RECLAIMING AZTLAN: SOUTHERN COLORADO AND CHICANO ACTIVISM OF THE
1970s

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by
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Dedication

For Tara, her support has been amazing
Acknowledgements

It is my honor to be adding to the historiography of Colorado and the Chicano Movement by completing the process of researching and writing *Reclaiming Aztlan: Southern Colorado and Chicano Activism of the 1970s*. Even though I use several topics in this thesis which I feel are vital to describe the history of southern Colorado during the 1970s this is in no way an entire history. Rather, I view my work as an opening salvo for history research to be done by future students and historians using the Ethnic Heritage & Diversity Collection housed in the archives at Colorado State University-Pueblo. I feel that a wealth of information exists pertaining to the Chicano Student Movement. The Juan Federico “Freddie Freak” Miguel Arguello Trujillo Chicano Movement Collection offers an excellent array of material for a historian to address the role of college students during the Chicano Movement in both Colorado and the region. The Jose Esteban Ortega Papers, also located in the university archives, provide a great deal of information for historians interested in writing about historical and cultural events planned by Chicano Activists throughout the state. The documents in this collection are intriguing and span from the early 1970s to 2007. Each collection highlights the role of Chicano Students and provides a foundation for research on that topic.

I believe that historians should tackle the role of organizations such as the Brown Berets and *La Raza Unida* when telling the story of the Chicano Movement in Colorado. The Garcia Family Papers donated by Delfina and Luis Garcia to the Ethnic Heritage & Diversity Collection offer a launching point for this type of research as Luis belonged to the Brown Berets. For both topics I recommend conducting oral history interviews with the *La Raza Unida* and Brown Beret members that still reside in the area. Eddie Montour would be an excellent resource. Though I have not spoken to him directly, he has spoken to me through the documents that I have used in writing *Reclaiming Aztlan* as I have quoted him several times. Mr. Montour has volunteered his
time in the past giving interviews to undergraduate students studying the Chicano Movement. Al Gurule has done much of the same to give interviews to undergraduate students. As the fiery *La Raza Unida* gubernatorial candidate in 1970, Gurule’s memory and documents would be valuable for any work on *La Raza Unida* in Colorado.

The area which I feel merits a significant amount of attention is the role of Chicanas in southern Colorado’s movement history. In writing *Reclaiming Aztlan* I have relied heavily on newspaper articles to develop the information needed to support an assignment of this size. Having read much of the printed work from the era I have found female voices to be relatively muffled. This stems from two places. First, in reading about political and labor activism in the 1970s connected to the Colorado Chicano Movement, contemporary newspapers largely interviewed and quoted men when writing their stories. Second, groups of activists which included several different women working and writing for *La Cucaracha*, a main source of information used to write about community and educational activism in Pueblo, consciously chose to leave by-lines blank. To remedy this I recommend conducting interviews with women involved with the movement. I have interviewed Deborah Martinez-Martinez and spoken with Deborah Espinosa and each woman provided great insight and thoughtfulness which I hope is translated in the following text. Each offered recommendations of other women living in Pueblo that played active roles during the movement and should have their voices heard.

I want to thank Beverly Allen, the archivist at Colorado State University-Pueblo and a number of work-study students who kept the doors open for me while I conducted my research in the off hours of the day. In addition to the collections housed at the university I accessed newspapers privately owned by Juan and Deborah Espinosa. I thank them for allowing me to access this information; they are gracious and patient hosts.
Abstract

This thesis, *Reclaiming Aztlan: Southern Colorado and Chicano Activism of the 1970s* is an historical examination of events that occurred in Colorado during the Chicano Rights Movement when the local Mexican American population organized and clashed with the Anglo establishment in an effort to better their communities. This work describes how Chicanos in southern Colorado lobbied to maintain historic land rights in the San Luis Valley and, more importantly, how Chicanos utilized alternative media to frame the debate and give voice to their side of the argument. The connection Chicanos have to the land runs deep and has been cultivated for generations as Mexican Americans living in Colorado utilized and worked the land in order to live. This connection to the land led Mexican Americans towards potential exploitation in the fields throughout Colorado causing Chicano Movement activists to engage in a struggle to improve both living and working conditions of migrant workers. Part of improving the living conditions of farm workers and disadvantaged Chicanos throughout southern Colorado meant addressing the health care needs of the poor. Chicano groups recognized this need and in Pueblo, Dr. Ricardo Rivera operated the Pueblo Neighborhood Health Centers in order to keep Chicanos healthy and well. The long term cure for issues facing the Chicano community in Pueblo and southern Colorado lie in improving the educational system for minority students. *Reclaiming Aztlan* argues that through the activism of Chicano students and the implementation of Chicano Studies curriculums at both the college and high school level during the 1970s a new generation of Chicanos received a superior education in comparison to their parents and, for the first time, had real opportunities to attend college, earn a degree and enter the middle class as proud, historically aware Chicano professionals.
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Introduction

Colorado is my ancestral home. As an educator, part of the job requires me to address the students who often inquire about my ethnicity and my country of origin. Because I am a Coloradoan and a Latino this seemingly simple and innocent question merits an often complex response. To avoid a prolonged explanation, I usually tell the student that I am of Mexican descent and that my family has lived here for several generations. This response seems to satisfy most students who kindly nod and tell me how interesting it is that my family has such deep roots in the state. On one occasion, after having delivered my canned response, one female student asked me, specifically, how long and how many generations of my family have lived in the region. I told her that I am a sixth generation resident and according to family genealogy sometime prior to the 1840s my great-great-great grandfather Jose Maria Archuletta moved into the San Luis Valley.

To emphasize the point of my family’s longevity in the state, I explained that the church where my daughters received baptism happened to be exact same church where my grandfather was baptized in 1919. The student responded with “Oh! Mr. Archuletta, you’re like a “white” Mexican!” which I found incredibly intriguing. One could argue that in modern American society all minorities are judged by two separate sets of standards. The first judgment is handed down by the majority wherein your authenticity or Americanness is assessed and deemed acceptable or not. The next judgment is more complex because it is stratified and originates within each specific minority group. Members of a minority group assess, for example the “brownness” or “blackness” of their peers which potentially creates unnecessary distinctions when none should exist. The girl happened to be a first generation American whose parents migrated to the United States from Mexico so to her, the long presence of my family in Colorado serves to make me “white” if not quite American.
I have thought a lot about what exactly it means to be a “white” Mexican as opposed to being a “brown” American. For residents of Colorado with a family history similar to mine the difference may be hard to identify. Regardless of which side of the question you philosophically fall, Colorado Latinos share a deep connection to the land and a long history of habitation. This presence is readily evident in the southern portion of the state where rivers, mountains, and towns have Spanish names and the landscape is dotted with adobe structures. Prior to 1848, the southern portion of what is now Colorado comprised the northern frontier of Mexico. Going back even further, the area’s first Hispano settlers arrived in southern Colorado because the Spanish government granted individuals large tracts of land emphasizing colonization as an instrument of control. Despite these facts the history of the region often becomes lost to the present residents of Colorado who view the area as wholly a white, American space. The widely accepted master narrative of our country tells school children of all races that through Manifest Destiny and Western Expansion white, Protestant men and women moved into the region bringing with them both civilization and American values while subduing all savage people living in the frontier. Colorado’s place within this American narrative is connected to the Gold and Silver Rushes which, after decades of rumors and stories, began in earnest when William Green Russell and a small contingent of people found large yields of gold in 1858 after spending the summer prospecting along the Front Range.¹ But what does this story teach us about the people already here and the places already settled?

¹ Elliot West, The Contested Plains: Indians, Goldseekers, & the Rush to Colorado (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 104 & 105. The American historical narrative that I am critiquing often times erases Native American history in the Southwest, not just Chicano/Mexican American history. In The Contested Plains Elliot West describes the Native American role in Colorado and the cultural decline of Native peoples caused by western expansion of white Americans. Many other scholars have produced historical arguments that reassert the presence of Native Americans in the Southwest. Though Native Americans are not the focus of my work, through research I have come to understand that many Chicano activists proudly connect to the Native American or indigenous aspect of their mestizo heritage.
In Colorado, an atmosphere of discrimination and socioeconomic disparity existed for decades prior to the Chicano Movement as Mexican Americans seldom challenged the Anglo power structure controlling Pueblo or other southern Colorado towns throughout the first half of the Twentieth Century. After World War II, a number of Mexican Americans living in Colorado chose to Americanize rather than remain outside of the American dream by holding on to their cultural traditions. It would be common for a man to return home from the service only to accept labor intensive employment in order to provide for his family. The desire to appear “white” within larger society relegated southern Colorado Mexican Americans to an inferior station in which they had to accept the treatment they received from Anglos, good or bad. Anglos controlling the city of Pueblo considered Mexican Americans “…a cheap source of exploitable labor at the mill or the ordinance depot” because that is “…what the Chicanos had always been.” The trade off for receiving employment and the government designation of Caucasian acted to keep Mexican Americans silent on social issues. However, by the late 1960s and early 1970s a growing number of Colorado Chicanos dissatisfied with the affects of Americanization grasped the importance of activism and began to labor for change within society.

Individuals involved in the Colorado Chicano Rights Movement stimulated change in Mexican American communities statewide by acting at the local level to identify needs and organized accordingly to advance their specific causes. This experience is indicative of the general Chicano Rights Movement of the 1960s and 1970s which occurred throughout the Southwest. In Colorado, Mexican Americans weary of the social status quo, which ultimately treated them as non-white, inferior others, endeavored to improve the conditions of their

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children’s schools, provide aid to the poor, reclaim lost land, improve working conditions among farm laborers, and to gain political power. *Reclaiming Aztlan: Southern Colorado and Chicano Activism of the 1970s* argues that the Civil Rights Movement in southern Colorado, or *El Movimiento*, focused on land, healthcare, and education and that the emphasis on grassroots organization by southern Colorado activists during the Chicano Movement is a template for organizing social movements as well as a outline for understanding how social movements meet the needs of particular communities in Colorado or elsewhere.

Central to the argument of *Reclaiming Aztlan*, the following questions emerged during the research process. How did denying southern Colorado Chicanos access to the land in the San Luis Valley affect their economic survival during the 1960s and how did this issue become politicized throughout Colorado in the 1970s? How did Chicanos in Pueblo learn about “Chicano issues” and how did they participate in the public discourse? What were the working conditions faced by Colorado’s Chicano laborers and how did poverty affect their health? How did activists in Pueblo serve the health needs of the poor, in particular the Chicano population? And lastly, how did Chicano activists in Pueblo improve the educational system and what influence did Chicano Studies classes have in that process?

To begin to uncover the answers to these questions, an analysis of a quantitative study of the Chicano population living in Pueblo County based on the 1970 federal census had to be completed. Several factors created socioeconomic gaps separating Chicanos and Anglos living in the region. *A Study of the Barrios de Pueblo* used the Socioeconomic Status Index, or the S.E.S., to demonstrate economic and social disparity among Puebloans of different ethnicities.³

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³George Autobee, “*A Study of the Barrios de Pueblo*” (M.A. thesis, Southern Colorado State College, 1975), 15. The S.E.S. Index is a composite scale which compares five different variables. These variables are Median Family Income, Education, Employment, Overcrowding, and Normal Family figures from a particular census tract. The ‘Normal Family’ figure refers to the number of two parent households within a tract.
The technician conducting the study, George Autobee, used the S.E.S. index to analyze forty different Pueblo neighborhoods, or “tracts,” which he then ranked 1 through 40. The statistical evidence indicates a direct correlation between a high percentage of Chicano residents and low S.E.S Index rankings for a given tract. The S.E.S. data from Pueblo County in 1970 is representative of other communities in southern Colorado because it highlights issues commonly plaguing Chicanos in the Southwest. The data confirms that Chicanos living in Colorado during the 1970s endured wide ranging social and economic problems such as low annual incomes, low educational attainment, and high rates of unemployment just to name a few.

Considering the social and economic problems faced by Colorado Chicanos, research focused next on oral histories and several recently conducted interviews to gain a greater understanding of the Chicano experience during the 1960s and 1970s. This work attempts to rectify the issue of an Anglo-centric perspective on state history by utilizing Chicano voices when analyzing The Chicano Movement and its impact on the history of southern Colorado. Currently, scholarship in Southwestern history emphasizes the importance of individual and collective memory and of recovering voices from the margins, as both a tool of self-empowerment and for the historical record. As one historian explains “Where the archives are silent, memories speak volumes....” The sharing of memories, the sharing of one’s personal

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4 Autobee, 20. All 40 tracts were ranked individually for each S.E.S. variable, with the “best” tract receiving a number one ranking while the “worst” tract received a rank of forty. For instance, the tract ranked fortieth overall had a Spanish surname population of 78.7% compared to the number one ranked tract which had a Spanish surname population of 7.9%. Autobee refers to people in the study as ‘Spanish surnamed’ which is the Mexican American or Chicano population living in Pueblo, Colorado at the time of the analysis.

5 Lydia R. Otero, La Calle: Spatial Conflicts and Urban Renewal in a Southwest City (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010), 1.

6 Monica Perales, Smeltertown: Making and Remembering a Southwest Border Community (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 10. A few individuals from southern Colorado have shared their memories of the Chicano Movement with me, and this work would be much different if they had not been so forthcoming.
history can be a dynamic means for understanding how an individual’s experience fits into the larger history of a particular place at a particular time.

The next phase of research called for studying the events associated with the Chicano Movement in Colorado and analyzing the practices of Chicano activists. This required an examination of several newspaper collections from the 1960s and 1970s which represented and reported the views of traditional, college, and Chicano media outlets. Combing over these articles uncovered what historian Ignacio M. Garcia describes as “Militant Ethos” or the ideas, strategies, tactics, and rationalizations used by Mexican Americans to combat racism, discrimination, poverty, and segregation. In Colorado during the 1970s the militant ethos of the Chicano Rights Movement, manifested itself as organized walk outs, marches, occupations, boycotts, strikes, and demonstrations. These activities occurred almost simultaneously and required media outlets to coordinate the efforts of southern Colorado residents. In the 1970s activists throughout the state demanded that traditional land rights and usage be honored, they demanded that unfair labor practices leading to poverty and poor health be brought to an end, and that education be improved so that future generations of Chicanos would be prepared to advance in society. Chicano Movement newspapers served El Movimiento by documenting those efforts.

