molinar, Carmen Felix, Oscar Lozano, Jose Borunda, Magdaleno Cisneros, Carlos Aceves, and Juan and Jose Montes, filed the suit.[161] The organization asked for $560,000 in "actual and punitive damages," and a federal court order prohibiting harassment, intimidation, and the use of police dogs during arrests. In the lawsuit, *La Campaña* also asked for the mayor and police chief to establish screening techniques to "find authoritarian personalities, racial prejudice and violent personalities… so problems in the barrio [could] be resolved in a humane manner." Aside from the harassment and intimidation claims, the neighborhood organization reported that the police seized three typewriters, a Multilith Offset Press, and the group's files and records at the time of the evictions and arrest.[162] In addition,

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[159] "Salazar accuses legal aid group," *El Paso Herald-Post,* April 1, 1978.

[160] Ibid.

[161] "La Campana plans suit," *El Paso Herald-Post,* April 11, 1978; "La Campana gets orders from judge," *El Paso Herald-Post,* April 24, 1978.

[162] "South Side Groups Files Suit," *El Paso Times,* April 12, 1978.

Oscar Lozano asserted that furniture and some other belongings had been impounded. Through the lawsuit, *La Campaña* wanted to not only protect the property from being demolished and becoming commercial, but also for their civil rights as tenants and residents of the barrio to be respected. [163]

It appeared that *La Campaña's* civil rights lawsuit fight was over before it began. The organization received an unfavorable order from District Judge George Sessions two weeks after the suit was filed. In the order, Judge Sessions ruled that none of *La Campaña* members requested a waiver of local court rule 2F, which required that attorneys not admitted to practice in the court ask for permission from the Judge to participate in the case. Judge Sessions also ordered the group to "educate themselves on the Federal Rules of Civil Procedures, Federal Rules of Evidence, and Local Court Rules."[164]

The orders from Judge Sessions, however, did not set *La Campaña* back. On April 27, 1978, the neighborhood organization re-occupied the Fifth and Mesa tenements along with two squatter families, and continued using the building as the group's headquarters.[165] Enrique Mejia, the owner of the property, claimed that even after all the controversies, city officials and the police were turning their backs on him, and left him "powerless to get them out."[166] The police officers on the other hand were very reluctant to get involved. Police Chief Bill Rodriguez made a statement to the *El Paso Herald-Post* that "the next time La Campana starts raising hell, we're going to get good solid warrants

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[163] Lozano, interview.

[164] "La Campana gets orders from judge," *El Paso Herald-Post,* April 24, 1978.

[165] "Campana returns to building," *El Paso Herald-Post,* April 27, 1978.

[166] Ibid.

before we arrest any of them. We're not going to be caught in the middle again."[167] In an interview with the *Herald-Post*, Enrique Mejia mentioned that he would wait until the May 6, 1978 primary election to begin legal action against *La Campaña*, since he believed politicians continuously supported the organization.[168]

Much like Tent City II, the media offered little coverage of the incident during and after the episode took place. In the end, the intense struggle paid off. Nonetheless, *La Campaña* purchased the tenement building through the Southside Low Income Housing Corporation.[169] In addition, the headquarters office became a community center called "Centro Chicano," which served the community of El Segundo Barrio for many years.[170] The tenement building at Mesa and Fifth was unexpectedly torn down in 2011. The reasons why the building was razed or the future plans for the particular lot are unknown.[171]

**Legacy of Squatter Demonstrations in El Segundo Barrio**

In just a decade, the fights against substandard housing made El Segundo Barrio a tumultuous battlefield. While city administrations pursued redevelopment programs to fight housing problems and the area's blight, these did not address the living realities of the Southside. Since the administration of Peter de Wetter (1969-1971), no other mayor

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[167] "Campana returns to building," *El Paso Herald-Post*, April 27, 1978.

[168] Ibid.

[169] Lozano, Interview.

[170] David Dorado Romo, "Why Do I Care?: The Destruction of the Segundo Barrio is Very Personal" *Paso Del Sur Group*, http://pasodels.ipower.com/news/why_care.html. Accessed September 24, 2014.

[171] Lozano, interview.

constructed housing units within the boundaries of the barrio.[172] Even though government housing was constructed in other parts of the city, residents of El Segundo were very attached to the area due to its Mexican ethnic, cultural, and religious ambience. As Raul Olivares, a spokesperson of MEChA told *The Prospector*, "the people want to keep the barrio because it is their home…they were born there and their children were born there…it is necessary to keep the cultural aspects alive."[173] Aside from people's attachment to the barrio, the uprooting of thousands of people to new areas of the city did not solve the conditions of the decaying neighborhood. Throughout the decade, urban redevelopment plans that favored industrialization and commercialization to revamp areas of South El Paso, continuously threatened the life of the barrio. Plans like the Tenement Eradication Program underscore the power relationships in El Paso, where the ethnic Mexican population had no socio-economic or political voice.

As more and more of these renewal plans ignored the plights of El Segundo Barrio and with the remnants of the Chicana/o Movement in the city and country, activists within the Mexican American community became increasingly radicalized toward the end of the decade as Southside tenants were supported by *La Campaña.* The organization, the Chicana/o Movement and the idea of self-determination, and the culmination of unfulfilled promises became factors that helped the community of South El Paso became more vocal. From the first Tent City to the Mesa Street Occupation, the Southside community adopted more direct-action tactics to combat urban revitalization and discrimination in El Paso. As Oscar Lozano, former member of *La Campaña* stated,

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[172] "Abundance of Talk Covered Housing Ills In South Side," *El Paso Times,* December 27, 1979.

[173] "Activist group claims repression," *The Prospector,* April 14, 1978.

"all of these [squatter] incidents tended to reflect a policy or a strategy of direct action—a more militant type of strategy to confront and publicize the [housing] issue."[174]

By studying closely the four episodes of resistance in El Segundo, the shifts in organizing strategies and the inclusion of different ideologies become apparent. From Tent Cities to radical occupations of tenements marked for demolition, Southsiders pressured city officials to recognize their human right to suitable housing, their rights as longtime residents of El Segundo Barrio, and their rights as citizens of El Paso. During the last two occupation demonstrations, *La Campaña* utilized many resources to help their cause and to protect the rights of Southside tenants. South El Paso exerted their legal rights through the court system, recruiting legal assistance and finding loopholes to advance their preservation fights. With the help of the EPLAS and *La Campaña*, squatters won two legal battles and educated Mexican American residents of El Segundo on their rights as tenants and citizens of El Paso. Squatter demonstrations in the 1970s also strengthened the familial and collective identity of El Segundo Barrio—a sense of community that had been created over generations.

Squatter demonstrations publicized the lack of adequate housing and their desire to protect the residential character of the barrio. Although activist groups saw this as an opportunity for political and social change, families, especially those headed by single mothers, had no other choice but to illegally occupy buildings and live in Tent Cities. Despite the motives behind their actions, tenants of El Segundo Barrio took direct action to expose the blight of the neighborhood, substandard living conditions, and the housing shortage crisis that plagued much of the 1970s. Tent City, Tent City II, *La Colectiva de la*

[174] Lozano, interview.

*Tays*, and the Mesa Street Occupation illustrate that Southsiders of all ages united to preserve the residential character of their beloved neighborhood, while demanding their rights as long time tenants of the barrio and citizens.

## Chapter 5
## "To Uplift the Spirit of the People:" Barrio Expressions, Cultural Activism, and Community Building in El Paso's Mexican Neighborhoods

"These murals have made a very real contribution. There was a time when there was no interest to help in our parts of town. Many felt those places were off limits, or wanted nothing to do with them. Now, even though the paintings have dark elements, even though there still are people who do not understand all of our symbols, they, too, take pride in the paintings. Now these places are a part of all of us."
-Carlos Callejo[1]

In November 2006, the barrio of Chihuahuita decided to renovate their 25-year-old community center as a means to revive the underused space during a citywide event called "Make a Difference Day." The *El Paso Times* reported that residents of Chihuahuita did not sit around and "wait for a city, state, or federal agency to show up with tax dollars," but rather "they just did it themselves." Three hundred volunteers from within and outside the neighborhood arduously worked to remodel the children's room, and installed a computer, a TV set, and sewing machine. Most importantly, the renovations around the kitchens and the dining area would make it easier for elderly residents to get meals at the center.[2] The participation of Chihuahuita in "Make a Difference Day" was not a rare occurrence. Earlier that year, when the residents of the barrio participated in a neighborhood cleanup, the *El Paso Times* reported that "pride exudes from Chihuahuita residents every time they talk of their united neighborhood in South El Paso. So when the chance comes to beautify the area, residents are happy to pull out their bags and put on their work gloves."[3] Residents were eager to share with the *Times* the importance of keeping their neighborhood clean, and instilling respect not only

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[1] Carlos Callejo quoted in Junior League of El Paso, *An Art of Conscious: A Guide to Selected El Paso Murals,* (El Paso, TX: Junior League of El Paso, 1996), 1.

[2] "Just do it," *El Paso Times,* November 4, 2006.

[3] "Residents make Sun City shine," *El Paso Times,* April 2, 2006.

for the barrio but also for the environment through these community projects. Year after year, the neighborhood participates in programs such as Keep El Paso Beautiful and the Great American Clean-Up, and has received numerous special recognitions due to the level of community involvement and efforts to maintain their barrio's cleanliness.[4] Even though these projects have been sponsored by the city of El Paso, Chihuahuita has prided itself on the fact that residents have accomplished larger beautification projects without the help of city officials for decades.

