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The struggle for dignity: Mexican-Americans in the Pacific Northwest, 1900–2000

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THE STRUGGLE FOR DIGNITY:
MEXICAN-AMERICANS IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST, 1900-2000

By

James Michael Slone

Bachelor of Arts
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
2000

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
Of the requirements for the

**Master of Arts Degree in History
Department of History
College of Liberal Arts**

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Mexican-Americans in the Pacific Northwest, 1900-2000

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ABSTRACT

**THE STUGGLE FOR DIGNITY:
MEXICAN-AMERICANS IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST, 1900-2000**

By James Michael Slone

Dr. Joseph A. Fry, Examination Committee Chair
Professor of History
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

This thesis explores the struggle for political, social, and labor rights waged by the Mexican and Mexican-American people in the Pacific Northwest. Drawing on earlier histories, social studies, census materials, interviews and newspapers articles spanning the twentieth century, the paper locates the roots of the community in the early twentieth century and details the organizing activities of farm workers, the direct political action of students, and the efforts of the whole community to attain political representation, economic power, and some measure of hard earned dignity. This study is equal parts political history, social history, and labor history, ultimately indicting an exploitive agricultural system in Oregon and Washington, one that has impeded every effort to improve the lives of Mexican immigrants, farm workers, and the community in general.

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INTRODUCTION

When I first arrived in Seattle nearly a year ago, I was completely unaware that the largest ethnic minority in the state was the Mexican-American community. European-Americans, many descendants of Scandinavians, predominate in Seattle and one has to travel to the small and increasingly gentrified Central District, or the neighborhoods in southern extreme of the city and the suburbs, to see large numbers of African-Americans or Latinos.

Even though Mexican-American Latinos currently represent the largest minority in most regions in the country now, people still tend to associate the Mexican-American community with the Southwest. Their presence is demographically much more noticeable and their cultural association solidified by their history there, from the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo to César Chávez. The idea that Mexicans are as economically important in the Northwest as they are in California did not dawn on me initially.

Mexican-Americans have performed a vital economic function in the Pacific Northwest, but based on the number of publications and academic writing on the subject of their history, one would never know it. One of the reasons the Mexican-American community is so little discussed is the simple fact they have not been enormously visible in the large metropolitan centers in the

western parts of Washington or Oregon. Seattle and Portland are mostly homogenous cities in mostly homogenous states, and only in recent years have Mexican-Americans and more recent Mexican immigrants appeared in notable numbers in these cities. Their burgeoning numbers in urban areas coincided with the arrival of other Latinos from Central America and the Caribbean in the mid 1980s, and Mexican-Americans have been largely subsumed into the more generic "Hispanic" population despite their much larger numbers.

Mexican restaurants and Latin dance clubs have become commonplace in Seattle in recent years, and one often finds Mexican workers toiling in the rear kitchens in the trendier clubs and bars frequented by hip twenty-something European-Americans. Milagros, a fashionable Mexican folk art store at Pike Place Market in downtown Seattle, sells Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) statuettes to upscale Seattle residents. Throughout the city striking murals point to an obscured Mexican-American past in Washington. Seattle based muralists Alfredo Arrequin and Yakima's Daniel DeSiga have both contributed to the city's history of public art. Even murals painted by artists of Scandinavian ancestry have the vibrant color and flat understated symbolism of Mexican murals. Signs of Mexican culture are easy to spot with an observant eye.

The successive waves of Mexican immigration are the result of two powerful forces: the economic pull of jobs and higher wages in the United States, and the economic and social problems

workers face in Mexico. The availability of work and higher wages has always been a strong incentive to cross the border. Throughout the last century, large numbers of Mexicans have come to the United States as farm workers and laborers, working the jobs European-Americans have been increasingly unwilling to do. As long as Mexico and the United States have been neighbors, the border has been more of a formality than an actuality, and the economic and labor needs of both countries have always been intertwined.

In the early part of the twentieth century, many Mexicans fled north to escape the chaos of the Mexican Revolution. In the latter part of that century, Mexicans emigrated to escape unemployment, poverty, and long term economic uncertainty. These problems were especially pervasive after the collapse of Mexico's economic "miracle" in the early 1980s, when falling world oil prices cut into the profits of Mexico's nationalized oil fields, the main source of the state's wealth and the lynchpin of the country's economy. Mexico's growing population was no longer sustainable as social programs disappeared, wages fell, and unemployment skyrocketed.¹ Low skilled workers were and are plagued with substandard living conditions and chronic underemployment in Mexico. Their prospects farther north, while not promising, are preferable to starving.

Early immigration to the Pacific Northwest was not a direct process. Most Mexicans who ventured north came from the southwestern states, seeking higher wages and better working

conditions. Many were migrant laborers who divided their year between California, Texas, and the northwestern states, following the crop cycle from job to job. Before the Bracero Program of the 1940s introduced large numbers of Mexican nationals into the region, most Mexican workers in Washington and Oregon were from the Southwest. It was not until much later that large numbers of immigrants came directly from Mexico. Since the 1980s, nearly all Mexican immigrants have come directly to the Northwest from Mexico.

Despite growing numbers of Mexicans in the Seattle area, especially in the greater Puget Sound metropolitan area, the community is still largely invisible in major cities. In the 2000 census, only 5.3 percent of Seattle's population was categorized as Hispanic. In Olympia, the state's capitol, Hispanics made up only 4.38 percent of the overall population. But regardless of these low numbers, Hispanics were the largest minority in the state, accounting for 7.5 percent of the population. Of 173,870 people born in Latin America, 148,115 originated from Mexico. Larger percentages live in the central and eastern parts of the state. In Yakima County, a major agricultural zone in the central part of the state, Hispanics comprised 35.90 percent of the overall population. So while Mexican-Americans are an inconspicuous presence in the Puget Sound area, they are a significant presence in Washington's agricultural regions.²

In Portland, Oregon, people of Hispanic or Latino origin are a larger minority, and made up 6.8 percent of the total population in the 2000 census. Eight percent of the state's population was Hispanic.³ Salem, the state's capitol, is situated in the Willamette Valley, an expansive and fertile region nestled between the Coastal range and the Cascades and one of the largest employers of Mexican labor. There, Hispanics were a significant 14.6 percent of the population. Twelve percent of the population claimed Mexican ancestry. Over seventeen percent of the surrounding Marion County was Hispanic and 14 percent claimed Mexican ancestry.⁴ Mexican-Americans in Oregon are more visible and increasingly more urban than their counterparts in Washington, but politically underrepresented. In 2000, just over 1 percent of elected city and county officials and 2.9 percent of elected and appointed state officials were Hispanic.⁵

Growing numbers in both states notwithstanding, Mexican-Americans and Latinos in general are lagging behind economically. In Washington, 21.9 percent of Hispanic families lived below the poverty line, compared to just 5.9 percent of European-Americans. Of 110,936 Hispanic households, 19,997 earned under \$20,000 a year. Over 11,000 Hispanic households made below \$10,000 a year. Of 1,951,720 European-American households, only 133,869 earned under \$10,000. Higher school dropout rates, fewer years of education, low paying jobs, and long periods of unemployment have plagued the Latino community.⁶ And yet these numbers offer only a glimpse of the extent of their economic problems since

undocumented immigrants form a large and statistically overlooked part of the community.

For more than one hundred years, Mexican-Americans have been politically voiceless in Oregon and Washington. Despite mainstream concessions to the Hispanic community's rights and some inevitable cultural visibility, Mexican-Americans have not generally been invited to participate in democratic government in the Northwest. There have been some political victories, but most of them have not been remembered or lasting. Many Mexicans are still employed in agricultural work, and many of those workers are undocumented and largely without rights. Collective bargaining rights and health insurance for farm workers have been elusive. Mexican-American families are poorer on average and have larger households.

A system of institutional racism and an economic bottom line that requires a permanent underclass, have kept rural Mexicans poor and powerless. In Washington in the 1990s, many seasonal workers still lived in tents, and urban Mexican-Americans were largely employed in low paying service jobs. Many problems that were addressed by the Chicano rights movement in the 1970s have not only remained unresolved, but have worsened. Added to the traditional problems of class and race, Mexicans in the Northwest have also faced the specter of immigration reform and the xenophobia that fuels it, especially since the 1980s. Despite their obvious economic importance to Washington and Oregon (in Oregon, agriculture is the second largest industry), Mexican-

Americans are usually deemed a threat when they emerge from the fields.

The story of Mexican-Americans in the Northwest is not a happy one. Things are gradually improving, but progress has been inexcusably slow. The need for low wage labor is not conducive to improved community standards of living or increased political power, especially when large segments of that workforce must look continuously over their shoulders for immigration officials. The journey from stoop labor to higher paying jobs has been a slow one, and failures in education have made career goals more distant and the prospect of failure more likely. That most of this is happening on the other side of the Cascades in Washington or in conservative rural Oregon obscures the problem from state officials. Mexican-Americans have done a fine job of building political coalitions and social organizations while fighting for equal rights over the past forty years, but they cannot rise to equal standing if the state or their employers do not meet them half way.

Along with these problems, there have also been positive changes. For over the last five decades, Mexican-Americans have become more culturally visible in the arts, academia, and professional settings. The overt racism of the past has been largely replaced with a more inclusive social order, especially in the progressive urban enclaves of the Pacific Northwest. If a Chicano politician had run for state office in the early 1960s, his or her likelihood of being elected would have been nil. Now,

Mexican-Americans sit in the state legislatures and have their own state commissions. Even if they remain underrepresented and largely ignored by mainstream political leaders, they still have achieved some political voice.

Despite a pervasive feeling of powerlessness, Mexican-Americans are encouraged to vote and an inclusive political atmosphere provides a chance to affect significant political and social change. And though farm labor victories have been rare, the 1990s saw a few notable organizing victories, with more likely to come. The rapid population growth of the Mexican-American community ensures that Mexican-Americans will one day form a significant political bloc in Washington and Oregon, even if they do not vote in large numbers today. The recent immigration protests throughout the United States reveal the true potential of the emerging Latino community, one that will soon have a say in the political destiny of the Pacific Northwest.

In this study, I have sought to locate and explain the roots of Latino social and political struggle in the Pacific Northwest. This is a history of political actors and organizations that have contributed to the betterment of the community over the decades, especially those concerned with improving the lot of workers. My approach is synthetic, drawing from the small body of research by historians and political scientists and more recent primary sources, especially newspapers, to create one overarching and hopefully coherent story spanning the twentieth century.

Most political histories of Mexican-Americans in the Northwest were written in the 1980s and the 1990s, and emphasize events before 1990. I have attempted to close that gap by addressing the events of that decade in detail, hopefully creating a more complete picture of the overall story. That detail also sheds more light on the 1980s; only by looking at the 1990s can one truly understand the real results of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act and subsequent legislation in Oregon and Washington. A large part of my paper addresses this new scholarship.

Another large section of my paper is devoted to the Chicano Rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s. That small historical moment is of great importance. The Chicano movement was the first truly political moment for Mexican-Americans in the Northwest and sets the stage for the mainstream social organizations and labor movements that followed in the 1980s and beyond. While the country may have taken a sharp right turn in the era of Reagan, Mexican-American political and social actors fought hard to ensure that the promise of the 1960s lived on. *El Movimiento*, as the movement is popularly called, gave birth to all subsequent political organizing, even if its idealistic aspirations were not fully realized. It is the real genesis of the paper.

This study is about Washington and Oregon but emphasizes Washington. One reason for this is the availability of sources. Living in Washington affords more access to state and academic

resources. In addition, Washington is the larger state demographically and economically, and exercises more regional influence. Oregon provides counterpoints and convergences, but when specific examples are called for, I emphasize Washington. Washington's Yakima Valley provides a central case study in the paper. Idaho, because of its geographical differences and somewhat divergent social history, has been excluded.

Because of the scope of this work, I have had to favor the larger and more inclusive political organizations and movements. This has led to some regrettable omissions. There is a lot of research that could be done on Chicana feminism and Latina organizations in the Northwest, or on children's rights advocacy groups. But there are simply no such organizations large enough or focused enough on the major issues affecting the Mexican-American community to warrant more than a passing mention. In the mid-1990s, the number of organizations advocating on behalf of Latinos bloomed in the Northwest, a positive sign, but most of their work falls outside the scope of this study, which ends in 2000.

A Note on Terminology

The terms Mexican-American, Mexican, Hispanic, Chicano, and Latino have different meanings and they are used in different contexts throughout this study. The focus is on Mexican-Americans, or Americans of Mexican descent. This group also includes non-Spanish speaking indigenous groups from Mexico, like the Mixtec

of Oaxaca. I use the term Mexican to signify undocumented Mexican immigrants and Mexican nationals, but sometimes I use it when addressing the whole community of Mexican descent, including citizens and non-citizens.

"Hispanic" and "Latino" are interchangeable terms and differences in the terminology are largely preferential. "Hispanic" is another term for Latino and refers to anyone of Iberian descent. The problem with it is that many people from Latin American are not of Iberian descent, despite the fact that large numbers of them speak Spanish. However, both Washington and Oregon have used the term to describe the whole Latin-American community. "Latino" means more or less the same thing but refers more broadly to Latin-America's Mediterranean cultural heritage, which includes language, customs, and dress. This term is problematic because it ignores the indigenous cultures of the Americas and their contributions to Latin America's hybrid culture. But these are the terms we have, and I use them interchangeably to describe the whole Latin American community, which includes Mexicans.

"Chicano" is derived of "Mexicano" and is a more politicized term, suggesting an American of Mexican descent. The term took on weight during the Chicano Rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s. It suggests a politically conscious and active member of the community. It is ideologically aligned with identity politics. "Chicano" is often used to describe the whole Mexican-American community by academics and activists, but for the

purposes of this paper it will refer specifically to the Chicano movement and its participants. I will refer to the community as Mexicans and Mexican-Americans.

Notes

¹ M.L. Miranda, "The Mexicans," in *The Peoples of Las Vegas: One City, Many Faces*, ed. Jerry L. Simich and Thomas C. Wright (Reno/Las Vegas: University of Nevada Press, 2005).

² United States Census Bureau, *2000 Washington Quick Facts 2000* [website] (2000). <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/53000.html>

³ US Census Bureau, *Portland Quick Facts 2000* [website] (2000); available from <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/41/4159000.html>.

⁴ US Census Bureau, *2000 Us Census* [website] (2000); available from <http://www.census.gov/main/www/cen2000.html>.

⁵ Oregon Progress Board, *Elected and Appointed Officials: A Report on Race, Ethnicity and Gender Parity* [PDF] (July 2002), 2-4.

⁶ *2000 Washington Quick Facts*.

CHAPTER ONE

THE ARRIVAL OF MEXICANS IN THE NORTHWEST

Mexican-Americans established their foothold in the Pacific Northwest in the first half of the twentieth century. Mexicans had been a small presence in the region since the eighteenth century, but it was not until the labor needs of large scale agriculture expanded that larger numbers of Mexican-Americans arrived, replacing earlier ethnic groups as the dominant source of farm labor in the northwestern United States. Hard work for low wages required a dependable source of cheap labor, and farmers in Washington's Yakima Valley and Oregon's Willamette Valley found Mexican migrants an ideal workforce. Mexican-Americans already performed a nearly subservient economic function in other parts of the United States, and that role would be duplicated in the Northwest.

The first large Mexican population entered the United States not by choice but by territorial conquest. The US-Mexico War of the 1840s expanded the US border to include the northern third of Mexico or what is today the Southwestern United States. A large population of Mexicans, including tejanos from the Texas Republic, and Indians now lived under US law. The farmlands and haciendas of the American Southwest were eventually seized by American

squatters and farmers armed with laws that favored their claims over those of Mexicans.

European-American penetration had already existed before the war, especially in Texas where Anglos seized control of profitable Mexican lands after the brief romance of the Texas Republic. It took little time for European-American immigration to the Southwest to render the Mexicans who remained in the territory a largely powerless minority. In the 1880s, railroad expansion brought European American farmers and miners westward in record numbers. However, the Mexican population also grew in the West and comprised 7 to 10 percent of the total population by the turn of the century.¹

Though Mexican-Americans are usually associated with the Southwest, Mexicans have been a small but perceptible presence in the Northwest since the eighteenth century. They first arrived as crew members on Spanish ships exploring the northern Pacific Coast and later as employees of US businessmen and ranchers. As the United States developed economically, labor needs changed and greater numbers of Mexicans entered the country, laying the foundation for a more concrete Mexican-American presence in the Northwest.

Throughout the 1770s the Spanish explored the Northwest, often with Mexican crews and provisions. Captain Juan Pérez sailed near Vancouver Island, while Bruno Haceta and Juan de la Bodega explored the Olympic Peninsula. Early Spanish sites were established on the Nootka Sound, on what is now Vancouver Island,

and at Neah Bay. José Mariano Mozino and José Maldonado investigated the region's flora and fauna, compiling a study of the indigenous Nootkan language, and Atanasio Echeverría made illustrations of local plant life.² Although there is little record of Mexican settlement in the region before the nineteenth century, these expeditions were among the earliest in the region. Spanish place names still dot the Oregon coast: Yaquina Bay, Cape Ortego, Haceta Head, Cape Blanco, Manzanita, and Tierra del Mar.³

From the 1850s to the turn of the century, the Oregon territory saw the expansion of railroads, mining, and cattle ranching. Vaqueros, or Mexican cowboys, came north in the 1860s and 1870s from California with Peter French, John Devine, and Herman Oliver, Anglos in need of capable hands. Peter French brought 1,200 heads of cattle from California to Oregon in 1872, accompanied by Mexican vaqueros.⁴ One of his hands, John "Chino" Berdugo, settled in Oregon permanently and French's favorite hand, Prim "Tebo" Ortego, was given a herd of his own. Juan Redón, John Devine's right hand man, worked on Oregon's first ranch in the arid Harney Valley in 1869 and later served as a cattle superintendent for the Pacific Livestock Company.⁵

Mule packing and mining also drew on skilled Mexican labor. In the 1860s, James Watt claimed that Mexicans were "brought up from California on account of their skill in such work." There is also evidence of Mexican prospecting in the Northwest. In 1870, the Idaho Tri Weekly Statesman reported that groups of Mexicans were prospecting near Boise City.⁶ While the details of

these early incursions are largely based on anecdotal accounts, the presence of Mexicans in the Northwest at the dawn of the twentieth century was indelible. Ultimately, the driving force that compelled them to move north in the nineteenth century was the same that has compelled them to move north ever since: the economic necessity of work and the availability of jobs.

From 1900 to 1930, the Northwest and the country as a whole witnessed a burgeoning influx of Mexican immigrants. The need for agricultural labor coupled with the flight from the chaos of the Mexican Revolution caused an upswing in the Mexican population in the United States. Throughout the American West, new railroads intensified ranching, mining, and agriculture. Between 1870 and 1900, the total western farm acreage tripled in size. The Reclamation Act of 1902 helped expand the total expanse of irrigated lands from 16,000 to 1,446,000 acres. In 1915, there were twenty-five reclamation projects operating.⁷ By 1920, there were 8.7 million total acres of farmland in the West, an increase from 3.3 million acres in 1900. With the sharp growth in arable land, the need for labor also grew.⁸

The oppressiveness of the Porfirio Díaz regime and the resulting instability and hardship of the Mexican Revolution were also major incentives to leave Mexico, especially after 1910. An estimated one million Mexicans crossed the US border during the upheaval of the revolutionary period. Most of these immigrants settled in the Southwest but some ventured further north.