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7 Ignacio M. Garcia, Chicanismo: The Forging of a Militant Ethos among Mexican Americans (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1998), 4. In addition to providing an analytical strategy for describing the tactics associated with the Chicano Movement, Garcia identifies distinct phases of the Chicano Movement during the 1960’s and 1970’s. The first phase of the Chicano Movement began when Mexican American intellectuals, politicians, and students came to believe that the liberal agenda of the 1960’s failed their community. (pg. 9) The second phase of the Chicano Movement rejected Anglo stereotypes of Mexican Americans and replaced those ideas with proud, historically rich Chicano archetypes ready to fight for their community. (pg. 11) This connection to a past lead Chicanos directly to the third phase outlined by Garcia in which Chicano activists, intellectuals, and artists affirmed a pride in their racial and class status and it became acceptable to be proud of their culture, food, language, music, and being brown. (pg. 12) The final phase of the Chicano Movement occurred when activists engaged in oppositional politics and developed platforms, manifestos, and tactics that opposed the American mainstream. (pg. 13)
Reclaiming Aztlan: Southern Colorado and Chicano Activism of the 1970s covers events which occurred in southern Colorado as they reached the crucial point when the efforts of Chicano activists to change the establishment began to take effect. It was during the decade of the 1970s that the Civil Rights Movement took hold in southern Colorado and despite great adversity; successful activism by Chicanos in Pueblo made the era one of great advancement. It is in this realm that this work adds to the historiography of the Chicano Rights Movement and focuses on the efforts of Chicano activists in southern Colorado and the improvements made in Pueblo, the region’s largest city. Reclaiming Aztlan fills the vacuum left by other historical works that approach the Chicano Movement in Colorado through the lens of the Crusade for Justice, a Denver based organization focused on education, and its leader Rudolfo “Corky” Gonzales. Historian Ernesto B. Vigil author of The Crusade for Justice: Chicano Militancy and the Governments War on Dissent, states that the goal of his work is to “…give readers and idea of who we are [crusade activists]” and why social problems in Denver, Colorado created longstanding grievances directly leading to political activism by Chicanos in the 1960s. Vigil’s work is required reading for those invested in learning about the Chicano Movement in Colorado but it does not focus on activism in the southern part of the state nor does it acknowledge the role of grassroots activists in Pueblo.

As Vigil’s work examines the Chicano Movement through the Crusade for Justice, Occupied America: A History of Chicanos written by Rodolfo F. Acuna is unparalleled in its scope as it addresses hundreds of years of history. Rather than using an organization, person, or event to make an argument, Occupied America provides background information on the Chicano Movement throughout the entire Southwest. It is widely used as a textbook for Chicano Studies.

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courses. Acuna broadly writes about the efforts of Chicano activists in the 1960s illustrating that the Chicano Movement happened, in part, because of grassroots recognition of American problems by Chicanos. He describes the 1960s as hugely important in understanding Chicano History and explains that during the sixties “Mexican American identity reached a point where it was integrated into the political life of the nation.” In this regard Vigil and Acuna are in agreement. This thesis includes the successes of the Chicano Movement in Pueblo during the 1970s and Acuna address the decade by describing the national conservative backlash. Even though increased educational attainment during the 1970s allowed many Chicanos across the nation to enter the middle class, Acuna argues the political dismantling of liberal programs designed to provide America’s poor opportunities to escape poverty, at the same time kept many Chicanos poor. Reclaiming Aztlán echoes the emphasis on grassroots, community activism however it examines Pueblo and southern Colorado under the microscope, whereas Acuna writes about the Chicano Movement on a national scale.

Like Vigil, activists and authors Jose’ Angel Gutierrez and Ignacio M. Garcia both write about organizations, locations, and individuals which exemplify beliefs and strategies of the Chicano Movement. In The Making of a Chicano Militant: Lessons from Cristal, Gutierrez describes the role of community organizing and Chicano mobilization as the catalyst for political successes during the Chicano Movement. He writes “Average people in the course of daily life make things happen.” In Chicanismo: The Forging of a Militant Ethos Among Mexican Americans, Garcia focuses on providing a theoretical framework for understanding the Chicano

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10 Acuna, 326.
11 Jose’ Angel Gutierrez, The Making of a Chicano Militant: Lessons from Cristal (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 5. Grassroots agencies proved significant in the election of Los Cinco Candidatos, the five original Mexican American candidates elected to political office in Cristal City, Texas in the mid 1960s and all later candidates running as La Raza Unida party members. Gutierrez writes The Making of a Chicano Militant in an autobiographical style.
Movement. In this effort he describes the role of Chicano Studies programs and the Chicano Press. He states “Both Chicano studies, as a political and academic movement, and the Chicano press, as a conveyor of information, proved to be crucial to the reinterpretation of the Chicano experience.”¹² Both of these authors write about the Chicano Movement in Texas and provide an in-depth analysis of topics covered by Acuna in *Occupied America*. The primary focus of this thesis is grassroots organizing, Chicano Studies, and the role alternative Chicano media in Pueblo during the Chicano Movement. In that regard, a comparative study of *Reclaiming Atzlan* and the work of Gutierrez and Garcia would be an interesting way to learn about the differences and similarities of the Chicano Movement as it unfolded in different areas of the country.

The conservative push back against the Chicano movement in the 1970s sought to associate criminal and antisocial behavior with the term “Chicano” and on some levels succeeded in turning the term into something deemed as radical. Some members of *El Movimiento* in Colorado relished the “rebel” or “outlaw” mystique associated with the term “Chicano” but generally during the 1970s many Mexican Americans attempted to distance themselves from the moniker all together.¹³ In *Reclaiming Aztlan: Southern Colorado and the Chicano Activism of the 1970s* the terms “Mexican American” and “Chicano” are used to describe the same group of people. However, self-identifying as a Chicano is a preference that longtime Pueblo activist Joseph Eddie Montour explains by stating “I am an American by birth and Chicano by choice…it’s a renaissance and a political statement.”¹⁴ With that in mind, this thesis mirrored the self-identification preference stated by the men and women providing oral

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¹² Garcia, 56.

¹³ Acuna, 327. My father recalls being told by my grandfather to watch out for Chicanos because they were all trouble makers. When I was young, I personally felt like the term came across as edgy or ethnic sounding compared to the term Mexican American.

histories. In some areas the term “Hispano” is used to describe residents of the San Luis Valley. Southwestern historians commonly refer to the Spanish speaking individuals living in New Mexico and Colorado from the mid 1800s as “Hispanos” and that precedent is followed in this thesis. The term “Latino” is used as a Twenty-first century idiom that universally describes diverse groups of Spanish surnamed people that may share cultural traditions, practices, beliefs, or languages.

The Chicano Movement, or El Movimiento, demonstrated the power of grassroots driven social change. El Movimiento allowed a minority group that felt it was treated as an afterthought at best, to assault the existing institutions in order to achieve a number of social and political objectives. El Movimiento had a large tent as it drew its members from high school and college campuses as well as the fields where migrant farm workers toiled.\(^{15}\) Vietnam veterans, blue-collar workers, and a number of Mexican American professionals became activists in areas throughout the Southwest in order to demand proper treatment by the established power structures controlling American society.\(^{16}\) The Colorado Chicano Rights Movement stimulated change within the Mexican American population when individuals, acting at the local level, identified the needs of their particular community and organized to advance their cause. In the 1970s Mexican Americans, identified in the federal census represented a third of the city of Pueblo’s total population making the city a hub for activism and the primary urban center in a region home to a large indigenous Chicano population for well over a century.

\(^{15}\) Cesar Chavez unionized farm laborers during the 1960s which lead to improved working conditions, better pay, and the right to collectively bargain. This work took extreme effort and Chavez lead the unionized workers during many strikes and boycotts especially on items such as grapes grown in central California. Chavez, born in Yuma, Arizona, brought the social and economic injustices faced by Chicanos to the mainstream through his efforts.

\(^{16}\) Few Mexican-American professionals existed at this time in American history as one of the purposes of El Movimiento was to increase the number of Chicano professionals. In writing this history I use the experiences of Chicano doctors, journalists, educators, and business that reaped the rewards of Chicano activism and then set out to continue and improve the quality of life for all Chicanos.
La Tierra our Lifeblood

“Historically La Tierra has been the lifeblood of our Raza. The land is deeply intertwined with our cultural heritage: nuestras raices son el la teirra. Our ties to la tierra span countless ages, for from our blood the land draws nourishment, as we in turn draw sustenance.” ¹⁷ La Cucaracha Volume II, No. 1 February 1977

In the 1970s land rights activism served as one of the great causes of El Movimiento as numerous Mexican American families living in southern Colorado resided in the region for multiple generations. For many families, this presence predated the 1848 annexation of the region by the United States through the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo. This long physical presence on the land during eras of Spanish, Mexican, and then American rule created a deep connection between the residents and the place itself. As small farmers, sheep herders, cowboys, or miners Mexican Americans living in southern Colorado counted on the land for their livelihood. Historian Maria Montoya argues that since the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848 inequality across the Southwest has been controlled by property regimes and that history and culture matter for those interested in understanding the effects of that inequality.¹⁸ Essentially, the Hispano loss of land in southern Colorado during the Nineteenth Century created economic disparity between Mexican Americans and Anglos in the Twentieth Century.

Montoya writes that “Many Hispanics, particularly those who live on old Mexican land grants, still feel a particular tie to the landscape even though it has become impractical for them to make a living from it.”¹⁹ Due to economic issues faced by Chicanos in the 1970s the subject of land rights became a prominent concern for activists living in southern Colorado. During the

¹⁷ “Land is the Struggle,” Pueblo (Colo.) La Cucaracha, February 1977.
¹⁸ Maria Montoya, Translating Property The Maxwell Land Grant and the Conflict Over Land in the American Southwest, 1840-1900, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), xv.
¹⁹Montoya, 208.
1960s a change in ownership brought thousands of acres traditionally used by Chicanos living in the San Luis Valley into private hands. The denial of communal land rights compounded issues facing southern Colorado Chicanos such as poverty. By the beginning of the 1970s Chicanos politicized the issue as they struggled for a return to traditional land usage. During the land rights struggle activists utilized the Chicano press to publicize their resistance and to gain the support of Mexican Americans throughout southern Colorado.

The struggle for land documented by La Cucaracha in 1977 defined the conflict between Hispanics and Anglos living in southern Colorado since the end of the United States’ war against Mexico and the drafting of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo. Signed in 1848, the Treaty included ten articles and the final three, dealing with property rights, citizenship, and land grants lead to generations of conflict. Prior to the treaty’s ratification the United States Senate eliminated Article X, a provision providing for the land rights of Hispano inhabitants of the newly acquired lands. Before the eventual acceptance of the treaty by Mexico, the Mexican government requested clarification explaining the U.S. Senate’s reasons for making the change. After 1848, a clash of cultures occurred in the Southwest because land based hegemonic control asserted by Anglo Americans and supported by the United States government failed to immediately subdue Mexican Americans living in the region.

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20 “Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848),” in The U.S. War With Mexico: A Brief History with Documents, ed. Ernesto Chavez (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2008), 121. Article VIII provided for the legal protection of property rights for Mexican citizens living in the ceded territories. Article IX, reworded by the U.S Senate before ratification, specifically dealt with the citizenship status of Mexicans living in the acquired lands. Article X stated “All grants of land made by the Mexican Government...in territories previously appertaining to Mexico, and remaining for the future within the limits of the United States, shall be respected as valid...”

21 Nathan Clifford, “The Protocol of Queretaro (1848),” in The U.S. With Mexico: A Brief History with Documents, ed. Ernesto Chavez (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2008), 129. Nathan Clifford, the U.S. ambassador to Mexico, made the official response in May of 1848 with The Protocol of Queretaro. The Protocol clearly stated that by suppressing Article X of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo the United States government “did not in any way intend to annul the grants of lands made by Mexico in the ceded territories” and that Mexican “grantees may cause their legitimate titles to be acknowledged before [A]merican tribunals.
Environmental factors led Hispanos and Anglos to engage in the creation of a joint frontier throughout northern New Mexico and southern Colorado which allowed both groups to survive economically. This economic competition began in the 1880s when the Anglo population increased making them the numerically dominate group within the region. In order to compete within this intercultural frontier Mexican Americans developed strategies to manage their changing economic circumstances. In southern Colorado and northern New Mexico, these adaptations allowed Hispano communities to thrive during an era of change however, if economic events called for a more militant and hard-line approach, regional Hispanics did not hesitate to turn towards vigilantism to fight for their land rights.

Mexican Americans violently resisted Anglo hegemony in the region when they organized groups such as Las Gorras Blancas. In northern New Mexico and Colorado’s San Luis Valley, Las Gorras Blancas rode at night cutting down fences, destroying railroad tracks, burning bridges, and intimidating local teamsters. After a night of vandalism members of Las Gorras Blancas nailed a message to a building which stated “Our purpose is to protect the rights of the people in general and especially those of the helpless classes....” Whether it was Las

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22 Sarah Deutsch, No Separate Refuge: Culture, Class, and Gender on an Anglo-Hispanic Frontier in the American Southwest, 1880-1914, (New York City: Oxford University Press, 1987), 14. First, Mexican Americans relied on communal village living which had long been the mode of operation. The second strategy involved Mexican Americans earning a multi-source income while moving between Anglo and Hispanic economic systems. The last strategy involved the expansion of Hispanic settlements into new areas of the region.

23 Deutsch, 25. In addition to the activities of Las Gorras Blancas, Mexican Americans maintained and created other organizations like the Penitente Brotherhood and mutualistas, mutual aid societies, to help them cope with life on the intercultural frontier. These groups provided social aid to underprivileged members of society and sometimes use political organization to fight the Anglo power structure from the inside. Perhaps the most significant social contribution of the Penitentes is the care and services they provided for the sick and deceased. The hermanos cared for the sick by creating informal hospitals and provided food and aid for their families. When a community member died the brothers performed necessary functions like seeing to the preparation of the body, spiritual services and burial. Marta Weigle. Brothers of Light, Brothers of Blood: The Penitentes of the Southwest (Santa Fe, N.M.: Sunstone Press, 2007), 151. The Penitente brotherhood also utilized consolidated political effort to force a change within the existing power structure. The 1892 election of Lorenzo Lopez as the sheriff of San Miguel County is a prime example of this organized political effort. Lopez, a known Penitente, left the Republican Party and joined the People’s Party in 1890 and within a two year time span had enough votes to win a county election and maintain his position as sheriff. (Weigle, 86.) Penitente political involvement remained active for several decades and helped the
Gorras Blancas or their Chicano counterparts in the 1960s and 1970s, the goal of protecting land rights which allowed Hispanics to survive in the harsh and desolate climate of southern Colorado remained important.

Because land served as the primary vehicle by which the United States asserted hegemonic control over new territories and populations Hispanics showed Las Gorras Blancas a great deal of support throughout the region. The spread of American democracy provided new economic opportunities for Anglos willing to move to western frontier territories. This expansion simultaneously asserted rights for Americans migrating from the East while limiting the rights of minority groups inhabiting the West. Historians describe the importance of land as a driving force behind much of the conflict in the Southwest between Mexican Americans and Anglos as prejudice and corruption prevented Mexican Americans from asserting their property rights. By the 1970s Colorado Chicanos clearly understood the narrative of lost land and the legal struggle over property rights as well as the dire economic consequences of living in the San Luis Valley.

Chicano activists living in Pueblo produced a newspaper which served as a sounding board for the Chicano Movement in the late 1970s. Activists used La Cucaracha to control a portion of the public dialog and to publicized pertinent events and worthy causes. Activists used La Cucaracha to reassert the cultural relevance of Chicanos throughout the region as the newspaper printed articles informing southern Colorado residents about the struggle between Chicanos living in the San Luis Valley and Jack Taylor during their long fight for historic land usage of the mountainous region known as La Culebra. The communication derived from La

citizens living in rural communities organize and meet the demands of Anglo encroachment and the changing political environment of the intercultural frontier.

24 Montoya, xii.
Cucaracha asserted the role of grassroots organization in the Colorado Chicano Movement during the 1970s.