The continued efforts to beautify and clean barrios in South El Paso are part of a legacy that stems from the grassroots preservation of the city's ethnic Mexican communities in the 1970s. As city authorities neglected the needs of the ethnic Mexican neighborhoods, community leaders attempted to solve their problems from within and with minimal help from the city. Amidst the dismantling of their neighborhoods, Southside organizations like *La Campaña Pro La Preservación del Barrio* and the Chihuahuita Improvement Association (CIA) created programs that helped with the beautification, betterment, and preservation of South El Paso, and provided opportunities for residents to become involved in the preservation and rehabilitation of the barrios through nonpolitical outlets. Murals, community gardens, food co-ops, community centers, and applications for historic status allowed Mexican Americans to embed their cultural heritage in the urban space. These challenged the negative image that city leaders and outsiders perceived of the area, breaking the stereotypes of these neighborhoods as "backwards" and "dirty" that resulted in their targeting for demolition. The cultural preservation projects not only bettered the conditions of South El Paso and challenged the

[4] Fred Morales, interview by the author, April 29, 2014, audio recording, El Paso, TX.

negative visions that city leaders had of the Mexican barrios, but it also allowed Southsiders to claim dignity and demonstrate ownership and pride of the area's physical space.

While city leaders viewed the areas of South El Paso as deplorable and its residents as obstacles to urban redevelopment, cultural preservation projects in the 1970s and 1980s allowed Southsiders to claim spaces in El Paso's urban identity, politics, and the city's history. In his work on youth culture and zoot suiters in Los Angeles and New York, historian Luis Alvarez argues that "the struggle for dignity by zoot suiters was thus a politics of refusal: a refusal to accept humiliation, a refusal to quietly endure dehumanization, and a refusal to conform."[5] While Southsiders did not use their bodies and fashion to claim dignity, Mexican Americans in South El Paso used these cultural preservation outlets to claim control of the image of their barrios, their lives in the neighborhoods, and the future of South El Paso altogether. These claims to space and dignity brought an opportunity to transform the barrios into spaces that met the needs of the community when city leaders ignored their rights and even their basic needs. Their engagement and participation in cultural preservation projects sent a strong message to city authorities that they were unwilling to relocate and abandon their beloved barrios.

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[5] Luis Alvarez, *The Power of the Zoot: Youth Culture and Resistance During World War II,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 8. For more on ethnic Mexican working class dignity see Gabriela González, "Carolina Munguía and Emma Tenayuca: The Politics of Benevolence and Radical Reform," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 24, no. 2&3 (2003): 200-229; María E. Montoya, "Creating an American Home: Contest and Accommodation in Rockefeller's Company Towns," in *Memories and Migrations: Mapping Boricua and Chicana Histories*, edited by Vicki L. Ruiz and John R. Chávez (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 13-43; Monica Perales, "She Was Very American," in *Smeltertown: Making and Remembering a Southwest Border Community* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 185-222.

**Beautifying the Walls of the Barrios**

One of the first instances in which *La Campaña* and the CIA helped the community claim dignity and symbolic ownership of the barrio was through beautifying its walls. As seen in the previous chapters, the 1970s marked a growth in political awareness in El South El Paso in part led by the mobilization of neighborhood organizations. While many residents joined and supported the overtly political and more radical efforts to preserve the barrio (squatter occupations, picketing, and other protests), others were afraid of the consequences their families and the community could face. Activists understood the need to engage a wide range of participants and sought alternatives to involve members of community in their broader preservation efforts. Organizations such as the Mexican American Youth Association (MAYA) and the Mexican American Committee of Honor and Service (MACHOS) provided an array of opportunities for the Southside to beautify the neighborhood. The two groups organized projects in which the youth and the rest of the community refurbished tenements and painted interior and exterior walls. These efforts did not end when the two organizations were defunded in the early 1970s.

Following the example of earlier organizations, *La Campaña,* found creative ways to inspire what they called *la regeneracíon del barrio,* or the rebirth of the barrio through methods that reflected the cultural traditions of Mexican Americans.[6] The neighborhood organization emphasized the need to beautify the barrio through not only maintaining and fixing the tenements, but also in celebrating the culture of the neighborhood through murals, gardens, and refurbishing the spirit of the neighborhood itself. Although *La*

[6] Oscar Lozano, interview by the author, February 24, 2014, audio recording, El Paso, TX.

*Campaña* played an instrumental role in the cultural efforts to preserve the barrio, the group had a less "hands on" role, allowing community members to take the reins of the different projects.

As the city of El Paso prepared to celebrate the bicentennial of the United States in 1976, members of *La Campaña* used this opportunity to create a project to commemorate the culture and heritage of Mexican Americans in South El Paso: by painting murals on the barrio walls. The Chicana/o activists believed that "in recent years, there has been a neglect of the Mexican culture throughout the city."[7] In order to address the lack of Mexican culture in El Paso and reclaim control over the barrio, the organization followed the example of Chicana/o artists across the country. This important Mexican art form, especially the 1930s-era works of *Los Tres*—David Alfaro Siqueiros, José Clemente Orozco, and Diego Rivera—inspired many Chicana/o activists to claim their histories and heritage through murals. The Chicana/o Movement of the 1960s and 1970s witnessed a national movement of street and public muralism. According to art historian Shifra Goldman, murals "became a major form of public communication for Chicanos in the Midwest and Southwest."[8] The murals drew inspiration from Mexican history, and incorporated cultural imagery such as Aztec deities and Mexican Revolutionary heroes like Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata in ways that affirmed a positive cultural identity. Chicana/o muralists utilized this medium to make a political statement and challenge the history that had often excluded their communities and

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[7] "Los Murales del Barrio" Proposal by *La Campaña Pro Preservación del Barrio*, ca. 1975, Movimiento Estudantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA—UTEP Chapter), MS251, C. L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso.

[8] Shifra M. Goldman, *Dimensions of the Americas: Art and Social Change in Latin America and the United States*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 8.

heritage. Examples of this are seen in barrios and other public spaces across the Southwest and Midwest in areas like Chicano Park in San Diego and throughout East Los Angeles.[9] Members of *La Campaña* believed that this important Chicana/o Movement art would help beautify the area and prevent buildings from being torn down, but murals would also give the residents of South El Paso a political voice, celebrate their history, and the opportunity to claim pride and ownership within the barrios.

*La Campaña* was not the first group to attempt engaging the community in muralism. As a result of the 1974 Tenement Eradication Program, MAYA launched a mural painting project in South El Paso. In June 1975, the organization held a press conference outside of Sacred Heart Church where spokesman Fred Morales explained that the youth group would take a role in the efforts to preserve the barrio. Morales told the *El Paso Times* that "the mural painting program w[ould] be MAYA's first concrete step toward its goal."[10] While the organization had a noble plan to preserve the "Chicano Essence" of the barrio, ultimately the project did not come to fruition because funding cuts led to MAYA's dismantling in the mid-1970s.

Because many members of *La Campaña* had been members of MAYA, the organization followed the examples of the earlier activist groups. In 1975, fueled by the community energy that Tent City II (see Chapter 4) attracted, the group initiated a barrio-wide mural painting campaign. The group wished for a larger, concrete, and well-

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[9] For more on San Diego's Chicano Park and Chicana/o muralism see Eric Avila, *The Folklore of the Freeway: Race and Revolt in the Modernist City,* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 149-179. For muralism in Los Angeles see, Alicia María González, "Murals: Fine, Popular, or Folk Art?, *Aztlan,* 13 (1982): 149-164; Margaret LaWare, "Encountering Visions of Aztlán: Arguments for Ethnic Pride, Community Activism and Cultural Revitalization in Chicano Murals," *Argumentation and Advocacy* 34 (Winter 1998): 140-153.

[10] "MAYA Sparks Plan To Paint South El Paso," *El Paso Times,* June 4, 1975.

organized program, that would "assist in the preservation of the area, for us and for upcoming generations." *La Campaña* believed that through murals "much of the history ha[d] been recorded. Murals represent[ed] the people, the values, the times and most important ma[de] visible the thoughts of the artistic individuals" in the barrio.[11] With the city prepared to celebrate the nation's bicentennial, *La Campaña* wholeheartedly believed that it was an important time to reinforce the Mexican culture of El Paso. Their project, *Los Murales del Barrio,* or the Murals of the Barrio, seemed like the perfect solution, given the strong cultural ties of the Second Ward and the closeness and connection many still had to México.[12] As the organization conceived the project, leaders stressed that the project was community oriented and that it was a "cultural, not a political or social effort."[13] Most importantly, according to Oscar Lozano, a leader of *La Campaña,* the endeavor would "give the barrio a badly needed facelift and let barrio artists display their talents." The effort in the end was to uplift "la [sic] espiritu de la gente," or the spirit of the people.[14]

*La Campaña* and residents of El Segundo quickly prepared to participate in the project. The community and the organization donated funds for the completion of *Los Murales del Barrio,* yet it would not be enough. As discussed in previous chapters, a number of members of *La Campaña* were educated and well aware of the opportunities that local and national agencies could provide for the residents of South El Paso. Leaders

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[11]"Los Murales del Barrio" Proposal by *La Campaña Pro Preservación del Barrio,* ca. 1975, Movimiento Estudantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA—UTEP Chapter), MS251, C. L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso.