The pressure to increase production during World War I prompted a more pronounced emphasis on migrant farm labor. The Immigration Act of 1917 eased immigration restrictions and allowed more Mexicans to enter the country.⁹ Many of the Mexican-Americans who eventually settled in the Northwest lived and worked for many years in the Southwest before moving north.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, the Mexican population expanded in the Northwest. The Utah Sugar Company's Idaho branch was the first major employer of Mexicans in the region. Its first factory opened in 1903 with several more following in different towns by 1912. In 1918 there were 1,500 Mexican laborers employed by the company in Shelley, Blackfoot, and Twin Falls. By 1930, the US Census Bureau reported that there were 1,278 Mexican Americans in Idaho, 1,568 in Oregon, and 562 in Washington. These numbers were not precisely accurate since many Mexicans were undocumented and never counted. The methodology used in the counts, largely based on surnames, local documents, and church records, could not yield exact figures.¹⁰

Throughout the first half of the 1900s, Mexicans fulfilled the labor needs of southwestern agriculture, especially in Texas, where Mexican-Americans still worked lands that were once under Mexican control. Many workers in the Southwest were drawn into the Rocky Mountain States by the sugar beet industry; employers in Colorado found Mexican and Mexican-American labor useful for large scale beet cultivation, and by 1930, 30,000 Mexicans were employed by the beet industry throughout the state. Sugar beet

companies used the promise of higher wages to siphon significant numbers of workers from the southwestern farm labor pool.¹¹

Recruiters from the sugar beet industry were so effective they disrupted the labor needs of Texan farmers, resulting in campaigns of intimidation against Mexican workers in the state and new legislation to curtail their recruitment elsewhere. The 1929 Emigrant Labor Agency Laws targeted out of state employers and effectively restrained the recruitment efforts of outside industries. But despite the Texas effort to curb the industry's hiring activities, sugar beets producers brought large numbers of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans into states adjacent to the Pacific Northwest.¹²

By 1930, the real potential for northwestern agriculture had become apparent. The most important commercial crops in the region were hops, sugar beets, apples, and asparagus. Crops in the central and eastern parts of Washington and Oregon required the attention of strong adult workers and a surplus labor force was needed to maintain optimum production. A migrant labor system developed in the region and continued to evolve into the 1930s.¹³ The work was extremely difficult and wages were low. Mexican-Americans became the dominate source of cheap agricultural labor in the Northwest. Washington's Yakima Valley provides a useful case study

The Yakima Valley is an eighty mile stretch in the south-central part of Washington, and lies just beyond the eastern slope of the Cascade Mountains. The Yakima Valley is actually a

series of smaller valleys cut by the Yakima River, a tributary of the Columbia River that flows southeasterly. The Wenatchee Mountains are the valley's northern border, and the Rattlesnake Hills comprise its southern border. The Cascades impose an east-west barrier in both Washington and Oregon, dividing the rainy and heavily forested western parts of the states from their arid interiors. The low country in the interior is naturally dry and treeless, and only through extensive irrigation is the land made arable.

The largest metropolitan areas in the Yakima Valley are the cities of Yakima in the Northwestern part of the valley, Toppenish in the central valley, and Sunnyside in the valley's southeastern part. In the 2000 census, Yakima had a population of 71,845, making it the largest city in the region.¹⁴ Crops dominate the valley, but the slopes of the Cascades provide timber and open rangeland for cattle ranching. Irrigation has made the Yakima Valley an agricultural powerhouse in Washington, with over 1,000 square miles of farmland. Row crops, tree fruits and hops are the valley's traditional mainstays. In recent decades, wine orchards have become a major regional commodity in the Yakima Valley and elsewhere in the state.

Most crops in the Yakima Valley are labor intensive, relying on a strong seasonal workforce. Farmers in the region are therefore compelled to seek the most workers for the lowest prices. Historically this has resulted in a reliance on a migrant work force and a more permanent seasonal work force

beholden to the land owner. In the decades since the 1930s the composition of this workforce became progressively more Mexican.

In his 1974 master's thesis at the University of Washington, Jesus Lemos explains that there were four overlapping migrant labor pools in the valley preceding and coinciding with the development of a Mexican-American work force. These were Yakama Indians¹⁵ (for which the valley was named), European-American settlers from the Midwest, Japanese-Americans, and Filipino-Americans. Eventually, the need for cheap, hard working labor rendered all these groups undesirable to the farmers. The farmers sought a compliant, malleable workforce, preferably one with little chance of upward mobility, and a number of factors ensured that these groups would not serve that purpose.

Between the 1890s and the 1930s, the most important workers in the Yakima Valley were the Yakama Indians, who left their homes on the reservation to work seasonally. Farmers benefited from the arrangement since they did not have to ensure pay or housing for the workers in the off seasons. However, by 1940 the quality of work diminished, and soon it became apparent that the Yakama were not interested in subordinating themselves to the dominant European-American society. The Yakamas' unwillingness to assimilate and social independence rendered them useless to the farmers.¹⁶

European-American migrants came from the Midwest to assist Indian workers with the hops and stayed to pick fruit. Initially, they faced housing and education discrimination, but because of

their physical and cultural likeness with the farmers they were able to integrate quickly into local society. Many eventually came to own farms of their own. European-American workers remained a component of the work force throughout the decades following the 1930s, but their numbers were eventually eclipsed by Mexican-American immigration.¹⁷ Cultural and phenotypic similarities prevented ethnic white Americans from becoming a subservient and thereby desirable work force.

Japanese-Americans provided some labor, but were more often involved in local entrepreneurship or owned farms themselves. European-American xenophobia prevented large numbers of Japanese-Americans from working in the Yakima Valley. Whereas other minority groups formed a controllable underclass, the Japanese-Americans were perceived as direct competitors. European-Americans went so far as to form organizations in the valley to hinder their success. Happily for local whites, the Japanese-Americans were interned on April 3, 1942, by the federal government following the outbreak of war with Japan. After the war, returning Japanese-Americans found their property confiscated and formidable public opposition to their resettlement.¹⁸

Throughout the 1930s Filipino-Americans formed a significant part of the workforce, but faced harsh discrimination, police brutality, and mob vigilantism. Besides inspiring racist sentiment, Filipinos also tended to organize, making them extremely undesirable to the growers. After 1936, according to

Lemos, Filipinos declined as a viable labor source due to their volatile and frequently transient nature. Their efforts to organize were met with dire consequences since there were no local or federal laws protecting farm workers seeking to organize in Washington in the 1930s or since.

A notable 1933 strike demonstrates the measures farmers were willing to take to block labor from organizing. Because of the seasonal nature of agricultural labor, unions never developed a strong base in the region. In the 1930s, agitators from the International Workers of the World arrived in the valley, alarming farmers with socialist rhetoric that appeared radical and dangerous. The IWW activities from 1931 to 1933 coincided with labor unrest resulting from the Great Depression. Unemployment was severe and unemployed laborers and transients were arrested and forced to work in chain gangs. For workers with jobs, wages were a low \$.15 per hour and job security was tenuous or nonexistent. In the spring of 1933, workers demanded an increase of wages to \$.35 per hour and formed picket lines. The Wobblies seized on the plight of the workers, calling for a valley wide strike.¹⁹

The IWW was joined by the Unemployed Workers of Yakima Valley and the tension between the workers and the farmers grew. Confrontations with armed farmers were narrowly avoided, but talk of a regional strike drew both sides into a direct confrontation. On the morning of August 24, a strike began at Congdon Orchards, but was brutally dispersed by farmers armed with "rifles, clubs

and axe handles." Workers responded with rocks and beatings, but the farmers easily overwhelmed them. That afternoon, the remaining workers were herded into what amounted to a large wire pen.²⁰

A state of emergency was declared in the Valley and first degree assault charges were leveled against the detained workers. They were rounded up and placed in a stockade in Yakima. When agitation continued, seventy-two armed national guardsmen were put to work, patrolling the streets to guard against protesting workers and agitators. Panic ensued in other towns and declarations of martial law were issued in some areas. More than one-hundred workers were ultimately arrested. In late December the charges against the agitators were dropped and they were told to leave the Yakima Valley for a year. When migrant workers of Mexican descent carried out strikes in the 1970s, the 1933 retribution still weighed heavily in the Valley.²¹

By the mid 1930s farmers had developed a strong sense of entitlement. Workers were expected to be compliant and satisfied with low wages, working hard during the harvest and remaining invisible and silent the rest of the year. The violence of 1933 was a graphic expression of that sense of entitlement. When Mexican-Americans finally arrived in large numbers, they were perfect for the farmers' needs. They worked hard and complained little, in part because their low standing in America's racial hierarchy ghettoized them, but also because many did not speak English. Later, when Mexican workers began to express themselves,

farmers were quick to denounce their expression in racial and political terms.

The first significantly large group of Mexican and Mexican-American labor arrived in the Yakima Valley in the 1920s from the nearby mountain states of Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado, and Montana. Many were originally recruited in Mexico by sugar companies promising land and year round work. These workers were brutally exploited by the beet industry, paid exceedingly low wages and left unemployed for most of the year. To struggling Mexican workers, the Yakima Valley seemed appealing by comparison, attracting modest numbers. A shortage in September 1941 nearly cost the valley a \$4 million harvest.²² Mexicans provided the solution since they were willing to do difficult work for exceedingly low wages.

Mexican and Mexican-American workers solved the farmers' labor problems. Mexicans were regarded as hard working and malleable, an inferior caste that provided no overt threats to the stability of the Yakima Valley. Northwestern crops required hard labor during the harvest season and Mexicans appeared willing to not only do the work, but do it well. Farmers have traditionally regarded themselves as benevolent patriarchs lending a hand of support to the less fortunate. When Mexican farm workers have complained, the paternalistic façade of the farmer has given way to an uglier reality: the bottom line.

Despite the emerging importance of Mexican labor, adequate housing for these workers was not a priority. Before 1939, there

was no permanent migrant housing in Washington. Tents were pitched on the growers' properties to house workers, and they usually lived in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions. Camps at hop farms housed over 1,000 workers at a time, usually with inadequate toilet facilities. A lack of medical attention exacerbated the effects of poor sanitation and health problems; doctors avoided the camps since migrant workers were often ill and unable to pay for their medical services. Growers usually responded to serious health problems by simply terminating sick workers. This policy did not prevent serious outbreaks of dysentery or typhoid fever. In 1939 there was a typhoid outbreak in the Yakima Valley and in 1940 dysentery killed three workers. Five more workers died from encephalitis the same year.²³

In 1937, the Federal Security Administration began plans for a permanent federal camp for migrants in Union Gap outside Yakima. According to the plan, the government "would purchase the land and build 30 to 60 cottages and 400 concrete slabs for tents at the cost of \$200,000." The federal government argued that workers should be adequately housed and provided with a sanitary environment year round; the alternative was teeming slum villages.

The plan was fervently opposed by the Yakima Chamber of Commerce and the farmers, who argued that the camp would create a permanent population of undesirables, a social burden, and most crucially, a hotbed of labor unrest. Farmers had no interest in housing the workers or providing services beyond the work period, leaving a labor force beholden to their interests.²⁴ Farmers

proposed an alternative plan for using the federal funds to establish camps on farm properties, where the workers could be monitored and controlled.

Despite the farmers' protests, the federal government began construction of a camp in 1939, with 200 cabins, 21 farm labor houses, a clinic, and a community center at a cost of \$351,931. A second camp was opened in 1941 in Granger. These camps were self-governing and lay outside the jurisdiction of the local sheriff's office to prevent vagrancy law abuses and harassment carried out by law enforcement in the valley. Makeshift private camps persisted despite the availability of new federal camps, and serious sanitation and health issues remained.²⁵

It is important to note that the growers' hiring and management practices were not simply driven by racism, but reflected short term economic convenience. Market prices and labor needs drove their reasoning, but racism often provided a convenient excuse to eliminate or build work forces along racial lines. Mexicans-Americans occupied a bottom rung on America's social ladder and their low status seemed to justify their exploitation. The treatment of minorities and wage laborers in the Yakima Valley was but one example of their treatment in Northwest as a whole. The introduction of Mexican nationals in the 1940s Bracero Program made the European-American attitude toward Mexicans even more apparent.

The Bracero Program began when the production demands of World War II greatly increased the need for Mexican labor in the United

States, especially in agricultural work. A labor crisis coupled with growing food production needs led to US-Mexican negotiations to shore up the American labor supply. In 1942 Mexico and the United States agreed upon a program running until 1947. The Mexican Farm Labor Supply Program, or Bracero Program, brought a total of 220,640 Mexican nationals to work in the United States for a period of five years. Mexican nationals, both documented and undocumented, became a major component in wartime production.

As in the rest of the United States, the beginning of World War II worsened a farm labor shortage in the Northwest. A migrant Mexican-American workforce was already in place, but the numbers were too small to meet the demands of increased production.²⁶ By the outbreak of the war, idle European-American workers were either receiving some form of federal or state welfare or had moved on to better jobs and were simply unwilling to do the low paying and physically difficult labor farmers offered.

Under Public Law 45(PL-45), amended during congressional appropriation hearings in April 1943, the Bracero Program went into operation. Run jointly by the War Food Administration and the United States Department of Agriculture, the Bracero Program allowed contracted Mexican nationals to enter the Northwest temporarily.²⁷ Most of the 220,640 Mexicans who entered the country went to the Southwest where their labor was most needed, but 21 percent were contracted in the Northwest. Seven-thousand,

six-hundred and eighty-six workers were recruited for the first year and 46,954 over the duration of the program.²⁸

Despite homesickness, extremely difficult work, and low wages, these workers performed an indispensable task. Their level of work was considered of high quality, and as a group they were ranked only behind domestic migrant workers in the potato harvest in Idaho.²⁹ The farmers were desperate for efficient low paid labor and exerted political pressure on the federal government to maintain the system as long as possible. This was no benign gesture on their part; their concern for the braceros did not extend beyond the workers' immediate economic importance.

Pay was discriminatory and a dual wage scale favoring European-Americans pervaded. This practice was kept in place by the farmers who colluded on setting wages for the Mexican workers, seeking to pay as little as possible. Workers were often paid below the pre-1943 farm wage. The old farm wage had been set by wage boards, supervised federally by the USDA, but these standards were never explicitly enforced on behalf of the braceros. In reality, the weak wage boards were simply ignored and farmer associations set the wages instead. Some braceros violated their contracts to work higher paying side jobs in canneries and elsewhere to supplement their income.³⁰

Farm work was dangerous for the braceros. Farmers made little effort to prevent accidents, even those resulting in fatalities. Since many Mexican workers did not receive safety instruction for farm equipment, like tractors, serious injuries were widespread,

including dismemberment, bone fractures, and head injuries. Transportation injuries were common, since workers were encouraged to ride in the back of flatbed trucks and on top of loads of potatoes or sugar beets. Reports in Oregon and Idaho indicate that workers were seriously injured or killed in automobile accidents, caused by negligence, poor driving, and reckless transportation. Little supervision and few safety provisions were extended to the braceros. No occupational insurance was included in their contracts. Medical settlements, when they were actually awarded, were small and unsatisfactory.³¹

Work camps were stifling, too hot in the summer (often due to a lack of tree coverage) and too cold in the winters (since the tents were constructed on concrete foundations and were not effectively sealed on the bottom). When braceros traveled to nearby towns, they faced discrimination from business owners and were sometimes the victims of racially motivated attacks by resentful locals.³² Signs in front of some businesses were explicitly anti-Mexican and discriminatory, warning Mexicans not to enter. In Stanwood, Washington, a law enforcement officer and a group of high school students attempted to drive Mexicans out of all local businesses, resulting in a near "race riot." A Mexican in Medford, Oregon was beaten by five men and wrongfully arrested for public intoxication.³³

Since most braceros did not understand English, entertainment was generally hard to come by and life in the camps was boring and repetitive. Out of sheer boredom and restlessness, some

workers turned to the one local business that would cater to them, the bordellos, and the result was sexually transmitted disease. Basic necessities like camp food also presented unexpected problems, some quite serious. For example, Mexican and Anglo-American food prepared in poor conditions led to cases of severe food poisoning. Illness presented problems for braceros, since serious illness of any kind often led to the immediate termination of the worker's contract.³⁴

A tedious, homesick social life coupled with long work days and horrible living conditions exacerbated the frustration caused by discriminatory wages. Far from Mexican representation or protection, northwestern braceros took the largely unprecedented step of unleashing strikes and work stoppages to protest their treatment. These strikes were encouraged by the Mexican consulate in Salt Lake City, Utah, since direct Mexican supervision was never possible in the remote Northwest. Wages drove strikes from 1943 to 1947.

According to Erasmo Gamboa, wages were officially set for braceros by county wage boards that were de facto controlled by farmer associations. Working in collusion with the federal government, farmers disregarded the established prevailing wage. An enforced wage ceiling also ensured that the braceros' pay would remain exceedingly low. In Burlington, Washington, braceros halted work to protest the higher pay of European-American workers. Farmers crushed the strike by claiming it violated the worker contract. In Idaho, where regional wages were

lowest, strikes were longer and more severe. Throughout 1943, strikes were so common they prompted the Idaho State Farm Advisory Committee to discuss ways to avoid stoppages in 1944.³⁵

In Washington, where wages were generally higher than in Oregon or Idaho, strikes were more efficient. More competition with industrial jobs ensured a higher wage for agricultural workers, and farmers were generally more willing to seek amicable solutions to end the strikes as quickly as possible. In Whatcom County, striking braceros received their requested wage increase, and in other cases braceros fought for and received the prevailing wage in Washington. However, as Gamboa has pointed out, workers in Washington and Oregon received higher pay but worked more hours (fifteen hours a day in Washington in 1946). When Harry S. Truman lifted wage controls from agriculture in November 1946, farmers in the Northwest maintained the same war-time pay for braceros, paying them five cents less per hour than local workers in Walla Walla.³⁶

In 1947, the US government began negotiations with the states and Mexico to renew the Bracero Program. However, changes in the system made it undesirable to northwestern farmers. Contracts would now be arranged directly between the farmer and the worker, the price for recruiting and transporting the worker would be shouldered by the farmer, and Mexico would have final say on recruitment areas. Because northwestern transport costs were so high, farmers were simply unwilling to recruit and transport braceros. But they still desired cheap Mexican labor. Beginning

with efforts of the Amalgamated Sugar Company, northwestern farmers looked to Mexican-Americans from California to beef up their labor supply. After 1948, Mexican-Americans were recruited in large numbers from the Southwest, effectively ending the Bracero Program in the north.³⁷

After 1947, the Bracero Program was extended in the Southwest until 1964, but ended in the Northwest on schedule.³⁸ The Bracero Program introduced the largest number of Mexicans into the Pacific Northwest up to that point and was the basis of subsequent immigration to the region. About half a million undocumented workers also entered the country during the wartime economic expansion. Those undocumented workers were often detained by Immigration officials and made informal Bracero workers themselves. In Texas, undocumented immigrants were handed over to farmers to increase the labor supply.

More than 60 percent of Bracero workers returned with work visas to the United States in the following years. Many Mexican-American workers in the Northwest were former braceros. The program introduced the greatest number of Mexicans in the region's history and served as a springboard for post-war immigration. The Mexican-American community that struggled to assert itself as a cultural, social and political force in the decades to come took root in the era of the Bracero Program of the 1940s.

During the war, some Mexican-Americans came north from the Southwest as military personnel and ended up staying. Mexican-

Americans came to bases like Fort Lewis in Tacoma, Larsen Air Force Base in Moses Lake, Fairchild Air Force Base in Spokane, and Ephrata Air Terminal. There were also recruited labor and migrant workers drawn from the Rocky Mountain States who came to work sugar beets in the Northwest, large numbers settling in the Yakima Valley and Oregon's Willamette Valley. This wave, along with returning braceros, formed the basis for the subsequent Mexican- American community in the Northwest.³⁹

In the 1950s and 1960s, when Mexican-Americans began to regard themselves as a permanent community and the Northwest as a real home, there followed increase in births, school enrollments, and public cultural celebrations. In 1957, Mexican-Americans staged a Mexican style fiesta in Quincy, Washington. In the same decade, Pro Fiestas Mexicanas, based on a tradition of labor camp fiestas, was established in Woodburn, Oregon. The public nature of these celebrations spotlighted the very real cultural presence of Mexican-Americans in the northwestern United States.⁴⁰

Throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, Mexican-Americans established the first Chicano businesses in the Pacific Northwest, with entrepreneurial energy concentrated in Mexican specialty stores and restaurants. In 1954, Chester Espinoza opened the first Mexican restaurant in Seattle, followed by Hipolito Mendez's restaurant in Sunnyside, Washington the following year. Nineteen fifty-five also saw the opening of La Mexicana, a Mexican food distribution company owned by Rudy Martínez. In 1960, El Como, a restaurant that also produced tortillas for the

open market, was established in Spokane. The Benavides and Zavala families started up a series of Mexican of restaurants in Othello, Washington between 1964 and 1965. In 1952, Mary Gonzáles founded Tortillería Gonzáles, a tortilla distributor operating in Portland and Ontario, Oregon. In 1965, The Medina family created a Mexican import store, El México Lindo in Woodburn, Oregon.⁴¹

Spanish language radio programming also began in the 1950s. In 1951, Hermina Méndez (originally from Eagle Pass, Texas) convinced the radio station KREW in Sunnyside to produce a show. Because she had no experience as a DJ, Mexican-American musicians were invited to play live in the studio. For years, KREW offered the only Spanish language programming in the Yakima valley. In 1965, Alfredo Herrera and Nelly Jiménez started a part time show on KWRC in Woodburn, Oregon. Alfredo actually had DJ experience and played records on the air. Though only part time and usually on weekends, these shows provided a much needed connecting point for the Mexican-American community.⁴²

The post-war Mexican-American community was the first to establish a strong cultural presence in the Pacific Northwest. But despite more visibility in rural Washington and Oregon, Mexican-Americans remained politically powerless. Hard work, low wages, and the resulting poor health and living conditions kept them tired and disenfranchised. Despite radio shows and restaurants, the economics of farm labor and racism greatly impeded social and political progress. In this respect, the

Northwest resembled the southwestern United States at the time, only low numbers and a largely rural existence in Washington and Oregon worsened their situation. But then, the community had only just been established.