With its many distinct and active Chicano organizations, residents of Pueblo supported *La Cucaracha*, a newspaper published primarily on a monthly basis from 1976 to 1984 and distributed to its readers for free. Written by Chicanos for Chicanos, *La Cucaracha* described itself as a “community newspaper” that represented the Chicano perspective that other local and more traditional media outlets lacked in their reporting. The three primary co-creators of *La Cucaracha*, Juan Espinosa, David Martinez, and Jess Vigil all believed that established media outlets like the *Pueblo Star Journal and Pueblo Chieftain* or Radio KAPI and *El Progresso*, Spanish language radio news programs, did not adequately serve the poorest members of Pueblo’s society.25 Chicanos represented the largest percentage of Pueblo’s poor, so *La Cucaracha* aimed to offer stories that the “average Chicano” needed to read. Because newspapers served as a tool for becoming educated on the issues, organizing to improve communities, and joining the public dialog the communication offered on the pages of *La Cucaracha* made the newspaper an important part of the Chicano Movement in Pueblo.

According to Espinosa “a network of friends” created grassroots support for *La Cucaracha* by distributing the newspaper from their places of business. The public could pick up a free copy of *La Cucaracha* while conducting their usual business at these local establishments. Over eight years of production this network grew to approximately 250 drop sites throughout the region. Though primarily distributed in the city and county of Pueblo, *La Cucaracha* had readers from the San Luis Valley, Rocky Ford, and other communities throughout southern Colorado.26 *La Cucaracha* staff members monitored distribution rates and

26 Juan Espinosa, interview by author, Pueblo, Co., 22 December 2011.
moved the newsstands accordingly. The newspaper was published by a volunteer staff and only solicited enough advertising to meet the cost of production. The paper exemplified the same type of grassroots activism as it covered with a number of contributors often working with Espinosa, Vigil, and Martinez on the weekends in one of their homes to complete the monthly issue of *La Cucaracha*. Anyone who wanted to contribute to the newspaper could make an impact.

Deborah Martinez-Martinez, a college educated Chicana volunteered her time to write articles for *La Cucaracha* in 1976. At that time, Martinez-Martinez worked full time for the League of United Latin American Citizens, or LULAC, as an education specialist. Once she finished her work day, Martinez-Martinez would drop her husband off at his night job and then go write stories for the newspaper from five o’clock in the evening until midnight. Many of the articles written by Martinez centered on educational issues in and around Pueblo. According to Martinez-Martinez *La Cucaracha* was one of perhaps fifteen Chicano Movement newspapers circulating around the Southwest. However, she mentioned that these other newspapers generally closed down within the first five years of their existence. The importance of Movement newspapers like *La Cucaracha* was that individuals reading the contents came to understand that opportunities existed for Mexican Americans allowing them to improve their circumstances. *La Cucaracha* and other Chicano newspapers provided Mexican Americans the vocabulary needed to pursue those opportunities. As Martinez-Martinez stated, newspapers allowed Chicanos to change their communities for the better by “giving people the words that they needed to describe what had been happening to them.”

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At the time, the creators of the newspaper believed that everybody in Pueblo would read *La Cucaracha* because it carried stories that the city’s other newspapers left out. Espinosa and company believed that *La Cucaracha* kept local issues on the minds of community members. This belief proved crucial as *La Cucaracha* provided a platform for Chicanos to publicize both the successes and needs of their community. The paper became the platform for the Chicano Movement in Pueblo because it continuously reminded community members of the issues they faced as well as providing a public way to connect activists. The newspaper boasted a professional staff and produced an excellent product for nearly eight years. The eventual decline of *La Cucaracha* can be pinpointed to the lack of business savvy held by the executive board as they adhered to the ideals of the Movement, even when it meant losing out on economic opportunities and not to any failure to promote Chicano issues or meet the needs of Pueblo’s Chicano community.\(^{29}\)

For Espinosa and the other founders of the newspaper even the name *La Cucaracha* held symbolic meaning for the way the newspaper represented the Chicano community in Pueblo and served as an important media alternative. Prior to its publication the creators, plus a small group of family and friends, voted to name the newspaper *El Mensaje del Pueblo*. Translated to English *el mensaje* means ‘the message’ which the journalists hoped to spread around town. Espinosa admitted that this name seemed a bit sanctimonious at best and perhaps smug at worst; however, it won the majority vote of the newly created executive board. After taking a night to reflect, Espinosa returned to his collaborators revealing a new idea for the name of their newspaper, *La Cucaracha*. The others immediately accepted the idea of “*una cucaracha en la

\(^{29}\) Juan Espinosa, interview by author, Pueblo, Co., 22 December 2011.
casa” or one cockroach in the house and changed the name of the newspaper and never reconsidered their decision.30

Espinosa and the creators of the newspaper described the significance of the publication’s name in the “Ola...” section of the very first volume of the paper. Quite directly, the name of the periodical represented the lowly insect which roamed the Earth for millions of years surviving all natural catastrophes. The doomsday rhetoric associated with the Cold War also pegged the cockroach as a creature capable of surviving a large scale atomic disaster. The staff of La Cucaracha likened the Chicano community’s ability to survive disasters and overcome dire odds to that of the cockroach. The paper stated “The Chicano, too, has survived. He and his Indio brother were in Aztlan first and have survived the Anglo society’s attempts to exterminate our language, culture, and future.”31 In addition to this comparison, the name La Cucaracha has significance in the history of the Mexican Revolution which occurred in the early Twentieth Century. Francisco ‘Pancho’ Villa, the famed military leader who fought against the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz named his supply train La Cucaracha as well as adopting the corridor, or song, ‘La Cucaracha’ as the marching song for his army, La Division del Norte. The idea of naming his newspaper after the cockroach also appealed to Espinosa because of the influence of Oscar Zeta Acosta’s book Revolt of the Cockroach People which referred to Chicanos and all poor people of color as the world’s cockroaches.32 In the end, the name stuck as the Chicano

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30 Juan Espinosa, interview by author, Pueblo, Co., 22 December 2011. When Espinosa reflected on renaming the newspaper La Cucaracha he remembered the words of the creators of Rolling Stone magazine when he heard them speak at the campus of the University of Colorado. The Rolling Stone executives recounted how the name of their magazine did not have any deeper significance than The Rolling Stones were a popular rock band and Bob Dylan had a hit song Like a Rolling Stone and they wanted to make a rock’n roll magazine so they named it “Rolling Stone.” Lawyer and activist Oscar Zeta Acosta wrote a book called “Revolt of the Cockroach People” about Chicanos and other poor people which influenced Espinosa. Deciding that their newspaper represented the needs of the cockroach people Espinosa simply decided to offer the alternative of La Cucaracha.


population of Pueblo embodied all of the ideas associated with the cockroach and the grassroots newspaper, *La Cucracha*, represented the Chicanos of Pueblo.

*La Cucracha* provided a basic right for an underrepresented cohort of people living in southern Colorado because Chicanos could obtain the newspaper at no cost and find within its pages news and information vital to the region’s Chicano community. Every person working for *La Cucracha* labored on a voluntary basis and had to find alternative employment in order to support their families; however, as activists the newspaper’s employees understood the impact and importance of providing the Chicanos of Pueblo a voice. In the second edition of the newspaper published and distributed in July of 1976, *La Cucracha* voraciously identified its purpose by stating:

There are those who would question the need for a newspaper which serves primarily Chicanos. Freedom of the Press is a right of every human being. It is through newspapers that history is documented; that ideas are aired; that births, deaths, and other vital statistics are recorded; and that the people's right to know is protected.  

As professional and educated activists, the staff of *La Cucracha* always understood the newspapers’ importance. Sitting at his dining room table twenty-seven years after the distribution of the final edition Juan Espinosa nodded his head and stared off into some distant location and explained that at that instant, producing *La Cucracha* felt like a significant accomplishment. Espinosa said “in the moment, we knew we were doing something historically important.”  

Chicano activists, in Pueblo and throughout the Southwest, had to reassert their cultural presence in order to push back against decades of Americanization. Chicanos believed that Americanization did little but marginalize Mexican Americans and deny them access to basic rights. Chicano newspapers created a public forum in which basic rights could be accessed.

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34 Juan Espinosa, interview by author, Pueblo, Co., 22 December 2011.
and protected through documentation. For Puebloans, *La Cucaracha* did indeed document the lives of Chicanos, their ideas for improving their communities, and recorded the history of *El Movimiento*. 

*La Cucaracha* encouraged its readers to become actively involved in community issues and empowered them to drive the content of each edition of the newspaper. The staff believed that Pueblo needed an alternative newspaper and a portion of that type of thinking required *La Cucaracha*’s creators to pursue alternative sources for their stories. *La Cucaracha* asked its readers for help and openly invited the citizens of Pueblo to provide news tips, stories, photographs, original art work, letters, poems and even criticisms to the newspaper so that those issues could be addressed and worthy items could be printed.35 This open-minded action made *La Cucaracha* relevant to Chicanos and developed loyalty between the paper and the Chicano community. Just as Hispano inhabitants of southern Colorado utilized the land communally, the Chicanos of Pueblo made *La Cucaracha* a common space, albeit an intellectual one. By disseminating the information found in the pages of the newspaper through casual conversation or pointed discussions, Chicanos in Pueblo took ownership of *La Cucaracha*. Because the newspaper existed, once inside a private household, it could turn any family member into a community activist. *La Cucaracha* used the power of information to support and generate grassroots organization of Chicanos in Pueblo. 

In that spirit, the newspaper covered stories often left untouched by the *Pueblo Star Journal* and the *Pueblo Chieftain*. Editions of *La Cucaracha* actively reported on affirmative action, bilingual education, Pueblo police brutality or specific barrio issues such as the push by Chicanos to force the city of Pueblo to erect lights on Troy Avenue after the extension of

Highway 50 separated the Dogpatch Barrio, a Mexican American neighborhood, and automobile accidents occurred because of the absence of traffic control lights. The increased traffic dangers in a Chicano neighborhood may not have been front page news for traditional media outlets however, as an extension of the community itself; *La Cucaracha* publicized the efforts of Chicanos working to improve their barrios. A voice in the public dialog allowed activists to become proactive rather than reactive.

This level of community input made *La Cucaracha* the platform for both collaborative and conflicting efforts by Chicanos to improve the city of Pueblo. The “Forum” section of the *La Cucaracha* sought articles written by Chicano activists outside of the newspaper itself. Activists from Southern Colorado State College used the “Forum” section to inform the residents of Pueblo about their activities. Chicano political groups like the Chicano Democratic Caucus or *La Raza Unida* Party used the “Forum” to provide Chicanos the opportunity to participate in local and state politics. Project Adelante directors kept Pueblo residents updated on the progress of that organization as it served many barrio members. This freedom of discussion also extended to *La Cucaracha*’s readers as each edition ran a “Cartas” or letters section. Through their letters, Chicano activists in Pueblo did their part in directing *La Cucaracha* to stories vital to *El Movimiento*’s ability to meet the needs of the community. The paper often received criticism from within the movement when *La Cucaracha* reporters covered a particular event, inadvertently leaving coverage of another event out of the edition which, at times, drove local Chicano activists to criticize the paper. With limited staff these types of issues proved to be

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unavoidable, however, *La Cucaracha* addressed the criticism openly through the “Ola” section of the paper.

In November of 1976, *La Cucaracha* sought to directly address community criticism and false information developing and spreading word of mouth throughout the city of Pueblo. *La Cucaracha* referred to word of mouth information as passing along the “Tortilla Trail.”39 The Catholic Diocese of Pueblo sponsored an anti-poverty program known as the Campaign for Human Development which donated a sum of $55,000 to a Pueblo based communications project. Word spread throughout town that *La Cucaracha* received this money and used it to cover production costs. In actuality, *Producciones Estrella Roja* or Red Star Productions, a Chicano start-up had received the donation and used it to open their doors. The staff of *La Cucaracha* directly and sarcastically addressed this misinformation by stating “To date, *LA CUCHARACHA* [their emphasis] has been published solely through advertising monies and the inkind services of a wholly (not to be confused with Holy) volunteer staff.”40 And in the spirit of underdog activists they added that the newspaper “...is a product of a group of young *carnales* and *carnalas* idealistic enough to believe they too have a basic right to freedom of the press, a right which, up to now, has been reserved for a small group of wealthy businessmen in politicos in southern Colorado.”41 *La Cucaracha* confirmed that the paper existed to provide a voice for the underrepresented people of Pueblo.

Money and the trappings of business did not taint the newspaper nor guide the stories; rather, reporters at *La Cucaracha* remained activists first and made themselves accessible to their

39 “Ola,” Pueblo (Colo.) *La Cucaracha*, August 1976. During our interview Juan Espinosa described again the powerful influence he believed this Tortilla Trail had on the success of his newspaper. A true community based alternative newspaper operating without making a profit the notoriety developed by La Cucaracha spread by individuals throughout Pueblo was essential to the continued production of the newspaper itself.


41 “Ola,” Pueblo (Colo.) *La Cucaracha*, November 1976. The terms *carnales y carnalas* used in the quotation is common for Chicano activists as it allows activists to refer to each other as family or as brothers and sisters.
readers by utilizing the newspaper as a form of two-way communication. Simply meaning, *La Cucaracha* presented information to the Chicanos of Pueblo intent on receiving opinions and replies back from the community. The needs of the community drove the content of the newspaper which added value to work undertaken by activists because *La Cucaracha* provided them a networking tool and access to information and the public.

As a newspaper written by activists, *La Cucaracha* often worked ahead of traditional news media in Pueblo covering stories well in advance of their counterparts. Espinosa and other staff writers believed that the ability to provide cutting edge stories bolstered the viability of *La Cucaracha* as a place for Chicanos to get their news and information. Within months of their inaugural publication the writers at *La Cucaracha* penned stories crucial to informing Pueblo Chicanos of the greater struggle of *El Movimiento*. In July of 1976, the newspaper reported on New Mexico land grant activist Reies Lopez Tijerina’s caravan to Mexico to meet with Mexican land activists. Tijerina championed the land grant issue in the Southwest for over a decade earning notoriety for his actions however; *La Cucaracha* pointed out that his story “was not covered by any other local media even though the land grant issue...has serious implications for Colorado Chicanos.” At the time, the *Pueblo Star Journal and Pueblo Chieftain* failed to note Tijerina’s caravan to Mexico despite the fact that Tijerina’s story made the pages of *Newsweek* magazine. The *Newsweek* story ran approximately four weeks after *La Cucaracha*, true to its

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42 Tijerina was born in Texas to migrant parents and worked as a fundamentalist preacher before becoming a champion of the land rights struggle in New Mexico. In the 1960’s he founded the Alianza--an organization designed to reclaim land lost by Chicanos since the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo by any means necessary. At one point, Tijerina faced federal prosecution for the occupation of national forest land in the state of New Mexico. It was in 1965, when the forest service revoked grazing rights of Nuevo Mexicanos, which created opportunity for the charismatic Tijerina to gain a following of supporters. Tijerina also participated in the Poor People’s Campaign, a march held in Washington D.C. at the invitation of Martin Luther King Junior. In 1972, Tijerina ran for national chairman of La Raza Unida Party however, he ultimately lost to Jose Angel Gutierrez. Information can be found in *Chicano!* written by Francisco Arturo Rosales.

mission of providing Pueblo Chicanos with an alternative news source, printed the story. The reporter assigned the Tijerina story by La Cucaracha spent five days traveling with the Tijerina caravan in Mexico before returning to Pueblo. As activists and professional journalists, staff writers for La Cucaracha labored to create a quality publication based on covering stories not covered by traditional media as well as covering stories Pueblo Chicanos found interesting.