[12] Ibid.

[13] "Murals Are the Life In El Segundo Barrio," *El Paso Times,* October 12, 1975.

[14] "History on the Walls with Art-In South El Paso," *El Paso Times,* October 12, 1975

of the organization became familiar with different funding options within the city to support the financing of the project. *La Campaña* petitioned for funds from the City of El Paso's Parks and Recreation youth summer employment program.[15] The organization described the objective of the project as two-fold: first to help employ Southside artists and youth in a productive manner, and second to beautify and show the culture of the barrio.[16] When *La Campaña* leaders met with city council member Arlene Quenon, the *El Paso Times* reported that "they had really done their homework. The group had lined up advisers, obtained permission from building owners to paint the murals on their property, and had designs and costs estimates ready when they met with her." Representative Quenon became instrumental for *La Campaña* to obtain funds. She believed that the project was "very worthwhile" and that the effort would "help develop a solid community spirit."[17] *La Campaña* received $21,000 for paint, supplies, and salaries for coordinators, advisors, and twenty-three barrio youth workers. The project was to be completed by September 26, 1975.[18]

The support of representative Quenon gave the green light to begin the project. *Los Murales del* Barrio would be supervised by activist Daniel Solis, and the under the direction of an artists' collective called *Los Muralistas del Barrio*, comprised of Arturo "Tury" Avalos, Gabriel "Gaby" Ortega, Pascual Ramirez, and Pablo Schaffino. The project also attracted nationally renowned El Paso artist Manuel Acosta, who volunteered as an advisor and taught the youth and interested community members basic art and

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[15] "Murals Are the Life In El Segundo Barrio," *El Paso Times*, October 12, 1975.

[16] "History on the Walls with Art-In South El Paso," *El Paso Times*, October 12, 1975.

[17] Ibid.

[18] "Murals Are the Life In El Segundo Barrio," *El Paso Times*, October 12, 1975.

mural techniques in his own home free of charge.[19] With the funds from the Parks and Recreation summer youth employment program, *La Campaña* commissioned an array of murals that reflected the history of ethnic Mexicans in the Southside.[20] While the leaders of the organization helped community members brainstorm and draft the proposal, the activists promised to help paint the proposed fourteen murals without dictating the subjects of the murals to allow the community to express their own perceptions of the barrio and beautify the area on their own terms.[21]

The *Los Murales* project became an important avenue for artists and the community to engage in an education campaign. Most of the twenty-three employed youth attended Bowie High School while others attended the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP). The artists, for the most part, had no formal art training and learned about colors, techniques, and Chicana/o history as they participated in the project. Artist Manuel Acosta told the *El Paso Times* that "these kids are beginning to discover their culture and they are very proud of it."[22] When the *El Paso Times* interviewed some of the participants, Leonardo Gallegos, an 18-year-old high school dropout, told the reporter "I learned this myself. I never had any schooling," as he painted Moctezuma, the Aztec ruler who died during the Spanish conquest of México. [23] While *Los Muralistas del*

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[19] "History on the Walls with Art-In South El Paso," *El Paso Times,* October 12, 1975.

[20] Junior League of El Paso, *An Art of Conscious,* 12, 20.

[21] Ibid. The youth workers credited for the murals are: Salvador Meléndez, Armando Sánchez, Eduardo Norte, Víctor Sánchez, Alfredo Morales, Manuel Arias, Manuel Torres, Lucy Benavidez, Isabel Lozano, Dolores Tovar, Rubén Marín, Víctor Cordero, Luis Pérez, Leonardo Gallegos, and Rafael Velázquez.

[22] "History on the Walls with Art-In South El Paso," *El Paso Times,* October 12, 1975.

[23] "Murals Are the Life In El Segundo Barrio," *El Paso Times,* October 12, 1975.

*Barrio* supported and guided the youth, the artists encouraged each individual to express their culture, histories, and to reclaim their neighborhoods through the murals.

*La Campaña* and *Los Muralistas* hoped the education campaign would also incorporate the community of South El Paso and empower them with the history on the walls. Many of these murals attempted to "inspire other artists to pursue their dreams and identify with their heritage" in addition "to develop community pride."[24] As art historian Marcos Sánchez-Tranquilino stated "muralists became important educators as they painted Chicano contributions to American society not included in textbooks. Through chicanismo, they also highlighted the ancient cultures of Mexico in order to show historical continuity and cultural legitimacy."[25] Furthermore, muralists and activists brought the histories of the community to the streets. In *The Folklore of the Freeway,* historian Eric Avila argues that with murals on the streets, "Spanish-Speaking people with limited access to schools, colleges, and universities could learn about Mexican American history and working-class struggle, which had been omitted from dominant narratives of American history."[26] The walls of South El Paso not only became important canvases to display themes in Mexican, local, and Chicano/a history, but they also served as a means to inform the community of the major threat it faced at that time: demolition. Tury Avalos believed that the murals informed the community about the city's efforts to demolish tenements. "People didn't realize that was happening then, painting was a way

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[24] Junior League of El Paso, *An Art of Conscious*, 20.

[25] Marcos Sánchez-Tranquilino, "Murales del Movimiento: Chicano Murals and the Discourses of Art and Americanization," in *Signs from the Heart: California Chicano Murals*, edited Eva Sperling Cockcroft & Holly Barnet-Sánchez, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993), 62.

[26] Avila, *Folklore of the Freeway,* 168.

of getting people together."[27] Murals then helped strengthen the meaning of the barrio for its residents.

Over the summer of 1975, *Los Muralistas,* youth employees, activists, and volunteers worked arduously under the hot summer sun, forty hours a week. Unfortunately, the project was not completed on time.[28] The youth and artists, however, promised the Southside community that the murals would be finished. In order to do so, they worked well after the September deadline to complete a total of thirteen murals without pay.[29] This reflected the commitment to the project in providing pride for the community of South El Paso. As Carmen Felix, leader of *La Campaña* stressed in an interview with the *El Paso Times,* "this is not for anything else except for the people."[30]

The thirteen murals painted under *Los Muralistas del Barrio* reflected "what each designer consider[ed] an aspect of barrio history," yet some of the images depicted in the works reflected common Chicana/o mural themes. [31] Themes of oppression, empowerment, historical figures and themes adorned the walls of the barrio. One of them, for example, illustrated Ernesto "Che" Guevara in black, red, and white, with a United Farm Workers eagle on his beret.[32] After the Cuban Revolution of 1959, the Argentine revolutionary became a symbol of resistance, social and political change, as well as self-

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[27] Arturo "Tury" Avalos interview in Miguel Juarez and Cynthia Weber Farah, *Colors on Desert Walls: The Murals of El Paso,* El Paso, TX: Texas Western Press, 1997.

[28] "Murals Are the Life In El Segundo Barrio," *El Paso Times,* October 12, 1975.

[29] Ibid.

[30] "History on the Walls with Art-In South El Paso," *El Paso Times,* October 12, 1975.

[31] "Murals Are the Life In El Segundo Barrio," *El Paso Times,* October 12, 1975.

[32] Junior League of El Paso, *An Art of Conscious,*12.

determination.[33] Salvador Meléndez, Manuel Arias, and Victor Sanchez, the main artists of the mural stated that "Che" was selected for the image "after asking young people in the barrio what they wanted on the wall." Guevara represented someone who "fought for the rights of [his] people."[34] Along the vein of Latin American revolutionaries, the youth painted a mural of Mexican Revolutionary leader Emiliano Zapata's infamous motto "*Tierra y Libertad*" (Land and Liberty).[35] In the Mexican Revolution, Zapata is associated with the struggles of Mexican peasants. Perhaps the choice of the Mexican revolutionary best spoke to the barrio's ongoing struggle to keep the area from the bulldozer.

Most of the murals, however, represented Aztec imagery, very common in Chicana/o art across the United States. This particular theme was important, because the indigenous past became an important aspect of *chicanismo*—the cultural and political identity that emerged during the Chicana/o Movement.[36] In addition to the mural of Moctezuma painted by Leonardo Gallegos, *Los Muralistas* painted a number of Aztec themed murals with bright colors and symmetric figures such as pyramids and eagles.[37] Two of the murals exemplifying these themes are "El Segundo Barrio" (Fig. 1.1) and a now whitewashed mural entitled "El Chuco, Tejas." The latter one, featured a symmetric pyramid and the feathered serpent figure, Quetzalcóatl in red, green, black, blue, and

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[33] Goldman, *Dimensions of the Americas*, 7.

[34] Junior League of El Paso, 12.

[35] "History on the Walls with Art-In South El Paso," *El Paso Times*, October 12, 1975; Cynthia Farah Haynes Papers, C. L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso.

[36] For more on *chicanismo*, see Ignacio M. García, *Chicanismo: The Forging of a Militant Ethos among Mexican Americans*, (Tucson: Arizona University Press, 1997).