Notes

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- ¹ Oscar J. Martínez, *Mexican-Origin People in the United States: A Topical History* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2001), 7.
- ² Carlos S. Maldonado, "An Overview of the Mexicano/Chicano Presence in the Pacific Northwest," in *The Chicano Experience in the Northwest* ed. Carlos Maldonado and Gilberto Garcia (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 2001), 2.
- ³ Richard S. Slatta, "Chicanos in the Pacific Northwest: An Historical Overview of Oregon's Chicanos," *Aztlan* 6 (1975): 328.
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ Bob Boyd, "Vaqueros on the High Desert Rangeland," in *Nosotros: The Hispanic People of Oregon*, ed. Erasmo Gamboa and Carolyn M. Buan (Portland, Oregon: Oregon Council for the Humanities, 1995), 34.
- ⁶ Maldonado, "An Overview of the Mexicano/Chicano Presence in the Pacific Northwest," 4.
- ⁷ Ibid, 5.
- ⁸ Martínez, *Mexican-Origin People in the United States*, 7-8.
- ⁹ Ibid, 28.
- ¹⁰ Maldonado, "Mexicano/Chicano Workers in the Pacific Northwest," 101.
- ¹¹ Martínez, *Mexican-Origin People in the United States*, 95-96.
- ¹² Ibid, 96-97.
- ¹³ Paul S. Taylor, "Migratory Agricultural Workers on the Pacific Coast," *American Sociological Review* 3, (1938), 225-32.
- ¹⁴ United States Census Bureau, *2000 Washington Quick Facts 2000* [website] (2000). <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/53000.html>
- ¹⁵ The Yakama Nation is also referred to as the Yakima Nation. They live on a reservation situated on the Yakima River that covers 1.3 million acres.
- ¹⁶ Jesus Lemos, "The History of Chicano Political Involvement and the Organization Efforts of the United Farm Workers Union in the Yakima Valley, Washington" (MA. Thesis, University of Washington, 1974), 37.
- ¹⁷ Ibid, 37-38.
- ¹⁸ Ibid, 38-40.
- ¹⁹ Erasmo Gamboa, "The History of Chicano People and the Development of Agriculture in the Yakima Valley, Washington" (MA. Thesis, University of Washington, 1973), 73-75. Gamboa compiled the story of the IWW strikes from a series of articles published in the long defunct Yakima Daily Republic. He also discusses farm labor housing at length, using many articles from the same publication.
- ²⁰ Ibid, 76-78.
- ²¹ Ibid, 76-78.
- ²² Lemos, "The History of Chicano Political Involvement," 41-42.
- ²³ Gamboa, "The History of Chicano People and the Development of Agriculture in the Yakima Valley, Washington," 82-83.
- ²⁴ Ibid, 84-85.
- ²⁵ Ibid, 85-86.

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- ²⁶ Maldonado, "An Overview of the Mexicano/Chicano Presence in the Pacific Northwest," 9.
- ²⁷ Erasmo Gamboa, *Mexican Labor and World War Two: Braceros in the Pacific Northwest, 1942-1947*. (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1990), 36.
- ²⁸ Ernesto Galarza, *Merchants of Labor: The Mexican Bracero Story* (Santa Barbara: McNalley and Loftin, 1964), 53.
- ²⁹ Gamboa, *Braceros in the Pacific Northwest*, 61.
- ³⁰ Ibid, 78-80.
- ³¹ Ibid, 70-72.
- ³² Erasmo Gamboa, "The Bracero Program," in *Nosotros: The Hispanic People of Oregon* ed. Erasmo Gamboa and Carolyn M. Buan (Portland, Oregon: Oregon Council for the Humanities, 1995), 42-43.
- ³³ Gamboa, *Braceros in the Pacific Northwest*, 112-114.
- ³⁴ Ibid, 98-100.
- ³⁵ Ibid, 78-80.
- ³⁶ Ibid, 83-84.
- ³⁷ Ibid, 121-124.
- ³⁸ Martínez, *Mexican-Origin People in the United States: A Topical History*, 34.
- ³⁹ Maldonado, "An Overview of the Mexicano/Chicano Presence in the Pacific Northwest," 10-14.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid.
- ⁴¹ Ibid.
- ⁴² Ibid.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CHICANO MOVEMENT

The decade of the 1960s saw a rapid increase in the number of Mexican immigrants in the United States. In 1964, the final termination of the Bracero Program left countless Mexican nationals, used to regular employment in the United States, unemployed in Mexico. Hungry for work, large numbers of former Braceros and undocumented workers crossed the border and entered the United States.

In 1965, the national-origins system was terminated, abolishing racial quotas and establishing an annual ceiling of 170,000 immigrants from the western hemisphere. A provision of the 1965 legislation allowed immigrants already in the United States to bring their families north without restrictions.¹ Future amendments raised annual national quotas, encouraging large numbers of Mexicans to emigrate. With sharp increases in both legal and illegal immigration throughout the 1960s, Mexicans and Latinos became a more conspicuous presence inside the United States, and greater numbers resulted in increased political mobilization.

The 1960s and 1970s were a period of progressive political mobilization throughout the United States. The Civil Rights and

student movements of the 1960s pushed minority rights to the forefront of national political debate. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawed discrimination in the workplace and public facilities, and was followed by the Civil Rights Act of 1968, which effectively banned housing discrimination. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 strengthened the previous Voting Rights Acts and encouraged more political participation among previously disenfranchised minorities.

A social reform movement within the federal government also took root in this period. Responding to the grinding poverty plaguing many minorities and the European-American underclass, President Lyndon B. Johnson promoted a comprehensive series of federal social programs under the banner of the Great Society. One program, the War on Poverty, became instrumental in providing federal funding to Chicano activist groups.

Mexican-Americans were also swept up in the national movements for change. The disproportionate drafting of minorities for the war in Vietnam intensified the existing social struggle and many Chicanos were actively radicalized while participating in anti-war demonstrations. Increased militancy in the anti-war movement spread into the Chicano movement. In 1965, César Chávez and the United Farm Workers carried out aggressive strikes and boycotts in California to protest low wages and the treatment of farm workers, winning a series of political battles that inspired more militancy among Chicano activists. The farm worker struggle in California spilled over into other regions, including the

neighboring states in the Southwest. Activists in New Mexico staged invasions of federal land in 1967 to protest the seizure of those same lands by Anglo-Americans after the Mexican-American War.

Following the lead of the farm workers and other concurrent student movements, activists like Rodolfo "Corky" González established progressive student organizations. González inspired students to organize politically with his epic Chicano poem, "I am Joaquín." Student organizations like MECHA (*Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán*) and MAYO (Mexican American Youth Organization) fought to introduce Mexican-American studies into universities, and struggled to provide scholarships and special grant programs to poor Mexican-American students. Students staged walkouts in universities and high schools throughout the Southwest and Midwest to protest the poverty and oppression the Mexican-American community faced on a daily basis. *La Raza Unida* fought for electoral victories, financing and aiding political campaigns with Chicano candidates.²

The mood of the country was charged and young Mexican-Americans were stridently engaged with the national struggle for civil rights. The Pacific Northwest was no exception, and though small in numbers when compared to the Southwest, Mexican-Americans in Oregon and Washington became vocal about social and political injustices visited on their community. The Chicano rights movement, or *el movimiento*, may have started in the Southwest, but it quickly spread to the Northwest. For the first

time in their history, Mexican-Americans in the Northwest vocally protested their mistreatment and the widespread discrimination they faced in the fields and in university classrooms.

Despite their economic importance, Mexican-American and Mexican farm workers in Oregon were not paid well or housed sufficiently in the 1950s and 1960s. Mexican-Americans were by and large impoverished and overworked, occupying a bottom rung in rural Oregonian social life. Both Oregon and Washington had large farm worker labor surpluses in the post war period, allowing farmers to pay extremely low wages and lay off workers whenever they saw fit. Large numbers meant that each individual worker was disposable, since he or she could easily be replaced by another. The seasonal nature of agricultural work meant long periods of unemployment and the state and employers offered no compensation in the off season. In general, Mexican-American and Mexican workers were left to their own devices, without sufficient health care, education, or quality of life. They had become a permanent underclass in Oregon:

Although growers realized the importance of the migrant to the harvest, little was done to upgrade living conditions, regulate wages, or provide for the schooling of children because of the relative surplus of migrant labor, both Mexican and Chicano.³

Though the national Chicano movement was centered on the Southwest, Chicanos in Oregon certainly had much to complain about. The local and migrant workers of the Willamette and Treasure Valleys were among the poorest in the state. The

political response to this dire situation in the Willamette Valley began with Lyndon Johnson's Great Society programs, most importantly the Office of Economic Opportunity. The OEO provided funding for grassroots anti-poverty groups and was instrumental in the creation of the most important organization in the state, the Valley Migrant League (VML).⁴ The developing Civil Rights movement drove political mobilization. African-American activists and their allies developed new political strategies, and the more radical offshoot organizations like the Black Panthers and the increasingly radical Students for a Democratic Society provided new tactics more confrontational in nature.

In 1950, President Truman chose Portland as the site for the Commission of Migratory Labor in the Northwest. A meeting was arranged to address the need for enlarging and improving the pool of migrant labor in the region. Since no Mexican-American workers were actually asked to testify on their own behalf, the Oregon State Council of Churches provided testimony and requested health inspections for migrant labor camps. The Oregon State Council of Churches and the Catholic Church were the only major organizations in the state that voiced the needs of Mexican-Americans prior to 1960. In 1955, responding to Chicano Catholics, the Catholic Church created the Migrant Ministry and invited Father Ernesto Bravo to provide Spanish language services for the Mexican-American community.⁵

In 1964, members of the Migrant Ministry, lawmakers, church leaders, and farmers established the Valley Migrant League,

headquartered in Woodburn.⁶ After securing an initial \$700,000 grant from the OEO, the organization soon expanded to encompass seven counties in the Willamette Valley. Its first political action was supporting the United Farm Workers Organizational Committee's grape boycott.⁷ Because of its socially progressive nature, the VML suffered a series of setbacks. Since it was federally funded, the VML was unable to take on a direct political role, especially if that role appeared radical or dangerous to the state's agricultural needs.

Direct involvement with the organizing efforts of the United Farm Workers, for example, was strictly prohibited. The Federal government routinely audited and investigated the VML, wary of any involvement with the more radical organization. Control of the funding meant control of the organization. Farmers, mostly opposed to any improvement in wages or living conditions for their workers, provided their own resistance to the VML. Harassment and death threats were used to discourage involvement with the organizing activities of the UFW.

Despite these problems, the VML responded to the needs of the community with some concrete measures. Answering the need for improved housing for migrant workers, the VML created the Farmworker Housing program, providing funds through the Federal Housing Authority to workers for building their own homes. In 1969, Frank Martinez, an ex priest from New Mexico, was appointed Executive Director of the VML. Having an outsider status, Martinez was not paralyzed by local politics, and took the

organization in a more concerted political direction. In 1970, Chicanos wrested control of the VML's Control Board from European-American farmers, and increased Chicano representation from 51 percent to 100 percent.⁸

In 1969, Martinez led a Poor Peoples' March to Salem to address the needs of the impoverished. And in 1972, presidential candidate George McGovern was asked by the VML to visit a migrant labor camp to see first hand the living conditions of Mexican-American farm workers. César Chávez also made a historical visit to challenge Oregon's Senate Bill 677; if passed into law it would have favored farm employers in cases of collective bargaining. After visiting a VML school, Chávez "went to the state capitol in Salem and gave a powerful and moving speech against passage of (the bill). This type of political mobilization eventually defeated the bill."⁹

The VML also promoted improved health in the Chicano community. In 1971 the VML received federal funding to establish the *Salud de la Familia* Clinic in Woodburn, replacing the closed Oregon Migrant Health Program. The clinic served the needs of the poor regardless of ethnicity and frequently visited labor camps to disseminate important health information in Spanish. In 1979, some staff members left the clinic and established the Virginia Garcia Memorial Health Center in order to guarantee bilingual assistance after a young girl, Virginia Garcia, died of a treatable illness when her parents were unable to communicate with health workers. The VML also established the *Centro Chicano*

Cultural in 1972 to provide cultural enrichment through arts, crafts, typing, languages, vocational training, and dance classes.¹⁰

Other activists followed the VML's example and established their own social organizations. The Chicano United Farm Workers of Oregon, under the leadership of Tito Aguirre, staged a successful strike against Has Farms in Independence in 1970, but never became a major organization. Both the *Salud de la Familia* in Woodburn and Oregon Rural Opportunities provided health services to migrant workers after 1972.¹¹

Education was a serious impediment of Mexican-American social development in rural Oregon. The instruction provided by public schools was monolingual and culturally geared toward Anglo-American students. In 1961 Oregon educators attempted to address the needs of Spanish speaking migrant children with specialized programs, including fifteen remedial summer programs for 1,185 students. The 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act provided federal funding for a series of programs aimed at Mexican-American students in Oregon. The Migrant Education Service Center was established in Salem in 1973, and prepared sensitivity training materials for use in bicultural and bilingual educational settings. Eastern Oregon State College offered bilingual four-year secondary degrees and provided federal stipends to Spanish speaking students from farm worker backgrounds.¹²

In 1968, the Oregon Board of Higher Education created a "3 percent policy," calling for the admission of students who could not meet the basic academic requirements for college; these students were to comprise three percent of the total student body. The program introduced the first generation of Mexican American college students to the social sciences and these students often became politicized as a result. Politicized students formed regional chapters of national Chicano student groups like United Mexican American Students (UMAS) and supported political actions such as the grape boycott in Salem and Portland. The VML did its part, providing a scholarship program and creating the Chicano Indian Study Center of Oregon (CISCO) at what had been Adair Air Force Base.¹³

The *Colegio César Chávez* was founded in 1973 at Mount Angel College, a private Benedictine repertory that floundered on debts and mismanagement. Sonny Montes and Ernesto Lopez transformed the institution into a college for Chicanos and other ethnic minorities. In 1975 the *Colegio* received candidacy status and boasted 22 graduates, but a \$10 million debt to HUD led to foreclosure, and the school was closed in 1983.¹⁴ Despite its ultimate demise, the *Colegio* was an extremely ambitious and unprecedented effort to create a Chicano intellectual and professional class from farm workers and immigrants.

Oregon's Chicano activism was modest when compared to the large numbers and incisive militancy of the movement in California, but it still attempted to address the fundamental

problems of the community, namely civil rights, increased political participation, higher living standards, and educational reform issues. Organizations like the VML effectively used federal funding to open important political discussion about issues that European-American farmers would have preferred not to confront.

The fact that institutions like the VML and the Colegio César Chávez existed in Oregon at all was a substantial sign that the Mexican-American community was tired of the low status afforded them and that Oregon's Chicanos were prepared to fight for substantial improvements in their private and professional lives. *El Movimiento* was the driving force of the community throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s. Unfortunately, once the movement lost momentum, it became dreadfully apparent that despite considerable symbolic thunder and rhetorical lightening, not much had actually changed.

As in Oregon, the 1960s proved to be a very political decade in Washington, and saw the emergence of the first wave of real political organizations advocating on behalf of Mexican-Americans. Before the 1960s, recreational clubs and small mutual aid societies formed the backbone of social and political organization in the Yakima Valley and elsewhere in the state. The *Sociedad Mutualista* of Granger was a typical example, concerned primarily with social events, culturally conservative, and opposed to rocking the boat. With the Civil Rights movement and the emergence of the New Left, a more politicized and culturally

aware movement emerged in the Yakima Valley, the Columbia Basin, and the Puget Sound regions.

By the 1960s, Mexican-Americans accounted for 41 percent of Washington's migrant workforce, and a much greater percentage in the Yakima Valley. In 1966 the migrant birthrate was 27.7 percent versus 17.2 percent for Washington generally and 19.4 for the nation as a whole. Forty four percent of all migrant births in 1966 were Mexican-American, compared to 42 percent for European-Americans. Despite their prominent numbers, the average life expectancy of Mexican-American workers was 38 years compared to 70 for the general population in the Northwest and lower than other migrants by more than 10 years. The migrant death rate was 12 percent compared to 9.4 for the average northwestern population. According to the Consulting Services Corporation, which compiled the data for the Office of Economic Opportunity, the number of deaths was probably a little higher since many went unreported. The infant mortality rate was 36 percent due to a lack of healthcare or access to childcare.¹⁵

In 1965, the average yearly income for migrant families was \$2,300 compared to \$7,000 for all families and was far beneath the \$3,000 poverty line.¹⁶ Though workers were paid above the minimum wage requirement, they were unable to work year round and Mexican-American migrants, with 6.2 members, had significantly larger households than average Americans. Migrant housing had improved somewhat since the 1940s, but still did not meet federal or state standards. The Consulting Services Corporation found

that migrant camp housing suffered from poor ventilation, inadequate garbage storage, and poor drainage runoff. Federal regulations called for residential privacy, but most housing only provided a single room for the whole structure. At best, life in the migrant camps was uncomfortable and Spartan.¹⁷

Life was difficult for migrant workers in the Northwest. One family's experience provides a telling example. Tomás Villanueva's family arrived in Washington to cut asparagus in 1957 with the promise of \$30 per worker to cover their travel expenses. Though he was only a child at the time, Tomás recalls his first experience of work and camp life in Washington:

So we came to Washington. Again, we were put in this little shanty labor camp, which was just two miles North of Toppenish, between Toppenish and Wapato. This was one of some twenty-labor camps owned and operated by the company, I should mention that this labor camp was no different than the ones we lived in Ohio, Oregon, Idaho and Arizona. There was just a one room cabin with bunk beds and a wood stove for cooking, with cracks all over the walls. We had to carry the water for cooking from a central water faucet and had only one outside shower for men and one for women--there were about sixty workers living in this same labor camp. In those times Cal Pak was the major employer and owned their asparagus fields and processed their own asparagus. They employed around six hundred asparagus cutters and close to the same number in their processing plant. We finished the harvest, and of course we never saw the other thirty dollars per person, but we didn't want to just travel to cut asparagus and go back home. We tried to do as much as we could, following the crops like many other farm workers.¹⁸

Mexican-Americans were the largest minority group within the state of Washington. In 1970, there were 75,050 people with Spanish surnames in the state, concentrated in rural communities in the Yakima Valley. Despite their large numbers, Mexican

culture was regarded as slow and backwards, and quite often Mexican-Americans internalized the stereotype and believed it themselves.¹⁹ Before the 1970s, no schools offered bilingual education and Spanish was actively discouraged in the classroom. Because child labor was commonplace, Chicano students were unable to attend school regularly. Mexican-American migrants averaged 17 weeks of school in a 36 week school year, and an adult's average number of years of schooling was only 5.4, compared to 12 for the whole state.²⁰ Mexican-American teachers were discriminated against; one teacher had to file a complaint with the State Board Against Discrimination in order to receive a teaching position he had been unfairly denied.²¹

Mexican-Americans also lacked legal representation and were the victims of unpunished police brutality and exaggerated fines. When Jesus Lemos visited a courthouse in Toppenish in the early 1970s, he found that all forty defendants waiting there were Mexican, Filipino, or Indians, and noted that there were no Mexican police officers, lawyers, or judges in Yakima County.²² Before the 1970s, only the Catholic Church provided any real representation.