La Cucaracha’s coverage of Reies Lopez Tijerina had a regional impact in the Southwest. The group founded by Tijerina in 1963, La Alianza Federal De Mercedes, a land grant organization, cited the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo as an unjust act imposed upon Mexico by the United States. La Alianza, which by the mid 1960s had thousands of members, made this assertion because, according to the organization, people do not just give away their lands or rights. The population affected by the loss of land and rights lived in present day New Mexico and Colorado as both the government of Spain and then Mexico granted individuals large tracts of land which they opened up to Hispano settlers prior to the war between the United States and Mexico.

Over the course of several months in 1977, La Cucaracha, dedicated to publicizing important Chicano issues, printed a series of article document the struggle for land occurring in southern Colorado. Apolinar Real, a 78 year old native of San Pablo, Colorado summarized the land struggle in the San Luis Valley to La Cucaracha and described the feelings of the Chicano people when he said “La Tierra est robada. Toda le gente tienen parte de la tierra. Un dia, va a resultar pa tras.” which in English means “The land was robbed. The land belongs to everyone. One day we will have it back.” Another San Luis native, 65 year old Juan La Comb outlined the path Chicanos could take to reclaim lost land as he explained “No necesitamos dinero,

44 “Ola,” Pueblo (Colo.) La Cucaracha, August 1976.
45 Acuna, 307.
46 “17 Year Land Struggle Continues,” Pueblo (Colo.) La Cucaracha, February 1977.
necesita mos unidad, union. La union es fuerza.” which *La Cucaracha* translated as “We don’t need money, we need unity. There is strength in unity.”  

Resisting Anglo land expansion had long been an occupation of southern Colorado Chicanos and the arrival of Jack Taylor in the 1960s reignited this effort. The conflict over land rights and usage united Colorado Chicanos and in the 1970s activists began legal proceedings to reassert Mexican American claims to the land in the San Luis Valley.

In 1977 *La Cucaracha* informed its readers that the modern land rights struggle in southern Colorado began in February of 1960, when Jack Taylor purchased a sizable amount of land in the San Luis Valley. Taylor, a North Carolina lumberman paid approximately $500,000 for ranch land and almost immediately decided to fence off 77,524 acres known as the Mountain Tract. Historically the Mountain Tract had been designated and established as communal property for the exclusive use of Valley residents. Chicanos living in the Valley needed access to the land fenced off by Jack Taylor to provide themselves with firewood and pastureland, as well as to utilize the area to hunt and fish.  

According to scholar and Colorado land rights activist Maria Mondragon-Valdez when Jack Taylor fenced off access to the mountain in 1960 “That’s one all hell broke loose” because “There is no way that you can live in the lowlands at this elevation, with 8 to 10 inches annually of rainfall, without accessing the uplands” as they were a “cornucopia” which could provide everything that you needed.  

The Chicano Movement newspaper *La Cucaracha* represented the land rights movement as a matter pertinent to all Chicanos when it stated “The issue is land, the backbone of all struggle” and encouraged its

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readers to support the residents of the Valley. The land rights movement in Colorado began in the San Luis Valley, an area with declining populations, poverty, unemployment, and poor education.

From the 1960s to the current day, Chicano activists from the San Luis Valley have based their claims to access and usage of communal lands on the 1863 Beaubien document. In the mid Nineteenth Century Charles Beaubien, a French-Canadian fur trapper, living in the Mexican frontier married a rica, a woman from rich Mexican family. Beaubien applied for land grants from the Mexican government because his wife’s status as a Mexican citizen made him eligible to receive them. By 1847 Charles Beaubien controlled the Sangre de Cristo land grant, which encompassed Colorado’s San Luis Valley and he eventually invited Hispano settlers to the area in order to develop the land. Land activist and close associate the creators of La Cucaracha, Shirley Romero-Otero described a familiar sentiment felt by many southern Colorado Chicanos when she said “We settled that community in the mid 1800s and we lived off the land. There is no way that my ancestors, my great-grandparents, my grandparents, [and] my parents could have survived without the resources on that mountain.” Many of the decedents of early Hispano settlers remained in the San Luis Valley or moved to Pueblo, southern Colorado’s largest city. To Chicanos living throughout southern Colorado, the connection to the land in the Valley ran

50 “17 Year Land Struggle Continues,” Pueblo (Colo.) La Cucaracha. February 1977. Throughout the 1960’s, after Taylor purchased land in the San Luis Valley, shots had been fired, people beaten, buildings had been set on fire, and barricades had been erected and destroyed. The land rights struggle in the Twentieth Century took often violent and ugly turns.

http://www.newmexicohistory.org/landgrants/sangre_de_cristo/english/grantees1.html (accessed Wednesday, February 22, 2012). By 1843 Beaubien had been granted the maximum amount of land the Mexican government would give to an individual, so he applied for and received the Sangre de Cristo Land Grant in the name of his son Narciso Beaubien. Following his son’s death during the 1847 Taos Uprising, Charles Beaubien inherited the grant

deep and the actions of Jack Taylor would not dissuade them from utilizing the land as their ancestors had for generations.

When Beaubien received his land grants from the Mexican government in the 1840s he assured the provincial governor of New Mexico that he intended to bring the land under private ownership in order to induce settlers to migrate across the mountain, form communities, and become industrious farmers, ranchers and miners.\textsuperscript{53} \textit{La Cucaracha}, reporting on the history of the Sangre de Cristo land grant for their Chicano readers, printed that after American usurpation of the region Beaubien maintained his traditional role and sought to protect and provide for the families living on the grant and on May 11, 1863, Charles Beaubien voluntarily signed a document which established certain regulations and privileges pertaining to the rights of settlers, current and future, in order to protect their use of the land.\textsuperscript{54} As Shirley Romero-Otero explains “[the] 1863 Beaubien document basically stated that the original settlers of San Luis, of \textit{La Culebra}, would have the rights to that mountain and those rights would be held in perpetuity.” She also expressed “…one of the things that I want to make real clear is that our rights come before the rights of the owner (Jack Taylor or whoever that may be) because the mountain is subservient to the land.”\textsuperscript{55}

Allowing Hispano settlers to utilize communal land in the San Luis valley to graze their livestock, gather wood, and to hunt and fish had become customary by the time Charles Beaubien sold the Sangre de Cristo land grant to his son-in-law, William Gilpin. When Gilpin purchased the land from Beaubien the two men made an oral agreement, which set a precedent for future transfers in ownership that included provisions recognizing, confirming, and

\textsuperscript{53} Montoya, 31.
\textsuperscript{54} “17 Year Land Struggle Continues,” Pueblo (Colo.) \textit{La Cucaracha}, February 1977.
safeguarding previously established settlement rights.\textsuperscript{56} When Jack Taylor purchased the land in 1960, the deed recorded in March of that year stated that all of the land negotiated is “...subject to claims of the local people by prescription or otherwise to rights to pasturage, wood and lumber and so-called settlement rights in, to and upon said land...” however, Taylor ignored these words and fenced off the land denying residents access to the Mountain Tract.\textsuperscript{57} As reported throughout 1977 in \textit{La Cucaracha} these actions sparked years of resistance, conflict, and activism by Chicanos in southern Colorado in an effort to secure land rights for present and future generations.

In the summer of 1974, Costilla County sheriff, Ernesto Sandoval, along with the county commissioners removed the barricades set up by Jack Taylor to block San Luis residents from accessing the Mountain Tract of \textit{La Culebra}. Local county officials made the decision to remove the barricades because of successful lobbying by young Chicanos applying political pressure on the county officials during an election year.\textsuperscript{58} During the 1970s the growth of student groups in southern Colorado, improvements in education, and increased access to information through the Chicano press acted to make young Chicanos a viable force capable of creating change in their communities. Costilla County commissioners and Sheriff Sandoval acted at the urging of Chicano youth but the whole enterprise benefited every resident opposed to

\textsuperscript{56}“17 Year Land Struggle Continues,” Pueblo (Colo.) \textit{La Cucaracha}, February 1977.
\textsuperscript{57}“San Luis Valle: Taylor Arrival Disrupts Valle Life Struggle for Land Begins,” Pueblo (Colo.) \textit{La Cucaracha}, March 1977. Resistance started almost immediately, the following are examples of conflict from the early 1960s: in July 1960, 3 men, Mariano Vigil, Celso Maestas, and Andrew Lobato were issued a restraining order based on a $10,500 suit filed by Taylor in federal court for grazing their sheep on his land "whenever and wherever the pleased." In August of 1960, Taylor filed a second suit against 313 residents of San Pablo, San Luis, and Chama asking that he be registered as sole owner of the Mountain Tract. In 1961, on Thanksgiving Day, Gilbert Medina, Eddie Medina, and Thomas Rael were pistol whipped and forced to walk several miles to meet with Jack Taylor by his men because there were on Taylor’s property looking for a stray heifer. At the time Taylor was quoted as saying "You should have killed them, not brought them back here." The next day Taylor and his men were jailed. They were later found guilty of assault and battery and fined $300 each in district court at Conejos, Co.
Jack Taylor’s land ownership. When reporters from *La Cucaracha* interviewed Sheriff Sandoval about the events from August 1974 he stated that by moving the road blocks to the Mountain Tract he “…figured I could stop bloodshed based on prior incidents” as Sandoval described a foreman on Taylor Ranch that “had to be crazy” because he asked the sheriff for permission “to kill the son-of-a-bitches” when Valley Chicanos accessed traditional lands that had come under Jack Taylor’s ownership.\(^{59}\) Cultural misunderstandings and customary differences between Chicanos and Anglos made the threat of violence a feasible concern for law enforcement. During the land rights struggle the disgust that Chicanos and Anglos held for each other sometimes became palpable.

Jack Taylor’s cultural detestation for Mexican Americans resonated from public statements he made degrading San Luis Valley Chicanos. First published in the Raleigh, North Carolina *News and Observer* and then republished in March of 1977 by *La Cucaracha* Taylor stated “They [Chicanos] know they’re not equal, mentally or physically, to a white man and that’s why they stick together so.”\(^{60}\) The remarks are blatantly racist and, taken at face value, they stem from resentment that slowly built up throughout several years of contention with Valley Chicanos. Regardless of why Jack Taylor made these statements the rationalization that mental and physical inferiority created community and clan-like behavior is untrue. The actions and affiliations of San Luis Valley Chicanos witnessed by Jack Taylor stem from generations of cultural practices rooted in the region’s Mexican and Spanish past. Chicanos viewed the land as “the lifeblood of our people…” and after being “abused, cheated, and robbed” they became determined to maintain the cultural practices that allowed their ancestors to survive in the arid

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mountain landscape of the San Luis Valley. Activists in Pueblo supported the land rights issue because for many, southern Colorado and the San Luis Valley had been home prior to serving in Vietnam or attending college. The loss of ancestral lands lay at the heart of the indoctrination of all Chicano activists.

Understanding the rich history of Mexican Americans in the Southwestern United States became a tenant of the Chicano Movement. Understanding the history of a place is paramount to recognizing and engaging with the validity of cultures and cultural perspectives. History of a specific place suffers when the people who have inhabited that space become pushed to the boundaries of society and their culture becomes threatened. When disenfranchisement of this kind occurs, history can then serve as a powerful and effective tool to organize and uplift minority groups and to resist social, cultural, and economic dominance. In 1969 at the First National Chicano Youth Liberation Conference in Denver, Colorado participants learned about the importance of historical awareness. Activists taught those in attendance that developing a consciousness of one’s historical heritage served to develop ethnic pride. At the conference poet and activist Alberto Baltazar Urista Heridia, better known as Alurista read *El Plan Espiritual De Aztlan*. As stated in Alurista’s poem “Aztlan [the Southwestern United States] belongs to those that plant the seeds, water the fields, and gather the crops....” In the Southwest, this land had historically been indigenous peoples and later Hispanos and their descendants. *El Plan Espiritual De Aztlan* set the stage for land activism by Colorado Chicanos in the 1970s making the struggle between San Luis Valley Chicanos and Jack Taylor an important issue worthy of coverage by *La Cucaracha* and other Chicano newspapers.

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62 Otero, 2.
The land struggle in the San Luis Valley would eventually lead both Jack Taylor and Chicano activists to seek a court ruling as a means to an end. After Sheriff Sandoval and the Costilla County Commissioners had the barricades removed Jack Taylor took legal action against them. Taylor asked the courts to issue an injunction, or a court order which enjoined the officials from ever setting foot on to Taylor’s ranch. It is strange to think that a private citizen would attempt to legally block public officials, elected to county offices, from entering his ranch. The idea that Jack Taylor could be somehow above the law only served to harden the resolve of Chicano activists involved in the land rights struggle. For Sandoval, in particular, a court order of this kind impeded his ability to serve as a law enforcement agent because events occurring at Taylor Ranch between local Chicanos and Jack Taylor kept requiring his attention. When interviewed by La Cucaracha, Sandoval relayed several cases involving Taylor which required the sheriff’s office to proceed with some form of investigation. San Luis Valley Chicanos accessed the mountain for hunting and fishing, firewood, and pastureland. When Jack Taylor arrived they refused to relinquish communal land rights or sell their property and they fought for the water needed to irrigate their crops. In general, throughout the 1970’s Chicanos occupied the land, accessed the resources provided by the mountain, and maintained a strong sense of community which had allowed them to survive for well over one hundred years.


65 “Struggle Continues ‘Impossible’ Taylor Settlement Offered,” Pueblo (Colo.) La Cucaracha, April 1977. After Taylor’s arrival, he had water flowing from the Mountain Tract diverted so that it flowed into an arroyo instead of down to other residences situated at lower elevations. A Chicano land owner who refused to sell his property to Taylor reported to Sheriff Sandoval that after he rejected the sale Taylor told him “Everyone has his price” and subsequently lost 17 head of cattle out of a total of fifty animals. The landowner found ten of the animals mutilated. Two Chicano youths hunting rabbits on the Mountain Tract had their rifles stolen and their money and shoes taken by Taylor’s men before being thrown off the land.
By 1977, seventeen years of Chicano resistance both locally and regionally had taken a
toll and Jack Taylor decided to negotiate a legal settlement with local Costilla County officials.
After the August 9, 1974 incident in which Valley residents, Costilla County Commissioners,
and Sheriff Ernesto Sandoval tore down barricades and fences from the Mountain Tract roads
Taylor filed a civil suit seeking $100,000 each from the four county officials involved. The trial
date had been scheduled for April 4, 1977 in the city of Pueblo. Prior to the trial date, La
Cucaracha printed several articles outlining the conflict between Jack Taylor and the Costilla
County officials, so as potential jury members, Chicanos living in Pueblo were well aware of
conflict’s history. One of Taylor’s lawyers wrote a letter dated February 17, 1977 which offered
an out of court settlement to the defendants. The letter requested that Taylor receive “proper
legal protection against trespassers and against other criminal acts” as well as reimbursement for
costs resulting from the 1974 incident.66 The letter clearly stipulated that Taylor expected
“protection from further efforts by County officials to reduce any part of the ranch’s size” or to
“change ownership of the land.”67 In response to the settlement offer La Cucaracha quoted
Sheriff Sandoval as saying “I don’t agree to any part of it. He’s asking the impossible.”68 The
settlement aimed to place property owned by Jack Taylor outside of the jurisdiction of local law
enforcement. The offer also failed to accommodate the needs of members of the community. In
particular, the one sided settlement deal attempted to disarm San Luis Valley Chicanos by
offering a parcel of land.