[37] Junior League of El Paso, *An Art of Conscious*, 20.

yellow. According to Manuel Arias, the design for the mural was chosen by him, Salvador Meléndez, Eddie Aguirre, Victor Sanchez, and Victor Cordero, after reading books on Aztec imagery. The youth chose the design to symbolize love, the duality of nature, wisdom, and friendship. Arias stated that the symmetry of the pyramid symbolized two friends "who protect one another by watching each other's back."[38] Tury Avalos, Gaby Ortega, Pablo Schafino, and Pascual Ramirez, painted "*Homenaje a Quetzalcoatl*" (Homage to Quetzalcoatl) (Fig. 1.2), another rendition of the ancient Aztec serpent God, with the face of the deity to the extreme right of the mural. Both Avalos and Schaffino explained that their particular portrayal of the feathered serpent "[was] mad about the oppression of Chicano people." Schaffino's interpretation of the mural, exuded the anger of Quetzalcoatl, as the face of the God "[was] pointing at City Hall with Anger because they want to tear it (the Second Ward) down." Despite the different visions of the artists, the people of the barrio would be given freedom to interpret the work themselves.[39]

Besides recovering the histories and heritage of the barrio's Mexican American population, *Los Muralistas* and the activists chose the sites of the murals carefully. The artists painted some of the murals in places that had special meaning, and held significance in the histories and everyday lives of the residents of South El Paso. The Che Guevara mural for example, although located on the side of the Duffy's Beverage Company on the 800 block of S. Florence Street, faced the empty lot where families set up the first Tent City in 1971. As seen in Chapter 4, Tent City I, represented one of the

[38] Junior League of El Paso, *An Art of Conscious*, 8.

[39] "Murals Are the Life In El Segundo Barrio," *El Paso Times*, October 12, 1975.

one of the first demonstrations by the community of South El Paso exposing the lack of housing in the barrio. In Chihuahuita, the "Chuco, Tejas" mural on the corner of Chihuahua and Seventh Streets was painted on one of the buildings that was once the headquarters of the Mexican American Youth Association (MAYA), the group where many of the Southside youth first became politically active. Tury Avalos' vision of Quetzalcoatl was painted on the wall of *El Centro Legal* or the Legal Center at 550 E. Paisano Drive.[40] The site choice of *Los Murales del Barrio* also became a means for Southsiders to claim ownership of the spaces within the barrios that were directly related to their history, their struggles, and their emerging political identities.

Fig. 1.1 One of the remaining murals from the 1975 *Los Murales del Barrio* project, entitled "El Segundo Barrio." The work is located in an alleyway on 513 E. Father Rahm Street. Photograph taken by author.

[40] Field Notes, Cynthia Farah Haynes Papers, C. L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso.

Fig. 1.2 Another remaining work from the 1975 *Los Murales* Project, "*Homenaje a Quetzalcóatl*." The work is located on a corner of Paisano Drive and S. Campbell Street. Photograph taken by author.

The community of Chihuahuita also utilized murals as means to beautify the barrios and claim dignity. Prior to the ideological differences between *La Campaña* and Chihuahuitans, Chihuahuita had benefitted from some of the programs initiated by their rival organization. CIA leader and former member of *La Campaña* Fred Morales, participated in *Los Murales del Barrio* and considered the project a good outlet for the community of South El Paso. Morales believed that the "concept of murals was really embedded in the culture of the Mexican American, and that [the barrio] had a lot of talent that [they] felt should be exposed to the community at large."[41] The *Murales del Barrio* project inspired the CIA to paint murals around their barrio too. Over the years, the CIA dedicated itself to painting/commissioning murals depicting the history of the

[41] Fred Morales, interview by Oscar Martinez, August 28, 1975, interview no. 201, transcript, Institute of Oral History, The University of Texas at El Paso, El Paso, TX.

neighborhood. Some examples include the meeting between Presidents William Taft and Porfirio Díaz in 1909, a depiction of the infamous boat on the Rio Grande that was used by many to cross between El Paso and Ciudad Juárez in the earlier part of the twentieth century, and a tribute to the Santa Fe Railroad and its role in the region.[42]

While many of the works provided a sense of pride for the community of Chihuahuita, one mural united the support of the barrio more than the others. In the 1970s, the neighborhood became threatened by the construction of a highway. The negotiations stipulated by the signing of the Chamizal Treaty provided the city of El Paso an opportunity to construct the Border Highway, or Loop 375. In 1973, Joe Battle, the director of the Texas Department of Transportation, made plans to construct an extension of Loop 375, threatening the life of the barrio. The community quickly rallied against the construction of the Border Highway. After two years of mobilization against the Texas Department of Transportation, Battle ceased his plan to build the highway through Chihuahuita.

As a means of honoring Joe Battle and his decision, the CIA and residents decided to paint a mural to remember the historic decision.[43] With the help of the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act's local office, the community funded an untitled mural in 1977. The mural detailed different images and themes. The background depicted the American Smelting and Refining Company (ASARCO) and its famous smokestacks, the urban setting of El Paso, and an intrusive highway that follows the river. A large and visible stop sign represented the community's plea to stop the construction of the

[42] Morales, interview by the author.

[43] Ibid.

freeway. However, the focal point of the mural was Apache Chieftain Victorio shedding a single tear. His tear represented the anguish of the Chihuahuita community because of the loss of land.[44] The mural is no longer in the neighborhood. However, it left a legacy and a reminder of Chihuahuita's history by documenting the community struggles to prevent the destruction of their barrio due to the invasive urbanization of the area.[45]

The murals painted in South El Paso during the 1970s sparked an artist movement in the barrio. Oscar Lozano, leader of *La Campaña*, told the *El Paso Times* that "the [*Los Murales*] mural project hopefully 'will act as a catalyst' for others to become involved in the beautification of 'El Segundo.'"[46] Lozano's desires soon became a reality. The next decades, artists utilized the empty walls of the barrio not only to rehabilitate the decaying area, but as canvases depicting the struggles, realities, history, and hopes of the ethnic Mexican community in South El Paso. El Paso artists have painted over 100 murals, with a significant number of them being in South El Paso. Some artists include Carlos Callejo ("Sida en Colores/AIDS in Colors," "El Chuco y Qué?/El Paso, So What?") Manuel Acosta (La Fé Clinic Murals) Felipe Adame ("Aztec Eagle Knight," "Ixtlaciuhuatl and Popocatépetl," "La Virgen de Guadalupe"), Gaspar Enríquez (Bowie High School Murals), Mago Orona Gandara ("La Niña Cósmica/The Cosmic Girl," "Señor Sol/Mr. Sun"), Carlos Rosas and Felipe Gallegos ("Entelequia/Entelechy," "La Familia Campesina/The Peasant Family," "Memorial to Manuel Acosta"). These artists were inspired to beautify the barrio through their numerous works, reclaiming the histories of

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[44] Morales, interview by the author; Field Notes, Cynthia Farah Haynes Papers; Junior League of El Paso, *An Art of Conscience: A Guide to Selected El Paso.*

[45] Morales, interview by the author.

[46] "History on the Walls with Art-In South El Paso," *El Paso Times,* October 12, 1975.

the Southside community and spaces that have meaning in the lives of Southsiders.[47] Since the 1970s, the mural movement has continued to grow in El Segundo with a new generation of muralists such as Jesus "Cimi" Alvarado ("El Corrido del Segundo Barrio/Song of El Segundo Barrio") who still strive to portray the history and experiences of the neighborhood.[48] The legacy of these artists remains in the barrio, attracting the attention of both locals and national audiences.

For years, the murals from *Los Murales del Barrio* gave the people of El Segundo hope and empowerment, and many recognized their importance as the painted walls not only beautified the urban spaces they inhabited, but also celebrated Mexican American history. As Chicano artist Manuel Acosta told the *El Paso Times* "every day the people of the neighborhood will see it [the murals] and have to think… it's a challenge… a symbol of hope."[49] While many of the original murals have been whitewashed or destroyed, two of the murals painted under the umbrella of *Los Murales del Barrio* remain.[50] According to barrio activist Salvador Balcorta, the murals got painted over "because [the youth] really never got permission from the owners of the buildings to put the murals up. [They] got permission from the businesses, but the businesses were renting the places."[51]

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[47] For a more detailed description on the murals of South El Paso see Miguel Juarez and Cynthia Weber Farah, *Colors on Desert Walls: The Murals of El Paso*, (El Paso, TX: Texas Western Press, 1997).

[48] "'This is Chuco art:' Segundo Barrio painter builds reputation with murals and public projects," *El Paso Times*, September 16, 2012.

[49] "History on the Walls with Art-In South El Paso," *El Paso Times*, October 12, 1975.

[50] Junior League of El Paso, *An Art of Conscious*; Creativity, Action, Service (CAS), "El Segundo Barrio Murals" brochure, http://visitelpaso.com/system/places/documents/1073/original/El%20Segundo%20Mural%20Brochure.pdf, accessed November 14, 2014.

[51] Salvador Balcorta, interview by Sandra I. Enríquez and David Robles, July 24, 2015, video recording, Civil Rights in Black and Brown Oral History Project Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, TX.