Before the explosion of Chicano activism, the Catholic Church had always been the primary Mexican-American advocacy group in Washington. In 1967, the *Cursillo* movement in the Yakima Valley promoted some social mobilization. But the main emphasis was rededication to the Church itself, and the movement was conservative, supporting the mainstream Anglo-American

establishment. Nevertheless, the Catholic Church did permit a Chicano political activist, Ricardo Garcia, to write a Spanish language political column in the Church newspaper, Our Times. Catholics also brought the Office of Economic Opportunity into play.²³

Another Mexican-American organization with an ambivalent relationship with the Chicano movement was the *Sociedad Mutalista*. Established in Granger in 1968, the *Sociedad* was primarily focused on community events. Culturally conservative and politically reactionary, the organization opposed direct political action, bilingual education, Chicano studies, and Chicano scholarships. According to Jesus Lemos, it was essentially a social club with membership dues. The *Sociedad* was critical of the Chicano movement, accusing it of reverse racism and intolerance. Still, one early political organization, the Yakima Valley Council of Community Action (YVCCA), took action seriously. Founded during Johnson's War on Poverty, the YVCCA created seven community centers in 1965 to offer education, employment, and self-help opportunities. In 1967, the so-called Green Amendment effectively placed farmers in control of the organization, politically killing it.²⁴

Many Washingtonian organizations that sought federal funding through the OEO were successful. No effective community leadership organization like the VML ever developed, but several ambitious organizations effectively filled the vacuum. In 1967, the United Farm Workers Co-Op in Toppenish was founded to promote

community development and ran a store where food could be purchased far below market prices. The Cooperative was established to express discontent with ineffectual anti-poverty programs, weakened by the intrusion of their funding sources. The Cooperative confronted the state government on issues ranging from neglect of health regulations at labor camps to farm worker health insurance. Farm workers were not covered by the state's industrial insurance laws. Tomás Villanueva, the Co-Op's main founder, discussed the purpose of the organization in a 2003 interview:

I started organizing an independent group. It was the United Farm Workers Co-op, and I used the name United Farm Workers Co-op, based on the farm workers in California. It was completely non-governmental. I convinced people to give \$5 into their shares and I got very successful. I got enough that would build a little store. It was very small to start with and we started running a sort of service defending people when growers did not pay their wages or when people got injured. We got people to get food stamps and those things... We all worked on it, and finished the roof and everything and we opened a brand-new store and most of the profits were used up to fight social injustice. To my knowledge there is no other organization other than the co-op that first assisted the first Mexican students to go to the University of Washington.²⁵

In 1968, the United Farm Workers Co-Op fought for workmen's compensation for farm workers. If a worker were injured, his only recourse was to sue the employer. But few attorneys would represent a Mexican-American worker against the growers. The Co-Op pushed for compensation during the Washington legislative session of that year, but was effectively shut out of the proceedings. The workers responded by holding thirteen hearings throughout the state. Farmers and workers clashed at these

meetings, the farmers insisting that the hard working Mexicans had it easy in Washington and were not in need of any compensation. The Co-Op and the workers secured compensation for full time workers who worked at least 150 hours for an employer; but since most migrants were unable to stay with one employer for that long, the victory was essentially nullified.²⁶

The United Farm Workers Co-Op also advocated the founding of the American Civil Liberties Union in Yakima in 1968. The ACLU provided legal counsel to Chicanos and from mid-July to September 1968 and handled more than 100 legal matters. It also distributed leaflets informing Mexican-Americans of their legal rights and protections. In 1970, the Co-op established the Farm Workers Family Health Center in Toppenish, but the intervention of farmers, including a letter to the Nixon administration, blocked federal funds.²⁷

Talk of labor organizing in the Yakima Valley had begun as early as 1966. The United Farm Workers Organizing Committee (UFWOC) encouraged Mexican-Americans in Sunnyside to organize, but Mexican-Americans in the Yakima Valley were unready. In December 1969 César Chávez visited the Yakima Valley, but farmers attempted to block the use of a Granger school for his speech. Over 200 Chicanos protested to the school board and Chávez was allowed to speak to some 800 workers who attended. The drive for organizing had not yet appeared in Washington, and Chicanos tended to place their support behind more modest, but realistic,

goals. For example, they supported the California grape boycott rather than agitating on their own behalf.

In 1970 students were able to use funds from the United Farm Workers Co-op to organize meetings in Granger for a new movement, *Del Año del Mexicano*, to promote political education and voter registration. They rejected War on Poverty programs and the so-called "Poverty Warriors" (employees of programs who benefited from the continuation of problems rather than their solution) who worked in them. Their goal was a "big push" that would move Chicanos into active social and political engagement and away from temporary solutions. Like many student organizers, Guadalupe Gamboa's work on a grape boycott at the University of Washington led to his organizing efforts in the Yakima Valley:

And so the Dale Van Pelt (UFWOC) came to us and told us about the boycott and asked for our help first of all in getting the grapes off of the campus and then picketing the neighboring community and we became totally involved because we all came from that background and started picketing the HUB (the Husky union building) where they sold grapes. It became a big issue, because the Young Republicans took up the cause against, and I remember we had big debates and a lot of coverage in The Daily, especially when we started the picketing. And this was a university just the prior year that had a lot of activity—a lot of marching and stuff—and the administration office was taken over. But we were very successful. We managed to get the grapes removed from campus and [the UW was] the first university in the country to do so. And then we started picketing out in the community. So that's how a lot of us became involved.²⁸

In 1970 student organizer Roberto Trevino met with hop worker Frank Salinas, who informed him that hop workers in Granger were planning on quitting their jobs due to low wages. Trevino suggested they should walk out and demand the higher wages

instead.²⁹ On Labor Day workers struck the Little Chief Hop Ranch in Granger. With the help of the cooperative school board, the ranch recruited high school students as strike breakers. The Western Washington Huelga Support Committee in Seattle provided food and support. Workers at Yakima Chief Ranch and Mabton Ranch soon joined the strike.³⁰

The chief complaint was low wages; the workers demanded \$2 an hour and the operator and part owner Dan Alexander would only agree to an increase from \$1.55 per hour to \$1.70. The hops were near ripening and the workers knew that the ranches had limited time to negotiate. At Strauss Ranch David Strauss faced a walkout and quickly gave into worker demands, providing two breaks, \$2 an hour, and guaranteed union elections so workers could choose who they wanted to represent them.³¹

Following this early success, migrant workers staged walkouts on eighteen ranches over the next three days. Some farmers responded quickly, others delayed action or intimidated workers. A few farmers put relatives and friends, who were generally less productive, to work.³² Thirteen ranches ultimately consented to new worker contracts. Unfortunately, most of these contracts were only good for a year and the wage increases were arbitrarily set at \$2/hour without factoring in long term considerations. Resistance to worker demands sometimes escalated to armed confrontations, though they were one sided. Guadalupe Gomboa recalled that,

At one place, we were actually met by armed foremen and relatives of the grower. It was called the Patnode Ranch where we had struck. It was a joint operation where they were processing the hops for one employer, so we struck while that employer's hops were being processed, then got the wages up. And then when the other one started, we went back, but by that time they knew we were coming, so they had five or six people with shotguns pointed at the workers, actually, and when we came up they threw us out and made comments about, "If you don't get out, there's gonna be some dead beaners on the road," and we eventually ended up filing a lawsuit against the company and managed to actually get an injunction, which is very unheard of at the local court level. It was called Garza v. Patnode, which established pretty much that workers had the right to organize and bargain collectively, and that was big news and there's a lot of newspaper articles around that.³³

According to Jesus Lemos, the strikes were premature; they were sudden and no follow up plan had been arranged to continue the organizing momentum. The movement had no leadership or overarching agenda, and worse, wasted the element of surprise. The farmers were now aware that Chicano workers were moving toward organizing and knew that the United Farm Workers was the organization they would likely turn to. Characterized as a "revolutionary social movement" by the Washington Asparagus Growers Association, the UFW was immediately and effectively identified as a threat in the Yakima Valley.³⁴

But, according to Lemos, the strikes did have some positive results. Solidarity among Mexican American workers in the Yakima Valley was achieved, just as the wealth and power and the farmers had been exposed. The union movement was now seen as the best road to higher wages, job security, personal dignity, and better working conditions. The strikes also exposed the racism of many farmers. Farmers sometimes resorted to the "lazy wetback"

stereotype now that the Mexican-Americans seemed unwilling to work for the old wage.³⁵ The strikes might not have created a strong labor movement overnight, but they served the important purpose of motivating the migrant workers to think socially and politically about their plight.

On an organizational level it quickly became apparent that the movement needed leadership and the workers needed representation. Roberto Trevino and Guadalupe Gamboa, both students at the University Of Washington, decided to stay on as leaders. On September 19, 1970, the first union election was held at Little Chief Ranch, followed by the second at Mabton on September 21. The UFWOC (AFL-CIO) was elected to represent the workers by 109-105 votes. In January 1971 Trevino and Gamboa traveled to California to learn how to organize under Chávez's direct guidance of.³⁶

During the same period other political organizations were formed in Washington to address the needs of the Mexican-American community. The Mexican American Federation first appeared in 1967 and focused on the political empowerment of Chicanos in Washington. The organization split Washington into three main districts, Puget Sound, Bellingham-Lynden, and the Yakima Valley. While organizers in the Puget Sound area concentrated their energy on employing and placing Mexican-American workers who gravitated toward the urban centers in the western part of the state, organizers in Yakima concentrated on voter registration and political education. In 1968, the Federation financed an

unsuccessful campaign for Country Commissioner and initiated a lawsuit to terminate the English literacy requirement for Washington. It also pressured the Yakima auditor to increase the number of Spanish speaking registrars.³⁷

In the Columbia basin, a few notable organizations were established in the 1960s. The Spanish American Club in Othello was founded in 1964, providing seasonal dances and other social events. In the fall of 1968, it ran voter registrations drives and worked with Washington State Migrant Education to establish a community center at the Othello Labor Camp. The Latin American Association, established in Quincy in 1964, promoted an end to religious, economic, and social discrimination through fund raising, fiestas, education, and recreational youth camps. In 1967, the Progressive League of Mexican-Americans spread throughout the Columbia region, fighting for access to licensing, health, and other essential agencies that discriminated against Mexican-Americans.³⁸

According to Gilberto García, it was the increased awareness of social inequalities and the contradictions of the Vietnam War among Mexican American students that gave birth to the Chicano student movement after 1968. Many students were from rural areas in California and so knew the living and working conditions of migrant farm workers and were aware of the discrimination and widespread racism Mexican-Americans faced throughout the country and in Washington. Students played an extremely important

function in political mobilization within the broader Chicano movement.³⁹

In 1968 a regional chapter of UMAS (United Mexican American Students) was established, exercising wide political influence on students in the Yakima Valley. Originally founded at the University of Southern California, UMAS was established at the University of Washington by Chicano students who had entered college for the first time under the Special Education Program. Most of these students were recruited from the Yakima Valley by members of the Black Student Union (BSU).⁴⁰ Cut adrift in Seattle without a strong community base (they only comprised 0.19 percent of the student body in 1968), these students eventually coalesced. In a recent interview, Guadalupe Gamboa recounted his experience as a student at the University of Washington:

I went to the University of Washington in '67, in the winter of 1967, it was a real cultural shock for me, because I had come from a small town where there were a lot of farm workers and [where it was] rural and very dry—to come to the big city in Seattle where it was all wet and it was all Anglo. At the University of Washington I was one of among five Latino students that I knew from all [over] the state. You had de facto segregation, and to make a long story short, I got involved with the Black students, who at that time [numbered] less than thirty, and they were the vanguard, agitating and leading and organizing drives that eventually forced the University of Washington, with the help of a lot of white students, to open up and start the recruiting program. [It] became the first four-year institution in the state of Washington to start an affirmative action minority affairs [recruiting] office and to open up the doors somewhat. So the first year I was here I was pretty lonely; it was just myself, basically. By the next year, thanks largely through the efforts of the Black Student Union, about twenty-eight or so Latino students, all from farm worker backgrounds, were recruited, and started at the University of Washington.⁴¹

UMAS created the Chicano Student Conference in Toppenish and fought to establish Chicano organizations within high schools. In 1969, they sought to politicize the farm workers movement and successfully forced the University of Washington to stop buying boycotted grapes.

The grape boycott had started in California in 1968 when the Guimarra Vineyards Corporation refused to allow the United Farm Workers to organize their workers. The company attempted to sell its grapes under other cooperative brand names, but the ruse was discovered. After the tactic was exposed, the boycott was expanded to include all table grapes. A UFWOC organizer, Dale Van Pelt, traveled to the University of Washington in Seattle to promote the California boycott to students. Initially, the campus YMCA took up the cause. After the A&P grocery stores stopped carrying grapes, the YMCA took the fight to the Campus Food Services, which refused to honor the boycott. On October 8, 1968, the student residence halls voted in favor of the boycott. Meanwhile, students launched a fast to protest Albertsons' refusal to stop carrying grapes.⁴²

After clashes between the SDS and Young Republicans over the sale of grapes in the Husky Union Building (HUB) on campus, UMAS became actively involved with the boycott and quickly assumed control of it. On January 21, 1969, UMAS president Jesus Lemos and minister of education Guadalupe Gamboa held a gathering promoting the boycott. Later that day, the HUB Advisory Board convened on the matter and advised the University administration

to stop the sale of grapes to students. The administration rejected the Advisory Board's recommendation.⁴³

UMAS brought a wide array of progressive student organizations together into a single boycott coalition and made Guadalupe Gamboa's cousin Erasmo their leader. The coalition created picket lines in front of the cafeteria and the Husky Den in the HUB, passing out food to students to prevent their crossing the line. Despite interference from Young Republicans, the students achieved their goal, with sales dropping 18 percent in the Husky Den and 24 percent in the cafeteria. On February 17, the administration complied with student demands and terminated grape sales. A new organization, UMAS effectively channeled the energy of numerous organizations (YMCA, BSU, SDS, the Young Socialist Alliance, and the Black and White Concern) towards a single political goal. Later, UMAS became MECHA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan) and continued working for Mexican-Americans within the university.⁴⁴

The University of Washington also became the headquarters of the Brown Berets in 1968. The Brown Berets were originally established in Los Angeles. The look of the organization was radical, with militant garb and nationalist rhetoric, but their political activities were generally lawful. Al Meza and Angie Grajeda began a Yakima branch in 1969, but the Seattle branch remained the more important, more active group. In 1970 the Berets ran a "Food for Peace" program in the Yakima Valley, providing food to poor Mexican-American families throughout the

winter. They also raised money for a legal defense fund to aid Chicanos arrested as a result of social and political confrontation.⁴⁵

MASA, or the Mexican American Students Association, was created in 1969 at Washington State and Yakima Valley Community College. At Yakima Valley, the students entered into discussion with the administration and successfully introduced ethnic studies into the Social Sciences department. In early 1970 MASA presented an Awareness Symposium. In 1971 MASA changed its name to MECHA (*Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan*) and was brought into line with the national Chicano student movement.⁴⁶

In 1972 MECHA held its first statewide conference with 165 students from throughout the state in attendance. The conference examined Chicano identity, the necessity of public education, and the constitutional rights of Mexican-Americans. Students from Evergreen State College and Washington State University created a board for directing MECHA activities throughout Washington. Students at Evergreen successfully pressured the college to approve a Chicano Studies program in November 1971. From 1972 to 1973 MECHA accused the Yakima Valley Community College's administration of neglect and discrimination, leading to a series of clashes that culminated in the occupation of a school building by African American and Chicano students in January 1973.⁴⁷

In the fall of 1972, the *Centro de la Raza* (The Center of the People) was established in a vacant school building on Beacon Hill in Seattle. When adult education and Basic English classes

were terminated at South Seattle Community College, Latino students and activists occupied the closed Beacon Hill School and peacefully demanded control of the facilities for a reasonable rent. After a fund raising event for victims of the 1972 Nicaraguan earthquake, the lease for the building was extended for five years.⁴⁸

Once the location was secured, political allies of different racial and social backgrounds worked together to make the *Centro de la Raza* a true community center. The center provided needed visibility to the small and widely dispersed Mexican-American community in Seattle. The *Centro* was and still is a multi-service community organization that provides educational, cultural, and social services regardless of ethnicity.⁴⁹ It is a lasting reminder of a period of optimistic and assertive political struggle, an era that formed the basis of all subsequent struggles in the Mexican-American community, the era of *el movimiento* and Chicano Rights.

El movimiento was a high watermark for grassroots activism and direct action in the Pacific Northwest. Increased immigration came at a time when the nation was embroiled in the political struggle for civil rights, and Mexicans long accustomed to playing the passive role of a laboring class found common cause with African-Americans and other minority groups who were treated with similar contempt. The fight for representation and labor rights was intensified by the war in Vietnam and a radicalized student movement.

Lyndon Johnson's Great Society programs provided a funding source for new civil rights organizations, including the Valley Migrant League in Oregon. The VML addressed the needs of farm workers, especially those pertaining to housing and health care. In 1970, Mexican-Americans were able to gain control of the leadership board, but their federal funding source kept them from working with the United Farm Workers to organize workers in the state. The VML inspired other organizations, like the *Salud de la Familia*, to provide health care to poor and uninsured Mexican-Americans.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, educators in Oregon worked to provide better educational opportunities for the Mexican-American community, creating remedial summer programs in 1961 and federally funded statewide educational programs in 1965. The 1968 "three percent policy" admitted Mexicans into state colleges and universities, creating the first wave of politicized Chicano students. These students formed local chapters of national student groups, like UMAS, and supported the California grape boycott. In 1973, the *Colegio César Chávez* provided degree programs for Chicano students and ultimately boasted 22 graduates before closing in 1983.

In Washington, politicized students at the University of Washington were integrally involved in the first efforts to organize farm workers and played a central role in bringing the UFW's grape boycott to the state. *Del Año del Mexicano* sought to organize workers, and in 1970 students and workers unleashed a

series of strikes for higher wages on hop farms. The farm workers forced an immediate increase in wages and quickly affiliated with the United Farm Workers. However, the lack of a long term strategy and strong resistance from growers killed their momentum and the movement floundered.

Students were far more successful supporting the UFW grape boycott at the University of Washington. In 1968, the local UMAS chapter took on a leadership role in the boycott and successfully forced the university to ban the sale of grapes. The University of Washington also became the headquarters of the more militant Brown Berets. Other Mexican-American student organizations emerged throughout the state's colleges and universities, eventually coalescing into MECHA.

Non-student organizations, like the labor oriented United Farm Workers Co-op and the urban *Centro de la Raza* provided health care, social programs and community centers for the Mexican-American community. The Co-op confronted the state on the absence of health insurance, workmen's compensation, and worker safety regulations. In 1968, the Co-op established an ACLU headquarters in Yakima, and later provided meeting spaces for the *Del Año del Mexicano* organizers. Established in 1972 in an occupied building on Beacon Hill, *Centro de la Raza* provided a multi-use community center for Seattle's Mexican-American community.

Both states confronted similar issues: rural poverty, under representation, a lack of healthcare, poor living conditions, exploitive work, low pay, and even lower levels of education.

Oregon's Chicano movement was more unified and driven by a handful of large community organizations like the VML. Washington's movement was more disparate, with several actors performing their own functions, whether providing funding, organizing labor, or fighting for rights on campus or in the community. Many organizations in the Northwest are still active in one form or another.

Unfortunately, few substantive problems were satisfactorily resolved in either state, and the same issues would continue to haunt the Mexican-American community well into the coming decades. The labor movement was swept under the rug almost as soon as it had arrived and failed to transform the Hop strikes into a sustained labor movement. Anti-poverty programs, lacking the support of the state governments, did not effectively eliminate the causes of poverty. The grape boycott was a success at the University of Washington, but was ultimately only a gesture of solidarity with California's workers and not a victory for laborers in the state.

By 1980, federal funding had disappeared and the Chicano movement had largely given way to Hispanic Commissions designed to provide policy advice and develop initiatives within the framework of the state governments. Mainstream non-profit organizations replaced the grassroots approach of the student and farm worker activists. A more sophisticated union movement, though one rooted in the work of the 1970s, replaced the more chaotic, haphazard approach of the student organizers. As the

nation moved more to the right, the left wing Chicano movement slid towards the center and agitation was largely replaced by the politics of compromise. Negotiation supplanted militancy.

El Movimiento was a one time event, a great momentous upsurge of political action that disappeared soon after it emerged. The struggle was far from finished, but the radical, youthful moment was over and pragmatism soon set in. Unfortunately, the causes of *el Movimiento* were not sufficiently addressed and questions of social injustice remained. Positive changes are possible, but only with the benevolent intervention of the state, the solidarity of the larger community, and the efforts of employers. A movement without outside support is doomed to collapse, and *el Movimiento* collapsed when its momentous challenge went unanswered by the mainstream. Immigration would greatly complicate the fallout.

Whatever its failures, it was an important and exciting period in the Mexican-American political struggle. Empowered by large scale social mobilization throughout the nation, the community embraced the possibility of positive, substantive, and lasting change. Though there were few overwhelming successes, the emboldened political movement helped create a number of organizations and social networks which could continue to fight for Mexicans and Latinos even as the political landscape shifted to the right and away from social programs. Since the 1960s, Mexican-Americans have had steady, if meager, representation in

northwestern politics. That presence began in the Chicano rights era.

Notes

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⁶ Slatta, "Chicanos in the Pacific Northwest: An Historical Overview of Oregon's Chicanos," 330.

⁷ Gamboa, "El Movimiento: Oregon's Mexican-American Civil Rights Movement," 53.

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¹³ Ibid, 333.

¹⁴ Gamboa, "El Movimiento: Oregon's Mexican-American Civil Rights Movement."

¹⁵ Consulting Services Corporation, "An Analysis of Migrant Agricultural Workers in Washington State," in *Migrant Farm Workers in the State of Washington* (Seattle, Washington: Office of Economic Opportunity, 1966), 10-13.

¹⁶ Jesus Lemos, "The History of Chicano Political Involvement and the Organization Efforts of the United Farm Workers Union in the Yakima Valley, Washington" (MA. Thesis, University of Washington, 1974), 45.

¹⁷ "Migrant Agricultural Workers in Washington State," 18-22.