To Valley residents, the land embodied life as it provided the resources required to
support the entire community for over one hundred years of the region’s history. Chicano
activists felt passionately that one man did not have the right to “cut the lifeblood of our Raza”

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and understood the conflict to clearly be one which pitted the rights of the community against the “selfishness” of an individual.⁶⁹ Because of the region’s Mexican roots, different customs and ideals existed, especially about how people interacted with the land. A forty-year-old farmer named Emilio Lobato explained those customs and ideals to La Cucaracha readers when he said “Over here we live out of honor. Everyone respects each other’s property, fence or no fence. But that don’t count to them [Anglos].”⁷⁰ To Chicanos communal utilization of the land implicitly cultivated personal prestige within society at large, whereas white American ideas about land held privatization of resources paramount.⁷¹ These divergent views cultivated over decades of time made the February 1977 settlement offer inadequate. For their part, Valley Chicanos would have had to accept access to 7,000 acres of the Mountain Tract. That is approximately 9% of the total area and the settlement outlined that the people would have “no rights to graze livestock or to remove any natural resources” from land which strictly made the land use recreational in nature.⁷²

In response to the struggle for land in the San Luis Valley, Chicano activists created the Land Rights Council based out of Chama, Colorado. Shirley Romero-Otero explained that when “My husband and I started the Land Rights Council in 1977; our ultimate goal was to regain access to the mountain and the historic use rights.” The group focused on using the court system to reach an outcome favorable to the heirs of settlers living in the region at the time Charles Beaubien documented the rights and privileges of the Mexican American inhabitants. As the co-founder of the Land Rights Council, Romero-Otero emphasized that Chicano activist “...went to court honestly hoping to get some kind of justice within a reasonable amount of

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⁶⁹ “Land is the Struggle,” Pueblo (Colo.) La Cucaracha, February 1977.
⁷¹ Deutsch, 16.
⁷² “Struggle Continues ‘Impossible’ Taylor Settlement Offered,” Pueblo (Colo.) La Cucaracha, April 1977. The settlement letter also made it clear that the land would be exempted from state and local taxes.
time." The results Romero-Otero sought took over twenty years to come to fruition. The publicity and support of land rights activism provided by *La Cucaracha* in the years leading up to the creation of the Land Rights Council allowed the organization to connect to Pueblo Chicanos. Any long term cause, like legal battles for land rights, require exposure to the public or the cause will become lost over time.

Activists also utilized Chicano Movement newspapers such as *La Cucaracha* to wage a battle of words to coincide with their activities. Chicano newspaper served an important role during the Chicano Movement because as one historian explains Anglos controlling land could, through outright neglect of Mexican American spaces, aid in the creation of false historical narratives which ultimately created an environment where Chicanos had to acquiesce to changes demanded by Anglos. This false historical narrative is known to historians of the Southwest as an “Anglo Fantasy Heritage” and it serves to bolster the whiteness of an area at the expense of eliminating the regions cultural heritage. *La Cucaracha* a free newspaper produced by college educated journalists worked to combat the development of an “Anglo Fantasy Heritage” in Pueblo and southern Colorado by reporting on Chicano issues and served the Chicano Rights Movement during the 1970s.

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73 Shirley Romero-Otero, interview in *The Raza de Colorado El Movimiento*, DVD, directed by Lisa Olken (Denver: Rocky Mountain Public Broadcasting Network, Inc., 2006). The LRC brought a class-action law suit against Jack Taylor on behalf of over one-hundred descendants of original settlers in 1981. On June 24, 2002 the Colorado Supreme Court ruled in favor of the descendant's land usage rights in a 4 to 3 decision.

74 Otero, 73.
Salud Es Un Derecho

“We have made special efforts to transcend the racial issue, but we feel we have a special commitment to the Chicano community. They have always received less than their share of respect, dignity, opportunity, and we do not want to continue that.”

Dr. Ricardo Rivera

Prior to the Chicano Rights Movement in Colorado, labor discrimination and social problems associated with poverty greatly affected the wellbeing of Mexican Americans. Working class Chicanos often faced low wages, long hours, and few benefits from their labor intensive jobs in factories or farms throughout the state. Because a large percentage of Chicanos lived in poverty they frequently received poor professional health care, if they could afford health care at all. Without the fundamental right of proper healthcare Colorado Chicanos faced cyclical poverty as Chicanos stood little chance to improve their socioeconomic station within society as potential illness always threatened to keep them at home sick rather than attending school or earning a day’s wage at work. In rural areas activists used labor strikes and boycotts to as a means to improve the quality of life for Mexican American farm workers. In urban areas such as Pueblo, medical activists sought to improve healthcare for poor people by providing quality care at little cost to the patient and by educating the public on health issues. In the 1970s Community organizing by Chicano activists in southern Colorado sought to end the ill effects of poverty on the health of Mexican Americans living in the region by publicizing the dire conditions faced by farm laborers and through the creation of the Pueblo Neighborhood Health Centers.

In 1970, tired of poor wages and atrocious living conditions Colorado farm workers conducted a lettuce strike in order to improve their lives. Chicano activists throughout the state joined their effort by boycotting lettuce in an attempt to end exploitation of the farm workers. In

75 “Medical Monopoly Threatened ‘by PNHC, Dr. Rivera Feels,” Pueblo (Colo.) La Cucaracha, November 1977.
addition to boycotting lettuce, Colorado Chicanos conducted a 110 mile march during the first week of August 1970 walking from Pueblo to the state capitol building in Denver literally taking their cause of rallying for the rights of farm workers to the streets. One of the organizers of the march, Magdalino Avila stated “If we save one farm worker from the abuse now forced on them in the field the march will be a success.” Avila, a resident of the southern Colorado town of Center also helped to organize a strike of the San Luis Valley lettuce workers highlighting the poor conditions they faced. Avila said “We want to show the people what is going on. The only solution to the problems of Colorado farm workers is a union victory….” Farm workers commonly encountered wage abuse and suffered from poor health due to the awful living conditions forced upon migrant laborers throughout Colorado. Avila, in order to raise awareness, spoke both as a labor organizer and a political candidate. At the time of the march in August of 1970, Avila had been actively campaigning for Colorado Secretary of State as a La Raza Unida party member and several other La Raza Unida candidates joined him during the march including legislative candidate Patricia Gomez, congressional candidate Martin Serna, and gubernatorial candidate Albert Gurule, all from Pueblo, Colorado.

The march served concurrent purposes, first to bring attention to the poor labor conditions forced upon Colorado farm workers and second, to unite Chicano activists in a common cause. The march allowed activists from numerous organizations with different ambitions, goals, and leadership and made a general statement of Chicano unity at a time in which the Chicano Rights movement in southern Colorado was young. Colorado labor organizations designed to unite farm workers such as Dicho y Hecho, Migrants in Action, and

Compecinos Nacionales from Pueblo, had several members participating in the march.\(^7^9\) In addition to labor oriented groups, affiliates from the University of Colorado’s United Mexican American Students organization or UMAS, Denver’s Crusade for Justice, the Brown Berets, and candidates nominated by the La Raza Unida political party participated in the march. Florencio Granado, a farm worker and march participant noted the various organizations taking part in the demonstration and said “Like any other movement we all have different ideologies, yet there was only one goal on that march, to get to Denver from Pueblo in a manner that would bring dignity to our people.”\(^7^8^0\) The grueling physical demands of the long march which occurred in the hot August sun allowed individual issues to be set aside as marchers realized that they were all in the same fight. Granado explained that the shared experience of hot and blistered feet forced the marchers to focus on one another. He said “You would look back and see your partner, or the woman behind you, and see [them] still going. You keep going,” and without speaking, those marching gave each other the strength to continue.\(^8^1\)

On the morning on Sunday, August 2, 1970 Chicanos participating in the march left Pueblo and covered approximately twenty miles during the first day of walking. This protest march started in Pueblo because of Chicano activism in the city which connected labor organizers and La Raza Unida candidates as well as other groups. Throughout the course of the day the energy of the marched surged as the number of participants doubled from seventy five when the march started, to one hundred fifty people by the time the protestors reached a rest stop

\(^{7^9}\) Dicho y Echo is a farm workers group organized at the beginning of the 1970 lettuce strike by Orinda de Vargas of Center. Migrants in Action is a regional group which developed in the 1960’s and 1970’s to advocate for better working conditions for migrant farm workers. Compecinos Nacionales, also a labor organization, had similar goals of improve the working conditions experienced by Colorado farm workers in the field.

\(^{7^8^0}\) “Chicano Trek Described As Drama, Not Protest” Boulder (Colo.) The Colorado Daily, September 4, 1970.

\(^{8^1}\) “Chicano Trek Described As Drama, Not Protest” Boulder (Colo.) The Colorado Daily, September 4, 1970.
along Interstate 25 approximately twenty miles north of the city.\(^{82}\) The excitement associated with the first day of the event and the ability of the march to gather additional participants during its first phase no doubt energized the demonstrators, because they covered the most ground during the first day of walking than in any of the subsequent days. The successful start of the protest march confirmed to Chicanos living in Colorado that Pueblo served as a hotbed for activism and was a center for individuals seeking to involve themselves in Chicano causes.

While walking along the interstate many Chicano marchers carried red, white, and black flags bearing the thunderbird symbol made famous by Cesar Chavez and La Causa, the unionizing of Mexican American farm workers. Many individuals also wore armbands of the same color.\(^{84}\) This visual display connected the people in Colorado and Pueblo to the events of the Chicano Movement which occurred throughout the region and received media coverage on a


\(^{83}\) Photograph located in the Southern Colorado Ethnic Heritage & Diversity Archives-Colorado Chicano Movement Archives, University Library, Colorado State University-Pueblo, Pueblo, Colorado.

national scale. In a picture printed in the Denver Post, taken along the march, you can see men and women standing two-by-two proudly carrying American flags, picket signs, and flags of La Causa. Several men wore sombreros or bandanas to keep the sweat out of their eyes as they trekked north in support of the strike started by Colorado’s lettuce workers. Many of these people were the poor migrant workers themselves who made the choice to represent their cause in the Chicano Movement. Marching is a symbol of activism that Colorado Chicanos utilized to bring attention to their cause and to create a groundswell of participation in El Movimiento just as anti-war protestors, African Americans, and numerous other groups in the United States used marches to bring about societal change.

![Chicano protestors march from Denver to Pueblo in August of 1970](image)

On the second day of the march, the reality of walking over 100 miles during the hot summer months set in and took its toll on the Chicanos participating in the protest. Despite the pain and

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85 On the night of Wednesday, August 5, 1970 the protestors marching from Pueblo to Denver were invited to attend a performance from Teatro Compensino, a theatrical group organized by California farm workers who portrayed the life of migrant farm workers in their productions, on the campus of Colorado College. The Teatro brought media attention to the plight of farm workers by travelling across the nation to perform.
personal sacrifice each member of the march had to deal with while marching approximately sixty or seventy protestors marched fifteen miles as the heat, their blistering feet, and interactions with the Colorado State Patrol slowed the pace. A spokesman for the Colorado State Patrol commented on the progress of the Chicano activists and said “They [the protesters] made pretty good time and the marching was in good order and well disciplined.” The conditions of the protest march did not deter the striking lettuce workers, the student activists, the political activists, or the Brown Berets as the march continued with several segments of the Colorado Chicano Movement present and unified in order to publicize the suffering of farm workers throughout the state.

Mexican Americans living in Colorado and working as farm laborers suffered from poor living conditions, low pay, and ill health. These circumstances existed because prior the Colorado Chicano Rights Movement growers received little or no resistance against the way they conducted business. The Chicano Movement drastically changed that dynamic. Labor organizer Juanita Herrera, sent to Colorado by Cesar Chavez, explained that the working conditions in the fields equaled abuse as there were no bathrooms, no breaks, and extremely low pay. Activist, poet and member of the Colorado Migrant Council, Lalo Delgado explained “When I came and saw how desperate [the situation was and] what these farm workers were going through it just kind of blew my mind. These people just need all kinds of help.” In other states throughout the Southwest farm workers experience similar cruelties and due to these circumstances Chicano activists in Colorado focused on helping the lettuce workers organize a strike against abusive employers and, to ultimately better their working conditions by orchestrating a public protest in

the form of a march from Pueblo to Denver. In this capacity the actions of southern Colorado Chicano activists served as a model that others could replicate.

The week long march by Chicano activists in support of striking lettuce workers preceded coverage of a fact-finding report that exposed the horrendous conditions Colorado growers forced their hired workers to endure while they weeded and harvested lettuce, sugar beets and other Colorado crops. The University of Colorado’s Center for Labor Education and Research received an $85,000 grant from the Office of Economic Opportunity and using that money the university conducted a three month investigation, which occurred in the summer of 1970. When the investigation ended the university released a seventy-nine page analysis of employment, housing, nutrition, and medical care of migrant workers.\(^{91}\) The university used the grant money to create a research organization called Salud y Justicia. Along with conducting research, Salud y Justicia provided emergency food, supplies, and medical care to migrant workers.\(^{92}\) In order to conduct the research and provide services for the farm workers the university created eight teams and then sent the teams to different regions throughout the state. Teams consisted of four members, a farm worker, a Chicano undergraduate, a law student, and a medical student.\(^{93}\) At the time, many Chicano students attending the University of Colorado came from southern Colorado towns as the institution opened its enrollment up to include more Mexican American students. The composition of the research teams indicated that the oppression of migrant

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\(^{92}\) Salud y Justicia translated into English means Health and Justice.

workers by Colorado growers went beyond labor abuse. Migrants faced legal exploitation, poor housing, and medical malpractice, which in many cases eroded the viability of the Chicano community.

Colorado growers routinely exploited their workers by failing to pay earned wages but with little legal recourse workers could not extract the portions of their payment being wrongfully withheld. According to the university report farm workers who filed wage claims, contacted law students, or caused any type of trouble lost their job and were blacklisted. A Salud y Justicia member said when dealing with an executive from Great Western Sugar Company, he found the man “to be deplorable in every sense of the word. In dealing with the migrant families he used every...trick in the book...in an attempt to force them into a compromising situation.”

The same executive explained “we are sick of you law students snooping around in our business.” Other stories of abuse surfaced in the report indicating that similar circumstances existed in several rural areas around Colorado. A farmer in Yuma, Colorado owed a migrant family $493 for work already finished but only paid the migrant worker $360. In that case, the worker filed a claim with the county Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service committee to recoup the lost wages but the committee denied the claim. Throughout Colorado, farmers continued to pay wages as low as $.55 to $.85 per hour to migrant workers. With owners offering pennies the cruelty of scandalous crew leaders left farm workers with little to show for their hours of work. The report found that many crew leaders engaged in spurious

practices, such as taking illegal Social Security deductions or lending money at exorbitant interest rates which further discriminated against the farm workers.\textsuperscript{97}

Coinciding with the wage abuse recorded in the University of Colorado report in the fall of 1970 the United States Civil Rights Commission produced their own 135 page report outlining the administration of justice, or the legal treatment of Mexican Americans living in the Southwest at the state and local level. The report coming out of Washington D.C. named Colorado, Arizona, California, New Mexico and Texas as locations with widespread evidence that Mexican Americans were being denied equal protection under the law. In Colorado, the report indicated that migrant farm workers and Mexican Americans from the San Luis Valley experienced peonage, or forced servitude. By the late Twentieth Century it seems odd that such a defunct labor system would still exist, however, peonage had long been a reality faced by western laborers as a historian wrote that “Padronism...was intrinsically related to the organization of unskilled work and corporate hiring practices in North America...” and that hiring practices such as demanding “fees,” “bribes,” or “extortions” were immoral, but accurately reflected historic hiring practices throughout the American West.\textsuperscript{98}

Working with the U.S. Civil Rights Commission investigators from the district attorney’s office in Alamosa County, in southern Colorado, found that local officials encouraged Mexican American defendants to forfeit bail. Essentially, those officials would tell Chicanos that posting bail would be too much trouble and add to the expense of appearing in court. The report’s most serious finding revealed that during the harvest season, farmers would go to jails in San Luis Valley towns like Center and Monte Vista and inquire about the number of Mexican American workers recently arrested. With that information the farmers would select the best workers and

\textsuperscript{97} Clem Work, “CU report is critical of migrant conditions,” Denver \textit{Rocky Mountain News}, September 15, 1970.
pay their fines then, once released from jail the farmers required the workers to repay the money by working in the fields. If the workers reneged on this compact they would be returned to jail.\(^9\) Mexican American individuals in Colorado could easily have their rights violated. Consolidating into a labor union as well as joining the activities of Colorado Chicano activists, offered farm workers an avenue for ending the discrimination they faced from local officials and potential employers.