Although Southsiders selected certain walls that represented important places or histories of the barrio, the whitewashing of the walls conveys the ongoing tensions between residents of South El Paso and property owners. Regardless of the contested terrain in the Southside, the murals allowed Mexican Americans to create a sense of place, a space for cultural pride, and a ground to reclaim dignity.[52]

**Nourishing the Barrios**

While the colored walls beautified the neglected barrio and allowed Southsiders to claim a sense of place in South El Paso, *La Campaña* and the CIA created more programs for the Mexican American community to become involved in the cultural preservation of the barrios. While the Chicano/a Movement and the African American Civil Rights Movement expanded across the country, ideas of self-determination inspired activists and residents of the Southside. As local and national governments failed to address the needs of minority communities, activist groups took matters into their own hands to solve poverty. Organizations like the Black Panther Party (BPP) engaged in pragmatic grassroots activism to provide communities one of the most basic needs: access to food. The BPP and supporters created community survival programs such as free breakfast programs and food giveaways.[53] In El Paso, *La Campaña* and the CIA created their own food justice self-sufficiency projects, planting a number of community gardens and forming food co-ops. Through these efforts, Mexican Americans in South El

[52] Avila, *Folklore of the Freeway,* 150-151.

[53] For more on the Black Panther Party's community survival programs see Peniel E. Joseph, *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era*, (New York: Routledge, 2006); Judson Jeffries, *On the Ground: The Black Panther Party in Communities Across America*, (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 2010).

Paso directed their energy to solve hunger in the barrio, but also exerted community control and dignity through food justice projects.

Pleased with the outcome of the *Los Murales del Barrio* project, *La Campaña* was eager to implement additional programs geared towards the beautification and the regeneration of the neighborhood. A year after the murals project, the organization designed a new plan for El Segundo—to create a community garden where the community could grow small crops. The organization acknowledged the changing times of the 1970s, and utilized the concerns of many American citizens—energy crises, the fluctuating economy, and the rise in costs of raising a family, which they believed were making people go "back to basics."[54] *La Campaña* knew that the community could use the abundance of sun and land in El Paso to encourage and train people to engage in urban gardening. This new endeavor would help the community of El Segundo Barrio in two ways: 1) people could grow small crops of commonly used vegetables and avoid high prices at grocery stores, and 2) residents would gain the personal satisfaction of working the land.[55] Although the community of South El Paso had been an urban center for decades, the constant flux of Mexican immigrants and the area's proximity to the border reinforced cultural traditions of growing plants for both medicinal and food purposes.[56] The social and economic realities of the United States at the time and the

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[54] For Anglo working-class backyard agriculture see Becky Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). For working-class backyard economies see Carl Abbott, *How Cities Won the West: Four Centuries of Urban Change in Western North America*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008), 136-138.

[55] "Los Jardines del Barrio," Proposal by *La Campaña Pro Preservación del Barrio*, 1, Chicano Vertical Files, C. L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso.

[56] For more on Indigenous and Mexican American *curanderismo* (traditional healing) and traditional plant use see Ramon Gutierrez, "The Pueblo Indian World in the Sixteenth Century," in *When Jesus Came the Corn Mothers Went Away: Marriage, Sexuality, and Power in New Mexico, 1500-1846*,

barrio's desire to continue the traditions of Mexican families growing and caring for flowers and plants seemed to be especially attractive to residents. This effort would lift morale and provide a much-needed recreational option for barrio residents. The project, which the organization named *Los Jardines del Barrio* (The Community Gardens), took place between late May and August of 1976. [57]

With this new project, the leaders of *La Campaña* aimed for state and national funding opportunities, and applied for funds from two agencies. The activists contacted the El Paso office of the Texas Agriculture Extension Service at A&M University about providing training and technical assistance for twenty-five leaders throughout the duration of the program. In addition, *La Campaña* asked the agency to provide tools and needed materials such as seeds, plants, pots, and potting soil. The organization also reached another agency, the El Paso office of the Comprehensive Employment Training Act, (CETA). This national program enacted during the Carter Administration provided money for economically disadvantaged persons through training and job opportunities.[58] The CETA Program would be responsible for the employment of the leaders and a coordinator.[59] Paul Moreno, the Texas State Representative, supported the project and sent a letter of recommendation to the Agricultural Extension Service on behalf of *La*

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(Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 3-36; Bobette Perrone, H. Henrietta Stockel, and Victoria Krueger, *Medicine Women, Curanderas, and Women Doctors*, (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989); Eliseo Torres, *Healing with Herbs and Rituals: A Mexican Tradition*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006).

[57] "Los Jardines del Barrio" Proposal, 3-5.

[58] United States Department of Labor, "The Labor Department in the Carter Administration: Summary Report—January 14, 1981." http://www.dol.gov/dol/aboutdol/history/carter-eta.htm, accessed November 30, 2014.

[59] "Jardines del Barrio" Proposal, 3.

*Campaña*, finding the project a "worthy cause."[60] *La Campaña* received $38,720 in CETA Funds for the employment of El Segundo residents, while the Texas Agricultural Extension Service provided materials and a consultant, Dr. W.S. Peavy, to train the program participants. While *La Campaña* did not receive all the materials needed, they asked community foundations for additional supplies.[61]

With CETA and local funds, *Los Jardines del Barrio* began to take shape. The program recruited leaders and families from the barrio to "promote pride and unity in the residential community." Program leaders underwent an intensive five-day training, where for six hours a day they learned the theories and practical tips on gardening. After this training, leaders went into the community and enlisted and instructed families that would work over a few months. *Los Jardines del Barrio* took place in two stages: in June, the group focused on home gardening, while in July, the families worked on the community garden plots.[62] In August, the families continued to oversee the two projects and train newly interested families in pursuing caring for both the home and community gardens.

Southside families were encouraged to participate in the projects together, to reinforce cultural values, heritage, and work collectively. Together, families grew basic staples in Mexican cuisine including tomatoes and peppers, which could grow with ease in the desert environment.[63] The accessibility to these vegetables strengthened the

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[60] Letter from Texas State Representative Paul Moreno to Dr. H.O. Kunkel, Chicano Vertical Files, C. L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso.

[61] Letter from Carmen Rios (Felix) to John S. McKee, Chicano Vertical Files, C. L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso.

[62] "Jardines del Barrio" Proposal, 4-5: "Time Sequence for *Los Jardines del Barrio*," Chicano Vertical Files, C. L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso.

[63] "Jardines del Barrio" Proposal, 4; Budget for Materials, Proposal, Chicano Vertical Files, C. L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso.

cultural heritage and food traditions in the area. Cultivating the vegetables would also alleviate families' grocery budgets, but one of the most important outcomes of the project became the cooperation between families and community members. *La Campaña* hoped that *Los Jardines del Barrio,* would "bring the family together to work in meaningful activities." In addition, the organization believed that "older people in the community w[ould] share their knowledge and skills with young people interested in gardening." Grassroots efforts such as *Los Jardines del Barrio* provided ample opportunities for families to cooperate in the bettering of both the household and the community. Further, the project allowed whole families to participate in the cultural activism to sustain their lives and their beloved barrio.[64]

Besides addressing the lack of food in the barrio and promoting the unity among families, *Los Jardines del Barrio* also repurposed empty lots and hoped to bring life to areas in South El Paso. Some of the smaller plots were planted in the tenements, where Southside activists believed they would have a great effect for barrio residents. In the initial application, the grant writers stressed that:

> A project such as this will have great impact on the tedious effect of living in crowded tenement conditions which offer little, if any necessary open space for this type of activity. The 'boxed-in' feeling and sense of hopelessness which accompanies living in one of the worst poverty areas of the city will be partly alleviated by the intentions of a project such as this one.[65]

These smaller plots reclaimed the courtyards of the crumbling tenements, where Mexican American tenants carved a dignified space within their residences, even when the tenants did not own the property. At the end of *Los Jardines del Barrio,* residents and activists

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[64] "Jardines del Barrio" Proposal, 1-5.

[65] "Jardines del Barrio" Proposal, 3.

organized three community gardens throughout South El Paso.[66] In a similar manner, the large plots were located on vacant lots where the city government demolished old tenements and had long refused to build new housing. As the empty lots symbolized the slow, strangling death of the barrio, the gardens infused new life in the spaces. With this project, the residents of El Segundo Barrio repurposed empty areas from the demolished tenements into spaces that had practical uses for the neighborhood.[67]

The community of Chihuahuita used similar beautification strategies as those employed in El Segundo Barrio due to the neighborhood's initial participation in *La Campaña.* The Chihuahuita Improvement Association followed the example of *La Campaña* in creating community vegetable gardens in 1976 and again in 1978. Chihuahuitans created two large gardens at 1009 S. Santa Fe and at Charles and Seventh Streets, in addition to fifteen mini gardens.[68] The CIA also petitioned the city's Comprehensive Employment and Training Act office for funds for the completion of a beautification project they called Project BELLO (Project Beauty). Through this endeavor, the community accomplished a number of things including cleaning ten vacant lots and backyards, painting graffiti off walls, planting grass in front of a tenement building, fixing tenement roofs, planting trees, painting restrooms in bad condition, painting murals, cleaning La Placita Park, and painting several buildings where tourists parked cars to cross over to Ciudad Juárez.[69] Chihuahuitans believed that keeping the

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[66] "Residents Seeks Community Control," *El Paso Times,* April 26, 1977.

[67] Lozano, interview.

[68] "Chihuahuita Barrio Center," Submitted by Chihuahuita Improvement Association, Chicano Vertical Files, C. L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso.

[69] "Chihuahuita Barrio Center," 4.

barrio clean exemplified the pride of the neighborhood and thus, clean-up campaigns remain as an important community responsibility today. The efforts of Project BELLO and other beautification projects encouraged the CIA and the community of Chihuahuita to have larger and more ambitious goals for their barrio.