¹⁸ Anne O'Neill and Sharon Walker, *Interview with Tomás Villanueva* [Interview] (Harry Bridges Center for Labor Studies website, June 7, 2004); available from http://depts.washington.edu/pcls/ufw/tomas_villanueva.htm.

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²⁰ "Migrant Agricultural Workers in Washington State," 15-16.

²¹ Gamboa, "The History of Chicano People and the Development of Agriculture in the Yakima Valley, Washington," 95.

²² Lemos, "The History of Chicano Political Involvement," 46.

²³ Ibid, 49-53.

²⁴ Ibid, 53.

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- ²⁵ Villanueva Interview.
- ²⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁷ Lemos, "The History of Chicano Political Involvement," 54.
- ²⁸ Anne O'Neill, *An Interview with Lawyer and UFW Organizer Guadalupe Gamboa* [PDF] (Harry Bridges Center for Labor Studies website, April 9, 2003); available from <http://depts.washington.edu/pcls/ufw/Lupe%20Gamboa.pdf#search=%22guadalupe%20gamboa%20interview%22>, 7.
- ²⁹ Lemos, "The History of Chicano Political Involvement," 63-64.
- ³⁰ *Yakima Herald-Republic*, September 6, 1970.
- ³¹ Ibid.
- ³² Ibid.
- ³³ Gamboa Interview, 9.
- ³⁴ *Yakima-Herald Republic*, September 30, 1971.
- ³⁵ Lemos, "The History of Chicano Political Involvement," 77-78.
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- ³⁸ Ibid.
- ³⁹ Ibid, 75.
- ⁴⁰ Walt Crowley, *Rites of Passage: A Memoir of Sixties Seattle* (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 1995), 255.
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- ⁴⁴ Ibid.
- ⁴⁵ Lemos, "The History of Chicano Political Involvement," 57-58.
- ⁴⁶ García, "Organizational Activity and Political Empowerment," 75-76.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid.
- ⁴⁸ Trevor Griffey, *Interview with Roberto Maestas* [Interview] (Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project, University of Washington website, February 22, 2005); available from <http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/maestas.htm>.
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CHAPTER THREE

THE 1980s AND THE IRCA

In the late 1970s and early 1980s the United States moved in a socially and politically conservative direction. The election of Ronald Reagan to the White House symbolically closed the door on the radical and militant political movements of the 1960s. The painful urgency of the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights movement dissipated in the malaise of the late 1970s, and Reagan provided a welcomed antidote to the cultural and political wars that formed the center of political discourse in the preceding decades with a sunny, if vapid, political style. Organizations on the left were forced to fight a defensive war in the 1980s against neo-conservatives and market libertarians who had little interest in the needs of the poor or minorities. The era of César Chávez and Chicano Rights effectively ended in the ideological void of the Reagan era.

The strategy of protest and direct action gave way to the work of mainstream governmental and non-governmental organizations. By the late 1970s, the youthful energy of the 1960s had been replaced by new political realism; except for some unruly union activity, political bargaining and pragmatism became the new mainstays of activism in the Pacific Northwest. Chicano

organizations became professional and those once called "poverty warriors" were now regarded as the legitimate political face of the community. On the state level, Mexican-Americans were provided with state appointments on advisory boards, where they could appeal to the state governments directly. By the 1980s, the salad days of Chicano idealism had largely come to an end. Despite a more mainstream polish on the community's surface, many of the problems faced by Mexican-Americans, especially farm workers, continued unabated.

Due to increased immigration and settlement following the Bracero Program, the Mexican-American population grew substantially between 1970 and 1980. Oregon and Washington's Hispanic population's growth rate was 76.5 percent, compared to the general population's growth rate of 19 percent. In 1969, the census counted approximately 105,311 people with Spanish surnames in Oregon and Washington. In 1979, when respondents were provided the option of claiming Spanish ancestry, the census counted 185,863 Hispanics. In 1980, 1.9% of Oregon's population identified as Hispanic, as did 3.0% of Washington's. While some undocumented workers were counted, one can reasonably conclude that many were not.¹

The largest Mexican-American populations were concentrated in the Yakima Valley in Washington and the Willamette Valley in Oregon. Mexicans made up 36 percent of Sunnyside, Washington's population, 54.3 percent of Granger's, and 65.4 percent of Mabton's. In Oregon, Mexicans made up 17.1 percent of Ontario's

population, 18.3 percent of Woodburn's, and 40.2 percent of Nyssa's. The 1980 census revealed the momentous growth that has characterized the Mexican-American community in the Pacific Northwest and the country as a whole since the 1970s. Mexican families are generally larger and their fertility rates substantially higher than other ethnic groups in the United States.²

Despite continued growth and increased mainstream political recognition, real political representation and social mobility did not develop in tandem with the rising population. Twenty six percent of Hispanic households earned less than \$10,000 a year in Oregon, and only 6 percent earned more than \$35,000 a year compared to 15 percent of European-Americans. In Washington, 32 percent of Hispanics made under \$10,000, while only 8.2 percent made over \$35,000 compared to 19 percent of European-Americans. Most Mexican-Americans worked as farm laborers or in the service industry and many were recent immigrants without the education or training necessary to earn higher incomes.³

In an article published in 1984, Richard Slatta and Maxine Atkinson identified a troubling discrepancy in the census report: Hispanic incomes had actually fallen relative to European-American incomes from 1970 to 1980. For example, in Oregon the median income of Hispanics was 85 percent of European-American incomes in 1970. By 1980, the percentage had fallen to 79 percent. In Washington, the percentage fell from 82 percent to 71. Despite the work of the Chicano movement, Mexican-Americans

saw a reduction in pay and in some cases living standards relative to the majority of the Northwest's population.⁴

Twenty-one percent of Hispanic individuals in Oregon and 22 percent in Washington reported incomes below the poverty line, or less than \$3,774. Lower incomes and larger families meant more people in smaller spaces. In Washington, Hispanic households averaged 3 people living in 4.4 rooms compared to 2.3 in 5.3 for average residents. Education, a major component in political empowerment, remained elusive. Forty percent of Hispanic males aged 20 to 49 dropped out of high school in Washington and Oregon. Fifty percent of Hispanic women did as well, some presumably to raise children.⁵

It was in this condition that Mexican-Americans entered the 1980s, the decade of Reaganomics and the first significant challenges to the political victories of the left in the 1960s and 1970s. Oregon and Washington continued to maintain a laissez-faire approach to Mexican-Americans, neither overly enthused about inviting them into political power nor determined to keep them out. The farmers, for their part, wanted to maintain the status quo: cheap surplus labor and social stability conducive to large scale agriculture. With apathetic state governments and an economic incentive to exploit Mexican labor, Mexicans and Mexican-Americans were left to their own devices. But the potential for mass political empowerment seemed to lurk in the growing demographics. In some voting districts, Mexicans

were a large minority. It remained to be seen whether greater numbers would translate into greater political power.

By the early 1980s, representation had been limited to the Hispanic Commissions. The Hispanic Commissions were actually established in the late 1960s and early 1970s, but were greatly limited in scope and power. In December 1969, Oregon Governor Tom McCall created the Governor's Commission on Hispanic Affairs. The Commission had fifteen members representing the Willamette Valley and eastern Oregon, and was created to advise the Governor on issues affecting the community. Unfortunately, a series of political battles led to the first Commission being abolished in 1971. The Commission had requested \$25,000 for establishing a governing body for its activities, but was denied the funding.⁶

In 1979, ten years after the first Commission was established, Governor Vic Atiyeh created two commissions, one for African Americans and the other for Latinos. These Commissions were established to offer policy advice on issues ranging from unemployment, education and job training, racism, community health, police harassment, housing and job discrimination and economic development, to the elderly. The Latino Commission received a budget of \$131,456 from 1981 to 1983. From 1983 to 1985, it received \$32,000, and a request for more funding was denied. From 1985 to 1987, the Commission received a budget of \$78,000. During this period, the Commission supported affirmative action bills and anti-discrimination laws. In 1987,

the Commission criticized Governor Neil Goldschmidt for not appointing Latinos to public office.

The Governor's Commission of Mexican American Affairs was established in Washington in 1971 to provide policy advice for all branches of the state government. Representatives were drawn from different social and economic backgrounds and met to discuss issues on a bi-monthly basis. In 1987, it was renamed the Commission of Hispanic Affairs and tackled issues affecting the whole Latino community. A 1987-1989 Biennial Plan addressed issues relating to access to governmental services, education, economic development, employment, farm worker housing, and immigration. The Latino Commission was an appointed body and not rooted in the community, but it still provided some form of representation.⁷

The Hispanic Commissions, while not solving serious problems afflicting Mexican-Americans and Latinos overnight, provided the important symbolic function of legitimizing the community and providing a voice within the government. Only one Hispanic politician, Representative Rocky Barilla, served in the Oregon state legislature in the 1980s. Washington's first Latina legislator, Margarita Prentice, was elected to the State House of Representatives in 1988.

Overall, representation was limited to a very select group of Northwestern legislators throughout the decade. In the end, the most important social and political development for Mexicans in the 1980s did not occur at the state level, but was introduced by

the federal government in the form of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act.

The United States has a long history of anti-immigration sentiment, often reaching its apogee in times of economic duress. The Great Depression, for example, led to the mass expulsion of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans to Mexico, even those who had lived their entire lives in the United States. As the Mexican-American population grew, especially in the post-war years, numbers began to inspire xenophobia. The increasing numbers of undocumented workers that had been trickling into the country after the Bracero Program became a popular scourge in American political culture, despite their economic necessity. The result was increased restrictionism. Two federal bills in the early 1970s called for strict jail sentences for employers who hired illegal immigrants, but neither was passed by Congress.

The end result of the immigration discussion of the 1970s was the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act. The IRCA strengthened the Immigration and Naturalization Service and levied strict fines on employers who hired undocumented workers. The bill provided amnesty for anyone who had lived in the United States since January 1, 1982. After the Act's passage, 2.7 million Mexicans legalized their status, greatly enlarging the United States' Latino population.⁸ Oregon and Washington both experienced a surge in the number of legal residents and farm workers in both states were saddled with a series of complications as a result. Despite the tough rhetoric of the

Immigration Reform and Control Act, illegal immigration has continued in both states. Economic necessity demands it.

The IRCA, while mainly concerned with cracking down on undocumented workers, came with a series of provisions protecting the agricultural labor supply. The first provided amnesty for undocumented workers who had been in the country since January 1, 1982. These workers could apply for legal resident status and eventually citizenship. The second created the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAW), granting legal residency to seasonal workers who worked for over two years in agriculture and permanent residency after three years. Workers were required to apply for SAW status before November 30, 1988.⁹

The third provision created a Guest Worker program, providing special visas when growers faced labor shortages. The fourth provision created the Replenishment Agricultural Workers Program (RAW) and made Guest Worker residency contingent on three years (90 weeks per year) of work and citizenship contingent on five years. The fifth provision placed sanctions on the employer for hiring undocumented workers with fines ranging from \$250 to \$10,000 per worker. In order to protect workers, a sixth anti-discrimination provision made it illegal to deny employment based on a foreign appearance. Finally, a Commission on Agricultural Workers was created to observe the economic impact of the IRCA on the states and provide aid packages for states that required it.¹⁰

During the 1987 harvest season, confusion among farmers and undocumented Mexican workers regarding the Immigration Reform and

Control Act resulted in a labor shortage in Oregon. Both groups were unsure what their rights were under the law. Undocumented workers feared exposing themselves to forces like the INS, which they were in the habit of avoiding. Farmers feared hiring undocumented workers because of the sanctions placed on them. The labor shortage meant spoilage and financial losses for farmers; 18 to 20 million pounds of strawberries went to waste in the first harvest of the season. In order to encourage growers to hire workers as needed, Governor Neil Goldschmidt informed the growers that the sanctions were not yet in effect.¹¹

In 1988 Oregon faced the opposite extreme: too many workers. The overall acreage had been reduced since the last year because of the labor shortage, and when workers arrived in February their numbers exceeded requirements. Since sanctions would not go into effect until December and the deadline for amnesty for SAW workers was November 30, workers felt confident enough to arrive in large numbers. Coyotes, opportunists who made immigrant smuggling and recruitment an underground business, promised work and charged unwary immigrants for fake documents and transport north. In the Willamette Valley, thousands of Mexican workers were without jobs, and more southwestern based migrants were still expected to arrive. State social services were overwhelmed.¹²

Inadequate migrant housing was already an issue in Oregon, but the surplus workers exacerbated the problem. Mexican workers lived in cars, barns, coops, and overcrowded apartments. The

search for jobs was complicated by uncompleted paper work and debts owed to Coyotes. Mexican workers were simply overwhelmed by the hurdles they faced on administrative and personal levels. In order to tackle the problem, Governor Goldschmidt and Department of Human Resources director Kevin Concannon requested \$500,000 from the legislature's emergency board and established the Governor's Commission on Agricultural Labor that fall. The Oregon Legislative Assembly responded by passing a series of crucial bills.¹³

Senate Bill 731 created more provisions for farm labor contracting. It required that contractors provide a handwritten document describing in specific detail what they were required to offer to the workers, written in Spanish if necessary. In the event of an early harvest, contractors were now required to furnish food and shelter to the worker and transport costs for travel back home if a job were not offered within thirty days. Employers that used unlicensed contractors faced fines up to \$2,000; payments were placed in a Housing Development Account and used by the Housing Agency to address the shortage. The bill made contractors and coyotes responsible for the immigrants they promised work.

Senate Bill 732 was passed to address labor camp housing since overcrowding and substandard living conditions were now grossly apparent. Under the bill, labor camps were required to register with the Bureau of Labor and Industries. Camp operators were required to maintain bonds of \$15,000 to pay fines levied for

non-compliance. All camps had to be licensed to operate and licenses were granted only if the camp passed health and safety inspections. Operators were forbidden to evict workers based on wage or labor disputes. If the camps failed to provide adequate shelter, alternative housing had to be offered by the camp operator. Workers were permitted to file complaints against operators to prevent abuses. By toughening standards, the law introduced much needed oversight for worker housing.

A companion bill, 733, opened the camps to outside organizations. Before its passage only government officials, doctors and educators could enter the camps, but now invited guests, religious groups, and non-profit organizations financed in part by the state could enter. And for the first time, unlimited access to public phones was required by law. Senate Bill 734 offered tax credits to private developers who worked on housing rehabilitation projects, paying for 50 percent of the costs per year. It required that these housing projects conform to public health and building code standards. To ensure that the new regulations and standards were upheld throughout the state, Senate Bill 735 reasserted the rights of workers and the economic importance of their labor, and declared that every part of the state should uphold the new standards.¹⁴

Washington also suffered its own initial labor shortage and eventual overcrowding problems in the wake of the IRCA. Housing became a serious problem in Washington in the 1990s and despite the passage of housing reforms in 1990, serious overcrowding and

unsanitary living conditions persisted. In the spring of 1987 undocumented workers generally avoided applying for amnesty for fear of the INS. But by early May, many Mexicans felt sufficiently safe to come out in large numbers. As a result, INS paperwork lagged and administrative offices frequently ran out of forms, complicating the legalization process.¹⁵ Over 25,552 undocumented workers ultimately applied for amnesty under the seasonal and guest worker provisions.¹⁶

Despite these numbers, Washington still had to contend with an initial labor shortage. As in Oregon, the IRCA was met with confusion by both farmers and workers, who worried about fines and crackdowns by immigration officials. Additionally, migrant workers were concentrated in California in 1987 due to an early harvest. In response to Washington's labor shortage, the federal government extended the deadline for legalizing worker status to June 26, 1987. As the year progressed, farmers found that they were able to make do with the number of workers available. The labor shortage was temporary and never became a serious crisis.¹⁷

In November 1988, the final citizenship deadline produced a flurry of applications, overwhelming organizations like the *Centro Campesino* with eighty applications a day, more than half of them from Yakima. Fraud was widespread and forged documents slowed the application process, adversely affecting legitimate applicants who were unable to register in time. In the same month, despite the flood of applicants, farmers expressed fears of a continued labor shortage. Farmers claimed that the 24,800

previously undocumented workers would be reluctant to do farm work now that they were citizens and theoretically permitted to seek other jobs. Farmers also claimed that the increase of the state minimum wage to \$3.85 would draw farm workers away from piece rate farm work.¹⁸

In August 1989 farmers raised the specter of labor shortages in an effort to convince the state to import Mexican laborers under the federal H2A program, a remnant of the Bracero era that the state had not considered using since the 1960s. Foreign nationals working under the program would certainly not have been afforded the rights of US citizens. Three Orchards requested 1,300 Mexican workers for the apple harvest from the Department of Labor, citing the need for "insurance" in case of possible labor shortages. Tomás Villanueva and the United Farm Workers of Washington claimed that there was actually a surplus of labor in Washington and that the aim of the Orchards was to acquire an exploitable labor pool.¹⁹

Many Mexican workers were attracted to Washington by the promises of coyotes and labor contractors, who ostensibly offered guaranteed work and eventual citizenship. The director of the Commission on Hispanic Affairs, Hector Gonzales, claimed that these "consultants" misrepresented themselves as *notarios publicos*, an officious title for lawyers in Mexico. An estimated one thousand Mexicans were victimized by "unscrupulous consultants." In February 1989 state representative Margarita Prentice, the only Latina serving in the state legislature,

introduced House Bill 1773 at the request of the state attorney general. A similar bill, Senate Bill 5715, was eventually signed into law. Both bills required that so-called labor consultants provide legally binding contracts stipulating the terms of service and written in the language of the worker. Contractors were also required to register with the secretary of state's office.²⁰

The renewed labor shortage farmers claimed to fear never appeared, but in 1989 and 1990, the threat of a housing crisis loomed as more workers poured into the state. In February 1989 House Bill 1663 called for the construction, rehabilitation, and acquisition of housing for workers.²¹ The bill authorized loans and grants for local governments and non-profit housing agencies. More housing bills were passed in 1990, including Senate Bill 6780. SB 6780 imposed stricter housing inspection procedures and standards in order to rehabilitate farm worker housing.²² These bills performed a function similar to the housing legislation approved in Oregon. Unfortunately, legislation in both states failed to prevent serious housing problems in the 1990s.

Despite the problems it caused, the IRCA did have a significant impact on Washington's dormant labor movement. The planting of orchards since 1964 had vastly increased the fruit tree acreage in Washington. As a result, labor shifted from row crops to fruit picking in the 1980s. Row crops remained an important part of agriculture, but seasonal workers were gradually concentrated in the fruit industry. In the 1970s most

Mexican-Americans in Washington were from Texas and moved between Texas, California, and Washington, following the crop cycle.²³ Many elected to stay, but their numbers were eclipsed in the 1980s by recent immigrants, including many who were naturalized under the IRCA. Workers continued to labor for piece-rate wages and earned well below minimum wage. Mexican-American farm workers in Washington remained underpaid and unorganized.

A few new community services and organizations emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s. *Radio Campesino*, or KDNA, was a public radio station that addressed community issues and gave voice to the concerns of farm workers. It was established in Granger and provided a progressive voice in the Yakima Valley. A labor organization, *El Centro Campesino*, was also established to organize farm workers. In April 1986 it organized a march from Granger to Yakima to protest low wages and deplorable working conditions. Over 2,000 workers participated in the march, and César Chávez joined the procession on its last leg. This march led to the reformation of the United Farm Workers of Washington as a true labor union.²⁴

Tomás Villanueva helped organize the march and claims that talk of organizing began immediately afterward. It was decided that Villanueva would serve as president and on September 21, 1986, a convention marked the formation of the United Farm Workers of Washington as a labor union. The IRCA's amnesty provisions drove workers out of hiding and the union was swamped with more labor disputes than it could immediately handle. The

existence of a union inspired workers, many of whom were previously undocumented, to come forward with their grievances and demands. In the first two years, the United Farm Workers of Washington State (UFWWS) participated in twenty five strikes. Villanueva asserts that the union was overworked and overstressed, without the resources to meet the demands of the workers.²⁵

On February 10, 1987, the UFWWS launched its first strike against Pyramid Orchards. Workers complained to Tomás Villanueva and Guadalupe Gamboa (now a lawyer representing them) about low wages for pruning. Only 60 workers were involved in the strike initially, but like the hop strikes of the 1970s, the first strike was a spark that set off several others. More than 100 picketers formed lines on weekdays and 300 to 400 on weekends. The Washington Grower's League, representing the interests of farmers and agribusiness, was formed to oppose the activities of the UFWWS, and waged a campaign against the union's activities. Strike breakers were recruited from California.²⁶

In March the League planned an April meeting in the parking lot of a mall, and asked farmers to pool their workers to break the strikes. UFWWS organizers appeared on KDNA and requested that workers picket the parking lot. According to Villanueva, over 2,000 workers showed up to picket compared to 50 scabs, who wore masks to disguise themselves, and the League's plan failed to materialize.²⁷ After the failure to break the strike through direct action, the farmers served their workers with injunctions

and took them to court, claiming they had harassed other workers. Guadalupe Gamboa and Michael Fox represented the workers and legally secured the right to picket.²⁸

The Pyramid Orchard strike lasted seven months, making it the longest strike in Washington's history. The UFWWS had survived their first large scale action. Guadalupe Gamboa claims that the strike was not particularly successful in terms of organizing the workers, but did lead to a general increase of wages in the region.²⁹ The United Farm Workers would carry out other strikes, the most important and successful against Chateau Ste. Michelle, a giant in Washington's embryonic wine industry. Still, the project of organizing the workers proved exceedingly difficult, and few statewide victories were won.