In the end, the report from *Salud y Justicia* concluded that “It is difficult to believe that in 1970 a form of slavery still exists…Despite statements of concern by those who own the larger...companies, this concern does not filter down to those who handle the day-to-day operation of the corporation. The migrant is at the mercy of those men--who show no mercy.”\(^1\) Chicano activists weary of this kind of abuse and discrimination occurring in Colorado joined the ranks to support their brothers and sisters laboring in the fields in order to improve their working conditions. These same Chicano activists supported boycotts of locally grown produce, and many other items, in concert with strikes in attempts to change the industry habits of Anglo businessmen. These types of activities were indicative of the Chicano Movement in the Southwest but as more information became available Colorado Chicano activists had to organize at the grassroots level to address the healthcare needs of the poorest members of their communities.

\(^9\) “‘Peonage’ charged in San Luis Valley,” Denver Rocky Mountain News, April 1970. In an additional article published on Thursday, April 30, 1970 in The Colorado Daily it is noted that farmers paying fines owed by jailed workers would often be given a discount by the local magistrate. The report from the Alamosa County district attorney’s office states “If the fine was set at $40, he [the magistrate] would only require the farmer to pay $25. The magistrate, however, would tell the workers the fine paid by the farmer was $40 and he owed the farmer $40 worth of work.”

\(^1\) Jack Phinny, “Migrant Conditions ‘Miserable,’” The Denver Post, September 14, 1970.
Colorado farmers had the discriminatory business habit of providing inadequate or absolutely no housing to the field workers they hired on a seasonal basis. Considering that farm laborers received less than a living wage to work in the fields, paying for adequate housing proved to be a significant challenge. During the growing season many farm workers in Colorado lived in housing as appalling as any urban ghetto. Reporting done on the study conducted by Salud y Justicia in 1970 stated “Housing conditions are deplorable but the State health department has been largely ineffective in solving the problem. Most migrant housing has at least three major violations of health department regulations.”\(^{101}\) The report concluded that “The small farmer faces a difficult problem in providing housing for his workers. The cost of maintaining and building adequate housing is alleged to be prohibitive…The large farm owner wants to increase his profit and does so at the expense of the migrant family’s health.”\(^{102}\) The failure of growers to provide adequate housing for all of their workers while paying them extremely low wages demonstrated how little growers cared for the well being of their fellow human beings. This type of disregard for the humanity of farm workers seeped into the consciousness of communities throughout Colorado and, worst of all, the medical field.

Unsanitary living conditions generally lead to health problems among farmer workers living and travelling throughout Colorado during the long growing season. When migrant farm workers or their children got sick, injured, or required medical services for any host of reasons

\(^{101}\) Steve Bride, “Migrant Workers Treated Worse Than Slaves, Say Researchers,” Boulder (Colo.) The Colorado Daily, September 14, 1970. Along with reporters from The Colorado Daily, Jack Phinny writing for The Denver Post highlighted some of the most egregious examples of poor housing conditions uncovered by the university study. In Burlington, Colorado, thirty-three people were found living in a converted chicken coop which had no light bulbs, no screen doors, no washing facilities or toilet. In another area known as Space City, six families totaling thirty people lived in a converted boxcar with a makeshift outdoor latrine. The report continued and described a small house in Larimer County with numerous broken windows in which fourteen people lived. At that particular house residents obtained their drinking water from a bug-filled cistern fifteen feet away from the front door and about ten feet away from the latrine.

they often could not pay the cost required to receive care. At the time of the study conducted by
the University of Colorado’s Center for Labor Education and Research in 1970, student activists
argued that under Colorado state statutes 36-10-10 and the Hill-Burton Act passed the United
States Congress in 1946, extremely impoverished non-residents could receive free medical care,
however, in reality Colorado migrants and non-resident migrants faced the same medical
discrimination and mistreatment. The Salud y Justicia report noted that in the summer of 1970
“...a pregnant migrant, went to the Greeley clinic for a checkup. The doctor there discovered she
was bleeding and told her to go to the emergency room.”\textsuperscript{103} Emergency room employees
discovered the migrant woman had no money and told her to go home. “Later that evening her
condition deteriorated and she was readmitted to the hospital where she suffered a
miscarriage.”\textsuperscript{104} Another migrant family faced discrimination in Conejos County, a large rural
region located in the southern Colorado, when the hospital held a newborn baby girl until her
parents paid the delivery bill. These types of activities occurred all around the state as the
hospital in Fort Morgan refused to admit a migrant girl without a deposit and the Weld County
Hospital refused to admit a migrant boy for surgery unless they received $500 to pay for
previous treatment.\textsuperscript{105} Because of these poor conditions Colorado activists sought federal dollars
to remedy the inconsistent and discriminatory medical treatment offered to migrant workers.

Agriculture in the 1970s, like today, is vital to the economic success of Colorado.
Because of the role of agriculture in the state’s economy farm workers were key to ensuring the
strength of Colorado’s farming industry. This industry suffered without healthy and capable

\textsuperscript{103} Steve Bride, “Migrant Workers Treated Worse Than Slaves, Say Researchers,” Boulder (Colo.) The Colorado
Daily, September 14, 1970.

\textsuperscript{104} Steve Bride, “Migrant Workers Treated Worse Than Slaves, Say Researchers,” Boulder (Colo.) The Colorado
Daily, September 14, 1970.

\textsuperscript{105} Jack Phinny, “Migrant Conditions ’Miserable,’” The Denver Post, September 14, 1970.
farm workers. When farmers failed to address the health needs of farm workers Colorado activists working with the Colorado-Wyoming Regional Medical Program recognized the problem and sought half a million dollars in federal grant money which allowed the Colorado Migrant Council to coordinate and deliver health services to approximately fifty thousand migrant farm workers and their families. The money would be used in a variety of ways. The Migrant Council trained five teams, called Equipos, comprised of three individuals. Each team included bilingual members to direct migrant farm workers to the appropriate health agencies to deal with their medical problems. Activists also used grant money to make the proposed “Health on Wheels” venture a reality. This program brought medical professional to the fields to offer care to migrant workers. Improving the healthcare available to farm workers enhanced the quality of life Chicano laborers and their families could expect while travelling the state doing back breaking work. The issue of poor health care also affected urban Chicanos driving activists in Pueblo to work towards the establishment of permanent health care centers with the aim of keeping all citizens healthy.

In Pueblo, Chicano activists took steps beyond establishing Equipos as they developed medical centers designed to provide care and to educate community members in an effort to improve the health of the Chicano community. The health services championed by Chicano activists in Pueblo actually provided services to anyone unable to pay for needed medical treatment. Health advocates in Pueblo opened and operated the Pueblo Neighborhood Health Centers in several locations throughout the city to meet the needs of the people. A great number of community members utilized the services provided by PNHC because of the four different offices located on the Eastside, Southside, and Northwest sections of town as well as in

Avondale. At the Avondale location, the PNHC could treat a number of farm workers and their families as that section of Pueblo County is known as more of a rural area. At each center patients received effective and quality care for a host of medical issues. Advertisements printed in *La Cucaracha* notified Chicanos that PNHC locations would provide them with pre and post natal care, as well as offering hearing and vision screenings, pelvic exams and pap smears, physicals, immunizations, blood pressure checks, counseling, home health care, and dental care. The wide ranging services offered by the PNHC ensured that the medical discrimination and malpractice experienced by Chicanos as outlined by the 1970 *Salud y Justicia* report would not occur in Pueblo. The Pueblo Neighborhood Health Centers used “*Salud Es un Derecho* Heath Is A Right” as their slogan and they honored that ideology by accepting Medicaid and Medicare as well as basing medical fees on the patient’s ability to pay.

Chicanos living in Pueblo during the 1970s constituted the largest and most economically disadvantaged group in the city and often times, issues related to poverty required the local government or barrio activism to provide basic benefits for those unable to meet their own needs. During the late 1970s Dr. Ricardo Rivera, a barrio activist, provided Puebloans and southern Coloradans with affordable health care through the publicly funded Pueblo Neighborhood Health Centers he directed for a time. People of all races and ethnicities utilized the health centers, however, in the city of Pueblo; Chicanos statistically had the greatest need. Dr. Rivera and the professionals working at the community health centers operated as activists and improved the quality of life for Pueblo Chicanos.

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107 “Pueblo Neighborhood Health Centers Advertisement,” Pueblo (Colo.) *La Cucaracha*, November 1976. The cost of health care in southern Colorado could be prohibitive for families living in poverty. In the early 1960s my father was treated by a curandera in Florence, Colorado named ‘Fat’ Lupe for what would be diagnosed as a stomach ulcer. Mexican Americans living in the area utilized the services of the curandera often which would have been acceptable in Mexican American society however, the true determining factor in seeing a curandera was the inability to pay for medical care.

According to the 1970 federal census data, approximately one-fifth of Pueblo’s Chicano population or 19.2% lived on an annual income below the poverty level. At that time Chicanos accounted for 43% of all Pueblo families receiving public assistance and of those families, 35% were female heads of household.  

Chicano families struggling to meet the needs of sick, elderly, or pregnant members of their household benefited from the services provided by Pueblo Neighborhood Health Centers. As Rivera stated often in the press, keeping people healthy was the goal of the professionals working at the Pueblo Neighborhood Health Centers.

In an interview printed in *La Cucaracha*, Rivera summarized his beliefs about healthcare, activism and the medical establishment by stating “Because private doctors are guided by business, they must limit their services to those who can afford to pay for them. This means that people do not see their doctor when they are well; they go to them when they are sick. Doctors make money when people are sick and they lose money when people are well.” He continued to draw distinct lines between Pueblo Neighborhood Health Centers and medical offices operated by other practicing physicians in the area by saying “That’s the fundamental difference; we are in the business of keeping people well.” Dr. Rivera provided the poor people of Pueblo, including many Chicanos with the care they needed in order to actively pursue better educations and employment and escape the trappings of cyclical poverty.

Aside from providing affordable care, the Pueblo Neighborhood Health Centers offered community members information designed to educate Chicanos and improve their health. The PNHC advertised frequently in *La Cucaracha* using the newspapers’ free distribution by local businesses as a way to connect to community members living in Pueblo. Frequently these

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109 Autobee, 18-19.
advertisements included health tips designed to promote a higher quality of life through simple improvements. These educational advertisements ranged from explaining the dangers and health risks associated with obesity, along with healthy ways to lose weight to the importance of proper prenatal care. The health centers opened their doors to the public in order to promote health education. For expectant mothers, the PNHC sponsored a series of prenatal classes, free of charge, which included education on proper nutrition, maternal and infant care, labor and delivery, prenatal and breathing exercises, child growth and development and a tour of the labor and delivery ward.\footnote{112 “Pueblo Neighborhood Health Centers Advertisement,” Pueblo (Colo.) \textit{La Cucaracha}, March 1977.} Rivera’s goals were that Chicana mothers in Pueblo would not have to suffer the embarrassments or poor treatment faced by women in other areas of the state outlined in the \textit{Salud y Justicia} report.

As health risks associated with obesity, pregnancy, and elder care were often associated with barrio problems the PNHC sought proactive ways to make an impact in the Chicano community. Issues like the medical needs of elderly Chicanos received due coverage as Dr. Rivera and other PNHC staff participated in a conference drawing approximately five hundred people which focused on the “diverse views on the nature of the problems (associated with elderly care) and the solutions that have been proposed and implemented” to improve the delivery of care to elderly Chicanos living in Pueblo.\footnote{113 “Conference Addresses Needs of Chicano Elderly,” Pueblo (Colo.) \textit{La Cucaracha}, February 1977.} Over the course of the two day conference Dr. Rivera centered discussions on planned expansions which would increase services offered to the elderly. These expansions were contingent on public funds and by publicizing elder issues, older Chicanos could become motivated to impacting local politics through voting in local elections. Because Dr. Rivera and the health centers provided health education free to the public and utilized \textit{La Cucaracha} to connect with barrio residents their...
efforts no doubt improved the lives of countless Puebloans, especially those Chicanos living at the lower end of the socioeconomic spectrum.

Dr. Rivera had deep seeded convictions about improving the lives of Chicanos residing in the barrios of Pueblo through providing them with quality health care. While growing up, Rivera moved constantly, living in thirty different towns; however, he spent time in several of Pueblo’s barrios and considered Pueblo his home. After dropping out of high school Rivera enlisted in the United States Navy and during his time in the military he earned his GED. After leaving the Navy, Rivera graduated from college and applied to the Harvard School of Medicine. When Rivera graduated from Harvard’s prestigious medical school, Rivera became the first Chicano graduate of the institution.114 Considering himself a “Chicano professional” who felt obligated to get involved with people, Rivera returned to Pueblo to offer his services to the poor. In 1975 he became the director of the Pueblo Neighborhood Health Centers and recruited fellow Harvard medical school alums Dr. Silvestre Quivedos (the second Chicano graduate of the Harvard School of Medicine) and Dr. John Radabaugh because they shared his same philosophy in regards to providing community health care to the poor and together they labored to make the PNHC a model program.115

When Dr. Rivera’s administration of the Pueblo Neighborhood Health Centers came under investigation by the Regional Office of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, or HEW, because of a building lease, the Chicano community defended Rivera based on the dignified treatment he gave them when they received care from the health centers. During a public meeting on October 6, 1977, a local woman in the audience endorsed the PNHC and stated “None of the doctors in this town will take Medicaid or Medicare patients. They tell you

114 “Medical Monopoly Threatened by PNHC, Dr. Rivera Feels,” Pueblo (Colo.) La Cucaracha, November 1977.  
115 “Medical Monopoly Threatened by PNHC, Dr. Rivera Feels,” Pueblo (Colo.) La Cucaracha, November 1977.
‘You’re all right, go home and stop wasting the taxpayers’ money’ but when you come to the health centers, they treat you like a real person, and really care about you.”116 This type of discrimination is reminiscent of the issues faced by migrant families who would be refused services or have their medical issues under assessed so doctors could avoid treatment. This woman provided testimony because Rivera, as an educated activist, improved the quality of life for the Chicanos of Pueblo. Chicanos valued those services and defended them fiercely as Brown Beret and longtime activist Eddie Montour stated to the HEW representatives at the October 6th meeting “The only reason the feds ever come to Pueblo is to come down on community projects....”117 For Rivera, the business of making money with his medical practice sat in direct opposition to his ideology of improving the health care received by Chicanos.