Although the CIA followed the footsteps of *La Campaña,* the different ideologies and community needs led the two organizations to diverge. According to Fred Morales, leader of the CIA, for decades, over a thousand residents in Chihuahuita "lived without any of the standard neighborhood accoutrements; without a church, a school, a library, a community center, or even a food store."[70] Chihuahuita residents geographically and socially "divorced" from South El Paso, because Chihuahuitans believed South El Paso received things easily from the city government. As a result of their disillusionment, residents decided to take care of things themselves, and thus strive towards "self-sufficiency" with as little city, state, and federal funds as possible.[71]

One of the first self-supporting projects was the creation of a food co-op or *la tiendita*, as it was called by many residents of the area. In México, the working classes frequent small community stores more than chain stores due to cheaper prices and accessibility to residents.[72] CIA leader Fred Morales spent much of his youth as a member of MAYA and as a VISTA worker, and understood the concept of food co-ops and Mexican *tiendas*. He knew the struggles of the barrio, and believed that the

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[70] "Chihuahuita Barrio Center," 2.

[71] Ibid.

[72] For more on Mexico's neighborhood stores or *tienditas* see John Christopher Cross, *Informal Politics: Street Vendors and the State in Mexico City*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); Enrique C. Ochoa, *Feeding Mexico: The Political Uses of Food since 1910,* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc, 2000).

community needed a store that would have cheap produce in order to alleviate the struggling finances of Chihuahuitans. While the Southside had a number of *tienditas* and chain grocery stores, none of these were within walking distance of Chihuahuita.[73]

Morales, along with barrio residents Jacinto Mendoza and Alberto Priego, brainstormed possibilities and took steps to make the project a reality.[74] In a town hall meeting, Morales spoke to residents and city council member Orlando Fonseca about the prospect of a food co-op. The community was skeptical at first, as families were unsure about the products and affordability of the co-op. Many asked questions about the use of food stamps, and about what the store would sell. After Morales gave favorable answers, the residents were convinced. That night, 31 families voted to put the plan forth.[75]

After the CIA spoke to the community, the organization gathered the support of several prominent neighborhood individuals, including Father Robert Gafford, a priest at Sacred Heart Church. The CIA found a room in the barrio where the *tiendita* could operate, and Father Gafford agreed to pay for the rent and the utilities.[76] Soon, the community of Chihuahuita provided volunteer hours, shelves, a scale, and even a fridge. Businesses and many other residents gave donations. In order to obtain affordable and quality produce, Morales and the organization traveled to Berino (west of El Paso, near the Texas-New Mexico border) to buy eggs. In addition the CIA also visited *mayoreo* (bulk) stores to buy milk and other products.[77]

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[73] Morales, interview by the author.

[74] "A different reason for dieting," *El Paso Times*, August 16, 1979.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Morales, interview by the author.

[77] Ibid.

Once established, the Chihuahuita Volunteer Savings Association (CVSA), sold all basic foods at very affordable prices, becoming a competitor to other stores in the Southside.[78] In a comparison done by the *El Paso Times,* the CVSA beat the four closest grocery stores in prices, noting "the coop offers savings of 87¢ over Safeway's prices, $1.61 savings over Plaza Grocery, and $2.80 over the prices of Magda's, the closest neighborhood store."[79] *La tiendita* became very popular amongst Chihuahuitans who saved money and did not have to leave the neighborhood to do their grocery shopping.[80]

To maintain the co-op, shoppers were asked to contribute a monthly membership fee of three dollars.[81] In order to keep prices low and offer the best deals, the CVSA had officers that managed the store, and even an acting president. In addition, the co-op provided work, on volunteer basis, to those who could no longer work. Alberto Priego, a 45-year-old resident who suffered from a stroke in 1978, was elected president of the CVSA. His main responsibilities included "setting up the service and researching the best buys on staple foods."[82] This opportunity allowed community members, including the elderly, to become involved in non-political barrio projects that were of importance to the community.

Through two different strategies, *La Campaña* and the CIA supported efforts to uplift the Mexican American community of South El Paso by addressing food shortages

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[78] "Pricing it right," *El Paso Times,* August 16, 1979.

[79] Ibid. The study was done by purchasing the most inexpensive products including four pounds of beans, four pounds of rice, one dozen eggs, and one gallon of milk.

[80] Morales, interview by the author.

[81] "Pricing it right," *El Paso Times,* August 16, 1979.

[82] "Family—a galvanizing force," *El Paso Times,* August 17, 1979.

and inaccessibility to basic necessities in these low-income neighborhoods. Food co-ops and community gardens aimed at helping Southside residents, were inspired by the community's participation in War on Poverty Programs, social movements, and Mexican American culture. These efforts not were not only attempts at alleviating hunger and poverty in the barrios at a time that city leaders failed to recognize the needs of the Southside barrios, but these projects also provided an opportunity for Mexican Americans in South El Paso to claim dignity and to provide for one another through programs aimed at beautifying the neighborhoods and assist the community.

**Carving Cultural and Historic Spaces in Chihuahuita**

Amidst the political fights between the CIA and *La Campaña* over Urban Development Action Grants and Community Development Block Grants, the community of Chihuahuita achieved one of its most desired community goals: the creation of a community center. For years, Chihuahuitans had petitioned the city to help them build a community center in order to have their own meeting space, as well to have a site for cultural programing. As the neighborhood lacked a center, Chihuahuitans had to meet in the streets of the barrio or share Sacred Heart Gym with other Southside organizations. The latter choice created conflicts between residents of El Segundo and the CIA. In addition, having community meetings at Sacred Heart was also dangerous, as it was difficult for Chihuahuitans, especially the elderly, to walk long distances and cross high trafficked streets to attend the meetings. The residents believed that it was time for

Chihuahuita to have a space in which to "congregate and promote better living conditions."[83]

As discussed in Chapter 3, the limited funds given to South El Paso in 1979 led the CIA, under Morales's leadership, to petition for the thirteen-acre area of Chihuahuita to become an independently designated Neighborhood Strategy Area (NSA). If the neighborhood gained this designation, Chihuahuita would become eligible as a separate entity from El Segundo Barrio and increase their chances to obtain urban development block grants.[84] Morales told the *El Paso Times* after a Community Development Steering Committee Meeting, that if the city granted the separate designation and CD funds, the community would mobilize in the creation of a much needed community center and an adjacent park. Morales also submitted proposals for other plans for a commercial center that would provide amenities for residents such as a clinic, a bakery, a café, and other small shops.[85] Although the city did not approve the independent NSA designation, the city promised the Chihuahuita neighborhood that a "Community Development staff would assist in developing a strategy for the area." City council also promised the community that their proposals would be reviewed.[86]

The city of El Paso kept its promise to Chihuahuita a few months later and encouraged the neighborhood to submit a proposal for federal funds. The CIA created a plan for a much-needed community center. The proposal stated that the community

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[83] "Chihuahuita Barrio Center," 3.

[84] "Chihuahuita under microscope again: Funding designation to be eyed," *El Paso Times,* December 7, 1979.

[85] Ibid.

[86] "Panel promises Chihuahuita consideration," *El Paso Herald-Post,* December 7, 1979.

center would be a start to tackle the "immense poverty and to hold activities, projects, classes, recreation, mettings [sic], etc."[87] The organization found a suitable location and promised that the community of the barrio would be solely responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of the facility and its programming. Once again, the CIA had the support of Father Gafford of Sacred Heart, who committed to pay rent, electricity, and telephone expenses.[88] Ultimately, the CIA believed that "a barrio center would bring people of all ages together and develop a sense of pride." In addition, the organization stressed that the "center would give the community a facelift that the area desperately need[ed]."[89] Most importantly, the center "would enhance the area residents to do their share of bringing up the area both physically and morally."[90]

With the help of City Development funds, the CIA was able to bring their plans to fruition. In 1981, the Chihuahuita Community Center (CCC) and an adjacent park were completed, and it was dedicated the same year.[91] The CCC became a meeting place for the residents of the Chihuahuita community, where they could take ESL, GED, or citizenship classes, hold tenant workshops, and have access to a library, a recreation facility for the youth and elderly, a meeting area, holiday programming, arts and crafts, homemaking classes, and for many other services.[92] Fred Morales recalled "the barrio

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[87] "Chihuahuita Barrio Center," 3.

[88] Budget, "Chihuahuita Barrio Center," Submitted by Chihuahuita Improvement Association, Chicano Vertical Files, C. L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso.

[89] "Chihuahuita Barrio Center," 6.

[90] Ibid, 7.

[91] Fred Morales, *Dates and Events in Chihuahuita History*, (Self Published, no date), 15 in El Paso Public Library Vertical Files.

[92] Morales, interview by the author; "Chihuahuita Barrio Center," 6.

was very small, but the park and center would be filled with lots of people." The CCC quickly became the pride of the barrio. [93]

In 1979 at the time of the proposal, CIA leaders hoped that the "Chihuahuita Barrio Center would be a landmark of a proud people with a proud culture that will live on for many years. The center could tell the story, history, and most important of all, the future of the people of Chihuahuita."[94] Their wishes are evident today as the center continues to serve the neighborhood. Chihuahuitans visit the center and the park, and participate in the many programs that it offers. Through the years, the residents cooperated in beautifying the center, and maintained the space. One of these projects was a mural in honor of the Santa Fe Railroad and its legacy in the community. Funded by the El Paso Junior League in 1992, the mural celebrated the Railroad and its positive changes in the community.[95] As seen in the recent beautification anecdotes in this chapter's introduction, the Chihuahuita Community Center continues to be important in the eyes of its community.