Other organizations were also established in the late 1970s and the 1980s to address the needs of the migrant workers. Evergreen Legal Services, for whom Guadalupe Gamboa worked, was founded in 1976 and offered legal counsel for lower income clients. The Sea Mar Community Health Center was incorporated as a non profit clinic for Latinos in Seattle in 1977; and, after securing \$300,000 from the federal government, it gradually expanded its services to include clinics in central and eastern Washington. Sea Mar remains one of Washington's largest health services providers, offering primary care and dental care, social services, maternal support services, health and nutrition education programs for homeless migrants.³⁰

The Yakima Valley Farm Workers Clinic was formed in 1978 and offered health services to farm workers who were unable to pay for medical care. In 1983 the Washington State Migrant Council was established, providing services in including educational outreach, health services, drug and STD education in twenty-four communities. The Washington Human Development Corporation was formed in 1984, concentrating on training farm workers for non-agricultural jobs and providing family and support services.³¹

The IRCA had increased the number of immigrants and workers in Washington, and migrant advocacy and labor organizations had grown to meet the challenge. The United Farm Workers of Washington's formation and strike activities corresponded with the burgeoning Mexican-American population and larger numbers of naturalized workers were empowered to fight for higher wages and better working conditions. Rural healthcare providers like the Sea Mar Community Health Centers grew to meet the demands of immigrants and migrant workers who entered the state in the wake of the IRCA worker amnesty. The 1990s provided ample tests and setbacks for these growing organizations and the community they represented.

Notes

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³ Ibid, Advance, table P5.

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- ⁴ Slatta, "The 'Spanish Origin' Population of Oregon and Washington: A Demographic Profile, 1980," 112.
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ Gilberto García, "Organizational Activity and Political Empowerment: Chicano Politics in the Pacific Northwest," in *The Chicano Experience in the Northwest*, ed. Carlos S. Maldonado and Gilberto Garcia (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 2001), 80-82.
- ⁷ Ibid, 83.
- ⁸ Oscar J. Martínez, *Mexican-Origin People in the United States: A Topical History* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2001), 41.
- ⁹ US Public Law 99-603. 99th Congress, second session, 6 November 1986, *Congressional Record and Staff Index Vol. 132* (U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington D.C., 1986).
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- ¹¹ Daniel P. Santos, "Improving the Lot of Migrant Farm Laborers: National and State Legislative Reforms of the 1980s," in *Nosotros: The Hispanic People of Oregon*, ed. Erasmo Gamboa and Carolyn M. Buan (Portland, Oregon: Oregon Council for the Humanities, 1995), 62-63.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ Ibid, 69-70.
- ¹⁵ *Seattle Times*, May 5, 1987.
- ¹⁶ *Seattle Times*, November 29, 1988.
- ¹⁷ *Seattle Times*, May 5, 1987.
- ¹⁸ *Seattle Times*, November 29, 1988.
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- ²¹ Ibid.
- ²² *Washington State Legislature House Bills: 1989-1990* (Government Publication Division of the University of Washington Libraries).
- ²³ Anne O'Neill, *An Interview with Lawyer and Ufw Organizer Guadalupe Gamboa* [Interview] (Harry Bridges Center for Labor Studies website, April 9, 2003); available from <http://depts.washington.edu/pcls/ufw/Lupe%20Gamboa.pdf#search=%22guadalupe%20gamboa%20interview%22>, 13-14.
- ²⁴ Ibid, 14.
- ²⁵ Anne O'Neill and Sharon Walker, *Interview with Tomás Villanueva* [Interview] (Harry Bridges Center for Labor Studies website, June 7, 2004); available from http://depts.washington.edu/pcls/ufw/tomas_villanueva.htm.
- ²⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁷ Ibid.
- ²⁸ *Gamboa Interview*, 14.
- ²⁹ Ibid, 15.
- ³⁰ Sea Mar Community Health Centers, *Sea Mar Community Health Center Official Website* [website] (2005); available from <http://www.seamar.org/>.
- ³¹ Carlos S. Maldonado, "An Overview of the Mexicano/Chicano Presence in the Pacific Northwest," in *The Chicano Experience in the Northwest* ed. Carlos Maldonado and Gilberto Garcia (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 2001), 103.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE 1990s: ADVANCEMENTS AND SETBACKS

The Immigration Reform and Control Act did not stem the flow of undocumented workers into the United States. The availability of counterfeit documentation ensured that illegal workers, especially farm workers, would continue finding jobs. The need for cheap foreign labor and poor conditions in Mexico continued to drive large numbers of immigrants to enter the United States at the risk of arrest or even death when crossing the border. In response, the border control continued to expand throughout the 1990s and more militarized campaigns in the Southwest sought to eradicate border crossings altogether.

The failure of the IRCA led states to establish their own immigration laws. Proposition 187, passed in California in 1994, eradicated welfare, education, and healthcare benefits for undocumented immigrants. A lawsuit from the Latino community prevented large parts of the bill from taking effect, but the law was a lightening rod in the country's immigration debate. The federal government toughened its own stance with the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act, strengthening the INS and denying essential services to undocumented workers. Despite tougher enforcement, the stream of

undocumented labor continued and the Mexican-American population increased.

The 1990 census in Washington and Oregon indicated strong demographic growth for the Mexican-American community. By 1990, there were 214,570 Latinos living in Washington, mostly Mexican. The rate of population growth from 1980 to 1990 was 78.8 percent. In Oregon the Latino population was 112,707, with a population growth of 70.3 percent. Despite serious problems faced by the Mexican-American community, the population increase also meant increased visibility for a people who were once nearly invisible in large parts of the Northwest.¹

Farm communities in the Yakima and Willamette Valleys experienced the largest growth. Latinos in Wapato and Toppenish made up the largest percentage of the populations (65 percent in Wapato and 63 percent in Toppenish). Nearly half (45 percent) of Othello's residents were Latinos. In Oregon, just over half (53 percent) of the population in Gervais was Latino, and Latinos comprised nearly a third of the population of Woodburn and Caldwell (32 percent and 20 percent respectively). Despite large numbers, voter registration was generally low, ranging from 7 percent of Latinos in Woodburn to 41 percent in Wapato.²

Poverty, lack of education, and poor English were the major impediments to voting. Forty five to 61 percent of Latinos over twenty five had less than a ninth grade education. In the cities examined in Washington and Oregon, 33 to 38 percent of the Latino population lived below the poverty line. In Quincy, Washington,

a staggering 50 percent lived below the poverty line. A more obvious problem facing the community politically was the lack of English language competency. In Toppenish, 45 percent of Latinos did not have an adequate grasp of the English language, greatly impeding their ability to understand political issues or to vote.³

On a positive note, cultural visibility increased in the 1990s. Spanish language radio stations, like KDNA in Granger, KZHR in Walla Walla, and KWIP in Dallas, Oregon offered extensive radio programming for Mexican-Americans. In 1995 three new Spanish language newspapers went into circulation in central Washington, joining *Viva* and *El Mundo*, established in 1984 and 1989 respectively. The three new papers, *El Herald*, *La Voz*, and *El Sol*, enjoyed smaller, but respectable circulations. The older papers had circulations of 10,000 and 23,000, and the newer ones ranged from 3,500 to 5,000. Despite relatively modest numbers, the introduction of three new papers was indicative of a larger Spanish speaking community and increased visibility.⁴

Labor Issues

Despite increased visibility, Mexican-American labor problems persisted into the 1990s in Oregon and Washington. By 1990, Oregon's agricultural industry was the second largest in the state, and worth more than \$2 billion a year (\$3 billion by 1998). Strawberries were the most labor intensive crop and attracted the most seasonal workers, peaking in June and July. In 1991 there

were anywhere from 34,200 to 128,564 seasonal farm workers in Oregon and the bulk of them were migrants of Mexican origin.⁵ Their average wage was \$5.00 per hour and many workers made less, especially those working for piece rate. Over half of Oregon's farm workers toiled in the Willamette Valley.⁶ Like the Northwest as a whole, Oregon was and remains wholly dependent on a Mexican and Mexican-American workforce, and a large percentage of those workers are undocumented.

By 1997, there were 86,400 to 150,000 seasonal workers in Oregon. In 1999 fruit pickers earned an average of \$5.70 per hour and field workers and average \$7.73 per hour. These wages met minimum wage standards but workers who were paid piece rate, especially undocumented workers, probably made substantially less than minimum wage during a bad yield. The seasonal nature of the work also meant extended periods of unemployment, and the annual income for an average farm worker was \$7,500. Annual income per family was less than \$14,000.⁷

Oregon's farm workers faced an uphill struggle. Like Washington, Oregon did not provide the right of collective bargaining to agricultural workers, leaving workers powerless to express grievances or exert pressure on their employers in wage disputes. An effort to introduce collective bargaining in 1989 failed in the state senate due to a lack of political support. Farm workers in Oregon lacked health insurance, sick pay, or unemployment benefits, and remained unorganized throughout the decade. Workers were permitted to form and join unions in Oregon,

but their employers were not required to recognize them. The only union representing farm workers in Oregon today is the *Pineros y Campesinos Unidos de Noroeste* (PCUN).

Founded in 1985 in Woodburn, PCUN had a membership of only 3,400 workers in the 1990s, though its numbers have since grown to over 5,000.⁸ PCUN grew out of the work of the Willamette Valley Immigration Project (WVIP) in the 1980s. Founded in 1977, the WVIP provided legal representation to undocumented workers. In 1978, the organization directly confronted the INS after the arrest of 100 workers during the cauliflower harvest.⁹ In the late 1980s, PCUN advocated on behalf of workers seeking amnesty under the Immigration Reform and Control Act, but quickly shifted its focus to wages and serious health issues like pesticide poisoning.

In 1990 PCUN issued so-called "red cards" to workers that allowed them to track their daily wage earnings. These were then compared directly to their pay stubs. Out of 10,000 cards issued, PCUN discovered 250 cases where workers were paid below minimum wage. Wage claims were filed with the Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industry on behalf of forty workers and one employer was forced to pay workers \$9,000 he had illegally withheld. In the same year, PCUN created *La Hora Campesina*, a radio call-in show catering to the interests and needs of farm workers. Because of its controversial pro-labor content, farmers exerted pressure on KWBX, the station that broadcast the show, and shut it down.¹⁰

In 1991 PCUN carried out a strike against Kraemer Farms for higher wages, the first of its kind since 1971. In the fall of 1992, PCUN targeted North Pacific Cannery and Packers (NORPAC) for a boycott. NORPAC was an agricultural cooperative of which Kraemer Farms was a member.¹¹ In 2002, ten years after it had started, the boycott finally came to an end as PCUN entered into formal negotiations with NORPAC, with talks mediated by Governor John Kitzhaber. PCUN had brought the situation to a head when it urged Sodexo, an agribusiness giant and major customer of NORPAC, to join the boycott. The effort prompted Sodexo to pressure NORPAC and PCUN to enter negotiations.¹² As of 2006 the negotiations are still underway, and the final resolution of the strike and subsequent boycott remains unresolved.

PCUN campaigned to raise public awareness of and wages for strawberry workers in 1995 by buying radio spots in Spanish, Mixteco, and Trique. PCUN had discovered that the farm workers were increasingly from non-Spanish speaking indigenous communities in Mexico and started to address labor issues in their own languages. By recognizing ethnic and linguistic differences, PCUN campaigned more effectively. In the latter part of the decade, PCUN secured collective bargaining for workers on four farms, including the organic Nature's Fountains Farms. Workers on these farms were contractually provided with grievance procedures, overtime, paid breaks, union recognition, and seniority.¹³

In the 1990s PCUN also actively opposed unchecked pesticide use. Farm workers in Oregon, many of them unable to speak English, were generally ignorant of the health threat pesticides represented. Pesticide expert Marion Moses taught PCUN staff members about pesticides for their field work in 1992, and in 1997 PCUN joined the Northwest Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides. The coalition filed a lawsuit against the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for its lax regulations of the use of the chemical Ronilan on green beans.¹⁴

According to a study by the Center for Research on Occupational and Environmental Toxicology (CROET), conducted from 1994 to 1997, there were sixteen serious worker compensation claims involving agricultural chemicals and eight of these cases involved pesticides.¹⁵ Despite ongoing health issues, pesticide use has continued to be a major issue in Oregon, mainly because the state has made little effort to regulate its use. The official PCUN website recently discussed its position on pesticide use:

Under current Oregon law, there are few protections for farm workers. Farm workers are excluded from the National Labor Relations Act, which effectively denies them the right to unionize that is guaranteed to all other sectors of the workforce. This means that farm workers are at-will employees and can be hired or fired at any time. While it is technically against Oregon law for an employer to retaliate against a worker for requesting adequate protective gear, for demanding medical attention to pesticide exposure symptoms, or for requesting pesticide use information, winning such claims has proven almost impossible. Therefore, many workers may recognize a health or safety hazard but remain silent in fear of reprisals or of getting fired. This situation proves even more serious for seasonal employees living in company-owned

housing, since they can not only be fired but also evicted from the labor camp in which they are living.¹⁶

Unlike Oregon, Washington State did not experience the creation of a new labor movement in the 1990s, but the UFWWS continued to address the concerns of Mexican labor. By the mid 1990s, Washington produced 60 percent of the nation's apples and 95 percent of apple exports.¹⁷ In the Yakima Valley, the workforce grew to 30,000 workers during the fall harvest season. Pickers were paid \$11 an hour for every apple bin filled, and enjoyed neither job security nor benefits.¹⁸ Migrant workers averaged \$4,983 to \$7,000 a year working for an agricultural industry worth billions.

The Washington Growers League claimed that farmers usually did not break even, were forced to work other jobs, and were simply unable to pay more to their workers. The League's spokesman Mike Gempler, blamed retailers and consumers who were unwilling to pay more for their fruit.¹⁹ While the consumer was and remains a component in the cycle of low wages, the farmers made every effort not to pay workers a living wage, and failed to provide health benefits or adequate shelter.

Workers routinely complained of back pain and pesticide poisoning. According to a report issued by the state Department of Labor Industries, agriculture work was considered one of the three most dangerous industries alongside logging and construction. Between 1994 and 1995, there were 2,500 injury claims, and many more injuries that went unreported because

workers feared losing their jobs. From 1979 to 1995, twenty-seven fatalities were reported in the tree fruit industry. Outside of the Chateau Ste. Michelle, workers remained unorganized and powerless.²⁰ For the Mexicans and Mexican Americans who dominated the fruit industry's workforce, work had not changed much since the 1950s. Two decades after the Chicano movement, migrant workers faced many of the same everyday challenges their predecessors had.

According to a 1999 survey by the Washington State Employment Security Department, there were 152,600 farm workers in Washington by 1999. About 125,000 of these were seasonal workers and at least 50 to 70 percent of the seasonal workforce was illegal. In January, Over 12,600 workers were required and 59,000 in October for the apple, pear, and potato harvests. Apples and other tree fruits became the dominant forms of agriculture, but hops and asparagus continued to require migrant labor. While the fruit tree acreage had doubled since 1964 and fruits replaced hops as the most contentious crop, the basic facts of migrant labor remained largely unchanged.²¹

Washington has never provided for collective bargaining, despite the persistent efforts of the United Farm Workers of Washington to secure collective bargaining rights for farm workers. In April 1993, the state legislature presented HB1287 to provide farm workers with collective bargaining rights for the first time in the state's history, but the UFW was critical of many of the bill's provisions, including a 72 hour strike

notification that limited the farm workers' ability to use strikes to gain bargaining leverage. The bill also required unions to cover the cost of their own labor violation investigations, since the state gave its own commission little actual power or funding. The union's reservations proved irrelevant since the collective bargaining bill ultimately failed to pass in the legislature.²² Despite the failure of collective bargaining, there were victories for farm labor, most notably in the fight against Chateau Ste. Michelle.

In the late 1980s workers from the Chateau Ste. Michelle vineyards complained about mistreatment and low wages. The Chateau was the largest producer of wine in Washington, with vineyards throughout the central and eastern parts of the state. Besides wage complaints, sexual harassment was also cited, with female workers complaining of inappropriate sexual conduct by supervisors.²³ Addressing these complaints, the UFWWS began a campaign to organize the workers. Guadalupe Gamboa offered legal advice to the workers, who under state law did not have the right to collectively bargain. When the Chateau was sued, it cited the absence of laws protecting farm worker organizing and claimed it had no obligation to recognize the union. In 1987 Tomás Villanueva and the United Farm Workers launched a boycott of Chateau Ste. Michelle. The first picket line went up in Woodinville, the location of the Chateau's corporate headquarters.²⁴

After 1990, the workers sought broader support for their boycott. Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition endorsed the organizing activity through more visible, media friendly channels. Rosalinda Guillen, a member of the Rainbow Coalition, volunteered to create a committee for organizing the boycott campaign. A Yale professor, Kurt Peterson, worked in the eastern part of Washington to organize the workers under the United Farm Workers of Washington. He soon joined the boycott campaign, and provided valuable research to use against Chateau Ste. Michelle. Under Guillen's guidance, the boycott targeted everything the Chateau touched, including local and national wine retailers, airlines, the British market (longshoremen and international shippers would not unload the wine), and picketers even blocked the Chateau's wine tour trains. Musical artists Willie Nelson and Kenny Loggins refused to play shows in Woodinville because of the boycott.²⁵

By early 1993, it seemed apparent to Guillen that the UFWWS were not effectively organizing and had made no progress in negotiating a working labor contract. Both she and Kurt Peterson felt that the union leadership was out of touch with the workers. Despite conflicts with the union board, Peterson asked Guillen to move to Sunnyside to organize the workers herself while he continued the corporate boycott campaign. In March 1993 Guillen quite her longtime job at a Woodinville bank and moved her family to Sunnyside. Guillen recalls that her parents and co-workers were "flabbergasted" by the decision. But she still remembered

her own experiences as a farm worker growing up and felt that nothing had changed for the migrants.²⁶

With no political experience, Guillen examined César Chávez's own writing on union building and used the United Farm Workers of America constitution as an organizing model. Guillen was cast as an outsider and a campaign of intimidation, including vandalism, was launched against her and the workers. The Chateau employed three union busters to disperse the workers, but their efforts were ultimately ineffective. Because there were no labor relations laws that protected agricultural workers against employers in Washington, the striking workers were forced to behave as though they had a right to disrupt the Chateau's activities despite the law. Guillen created highly visible picket lines and organized meetings at the company's gates, forcing the strike into the public eye. Meanwhile, the Rainbow Coalition continued its media-savvy campaign against the company.