The Regional Office of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) limited Dr. Rivera’s ability to provide services for the Chicanos of Pueblo during an investigation they conducted which focused on Eastside location of the Pueblo Neighborhood Health Centers. The investigation centered on the lease and the lease arrangement allowing the PNHC Eastside location to open its doors to the public. While HEW officials investigated the lease arrangement for the Eastside center, they placed a hold on grant funds intended to develop new health programs in Pueblo and then officials ultimately decided to levy $60,000 worth of cutbacks.118 As an activist and medical professional, HEW’s blockage of grant funds disgusted Dr. Rivera because they placed limits on the health centers’ ability to providing care for those in need. During a public forum with HEW officials, Dr. Rivera himself asked “How can you set back

services to thousands of people on such flimsy evidence?” HEW officials responded to Dr. Rivera by explaining that the decision to delay funding came down to administrative considerations and was difficult to make.

Rivera and the governing board controlling the health centers contested the cutbacks imposed by the regional HEW office despite the danger such action had on Rivera’s future as the health center director. Juan Espinosa, a client of the Pueblo Neighborhood Health Centers and creator of La Cucaracha, explained that Dr. Rivera’s socially progressive activism made him a target of local government and ultimately lead to his removal. The public contest over budget issues and the investigation into the lease agreement of the Eastside location merely provided Anglo power brokers in Pueblo the environment required to remove Rivera. While the doctor objected to the $60,000 cuts, HEW officials hinted that PNHC must accept the new budget or risk losing all of their funding funneled in from that bureaucratic agency. As the director, Dr. Rivera did not solely manage the Pueblo Neighborhood Health Centers, but rather Rivera worked with an active board. Many board members felt that HEW’s “take it or leave it” attitude toward budget cuts threatened to force the board into making changes in programs offered by PNHC and its staff to the citizens of Pueblo.

The Pueblo Neighborhood Health Centers experienced a crisis in funding a year prior to the lease investigation conducted by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) and the counter-investigation on HEW proposed by Dr. Rivera as the director of PNHC for wrongfully withholding federal grant money. In 1976, the PNHC requested a sum of $37,500 from the city of Pueblo and the exact same amount from Pueblo County. The PNHC requested

120 “Health Centers Seek Probe of Regional HEW,” Pueblo (Colo.) La Cucaracha, October 1977.
121 Juan Espinosa, interview by author, Pueblo, Co., 22 December 2011.
that the city utilize its revenue sharing fund to meet the $37,500 price tag. The PNHC made the requests with the intent to utilize those funds to open a pharmacy, a lab, and hire 17 additional staff members to split between the four existing PNHC locations.123 The Pueblo Chicano community relied on the services provided by Dr. Rivera and the PNHC through the use of public funds. Asking the city to use its revenue sharing funds in 1976 placed Pueblo’s city government in a position to come out strongly in support of the poor and elderly without shrinking the budgets of other city projects, however, the city council failed to meet the budgetary request in its entirety. The City Council approved a sum of $11,500 towards the funding of the PNHC while the County Commissioners doled out $10,000. The city and county governments of Pueblo allocated approximately 29% of the total sum requested by PNHC leaving the medical professionals $53,500 shy of the minimum budget required to build the pharmacy, lab, and to hire additional staff.124

Dr. Rivera understood the implications of failing to properly fund the Pueblo Neighborhood Health Centers and so did the city and county politicians who chose to deny funds to the PNHC. Through the Chicano press, Dr. Rivera made it clear that the health centers had reached crisis mode in terms of funding. He stated “Unless additional funding is forthcoming we are going to have to seriously consider closing the health centers to new patients. We are currently operating on about 40% of what we need. We are $800,000 to $900,000 short of what we need to run the program.”125 Despite these funding setbacks Dr. Rivera and the staff of the four PNHC locations continued to provide care for those in need. Dr. Rivera planned to personally lobby the Pueblo Area Council of Governments or PACOG, a city and county

coalition, for the funds he believed would be necessary to continue to provide health care to Pueblo’s poor and disadvantaged citizens.

Dr. Rivera sponsored a community forum on October 22, 1977 with the hopes of settling the disputes between the health centers and local officials so more time and effort could be spent providing local Chicanos with healthcare as opposed to battling for funds in to keep the Pueblo Neighborhood Health Centers operating. Rivera felt that local officials had lost sight of the goal of the health centers, keeping people well, so he hoped a public forum would allow Pueblo officials to voice their concerns. According to La Cucaracha much of the criticism of Dr. Rivera and his directorship of the PNHC arose in the late summer of 1977 when Terrance Curran, a reporter from the Pueblo Star Journal and Chieftain wrote a three-part series about the HEW investigation and alleged “improprieties” dealing with the Eastside location’s lease. In response to Curran’s reports, the PNHC Board of Directors stated that “The newspaper creates an investigation, and then used the investigation to document their contention of possible criminal conduct.” Additional, the Curran series created the false impression that other Pueblo medical and dental providers were critical of how PNHC conducted business. In order to clear the air, the PNHC hosted a community meeting on October 22, 1977 at the Sangre De Cristo Arts Center to bring local critics of PNHC and the health center together to discuss any divisive issues or concerns. The PNHC advertised the meeting in local media outlets and invited city and county government officials as well as medical professionals from the area. Dr. Rivera’s efforts to unite the health center’s supporters and its critics ultimately failed, however Rivera’s

role as an activist who educated Chicanos and fought to improve their medical condition allowed him to make a lasting impact on the citizens of Pueblo.

As medical activists serving the Chicanos of Pueblo the PNHC doctors became involved with the community because they felt that the poor could make social advancements when they had access to medical assistance. What the PNHC doctors established in Pueblo served as an example for providing proper services to both disadvantaged and transient populations. As Dr. Rivera stated, getting involved “is everyone’s responsibility” and when negligence is present community members ought “to be outraged when they see injustice occurring, it is their absolute obligation to address it.”

Dr. Rivera felt that the medical establishment in Pueblo denied Chicanos equal access to health care so he made it his mission to meet their needs.

In the 1970s southern Colorado activists held the belief that poverty kept Chicanos from receiving proper health care. Without access to appropriate medical treatment both rural and urban Chicanos faced social stagnation and unnecessary suffering. Activists understood that for rural Chicanos, especially those that worked in the fields, better working conditions and improved wages would permit the laborers and their families to stay well. These farm workers often suffered abuse and were treated in an undignified manner by medical professionals throughout the state. In 1970 Salud y Justicia, an organization originating from the University of Colorado exposed the abuses faced by farm workers and championed improved rights for these Chicanos. In the same year, the U.S. Civil Rights Commission found that Chicano laborers in Colorado did not receive equal protection under the law. In order to right these wrongs farm workers and activists conducted a lettuce strike and a boycott in an attempt to force Colorado farmers to change their business practices. The lettuce strike received statewide media attention

129 “Medical Monopoly Threatened by PNHC, Dr. Rivera Feels,” Pueblo (Colo.) La Cucaracha, November 1977.
as Chicano activists conducted a protest march from Pueblo to the state capitol building in Denver. In Pueblo, urban Chicanos would benefit from the barrio activism of Dr. Ricardo Rivera and his work with the Pueblo Neighborhood Health Centers which treated Chicanos with dignity and offered quality care. The work of Chicano activists in Pueblo and southern Colorado could serve as a template to understand the affect of poverty on the health of the Chicano community and the necessary steps to improve care in both urban and rural settings.
Education es Liberacion

"Parents are mad--it begins to show that the school system is not working for the Chicanos in this town. It's a brainwashing mechanism--probably the best the system had--it's a farce." Dario Madrid (Pueblo Resident and parent of school aged children, 1977)

The grassroots organization of student and parent activists in Pueblo, Colorado during the 1970s serves as a template for understanding the role of activists in the creation and implementation of Chicano Studies programs during the Chicano Movement and the positive impact of those programs in Chicano communities. To improve both the treatment of Mexican American students and their education, disenfranchised youth and their parents confronted the local university and school district. In Pueblo, activists created community pride by promoting educational values to low income students at neighborhood gathering places known as Barrio Stations which provided young Chicanos positive role models. At Barrio Stations, young Chicanos interacted with college students actively involved with the Mexican-American student organization from Southern Colorado State College, now known as Colorado State University-Pueblo. This mentoring motivated some Chicanos to graduate from high school and pursue college degrees because through an improved education Chicanos living in Pueblo could make an impact in their communities and achieve greater economic success.

Beginning in the late 1960s college courses on race, culture and ethnicity began to emerge throughout the Southwest which allowed young Chicanos to tackle the issues of identity and social awareness. In Colorado, Chicano activists educated themselves on the history of the region which helped to initiate a movement designed to improve the lives of all Mexican Americans and grow cultural pride. When people, cultures, and values converge some of the components of either society may get adopted or combined into a new social norm, while others

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get lost during the process. Ethnic studies courses became a component of the Civil Rights Movement because they provided an avenue for students to participate in equality movements by first understanding the history of their particular race and culture. This type of education proved to be necessary because many Chicanos in the Southwest had grown up with no clear identity. In Colorado, it would be common for residents with similar backgrounds to identify themselves as Spanish-American, Mexican-American, or Mexican. Prior to rise of Chicano Studies courses a lack of knowledge often occurred because Chicano parents, who had spent a lifetime being punished for speaking Spanish and being ridiculed about the type of foods they ate, did not teach their children about their heritage. Beginning in the late 1960s at college campuses throughout the Southwest Chicano Studies moved students away from accepting assimilation in American society and cultivated a love for culture, community, and activism.

Activists working to advance the quality of life for Mexican Americans living in Pueblo set out to improve the education available to Chicano students of all ages. The Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan (M.E.Ch.A) organization at Southern Colorado State College provided the Chicano community with stable activists determined to use education as a catalyst for systematic change for all Chicanos living in Pueblo. In 1969, according to a timeline and brief history of Mexican American student organizations at Colorado State University-Pueblo, college students created Chicanos for Action, the first Chicano student organization at the Pueblo campus. During the 1969 fall semester newly elected Chicanos for Action, or CFA leadership voted to change the organization’s name to M.E.Ch.A, which the organization is more widely known.131 This new leadership included George Autobee and Pablo Gonzales, both of whom

131 “M.E.Ch.A & Chicano Studies: Southern Colorado State College, SCSC, Colorado State University-Pueblo, 1969-1973,” in the Colorado Chicano Movement Archives, University Library, Colorado State University-Pueblo, Pueblo, Colorado, 2. This document is a timeline and brief history of the creation and early accomplishments of the Movimiento Estudiantil de Aztlan or M.E.Ch.A organization at the state university in Pueblo, Colorado. It
attended the 1969 Crusade for Justice Youth Conference in Denver and heard the empowering message of gaining historical awareness and organizing to reach community goals and break barriers. At the conference students attended workshops and performances and adopted the label “Chicano” in an attempt to dedicate the movement to the most exploited sector of the Mexican community within the United States and set goals for nationalism and self-determination for Chicano youth. Inspired by the conference, the delegation from Southern Colorado State College went about improving their campus and the city of Pueblo by creating a Chicano Studies program.

As leaders of a young organization, Southern Colorado State College M.E.Ch.A members had to educate themselves on what successful Chicano Studies curriculums offered prior to lobbying the college to implement a program in Pueblo. Autobee and Gonzales, along with other M.E.Ch.A members began attending Chicano Studies workshops hosted by larger universities throughout Colorado. They learned that a standard Chicano Studies program would teach students history and instill cultural pride while at the same time prepare the students to work as activists and leaders within the Chicano community. In 1969 they studied programs at the University of Colorado in Boulder, the University of Northern Colorado in Greeley, as well as Colorado State University located in Ft. Collins. During this barnstorming effort, the students made valuable connections which helped them hone the message they sought to deliver to the Chicanos on the campus of Southern Colorado State. Activists believed the college in Pueblo needed more Chicano professors, increased aid to Chicano students, and a Chicano Studies program.
program to engage students in social causes as well as teach them the history of the Southwest highlighting the Mexican roots of the region.

Touring programs offered at other universities benefited Pueblo students because they made important connections. They utilized these new connections to bring the message of *El Movimiento* to Southern Colorado State College. Salvador Ramirez, the director of Mexican American Studies at the University of Colorado traveled to Pueblo to deliver the keynote address at the Pueblo Unity Conference co-sponsored by M.E.Ch.A and held at the student center on campus.\(^{133}\) During the keynote address Ramirez spoke on several themes important to *El Movimiento* and in particular he urged the 300 people in the audience to question the current power system, evaluate the factors which caused Chicano repression and suppression, and to assess the local schools. He stated that “We [Chicanos] must begin to question the ‘system’--and the systems--of people who have hurt us--those people who hurt your parents and grandparents and who, if we do not organize, will hurt our sons.” Ramirez also pointed out that because of continuing repression, Mexican Americans in the Southwest had grown afraid to stand up to the entrenched Anglo establishment and suggested that the school systems made systematic repression possible leading to inadequacies in housing, education, health, and employment.\(^{134}\) This message resonated with Chicanos in Pueblo who had begun the work of making the local schools more beneficial for Chicano youths. By the fall of 1970 The Southern Colorado State

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133 Bob Thomas, “Keynotes Pueblo Unity Meet--Ramirez: Chicanos Must Wake Up and Start to Ask Critical Questions,” *The Pueblo Chieftain*, 1970. Ramirez graduated from the University of Texas at El Paso and New York University before working as a sociologist and becoming the director of the Mexican American Studies program at the University of Colorado. Ramirez grew up in El Paso, Texas. The archives at the Colorado State University-Pueblo Library house a number of newspaper articles donated by local activist Pablo Gonzales. These articles have been cut out of newspapers so certain information such as the writer, the date, or perhaps the name of the publication was unavailable. When the newspaper articles from the Pablo Gonzales Papers are used in this chapter the footnote will include all available information.

College M.E.Ch.A organization had already determined that it would be their mission to improve the education for college bound Chicanos by providing them with Chicano role models in and out of the classroom and by creating an environment where Chicanos would be accepted on college campuses.

In 1970, George Autobee acting as the student government’s Commissioner of Academic Affairs along with M.E.Ch.A President Pablo Gonzales proposed that a group of Chicano students go to California to visit Chicano Studies programs. They submitted their proposal to the student government of Southern Colorado State College and that body approved the bid. While in California the group, which included Dr. Jose Cordova an S.C.S.C. professor, visited the University of San Diego, the University of California at Riverside, the University of California Los Angeles, and UC-Berkley. Using what they had learned the student activists established a curriculum as well as a required reading list for Chicano Studies courses. The activists also compiled a list of qualified instructors to teach the courses, as they intended to open classes for enrollment during the fall semester in 1971.\textsuperscript{135} However, the real work only began when Chicano activists took their plan to the administration of the college for final approval.