The enthusiasm around the Chihuahuita community pressed residents to assert their culture and history within the city of El Paso. In 1979, the community of Chihuahuita began a battle for one of its biggest accomplishments—a quest to become one of El Paso's Historic Districts. The appeal to become a Historic District stemmed from the funding and neighborhood protection promises the designation guaranteed. An *El Paso Times* article described that if the barrio of Chihuahuita received a Historic

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[93] Morales, interview by the autor. Interview in Spanish. Original quote: "Tan chiquito el barrio que llenábamos el center y el parque con tanta gente."

[94] "Chihuahuita Barrio Center," 7.

[95] Junior League of El Paso, *An Art of Conscious,* 9.

District status, the community would be eligible for grants up to $1,500 per structure for exterior renovations and building preservation, as well as rehabilitation loans for up to $10,000 per building. Most importantly, if the neighborhood got the approval, demolition of buildings, industrialization, and the extension of the Border Highway through the area "would be slowed considerably or halted altogether."[96] On November 13, 1979, the CIA petitioned city historic preservation officers to consider granting the barrio a Historic District Status. After the community's history presentation, the city's Historic Landmark Commission voted unanimously to recommend the barrio for historic status. This action meant that the vote for Historic District was now in the hands of the City Plan Commission and city council for approval.[97]

The energy for the creation of a Historic District designation for Chihuahuita continued into the following year. In order to present the historical significance of Chihuahuita to the El Paso Historic Landmark commission, Fred Morales, now a well-established local historian, was tasked with collecting materials and writing a booklet on the history of the barrio. To help Morales and the community of Chihuahuita, the El Paso Historic Landmark Commission recruited the help of Darlene Luna, a UTEP photography student; Yolanda Flores, an oral historian; Rodolfo Mares Jr., a graduate of UTEP working on architectural and historical development; and Skip Clark, another graduate of UTEP involved in academic research.[98] Chihuahuitans were thrilled with the potential of the Historic District Status. When interviewed for the *Herald-Post,* Morales said that

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[96] "Chihuahuita gets initial approval for designation as historic area," *El Paso Times,* November 14, 1979.

[97] Ibid.

[98] "Chihuahuita's story," *El Paso Herald-Post,* January 28, 1980.

residents hoped "to have a Chihuahuita cultural revolution" and that the community wanted to make the area "tri-lingual, (Spanish, Indian, English) and tri-cultural."[99] Although the booklet and materials were completed by the deadline, the Historic District Status did not come easy. The CIA and the residents of Chihuahuita however, did not give up the fight. The community understood that obtaining the Historic Neighborhood status would be the best bet to maintain and preserve their barrio.

For years, Morales, the CIA, and Chihuahuitans pressed historical officers and city leaders for the historic status. The community emphasized the importance of the neighborhood in the city's history as a whole. After all, Chihuahuita was part of the original Ricardo Brusuelas' 1818 Spanish Land Grant, one of the first places ethnic Mexicans settled in El Paso after the American period, and the city's historic First Ward. Presidents William Taft and Porfirio Díaz met in Chihuahuita. The barrio also played a role during the Mexican Revolution and during the period of prohibition as the site of intellectual and financial support to revolutionary efforts and illicit trade and intrigue.[100] Chihuahuitans tried long and hard to convince historic preservation officers about the importance of the neighborhood. Meanwhile, the Anglo-dominant sites and neighborhoods of the city obtained their Historic District designation the same year in which they were petitioned. Chihuahuita continued to be overlooked for several years. In an interview, Fred Morales mentioned that historic preservation groups such as the El Paso Historical Society and the Landmark Commission were ignorant of the history of the barrio. Furthermore, he stated that the denial of the status was "just because it is a

[99] "Chihuahuita's story," *El Paso Herald-Post,* January 28, 1980.

[100] Fred Morales, *Dates and Events in Chihuahuita History,* 6-9.

Mexican barrio, it is poor, and it doesn't have architecture from Henry Trost (a famous architect of the Southwest)."[101] As architectural historian Dolores Hayden argues "care is not taken to preserve the spatial history of ordinary working people and their everyday lives. A few buildings or even small districts may be preserved for their architectural excellence—often the houses, clubs, and business places of the wealthy… preserving the identity of the White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, male elite."[102] While El Paso Landmark commission officers followed the trends of historic preservation in the country, Fred Morales and the community of Chihuahuita did not give up, as the historic status could change the future of the barrio.

After a decade of struggling to achieve the historic status and almost abandoning the preservation cause, the perseverance of Chihuahuita paid off. Morales explained "we were about to give up, we were so tired of dealing with the city. But finally, we got our status. I think it was because they finally got tired of us constantly petitioning [for the historic status] that they finally approved the Historic District."[103] In 1991, the City of El Paso declared Chihuahuita a Historic District "because of its long and significant history."[104] Even though obtaining the historic status did not bring about funds for renovation, the biggest accomplishment was the preservation of the area, as the historic

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[101] Morales, interview by the author. Interview in Spanish. Original quote: "Historic groups were ignorant to the history porque es un barrio mexicano, es pobre, no tiene arquitectura de Henry Trost."

[102] Dolores Hayden, "The Power of Place: 'Claiming Urban Landscapes as People's History,'" *Journal of Urban History* 20, no. 4 (August 1, 1994): 466.

[103] Morales, interview by the author. Interview in Spanish. Original quote: "Nos íbamos a rendir, ya estábamos cansados de tratar con la ciudad, que por fin. Yo creo que se cansaron de que estuviéramos a cada rato fregando que nos aprobaron historic district."

[104] "Chihuahuita Texas Historical Marker Dedication Ceremony," June 12, 2004, Vertical Files, El Paso Public Library.

status provides protection from future redevelopment projects. To date, Chihuahuita is the first and only Mexican barrio in El Paso to be named a Historic District.[105]

**For the Betterment of the Barrio**

After decades of living in neglect, the communities of South El Paso embarked on beautification and self-sufficiency projects to better their communities on their own terms and claim dignity through different spaces in the barrios. Encouraged by organizations such as *La Campaña* and the CIA, and the Chicana/o Movement and other social mobilizations across the country, residents of South El Paso found opportunities to get involved in the non-political efforts to preserve their communities. Most of these projects endeavored to dismantle the negative stereotypes community outsiders had of the barrios by showing city authorities and outsiders the pride of ownership South El Paso residents felt. Mural paintings, gardens, and community centers allowed Chihuahuitans and residents of El Segundo to refurbish the substandard barrios, carve out spaces that uplifted the barrios and provided basic services, and actively use spaces in the neighborhoods as canvases for cultural memory and outlets for political change.

Southsiders' experience with cultural preservation efforts also highlights the Chicana/o ideology of self-determination to sustain places that contribute to community survival. While their mobility in the city was restricted and boundaries were clearly demarcated, residents of South El Paso empowered the marginalized area with projects that met the needs of the barrio and gave hope to the people. By creating vegetable

[105] Plan El Paso, Chapter 8: Historic Preservation, http://planelpaso.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/DRAFT%202%20ELP%208%20Historic%20Preservation_web.pdf, accessed April 14, 2015.

gardens, food co-ops, and community centers, Mexican Americans enfranchised the barrios by not only furnishing food needed for nourishment, but also in providing valuable skills that could transfer into other areas of their lives.

The histories of the two communities reveal the pride that its residents exuded, the desperate need to develop cultural spaces for their barrios, and the willingness to do things themselves when city leaders planned the dismantling of their communities. Most importantly, the residents of Chihuahuita and El Segundo Barrio make evident that neighborhoods have historically turned to cultural grassroots efforts to preserve their communities from the urbanization threats that surrounds them. The different projects throughout the barrio reflect the neighborhoods' pride, dignity, identity, and ownership of the urban space where they had been segregated and marginalized for decades.

## Conclusion

In January 2016, the *El Paso Times* reported that an 87-unit apartment complex located on the corner of Campbell and Third Streets would be completed by early March. This $4.75 million project on the border of South El Paso, is an "ultra-modern, five story complex, which includes 3,654 square feet of ground-floor retail space, [which] will inject new life into an area dominated by tenements." People interested in renting a unit at the Campbell Apartments are expected to pay $585 a month for a one bedroom unit to $1,020 for three bedrooms.[1] The Campbell Apartments are just one of several apartment buildings springing up in the area, as city leaders are engaging in several efforts to revitalize the Downtown district. Although the apartments are South of Paisano Drive, the *Times* reported that residents would still be in close proximity to the city core, federal buildings, and shopping districts.

A month later, Preservation Texas, a nonprofit organization based out of Austin, listed El Segundo Barrio among their Texas' Most Endangered Places at the state's annual Preservation Summit. In selecting the spaces, the organization stated that "the sites on the 2016 list represent cultural, architectural and historic places that are at risk, and represent the types of sites that are endangered in Texas."[2] Preservation Texas also commended these areas and buildings because activist and grassroots groups are mobilizing to defend the sites from destruction. The organization furthermore declared that El Segundo Barrio "would benefit from more detailed documentation, research and

[1] "2016 brings new venues to El Paso," *El Paso Times*, January 10, 2016.