In 1994 the United Farm Workers of Washington directly affiliated with the United Farm Workers of America and the ALF-CIO. The United Farm Workers of America took action in the ongoing boycott, even urging Washington's Liquor Control Board to ban the sale of Chateau wines in 140 state liquor stores. The control board rejected the ban, but the board's chairman Joe McGavick urged the winery to allow union elections. The farmers insisted that union elections should be overseen by an outside party, since outside arbitration was not provided for by state law.²⁷

Eventually elections were held and the organizing efforts of the workers paid off: the union was granted a new contract in December 1995. It might have taken longer, but Guillen forced the Chateau to accept a deal before the union elections that called for outside arbitration if a contract was not secured within seventy-five days of the initiation of negotiations. The Chateau Ste. Michelle contract provided for a pension plan, a medical plan, the formation of a Pesticide Committee, and higher wages. Guillen later worked to make binding arbitration the law in California with a 2002 amendment to the 1975 Agricultural Labor Relations Act.²⁸

The Chateau Ste. Michelle strike was the only significant, successful effort to organize farm workers in the 1990s. In early 1998 the United Farm Workers and the International Brotherhood of Teamsters fought to organize 581 fruit warehouse workers in Wenatchee and 301 in Yakima, employed by Stemilt Growers and Washington Fruit and Produce respectively. Warehouse pay averaged \$12,000 a year, though employers claimed it was higher. Stemilt Growers paid \$7.50 an hour, a wage the Washington Growers League claimed was as high as the industry could afford. The workers at Stemilt were housed in a \$225,000 complex of small homes surrounding a bathhouse. Addressing the attitude of the growers, an organizer Andrew Barnes described it as an "almost feudal system. [The growers] still have a sense of: this is our family business and how dare anyone make waves with how I pay my employees."²⁹

In September 1999 the seasonal and migrant labor situation in Washington prompted Mexico to file a complaint with the National Administrative Offices (NAO) stating that Washington had violated the North American Free Trade Agreement's labor laws. Mexico's Secretary of Labor Mariano Palacios Alcocer charged Washington's apple labor industry with interference in organizing, denying migrant workers adequate healthcare, wages, or housing, and exposing workers to unsafe working conditions and pesticide poisoning. A coalition of farm worker advocates, unions, human rights workers, and academics pressed the complaint. Despite the complaint and subsequent hearings in Mexico City, Mike Gempler of the Washington Growers League casually dismissed the whole matter as "another tactic to gain attention for the organizing agenda."³⁰

Farm Worker Housing

Housing also proved to be as serious issue facing farm workers in Oregon and Washington in the 1990s. In spite of the housing reforms instituted in the wake of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, housing had not improved substantially since the 1950s. As the population of workers grew in the late 1980s, the states failed to meet the housing challenge. Unwilling to shoulder the cost of higher housing standards, work camp owners demolished many of their camps, and farm workers were forced to move into local neighborhoods they were unable to afford. By 1999 most camps in Oregon had been demolished. A report compiled by the League of Women Voters of Oregon stated:

Farmers are increasingly turning away from housing their workers. In 1999, 310 farm agricultural labor camps (formally called agricultural labor housing) were registered with OR OSHA, the state agency charged with regulating this housing supply. These 310 camps reported 12,454 occupants. This is a decrease from about 1,000 camps in 1959 (an era of greater reliance on hand harvesting). Farmers say the cost of providing and maintaining this housing and increased government regulations are the main disincentives to providing farm worker housing.³¹

There followed the kind of overcrowding and unsanitary living conditions that drove the state to issue the 1989 reforms in the first place. The housing that did exist did not meet OSHA standards in the early 1990s and the Oregon Housing Associated Services claimed in 1993 that the state needed 2,259 housing units for local workers and 6,584 for migrants.³² The most common form of new housing was federally and state funded housing projects. These projects were carried out by non-profits like the Community and Shelter Assistance Corporation (CASA). Established in 1988, CASA worked with the state to provide affordable housing, rehabilitated older housing, arranged home financing, and counseled farm workers to assess their housing needs. Between 1988 and 1999, CASA constructed 530 units.³³

But even with state assistance, the price of constructing homes was prohibitively expensive and home ownership elusive. Without adequate work camps or housing, many seasonal farm workers resorted to making their own makeshift camps. These camps were illegal but became a necessity when workers were faced with the prospect of homelessness. The League of Women Voters observed that:

Many unregistered camps exist. In some cases farm workers are living in a farm building not intended for human habitation - a barn or other outbuilding. Old housing trailers have been observed which are not hooked up to any sewage or septic system. Workers may use irrigation water for drinking, cooking, and bathing. The number of unregistered camps is unknown but has been estimated to be as high as twice the number of registered camps. The living conditions in unregistered camps have been described as abominable.³⁴

In Washington, the housing of migrant workers was also a serious problem throughout the 1990s. The Office of Rural and Farmworker Housing (ORFH) conducted a series of surveys in ten communities east of the Cascades to determine housing issues for seasonal workers. Ninety-four percent of respondents surveyed in Sunnyside and 90 percent of respondents in Basin City complained of overcrowding. Toppenish and Wenatchee had the smallest number reporting overcrowding, with 65 percent and 55 percent of those polled citing this problem. In many cases, several families shared one housing unit.

In 1993 Cipriano Garza Jr. of the Department of Housing and Urban Development declared housing a community problem and called for cooperation between the state, farmers, and workers to address the issue. Rent for normal housing was too high for most farm workers and housing costs generally exceeded half of their income, resulting in overcrowding and substandard housing.³⁵ In Chelan, fifty people were crowded into one complex with nineteen one room units and one communal bath. The Department of Community Development called for 55,000 units to end overcrowding and the HUD requested funding for the new housing plan by 1995.

Despite a series of plans like this one, housing continued to be a problem for the remainder of the decade.³⁶

In 1994 the Health Department worked with cherry farmers and developed a tent camp program for housing seasonal workers. Only one camp was established initially but was expanded to five licensed camps in 1995. The camps did not meet state housing rules, but farmers argued that they were simply unable to provide better shelter. The first camp housed 600 workers in need of seasonal shelter and fell below established standards. The program was touted by farmers as an ideal alternative to the illegal camps that lacked water and sanitation. Workers had to provide their own tents and the growers provided garbage pickup, drinking water, showers, and bathrooms. Guadalupe Gamboa claimed the camps were a step backward, comparing the program to housing in the Grapes of Wrath era. Some of his clients in Evergreen challenged the project, contending that the tents were structurally unsafe.³⁷ In the summer of 1997 law enforcement officials raided and closed an illegal camp next to a cherry orchard in Grant County.

According to Health Department figures, at least 37,700 of 62,300 workers on 1,000 farms lived in substandard conditions, mainly in camps like the one in Grant County. Senator Margarita Prentice claimed that "as far as housing is concerned, our Mexican migrants never had it so bad." According to the United Farm Workers, the growers were simply unwilling to pay for affordable shelter for their workers. The growers predictably

claimed that housing standards, unfair fines, and labor unions were to blame for the lack of housing. A compromise housing bill, allowing growers to shirk housing standards and building codes altogether, was rejected by Governor Gary Locke.³⁸

On October 7, 1998, fifteen farm worker advocates occupied the Employment Security Department Office in Yakima Valley to protest the squalid living conditions of migrants in Grant County. In Sentinel Gap, workers had established a makeshift riverside camp on County Public Utility land. Public toilets were provided to the workers, but unsanitary living conditions prevailed. The camp was covered with litter and infested with flies, but provided some shelter. In an interview for the Seattle Times, Mattawa's mayor, Judy Esser, said that it was "not uncommon to have 15 or 20 people sharing a 12 or 14-foot mobile home. But the town government is too poor to do much about it." The Grant County Health Department had planned to create an emergency shelter at a cost of \$500,000, but the state refused funding and the plan fell through.³⁹

In January 1999 Governor Gary Locke proposed a plan to establish housing for 10,000 migrants, less than a third of the 37,000 pickers who were essentially homeless during the harvest. The illegal camps had become a noticeable problem; riverside camps had become so large that raw sewage seeped up in many towns in central Washington. Locke's proposal would have provided \$40 million over a ten year period, consolidate all housing regulatory authority under the umbrella of the Department of

Health, create a comprehensive information depository for growers and non-profit organizations, and most controversially, revive the cherry tent camps. The state's involvement in the new plan quickly won the endorsement of the growers, since it placed the housing burden on the state's shoulders and allowed farmers to provide their own camps on the cheap.

Farm worker advocates were not as enthusiastic in their assessment of Locke's plan. The United Farm Workers claimed there should be more year-round housing to combat seasonal homelessness and rejected the proposal to bring back the structurally unsound tents. Sea Mar Community Health Centers proposed permanent state funding with a dedicated fund of \$5 million a year and also rejected the revival of tents. Despite criticism and outside advice, Locke pushed forward with his plan, directing state agencies to fund low income housing for migrants and seeking matching federal funds.⁴⁰ In late July OSHA ruled that the tents did not live up to federal standards and told the growers to expect closures and fines. OSHA's regional administrator, Richard Terrill, told the Seattle Times: "A pup tent without a floor, no electricity, and keeping your food in an ice chest? I'm not sure that's a step up from homelessness."⁴¹

In July, the state shut down five non-compliant camps on farm property. More than thirty workers were found living under tarps in a camp strewn with raw sewage and garbage. Two camps were discovered and closed in Pasco and seventy farm workers were displaced. Workers were given hotel vouchers by the Department

of Health. The vouchers were good for two weeks, hardly enough time to solve the worker's immediate housing needs.⁴² In general, federal and state housing regulations were impossible to maintain with what the state and the farmers were willing to spend on housing migrant workers. The housing provided by the farmers never met the basic requirements, and instead of ensuring that the migrants were adequately housed, the state and federal government simply dismantled what little housing they had.

Health Care

A lack of health care presented serious problems for the Mexican and Mexican-American community in the 1990s. Generally low incomes combined with a lack of health insurance meant that medical problems that were minor within other ethnic groups were far more serious for Mexican-Americans and Latinos. In 1994 the Oregon Health Plan sought to provide healthcare coverage for most Oregonians, but because of income instability among Mexican-Americans and Latinos caused by high unemployment and seasonal work, many failed to qualify for Medicaid coverage. In 1995 four out of ten Latinos lacked health insurance. Undocumented workers were especially vulnerable to bad health, but even documented workers were in generally poor health.⁴³

In Oregon in 1995 Latinos were two to four times more likely than European Americans to be infected with communicable diseases, especially sexually transmitted diseases. Within the Latino and Mexican-American communities, higher mortality rates were linked

to preventable ailments, including diabetes and chronic liver disease. The mortality rates for mothers during childbirth were twice as high as the remainder of the population. Low incomes and the absence of insurance meant that many Mexican-Americans could only visit the doctor in emergencies. Preventative measures like routine checkups were not a widely available option.⁴⁴

Migrant and local seasonal workers had to rely on migrant health clinics, but their reach was limited by funding and scope. *Salud de la Familia* in Woodburn and Virginia Garica Memorial Health Center in Cornelius both continued to operate. *La Clinica del Cariño*, founded in 1986 by a group of public health practitioners and based in Hood River, provided rural medical service. In 1999, the US Health Resources and Services Administration funded fourteen migrant health centers throughout the state, but their resources were stretched thin and they only covered about 20 percent of the overall farm workers. Treatment was confined to farm workers who could qualify for residency and undocumented workers could only be treated in emergencies.⁴⁵ Currently, an estimated 90 percent of farm workers receive no health care.⁴⁶

In Washington the 1993 Health Services Act required that employers pay at least half of their employees' health costs. However, the act excluded seasonal labor, effectively shutting out 175,000 workers. The state legislature nominally added the exclusion so that medical costs for migrant workers could be

investigated further; a deadline was set for December 1994. In fact, the exclusion was put into place to placate rural lawmakers, whose grower constituency claimed they could not afford the cost.⁴⁷

On January 4, 1994, farm workers and migrant clinics in Washington filed a lawsuit against the state to end the exclusion, claiming that it violated anti-discrimination laws. In early February, the state House of Representatives voted 78-17 to end the exclusion. HB2443 established a seasonal worker advisory board to investigate worker needs, health care distribution and cost. Dissenting Republican lawmakers warned that it would mean losing jobs, and rural representative Barbara Lisk said that growers would not accept the cost.⁴⁸ Health care is still out of reach for most farm workers.

Education

Mexican-Americans also faced serious educational hurdles. Institutional racism and cultural assumptions provide powerful obstacles to Mexican-American success in education. Spanish is regarded as an alien language and Mexican-Americans are frequently accused of obstructing their own education by refusing to speak English. Mexican-Americans, especially women, have traditionally been regarded as subservient and inferior to European-Americans. Frequently, they are stereotyped along gender lines, and mainstream Americans often assume that Mexican women exist primarily to rear children and run the household.

Looked down upon, Mexican-Americans are frequently blamed for their educational failures.⁴⁹

Throughout the 1990s, education remained a significant hurdle for the Pacific Northwest's Latino and Mexican-American population. Oregon's and Washington's Hispanic dropout rates paralleled national trends, and students in both states contended with the same hurdles as Latinos throughout the whole nation. In 1995, the average dropout rate for Latino students in Oregon was 16 percent. In 1996 alone, 1,400 Latinos dropped out of Oregon high schools. Poverty, racism, cultural assumptions about what Latino students were capable or incapable of, and splintered families were all contributing factors.⁵⁰ Children of farm workers, often working long hours themselves, also suffered academically

Some schools sought to create a more welcoming environment for Latino students, providing teachers and staff responsive to their needs, involving parents in their children's education (including English lessons for parents at night), setting high academic standards, offering bilingual classes, and promoting an atmosphere of tolerance by taking an active interest in Latino culture and providing role models from the community. Smaller schools, like Nyssa High in Nyssa, tended to perform better on average because of comparatively smaller class sizes.

Organizations like Hispanic Parents for Portland Public Schools were formed as more Latino families moved into urban centers like Portland in the late 1980s and 1990s. These

organizations allowed parents to run their own meetings with the school boards to address student needs.⁵¹ To meet childcare and educational needs of migrant children, the Oregon Child Development Corporation (originally formed in 1971) provided childcare and development programs. Migrant Head Start, Migrant Child Care, and the early Literacy programs actively served 8,000 children in 1999.⁵²

Political Empowerment and Immigrant Rights

The most important factors in empowering the Mexican-American community are political participation and strengthening immigrant rights. According to Antonio Sanchez, the composition of Mexican-Americans and Latinos had changed by the 1990s, even as the population increased significantly. Many seasonal and non-seasonal workers had elected to stay in the Northwest and raise families, while transient migrants continued to follow the harvest. Those who decided to stay often pursued other careers and developed permanent communities apart from agriculture. Education, housing, and employment became more central to the permanent residents as they sought social and political recognition. Migrants tended to be young, single transients, whose interests were more circumstantial.

The passage of Proposition 187 in California in 1994 struck a powerful chord in Oregon's Mexican-American community, igniting it into political action. For the first time since the Chicano movement, Oregon's Latinos moved toward proactive political

mobilization. The Commission on Hispanic Affairs and the Metropolitan Human Rights Commission of Oregon became more politically active after 187's success. In December 1994, The City of Eugene Human Rights Commissions held a community meeting to discuss Proposition 187, and Latino student groups held meetings of their own at Portland State University.

Despite increased mobilization, political powerlessness continued to define the Mexican-American community. By 1990, Latinos were the largest minority population in Oregon. Two years later Latinos comprised 5 percent of the state's population; a large majority of them were Mexican-Americans. Regardless of their numbers, the community enjoyed little political representation. In 1992 there were no Mexican-Americans or Latinos serving in the state legislature and only one Latino, Armando Garcia of Salem, served on a city council. The only state level institution Mexican-Americans could turn to was the Oregon Commission on Hispanic Affairs.⁵³ People of Mexican descent, despite their continued economic importance, were still as under represented as they had been in the 1960s. In 2000, Latinos only made up 1.1 percent of the elected officials in the state, even though they comprised more than 8 percent of the state's population.⁵⁴

Oregon was and remains a very white state. Minorities made up only 11 percent of the population in 1990, and held just seven of ninety seats in the state legislature, or 7.7 percent. In May 1992 seven minorities ran for seats in the legislature and two

ran for statewide offices. One Latina campaigned for a seat on the legislature, the second Latino to make a bid for the state legislature in the history of Oregon. Juanita Hernandez, an activist and social worker, fought unsuccessfully to represent District 5, which included the burgeoning Latino community in Washington County.⁵⁵ One serious problem that Oregon faced when it came to empowering Mexican-Americans was the presence of undocumented workers and non-citizens. Only an estimated 40 percent of Latinos were eligible to vote.⁵⁶

By 1995, Mexican-Americans had become more visible due to movement into the cities and suburbs of Oregon. Increased visibility meant increased resentment and unease among the European-American majority. In 1980, 94.6 percent of Oregon was white, and by 1990, 92.8 percent of the state was white. As of 2000, less than 90 percent of the population is white. The emergence of a visible minority, especially one that spoke another language, fueled xenophobia. In 1995, a bill that failed to pass the state legislature attempted to deny drivers licenses to non-citizens. It was aimed at the estimated 20,000 undocumented workers in the state and dubbed the "driving while Hispanic" bill. A second bill would have required all Spanish speaking children enrolled in public schools to enter English programs; a third imitated the language of Proposition 187 in California. Neither of the latter two bills made it out of committee.⁵⁷

In 1996, President Bill Clinton's Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act passed and created a series of zero-tolerance immigration reform measures. These included 1,000 more border patrol agents, a ban on poverty aid for undocumented workers, the deportation of legal immigrants who received welfare benefits for over twelve months in the first years of residency, and more expeditious deportations. Oregon's Democratic representative Elizabeth Furse came under fire for supporting the bill. She defended her vote, citing her discomfort with illegal immigrants in the state.⁵⁸ INS raids throughout that year resulted in increased apprehension in the Mexican-American community.⁵⁹

During the fall of 1998, the Latino Voter Registration Project registered 2,200 new voters. The campaign was organized by *Causa*, an immigration rights coalition formed in 1995 to combat anti-immigration policies in the Proposition 187 mold.⁶⁰ Mexican-Americans and Latinos remained critically powerless in an era of intense mobilization against them. There were nearly 200,000 Latinos in Oregon in the latter half of the 1990s, but few of them were able or willing to vote. It certainly did not help that the Secretary of State Phil Keisling refused to provide Spanish language Voter's Pamphlets, claiming that printing them in a second language was a slippery slope toward printing them in every language. Only one Latina, Senator Susan Castillo, sat in the state legislature. *Causa's* speaker bureau coordinator had this to say about Mexican-Americans and democracy in Oregon near the turn of the twenty-first century:

Some people think if you're a Hispanic man between 25 and 40, you're probably a farm worker, uneducated. You're more like a mule to work than a human being. When people feel discriminated against, they lose trust.⁶¹

Mexican Americans suffered a similar fate in Washington. A largely rural underclass, recent Mexican immigrants were not actively courted by state politicians, who were largely focused on the heavily urbanized western part of the state and their major constituencies. A large political rally in Sunnyside on November 2, 1994, opposed Proposition 187 in California and endorsed Kathleen Brown against 187's champion Pete Wilson in California's governor race. The concurrent senate race in Washington between Slade Gorton and Ron Sims went largely ignored by the Mexican-American community. Political leaders showed little or no interest in the issues affecting immigrants and their apathy was met with apathy.⁶² While Gorton supported the driving sentiment behind Proposition 187, Ron Sims never seized on this weakness to appeal to Mexican voters. Immigration was the most important issue in the community and was not even brought up in a KDNA debate between two Spanish speaking surrogates representing the candidates.

In November a coalition of Washington advocacy organizations came together in response to the passage of Proposition 187 in California. The immigrant rights coalition feared a 187 domino effect in other states and met twice to discuss the issue. The situation was deadly serious to recent Mexican immigrants, but went completely unaddressed in Washingtonian politics. Rosa

Guerrero, a worker at Chateau Ste. Michelle, told the Seattle Times "nobody comes and talks to us. The politicians only go to the rich people. We're not seen. Nobody sees us."⁶³

In the summer of 1995, reacting to Proposition 187 and a nation-wide attack on affirmative action programs, the Commission on Hispanic Affairs launched a voter drive with the goal of registering 300,000 new Latino voters. Nationally, Latinos made up 10.3 percent of the overall population, and two-thirds of them were Mexican Americans. According to a 1994 census, there were at least 284,000 Latinos in Washington, 74 percent of them Mexican, an increase from 214,570 in 1990. Yet there were only three Latino legislators in the state.⁶⁴ The mid-nineties saw a shift in Mexican-American and Latino politics toward electoral victories and the ballot box. In local government, things have gradually improved.

In November 1997 Yakima Valley elected its first Mexican-American politician to office. Clara Jimenez, an adjunct professor and local history teacher, won a seat in Toppenish's city council. The short lived organization, Adelante, was established by Lolo Arevalo to organize the Latino community politically. In the same month, Adelante and the Commission of Hispanic Affairs held a meeting to gauge the community's worst fears. Low test scores, Proposition 187, and the new threat of Initiative 200 (I-200 would have ended affirmative action in hiring and university enrollments) were among the worst. Voter registration continued throughout the year, carried out by

canvassers from the Southwest Voter Registration Education Project, and state representative Phyllis Gutierrez Kennedy met with Governor Locke to discuss farm worker housing.⁶⁵ In an interview with the Seattle Times, Lolo Arevalo explained the driving force behind the new push for political power:

All I have to do to get motivated is go to the Yakima Valley. Every time I go there, I'm reminded that we have no voice and we're looked down on. A simple example is just going to the grocery store and seeing some clerk trying to talk to someone who doesn't speak English that well. Instead of trying to help them, they're condescending and demeaning.⁶⁶

Limited minority electoral gains did not deter ongoing attacks on immigration and affirmative action throughout the decade. Some of the harsher tactics employed by the Immigration and Naturalization Service elicited opposition from both Mexican workers and growers. In March 1999 the state House of Representatives approved a resolution condemning the treatment of workers by INS officials for causing "emotional and psychological distress." Representatives Barbara Lisk, a Republican, and Phyllis Gutierrez Kennedy, a Democrat, denounced a recent sweep that resulted in workers, some of whom were legal residents, being detained for over seventy-two hours. The resolution also cited a 1996 raid in Yakima that ended with the deportation of thirty-nine people, including seventeen mothers who were forcibly separated from their families.⁶⁷ Michelle Youngquist, the owner of the pumpkin farm where the men and women had been employed, reported that the workers were abused and dehumanized by the arresting INS officials.⁶⁸

In a Seattle Times editorial appearing on April 1, 1999, Ricardo Sanchez argued that the INS crackdowns were staged for the benefit of the tax payers. Washington residents complained about the tax burden of illegal immigrants while farmers demanded their labor to prevent work shortages. INS raids, including a series that ended with 564 arrests, were carried out in the off season, avoiding major harvest seasons when immigrant labor was critical. The primary targets of the raids were poor workers who were of no use to the farmers.⁶⁹ Despite the rhetoric of zero tolerance, a large part of Washington's agricultural work force was undocumented. Yet INS raids never led to notable labor shortages.