[2] "2016 Texas' Most Endangered Places," http://www.preservationtexas.org/2016-texas-most-endangered-places/, accessed March 25, 2016.

legal protection."[3] Local preservation organizations such as the El Paso County Historical Commission and the Texas Trost Society had no role in the designation—Preservation Texas investigated the matters on its own.[4]

In the last decade, an atmosphere of anxiety and fear regarding the future of the Southside has loomed in El Paso. In 2006, the city, with the help of a number of business leaders and private investment groups (for the most part Anglo), have designed plans to gentrify the area within the span of a decade (called the 2015 Downtown Plan). Although the proposed plan's focus is the Downtown district, it also targets a portion of El Segundo Barrio for demolition. The redevelopment project, however, was met with opposition by the community of South El Paso, as residents and supporters believed the plan would improve Downtown at the cost of the Southside barrios. Conflicts quickly arose as the main investment group, the Paso Del Norte Group, gave a polemic PowerPoint presentation before City Council. The Glass Beach study, as the presentation came to be known, used an image of an older Mexican American gentleman to describe current El Paso as "old," "dirty," "lazy," "speaks Spanish," and "uneducated." Meanwhile, the future of El Paso included pictures of actors Penelope Cruz and Matthew McConaughey to characterize the potential of the city along with the words "educated," "entrepreneurial," "bilingual," and "enjoys entertainment."[5] The Glass Beach study re-mobilized the Southside community, as the plan's subtle racism raised questions about

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[3] "2016 Texas' Most Endangered Places."

[4] El Paso County Historical Commission's *Facebook* page, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=1316864775005694&id=204564212902428, accessed March 25, 2016.

[5] "The Best Laid Plan," *Texas Monthly*, February 2013, http://www.texasmonthly.com/articles/the-best-laid-plan/, accessed March 25, 2016; "An El Paso Identity Crisis," *El Paso News*, March 24, 2016, http://elpasonews.org/2016/03/an-el-paso-identity-crisis/, accessed March 25, 2016; "Glass Beach Study," http://socialunwind.com/t/the-2006-glass-beach-report/50, accessed March 25, 2015.

the motives for the developments of South El Paso. The Downtown Plan was halted due to the disagreements in the community and the economic recession. A few years later, however, City Council revised the 2015 Downtown Plan and renamed it Plan El Paso 2010. Leaders and the private investment community have utilized the redevelopment project as a blueprint for the current uplift of Downtown El Paso. Although Chicana/o activists (many of them involved in the fights from the late 1970s) have been vocally opposed to the plan, South El Paso still remains under the threat of the bulldozer.

Fig. 2.1 Campbell Apartments on the corner of Campbell and Third Streets in El Segundo Barrio. Photographs taken by author, March 27, 2016.

The shadows of the towering Campbell Apartments, the 2016 Endangered Status, and the city's Downtown Revitalization Plan are vivid reminders of the constant waves of redevelopment plans that have plagued the area for much of the twentieth century. While the community of South El Paso fell victim to renewal plans including razing of tenements, highway construction, and the resolution of a one hundred year old boundary dispute, the 1960s and 1970s brought a new energy to the area. The combination of the

Chicana/o Movement, the feelings of ownership and belonging of the neighborhoods, and the rapid disappearance of the barrios fueled one of El Paso's most important movements for Mexican American civil rights.

This study chronicled activism in the barrios of South El Paso from 1967 to 1981. This dynamic community created by the forces of mass immigration and capitalist exploitation became the home of thousands of ethnic Mexicans for generations. Although politically, economically, and socially marginalized, Mexican Americans created a vibrant community that protected them from discrimination in other parts of the city. While it was a densely populated area and one of the poorest urban slums in the Southwest, Southsiders developed their own identity, claimed ownership of their neighborhoods, and created institutions to uplift the residents of the barrio. When aggressive redevelopment plans targeted the area in the late 1960s and the 1970s and the neighborhood began to disappear, Southsiders believed that "the barrio is slowly being strangled to death, its right to exist as a homogenous community is being denied."[6] The destruction of their neighborhoods incited the Mexican American residents to take matters into their own hands and fight for better housing and the preservation of the Southside barrios.

The mid 1970s witnessed the rise of grassroots organizations in South El Paso. Neighborhood associations such as the Chihuahuita Improvement Association (CIA) and *La Campaña Pro Preservación del Barrio* pressed for the control of the future of the Southside, as well as community controlled redevelopment plans for the area, as residents demanded a voice and vote in urban renewal projects. While the community did not

[6] "Manifesto from the Community of South El Paso," ca. 1975, UTEP MEChA Manuscript Collection, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department, University of Texas at El Paso Libraries.

oppose the redevelopment of South El Paso, they disputed the lack of community agency and the unwillingness of city leaders to maintain the residential character of the area. The two groups, along with residents from the Southside communities, employed three methods of activism to preserve the barrios. First, the formation of neighborhood grassroots organizations such as *La Campaña* and the CIA allowed residents of the area to voice their concerns in city hall and to governmental agencies involved in the renewal processes. The activism of the two neighborhood groups was informed by the National Chicana/o Movement and their participation in War on Poverty programs, where they gained experience in organizing, grant writing, and legal strategies. The convergence of the two social movements allowed activists to respond to local concerns and advocate against the eradication of the neighborhood. Second, as urban redevelopment moved forward, and residents were uprooted from the barrios and found no housing options in or out of the neighborhoods, Southsiders staged Tent Cities and squatted on properties marked for demolition to demonstrate the lack of and urgent need for better housing in South El Paso. These squatter episodes represented more radical displays of community protests against the demolition of housing options within the barrio. Third, residents participated in community-based cultural projects by painting murals on barrio walls, planting community gardens, creating community centers and food co-ops to beautify the barrios in their own way and also address the cultural and economic needs of the community. Such simple expressions of neighborhood solidarity and problem-solving reflected the accommodations residents had made over generations of residential and spatial segregation. In their "geographic prisons" Mexican Americans developed a sense of attachment and ownership of the decaying Southside. Their gardens, co-ops, and

murals countered city authorities' claims that the area was backwards and dirty. It was their home.

By employing different strategies to preserve the Southside barrios, Mexican Americans gained a political voice, challenged the urban revitalization visions of city leaders, and essentially manifested that the barrio was not for sale to local, state, and federal power structures. Southside activists exposed the substandard conditions Mexican Americans lived in for decades, blocked Housing and Urban Development applications for federal funds, purchased properties marked for demolition, brought important community controlled institutions to the area, and obtained a Historic District Status for Chihuahuita. Although ideological differences, conflicts of personalities, and the stresses of obtaining federal funds created many tensions between South El Paso organizations, the stories of these grassroots groups highlight the varying measures a community took to preserve their spaces in a city that physically and figuratively erased them from the face of El Paso. Although the Southside lost residential properties and a significant percentage of its population, in the end the efforts of the CIA and *La Campaña* helped to stem the tide of gentrification.

While South El Paso preservation efforts appear to chronicle only a small neighborhood in the largest city along the U.S.-México border, these histories have larger implications within Chicana/o and urban histories, as well as the narratives of social movements. The story of South El Paso provides an understanding of the successes of localized mobilizations during and in the aftermath of the Chicana/o Movement. While the nationalist movement lost much of its momentum by 1975, the community of South El Paso won important battles, as better housing and neighborhood preservation were

significant concerns for the Mexican American community in the city. South El Paso also provides an opportunity to explore urban redevelopment beyond the black-white binary. The defense of the Southside barrios provides an urban renewal victory insofar as the community forced city leaders to build more housing in the area. Lastly, South El Paso gives a glimpse of how the border played a role in the lives of residents in the barrios. Wedged between the city center and the Mexican population across the Rio Grande, the Mexican Americans living in South El Paso became an invisible community. It was the border that brought many of the residents to the United States in the first place, but it was also the border that shaped their identities and the spaces in which they lived.

Today, the one square mile of South El Paso is home to just over 8,000 people—a combination of older generations and newcomers to the United States.[7] Although the population has diminished since the 1970s, thousands of Mexican Americans in El Paso still have strong connections to the barrios, as their grandparents or parents lived there and often visited the area. The barrios of El Segundo and Chihuahuita hold important places in the lives of El Pasoans, as evidenced by the vocal community, both within the barrio and outside of it, that has mobilized to save the area in recent years. As plans to gentrify the area continue to threaten the livelihood of the Southside, new organizations such as the Chihuahuita Neighborhood Association and the Southside Neighborhood Association, have become outlets for residents of the area to voice their concerns, following the legacies of *La Campaña* and the CIA. South El Paso has also gained important allies from outside the community in the faculty and students at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) and the El Paso County Historical Commission. The latter

[7] El Paso Census data for tracts 18, 19, and 20, http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=DEC_00_SF4_GCTP16.CY07&prodType=table, accessed March 25, 2006.

will be conducting a comprehensive architectural survey of El Segundo Barrio, which the Historical Commission hopes will help with an application for a new National Historic District in El Paso.[8] While the future of South El Paso is unknown, one thing is certain: the neighborhood still holds a special place in the lives and memories of many El Pasoans who have mobilized to preserve their histories, roots, and their beloved barrios.

[8] El Paso County Historical Commission's *Facebook* page. https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=1316864775005694&id=204564212902428. Accessed March 25, 2016.

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