Lynda V. Mapes elaborated further in June 2000. She reported that the INS had stopped conducting sweeps and simply requested payroll information from farmers. Farmers responded by sending out their payrolls in the winter, timed so that they would not hear back from the INS until after the harvest season when the workers were no longer present. Workers for their part could produce all twenty-nine possible requested documents, and farmers were easily satisfied. The economic needs of the farmer and the worker led to indirect collusion between the farmers, workers, and the INS in Washington. Instead of conducting large scale crackdowns, the Border Patrol avoided illegal immigrants and focused on drug busts and routine criminal investigations. The INS only had seven officers to investigate 163,000 employers and

a network of underground criminal operations ensured that farmers would have their workers.⁷⁰

The 1999 federal Farm Worker Amnesty plan was a telling example of the role economics played nationally and locally in shaping the debate on immigration. Despite claiming that it would improve the lives of 600,000 undocumented workers, the plan actually made hard work a prerequisite. Introduced by Representatives Gordon Smith (a Republican from Oregon) and Bob Graham (a Democrat from Florida), the bill would allow workers to apply for legal status after 150 days of work and provide an opportunity for citizenship after 180 days of work per year over a five year period. Erik Noel Nelson of the United Farm Workers of Washington described the plan as "indentured servitude" and said it would create "third world conditions in the United States." The farmers, on the other hand, were ecstatic.⁷¹

The Growers League of Washington claimed the plan would make sense of immigration issues and allow farmers and workers to cooperate.⁷² In reality, the bill was a mixed bag and would have helped some and hurt many others. Workers would clearly not have had the right to organize or demand higher wages. While beneficial to some workers, the term "indentured servitude" was an accurate way of describing the bill. The ultimate beneficiaries of the amnesty would have been farmers who gained a legal workforce with no rights and compelled to do exactly what they were told with the hope of attaining citizenship five years later. Fittingly, the bill was quickly labeled the "Bracero

Bill." On February 22, over seventy-five people, including ex Governor Mike Lowry and El Centro de la Raza's Carmen Miranda, marched on the Federal Building in Seattle, protesting the bill and demanding unconditional amnesty.⁷³

The national attack on affirmative action also took its toll on Washington. On November 1998 the passage of I-200 ended race based affirmative action in hiring and university enrollments. Upon the bill's passage, the University of Washington issued a statement indicating that minority status was no longer an acceptable criterion for admissions. By the spring of 1999, there were significant drops in minority enrollments. African-American students declined 40 percent, Latinos 30 percent, and Native-Americans 20 percent. Minorities only made up 5 percent of the total student body at the University in 1999, down from 9 percent the previous year.

Affirmative Action had been a significant factor in ensuring representation of minorities and the disadvantaged in Washington's universities and colleges.⁷⁴ In October 2000, responding to the radical decrease in minority enrollments, the University of Washington announced a \$65.6 million scholarship program designed to raise enrollment to pre I-200 levels.

Notes

¹ United States Bureau of Census, 1990 US Census Report: QT-P1E Age and Sex for the Hispanic Origin Population (1990). Available from <http://www.census.gov/main/www/cen1990.html>.

² Gilberto García, "Organizational Activity and Political Empowerment: Chicano Politics in the Pacific Northwest," in *The Chicano Experience in the Northwest*, ed. Carlos S. Maldonado and Gilberto Garcia (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 2001), 85-87.

³ Ibid.

⁴ *Seattle Times*, April 14, 1996.

⁵ Carlos S. Maldonado, "An Overview of the Mexicano/Chicano Presence in the Pacific Northwest," in *The Chicano Experience in the Northwest* ed. Carlos Maldonado and Gilberto Garcia (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 2001), 116-117.

There were actually 2 divergent estimates for seasonal workers in the early 1990s. The Oregon Employment Division (OED) published a report in 1992 claiming there were approximately 34,200 seasonal workers in Oregon. A regional estimate in the Atlas of State Profiles- Estimate Number of Migrant and Seasonal Farm Workers, published in 1990 claimed there were up to 128,464 seasonal workers in the state. Divergent estimates by the OED, the state, and other independent sources have continued to the present and appear together and in separate reports and articles. Maldonado's article in the Chicano Experience in the Northwest discusses these diverging numbers in greater detail.

⁶ The League of Women Voters in Oregon Education Fund, "Farm Workers in Oregon: A Study of the League of Women Voters of Oregon Education Fund," (Salem, Oregon: 2002); available from <http://www.open.org/~lwvor/Farmworkers2.htm>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ PCUN, *Pineros Y Campesinos Unidos Del Noroeste Official Website* (2006); available from <http://www.pcun.org/resources/aboutpcun.asp>.

⁹ Lynn Stephen, "Cultural Citizenship and Labor Rights for Oregon Farm Workers: The Case of Piñeros Y Campesinos Unidos Del Noroeste," *Human Organization: The Journal of the Society of Applied Anthropology* (Spring 2003): 27-38.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ PCUN, *Pineros Y Campesinos Unidos Del Noroeste Official Website*.

¹² PCUN NORPAC, "Oregon Farm Worker Union Pcun and Norpac Foods, Inc. Create Framework for Managing Farm Labor Relations," February 15, 2002.

¹³ Stephen, "The Case of PCUN," 27-38.

¹⁴ Maldonado, "Mexicano/Chicano Workers in the Pacific Northwest," 117.

¹⁵ Joan Rothlein, "Oregon Chemical Surveillance Program (Oregon's Workers' Compensation) 1991-1997," (Portland, Oregon: The Center for Research on Occupational and Environmental Toxicology 1997); available from <http://www.ohsu.edu/croet/outreach/database/workcomp/workcompjr.html>.

¹⁶ PCUN, *Pineros Y Campesinos Unidos Del Noroeste Official Website*.

¹⁷ *Seattle Times*, January 4, 1998.

¹⁸ *Yakima Herald-Republic*, October 20, 1996.

¹⁹ *Seattle Times*, August 24, 1997.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ *Seattle Times*, June 19, 2000.

²² Maldonado, "Mexicano/Chicano Workers in the Pacific Northwest," 105-106.

²³ Sharon Walker and Sarah Laslett, *Interview with Rosalinda Guillen* (Harry Bridges Center for Labor Studies website, March 12, 2004); available from http://depts.washington.edu/pcls/ufw/rosalinda_guillen.htm

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- ²⁴ Anne O'Neill, *An Interview with Lawyer and UFW Organizer Guadalupe Gamboa* [Interview] (Harry Bridges Center for Labor Studies website, April 9, 2003); available from <http://depts.washington.edu/pcls/ufw/Lupe%20Gamboa.pdf#search=%22guadalupe%20gamboa%20interview%22>, 16.
- ²⁵ *Seattle Times*, February 11, 1994.
- ²⁶ Guillen Interview.
- ²⁷ *Seattle Times*, November 10, 1994.
- ²⁸ Guillen Interview.
- ²⁹ *Seattle Times*, January 4, 1998.
- ³⁰ *Seattle Times*, September 9, 1999.
- ³¹ The League of Women Voters, "Farm Workers in Oregon."
- ³² Maldonado, "Mexicano/Chicano Workers in the Pacific Northwest," 117.
- ³³ CASA, *Casa Official Website* (2006); available from <http://www.casaoeforegon.org/who.html>.
- ³⁴ League of Women Voters, "Farm Workers in Oregon."
- ³⁵ *Seattle Times*,
Note: The first number is given by Washington State Employment Security Department, and presents a more conservative figure.
- ³⁶ *Seattle Times*, December 12, 1993.
- ³⁷ *Seattle Times*, October 15, 1995.
- ³⁸ *Seattle Times*, August 24, 1997.
- ³⁹ *Seattle Times*, October 7, 1998.
- ⁴⁰ *Seattle Times*, January 4, 1999.
- ⁴¹ Ibid.
- ⁴² *Seattle Times*, July 6, 1999.
- ⁴³ Antonio Sanchez, "Social Policy and the Oregon Hispanic Community," in *Nosotros: The Hispanic People of Oregon*, ed. Erasmo Gamboa and Caroyln M. Buan (Portland, Oregon: Oregon Council of the Humanities, 1995), 72-75.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid.
- ⁴⁵ League of Women Voters, "Farm Workers in Oregon."
- ⁴⁶ Oregon Public Broadcasting, *Oregon Farmworker Issues Website* [website]; available from http://www.opb.org/programs/oregonstory/ag_workers/issues.htm.
- ⁴⁷ *Seattle Times*, December 31, 1993.
- ⁴⁸ *Seattle Times*, January 4, 1994.
- ⁴⁹ Luz Maciel Villarroel and Sandra Fancher Garcia, "A Historical-Cultural Profile and Status of Chicanas in the Northwest," in *The Chicano Experience in the Northwest*, ed. Carlos S. Maldonado and Gilberto Garcia (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 2001), 171-174.
- ⁵⁰ *The Oregonian*, February 16, 1997.
- ⁵¹ Ibid.
- ⁵² League of Women Voters, "Farm Workers in Oregon."
- ⁵³ *The Oregonian*, April 13, 1992.
- ⁵⁴ Oregon Progress Board, *Elected and Appointed Officials: A Report on Race, Ethnicity and Gender Parity* [PDF] (July 2002), 2-4.
- ⁵⁵ *The Oregonian*, March 1, 1992.
- ⁵⁶ *The Oregonian*, November 1, 1998.
- ⁵⁷ *The Oregonian*, September 28, 1996.
- ⁵⁸ *The Oregonian*, November 1, 1998.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid.
- ⁶⁰ *The Oregonian*, June 25, 1995.
- ⁶¹ Ibid.
- ⁶² *Seattle Times*, November 2, 1994.

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- ⁶³ Ibid.
- ⁶⁴ *Seattle Times*, August 20, 1995.
- ⁶⁵ *Seattle Times*, November 30, 1997.
- ⁶⁶ *Seattle Times*, June 19, 1999.
- ⁶⁷ *Seattle Times*, March 16, 1999.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid.
- ⁶⁹ *Seattle Times*, April 1, 1999.
- ⁷⁰ *Seattle Times*, June 19, 2000.
- ⁷¹ Linda Ashton, *Seattle Times*, October 29, 1999.
- ⁷² Ibid.
- ⁷³ *Seattle Times*, February 22, 2000.
- ⁷⁴ *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, May 18, 1999.

CONCLUSION

THE CONTINUING STRUGGLE

The early history of Mexicans in the Pacific Northwest is obscure. Mexicans first arrived in miniscule numbers in the eighteenth century and in slightly larger numbers throughout the nineteenth. The early twentieth century saw the development of large scale agriculture in the Yakima Valley in Washington and the Willamette Valley in Oregon. The expansion of irrigation eventually drove the agriculture industry into the arid western parts of the states. Increased acreage meant increased labor needs and farmers eventually sought out Mexicans, first in Texas and neighboring mountain states and eventually among Mexican nationals, to provide low cost labor. From the very beginning, the economic aims of the northwestern farmers dictated the presence of Mexican-Americans while also limiting them politically.

The increased food production requirements of World War II, coupled with labor flight to industrial jobs and military conscription, led to a farm labor shortage in the United States. The shortage was acutely felt in the Northwest, where worker shortages had already led to a crisis in the winter of 1941. Mexican nationals were contracted to work in the United States

under the Bracero Program. Those Mexicans who traveled to the Northwest discovered an unsafe work environment, discriminatory wages, and deplorable living conditions. A dual wage scale developed by farmers triggered a series of strikes in Washington, Oregon, and Idaho, the only actions of their kind carried out by Bracero workers. After the war, many braceros returned, and workers from California joined them.

By the 1950s, Mexican-Americans and undocumented immigrants were employed primarily as seasonal workers in the rural Northwest, toiling for low wages during the harvest and remaining unemployed in the off season. Many lived in government and privately owned work camps together with European-American transients, though some also lived in permanent residences. Bad health, low wages, and a lack of education ensured that the community was socially and politically isolated. However, the Chicano Rights movement, originating in California, pushed a generation of Mexican-American university students towards open confrontation with mainstream American society. A Chicano student movement, started by United Mexican American Students, led boycotts and forced Chicano studies into the classrooms throughout Oregon and Washington.

Influenced by the young Chicano militants locally and inspired by the United Farm Workers in California, a Mexican-American farm labor movement developed in the 1970s. Through a series of actions, including strikes, the Valley Migrant League of Oregon and the United Farm Workers of Washington fought for higher wages

and better lives for seasonal workers. Unfortunately many of their victories were transient and the conservative 1980s saw the rolling back of their limited victories. A mainstream approach emerged in the Governors' Commissions on Hispanic Affairs that rose to prominence in Washington and Oregon. The Commissions addressed issues ranging from affirmative action to police brutality, but had little power beyond offering policy advice to the state governments.

The growing presence of undocumented workers in the United States prompted the 1986 passage of the federal Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) to curb illegal immigration, effectively providing amnesty to 2.7 million undocumented Latinos. The sudden passage of the act led to burgeoning numbers of Mexicans seeking work in the Northwest and produced housing shortages and large numbers of homeless unemployed seasonal workers. Oregon and Washington addressed this problem with a series of housing and labor reforms, but never resolved the root of the housing problems: the general poverty of the farm worker class. Despite its failure to curb illegal immigration or improve the lives of Mexican workers, the passage of the IRCA did allow many Mexican workers to publicly address their grievances, often in the form of labor organizing.

The United Farm Workers of Washington's ranks swelled in the wake of the amnesty with workers demanding better pay and working conditions. The strike against Pyramid Orchards and subsequent strikes for higher wages were complicated by the lack of

collective bargaining. Both Oregon and Washington denied collective bargaining to agricultural workers, and workers have traditionally been forced to fight aggressively for union representation or grievances. In the 1990s the United Farm Workers of Washington became affiliated with the national UFW following the long strike and boycott against Chateau Ste. Michelle. Despite a few victories, the Chateau Ste. Michelle outcome being a notable one, there was little actual labor reform for the agricultural industry as a whole. Similarly, Oregon's *Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste* (PCUN) scored a victory against the North Pacific Cannery and Packers (NORPAC) in 2002, but most farm workers failed to benefit from it.

The 1990s proved to be a daunting time for Mexicans and Mexican-Americans in the Northwest. In both Oregon and Washington, poverty, the absence of health care, poor working conditions, educational failures, and serious housing problems continued to plague the community. Most Mexicans were and are still engaged in agricultural labor, an industry that is not conducive to upward mobility. Without comprehensive reform of the agricultural industry and state labor laws, including expanded healthcare coverage for farm workers, wage controls, provision of affordable housing, and the right to organize, most Mexican-Americans will not significantly improve their lot in the foreseeable future.

Without representation in the government matching their demographic growth, Mexican-Americans will remain disenfranchised.

In the 1990s Oregon and Washington state governments failed to effectively provide political outreach to the Latino community. Non-Latino politicians rarely made any effort to address issues that affected rural or urban Hispanic voters. In the early 1990s it was almost as though the Chicano movement had never happened. California's Proposition 187 prompted a move towards electoral politics among Mexican-Americans, but there are still very few Mexican-American legislators or state officials in the Northwest.

With national immigration reform legislation looming, Mexican-Americans can ill afford to remain politically powerless. Many older Mexicans and newer immigrants do not vote. New arrivals, even when allowed to vote, often do not understand English well enough to participate in the process. Oregon and Washington should make every effort to enroll marginalized voters through extensive year round voter drives and educational outreach, including voter pamphlets printed in Spanish and the indigenous languages of Mexico. If there are ever to be significant political, economic, and educational reforms for Mexican-Americans, there will have to be more representation, and the ballot box is one of the few tools naturalized immigrants can use to gain that representation. Advocacy groups are important, but the state governments must take serious action if Mexican-Americans are to play a real role in policy making.

It is unpopular to write in terms of class struggle today, having an unfashionably Marxist tone, but the political history of Mexicans in the Northwest is largely a history of social and

economic struggle. The economic pull of jobs and promise of upward mobility were and are powerful draws for poor and unskilled Mexican labor. And the need or desire for cheap and effective labor has compelled private interests, like the farmers of the Northwest, to actively seek Mexican immigrants and migrants (including those without documentation) to work those jobs that European-Americans are unwilling to do. The needs of the agricultural industry in the Yakima, Columbia River, and Willamette Valleys determined the volume and nature of Mexican immigration to the Northwest.

Cultural and racial prejudices have played an important role in the traditional subjugation of Latinos and Mexican Americans, and indeed racism and bigotry still exist in the Northwest. But, as with the rest of the country, this racism has had a uniquely economic function in rural Washington and Oregon. Segregation and discrimination are guarantors of social immobility. Preventing access to education, health care, and voting rights guarantees that underclass workers remain underclass workers. The unique role Mexicans and Mexican-Americans played in the Northwest before and after the civil rights movement was that of a permanent underclass, a surplus labor supply that did the work no one else wanted.

Racism performed a useful function in places like the Yakima Valley, providing the justification for economic exploitation and barring the migrant underclass from democratic and social participation that might jeopardize their usefulness to the

farmers. As long as Mexicans were willing to work hard for little and ask few questions, they were spared the full brunt of overt racism. It was only when Chicanos actively asserted themselves that the system the farmers had devised came to antagonize them. The struggle for dignity contradicted the economic needs of the farmer class, who responded with stubborn resistance.

Mexicans have historically been sent a mixed message from the United States. US industry, particularly agriculture, exercises considerable influence on immigration; it has exercised this pull since the nineteenth century and continues to do so today. Mexicans have felt compelled to follow economic opportunity to the United States. But when they have attempted to assert themselves as political and economic agents, Anglo-Americans have sought to close the door. The message has often been: work hard and keep your mouth shut and you can stay, but do not fool yourself into thinking that you are entitled to our rights. Even naturalized migrant workers and second and third generation Mexican-Americans were compelled to remember this in times of unrest.

As I write this, both houses of Congress have proposed comprehensive national immigration legislation that may lead to amnesty for 11 million illegal immigrants. Reflecting the character of the national debate, legislative proposals have ranged from draconian mass deportations to more benevolent worker visas. Some states have taken the initiative with their own

legislation, arresting and deporting undocumented immigrants, and recent initiatives in Arizona have sought to ban undocumented immigrants from all public services. Meanwhile, right wing extremists "protecting" the US border have a sympathetic ear with mainstream news pundits like Lou Dobbs who express blatant xenophobia on national television. Responding to the general mood of the debate and trying to move it in a more productive direction, thousands of immigrants have taken to the streets in massive demonstrations. For the first time in the nation's history, large numbers of undocumented workers are openly protesting, publicly declaring their economic necessity.

A recent compromise bill in the U.S. Senate, one that would have provided the possibility of citizenship for millions of workers, collapsed in partisan hostility. But after a recess, talks have begun again and a new immigration bill is quite likely to pass in the near future. A much harsher bill in the House would not only criminalize undocumented immigrants, but also anyone who assists them. President George W. Bush, himself from a state that is heavily reliant on Mexican agricultural and service labor, has indicated his support for compromise legislation that makes citizenship contingent on work. Beefing up the border patrol, cracking a few heads, and creating a workers amnesty are not terribly revolutionary ideas and the result will very likely be a sequel to the IRCA, albeit one without an analog to the pre-1982 amnesty.

On a recent National Day of Action, an unprecedented 25,000 protesters marched down 2nd Avenue in Seattle and rallied before the Federal Building as part of national immigration protests. Most of the participants were Mexican-Americans and many were undocumented immigrants. The march was the largest political rally by Latinos in Seattle's history. A smaller rally of 1,200 recently marched in Portland. Walkouts have been staged in Washington and Oregon to protest the harsh House legislation. The Day of Action demonstration in Seattle was significant. For one day, Mexican-Americans were conspicuously visible in the economic capitol of Washington.

The rally suggests that Mexican-Americans can exercise real power in Washington and Oregon. Barring mass deportations, a large number of those gathered are here to stay, and are now aware they have a voice and the impetus for collective action on their own behalf. But if a compromise bill provides citizenship for large numbers of them, the real fight will have just begun. Political organizing of this magnitude must continue well into the future if Mexican-Americans are to achieve the economic progress, political representation, and human dignity that they have earned but have long been denied in the Pacific Northwest.

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