Despite all of the footwork done by M.E.Ch.A activists with the intention of unveiling the Chicano Studies program at Southern Colorado State College as smoothly as possible, when the time came the college administration balked, delaying implementation for an entire school year. The first roadblock came from the office of Dr. William Binkley, S.C.S.C Vice President and Dean of Academic Affairs. Dr. Binkley objected because he did not believe the college, or the city of Pueblo for that matter, required a field of study dedicated to teaching the history of Chicanos. At a meeting with members of the M.E.Ch.A organization and the college curriculum

committee, Binkley stood up and looked out his office window which provided him a view of the city’s Eastside, then sweeping his hand out in front of his body as if to display his view of Pueblo to all of those in his presence, he commented that looking out his window and seeing the town reinforced his belief that Chicano Studies was not needed. In his estimation, the population required to support an independent area of study did not exist.\textsuperscript{136} George Autobee commented that “I think they were in their own world and did not see our Chicana/o community. We were all looking out the same window and saw two different worlds.”\textsuperscript{137} Ironically, Mexican Americans made up a third of Pueblo’s population at the time, and the area of town to which Binkley motioned while making his point just happened to be an Eastside barrio known as Dogpatch with a Mexican American population substantially higher than the city average.

Dr. Binkley represented the misunderstanding and social disconnect which existed between the Anglo establishment in Pueblo and the Chicanos working to empower themselves through education. In 1971, Binkley felt Chicano Studies had no place at the university because he did not envision large numbers of Chicano college students enrolling at Southern Colorado State. Statistics supported Binkley’s view because at the time, approximately 3,310 or 2.8\% of the 118,238 Chicanos living in the urban and rural areas of Pueblo County were college educated.\textsuperscript{138} Contributing to the presumptuous stance taken by Dr. Binkley statistics also backed that a significant portion of Chicanos in Pueblo would have difficulty paying for a college education. However, a number of young Chicanos fought in Vietnam and then returned home intent on bettering themselves through education. The G.I. Bill afforded them an

\textsuperscript{136} George Autobee, interview by author, Pueblo, Co., 24 October 2011.
\textsuperscript{137} George Autobee, interview by author, Pueblo, Co., 24 October 2011.
\textsuperscript{138} Autobee, 18.
opportunity.  George Autobee, a United States Marine and Vietnam veteran, worked on campus along with the M.E.Ch.A organization to procure scholarship money for other Chicanos. In 1971, their efforts resulted in over $25,000 worth of funds earmarked to bring Chicanos onto the S.C.S.C campus. The money received by M.E.Ch.A came from the university’s Special Services program and the Disadvantaged Scholarship Program created by Student Government. After funding had been secured, over 100 Chicano students were recruited to enroll at S.C.S.C for the fall semester.  Despite the money and the numbers, Dr. Binkley failed to waiver on his stance and did not approve the Chicano Studies Program forcing the activists to take further action.

Having been denied by the office of the Dean of Academic Affairs, the student activists intensified their campaign for the creation of a Chicano Studies program and focused their efforts on persuading university president Harry Bowes to make a decision favorable to the Chicano community on campus. Dr. Bowes had a history of affable interactions with the Chicano student population at Southern Colorado State College and Chicano student leaders Pablo Gonzales, George Autobee, and David Vigil recalled personal interactions with Dr. Bowes in which he endeared himself by heartily eating a meal of frijoles and tortillas at a local restaurant.  Regardless of any genuine meaning behind Dr. Bowes’ mealtime interactions, Chicanos felt that he could be leveraged into implementing Chicano Studies. As the president of the college, Dr. Bowes feared negative press or violence associated with student demonstrations on campus.

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139 Mexican Americans living in the Southwest were statistically over-represented in the Vietnam War. They served at a higher rate, were conscripted at a higher rate, and became casualties at higher rate than other groups living in the same region. Several activists described and/or referenced in this history served in Vietnam. Those include Juan Espinosa, George Autobee, David Vigil, and Eddie Mountour. See appendix for more information about the experience of Pueblo’s Chicano activists in Vietnam.


Negative press could interfere with the school’s ability to raise money and make the administration appear ineffective in both the eyes of the Anglo and Chicano community in Pueblo. Chicano activists throughout the state as well as the nation had used civil disobedience to create change when existing power structures were too slow in meeting new demands. Under the leadership of George Autobee and Pablo Gonzales, Chicanos on the campus of S.C.S.C. prepared to take Dr. Bowes to task through the use of student protests.

In the spring 1972, M.E.Ch.A members organized a demonstration to make Chicano Studies a reality at Southern Colorado State College. The student protesters gathered outside of the administration building with banners and placards indicating their dissatisfaction, demands, and cultural pride when, according to George Autobee, President Bowes appeared before the Chicano student leadership in order to find out what it would take to make the demonstrators go home. The activists insisted that President Bowes could defuse the situation by instituting a Chicano Studies program. Chicano on campus also demanded that an Anglo financial aid director be removed from his position for making derogatory comments towards Mexican American students. Weary of the negative attention connected to student demonstrations, Dr. Bowes promised to make Chicano Studies a reality. Later on George Autobee would recall the interaction with Dr. Bowes as the administrator asked “Well, if we give you Chicano Studies will you call of this protest?” To which Autobee said yes and then, according to Autobee, Bowes inquired “Do you have your faculty, your students and your scholarship money?” to which Autobee again replied yes. Bowes then stated “I guess we can start in September with our new classes.”

142 George Autobee, interview by author, Pueblo, Co., 24 October 2011.
academia...I hated to go through that process to do it, but they wouldn’t listen to us until the demonstration.”

Dr. Bowes made good on his promise and in the fall of 1972 all one hundred of the local Chicano students recruited by M.E.Ch.A, during the previous year, received admission to the college as well as a full financial aid package. Many of these students received funding from the Special Services department at the college which acquired $100,000 of money from the Department of Education. The Special Services department met another student demand and hired Chicanos as the director and assistant director in order to assure that these funds made attending college a reality for Chicanos unable to afford tuition.

With appropriate funding secured for Mexican American students, Southern Colorado State College began offering Chicano Studies 101 in the fall of 1972. The financial aid director who angered Chicano students with the use of racist comments also had his contract terminated by the university. Both events are critical to understanding Chicano activism in Pueblo and particularly on campus because they display how activism, not complacency and compliance by ethnic minorities, made the college atmosphere more receptive to the needs of Pueblo’s Chicano community. College Student could learn about their historical and cultural heritage and take that information to Chicano youths living in the community through organizations such as Project Adelante. The connection between Chicanos on campus understanding their regional history then spreading that information worked to improve the overall condition of the Chicano population in Pueblo because it cultivated a historical purpose and place for Chicanos. The work

of student activists on the campus of S.C.S.C typifies the experience of Chicano students throughout the state and the region as the leveraged university administrations to institute Chicano Studies programs and increase the minority enrollment of their universities.

Students actively involved in the M.E.Ch.A organization at Southern Colorado State College took their message of education, cultural awareness, and community improvement to the barrios of Pueblo when they created Project Adelante a community outreach organization that provided instruction, mentoring, and developmental programs for Chicanos starting in 1970. Initially the city of Pueblo, viewed Project Adelante as a tutorial program because community youth leaders and Chicano students providing academic mentoring at the Sangre De Cristo Community Center on Sprague Avenue for approximately two hundred children each evening. These elementary and junior high students received basic help to improve their performance in school as well as learn the history of Chicanos in the Southwest. Every Friday, Project Adelante provided recreation and art classes taught by local Chicano artists. Student activists working for Project Adelante mentored high school students as well, helping those seeking a GED or assisting them in the college application process. However, Project Adelante provided services to Chicanos beyond tutoring. Among these, Project Adelante conducted voter registration and poll watching for local elections, dispensed legal advice to community members in need, and served as a drug abuse prevention center.

Translated literally, adelante is the Spanish word meaning forward or move on, which explains the goals of the Chicano Movement in Pueblo which focused on constant and gradual improvement for the city’s barrios so the idea of making community advancements based on local activism is fitting. The origin of Project Adelante in Pueblo, Colorado lay with the progressive ideas taught in Chicano Studies courses on college campuses throughout California

during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Chicano activists attending college would recruit prospective students and engage in community projects while working out of storefront operations located in different barrios.148 These locales became known as Barrio Stations. From these Barrio Stations college students involved themselves in a host of different enterprises all aimed at improving the Chicano community at large and improving the overall quality of life for each individual. Barrio Stations gave Chicanos the space they needed for reflection and organization in order to improve individuals and neighborhoods. Upon witnessing the impact Barrio Stations had on Chicano communities in California, students from Southern Colorado State College eagerly grasped onto the idea of creating a similar program in Pueblo. These same students returned home and organized to make change on campus. The first order of business was to successfully establish a Chicano Studies program at S.C.S.C. and then to create a Barrio Station. Around the Southwest, from Texas to California, activists worked to launch Chicano Studies programs so that their communities could reap the benefits of improved education. This effort took approximately four years but, by 1974 activists secured revenue sharing funds from Pueblo City Council and using that money they set up offices in local public housing projects and Project Adelante became a publicly funded anti-drug program.149

Project Adelante gained most of its recognition as a community organized and operated drug prevention center. Pablo Gonzales, a M.E.Ch.A activist who went on to become the director of Project Adelante, described his work creating Project Adelante as the one

accomplishment he is most proud of throughout his lifetime of service and activism. At Project Adelante’s creation, inadequacies in education and employment among Chicanos lead to a great deal of drug abuse and criminal activity. In 1976, Gonzales described the problems facing Pueblo Chicanos in an editorial printed in La Cucaracha by stating “Poverty, unemployment, and jails continue to be the burden of all Chicanos, and the only way to eliminate this pathetic state of existence is for Chicanos to become politically aware.” In the same editorial Gonzales laid out the role Adelante could play in Pueblo by stating “Project Adelante as a community based program providing Pueblo citizens with an alternative to institutions and prisons.” In order to make full use of Project Adelante Gonzales believed that Chicanos had to become involved in local government and community planning. Through that involvement Chicanos could develop relevant programs and meet the specific needs of their communities. Salud y Justicia, another organization originating on a college campus is another example of how college students worked for social causes to improve the lives of Chicanos.

The ability of Project Adelante to combat the pitfalls of drug abuse among Pueblo’s poor earned it state and national recognition. In 1975, the Pueblo Chieftain printed a story noting Project Adelante as “the top drug abuse prevention program in Colorado” a status based upon “A program’s innovativeness, ability to be duplicated elsewhere, format, and degree of youth involvement in planning and implementation....” The story goes on to report that in addition to being recognized as Colorado’s top program, Project Adelante earned national acknowledgement as one of the top eleven programs in the country. The program focused on altering the root causes for drug abuse among Pueblo’s poor by combating unemployment,

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150 Pablo Gonzales, interview by author, 24 October 2011.
152 “Adelante narcotics, drug program singled out as national model,” The Pueblo Chieftain, February 9, 1975.
trouble with law, negative self-concepts, as well as family and individual problems.\textsuperscript{153} This had a positive impact on young Chicanos in Pueblo because the mentoring children received via Adelante activists demonstrated that education would lead to prosperity. The early focus by Project Adelante on academic tutoring and Chicano Studies education allowed Chicano youths, who otherwise had little opportunities or insufficient role models, to develop a positive self-concept and to adhere to the positive message conveyed by Adelante. Because of this success Project Adelante received ‘mini-grants’ from federal agencies as well as funding from state and local government.\textsuperscript{154} However, this success did not guarantee that proper funds would continue to be funneled to Project Adelante from public sources.

For a time the success of Project Adelante allowed for expansion throughout the city and incorporation of other youth organizations under the Adelante banner but eventually the program found itself battling for funding. The Community Youth Organization in Pueblo provided recreational and social activities for school aged children but had apparently fallen on hard times as Ron Martinez reported in May of 1976 in an article entitled “New life for old CYO building” that Project Adelante Inc. moved operations into the former CYO building located at 1102 E. Abriendo Avenue. A member of the Community Youth Organization welcomed the presence of Project Adelante and stated that she believed “Under the sponsorship of Adelante, I feel the young people of Pueblo and in particular the surrounding community will find a place they can call their own.”\textsuperscript{155} This public statement reflects the positive relationship Project Adelante cultivated with the citizens of Pueblo. Moving operations into new locations gave local

\textsuperscript{153} “Adelante narcotics, drug program singled out as national model,” \textit{The Pueblo Chieftain}, February 9, 1975.

\textsuperscript{154} “Adelante ‘trip’ to combat drugs,” \textit{The Pueblo Chieftain}. This newspaper article describes the awarding of $1500 to Project Adelante from the National Search Project of the National Institute for Drug Abuse. As the top drug prevention program in the state of Colorado Project Adelante was also eligible for 5 larger grants awarded by the same agency.

Chicanos access to all services provided by Adelante activists and did not blight the community. Much of the Chicano Movement involved the creation of positive spaces within communities struggling with issues of poor education, high crime, unemployment and a general lack of hope. Project Adelante offices, as a “Barrio Station,” provided space for Chicanos to earn self-respect and make positive change for their communities as they tackled these barrio issues. The media may have given most credence to Project Adelante’s success as a drug prevention center, however it is the importance of providing space for discussion, debate and action occur which is the lasting legacy of Adelante.

When the time came for Project Adelante to lobby for public funds it rested its claims on the grounds that the services provided allowed for community members to acquire the necessary tools to live a productive and meaningful life. In July of 1976, Project Adelante publicly addressed the Human Resources Commission and the Pueblo City Council through the editorials of local newspapers. Those governing bodies elected to defund Project Adelante despite having the apparent resources to provide the program with public money. Project Adelante leaders ask the question in their editorial of how only $125,000 had been allocated to local social health programs when City Council earmarked a total of $250,000 out of the city’s revenue sharing fund to develop social health programs.\(^{156}\) To the leaders of Project Adelante the defunding measure had “been personal rather than purposeful” and the Human Resources Commission chose to utilize the same approach in Adelante’s evaluations. In this same editorial Project Adelante touches on its barrio station roots and defines itself “as a community service organization [that] has provided educational, health, and legal services to a target population of poor...Operating in Bessemer and [the] southside of Pueblo...Adelante has been instrumental in recruiting and motivating young and disadvantaged Pueblo citizens into higher levels of

\(^{156}\) “Forum,” Pueblo (Colo.) La Cucaracha, July 1976.
education whether by obtaining high school diplomas, undergraduate degrees, or specialized training.”\textsuperscript{157} In essence, to deny funds to Project Adelante was to deny the disadvantaged Chicanos of Pueblo, as well as other poor people, a chance to receive essential services and improve their life. As Adelante’s “orientation is toward the development of a positive self-image in reconstruction for a meaningful life.”\textsuperscript{158} As a social health program Project Adelante aided Chicanos in developing the skills required to break the chains of drug abuse and poverty.

The success of student activists at Southern Colorado State College during the early years of the 1970s allowed for them to lobby for a Chicano Studies program and branch out into the community through the creation of Project Adelante; however these programs required constant advocacy and support. After the college implemented Chicano Studies, activists on campus had to continually apply pressure on the school administration to keep that vital program open for all future students. Many of these future students had been mentored through Project Adelante and were prepared to earn a college education. Not only did Chicano Studies breed cultural pride but the funds from the Special Services program secured by the Chicano Studies program also provided vital financial aid which would allow a new generation of students to pay for college.

During the 1974-75 school year M.E.Ch.A members voted to change the organizations name to Chicanos United for Action or C.U.F.A., a nod to the original Mexican American student group formed in 1969.\textsuperscript{159} Regardless of the name change, activists lead by Vietnam veteran David Vigil worked to expand on the efforts of previous Chicanos on campus push the administration towards awarding the Chicano Studies program departmental status. On May 13, 1975 David Vigil described the concerns of Chicanos on campus in a letter to Dr. William

\textsuperscript{157} “Forum,” Pueblo (Colo.) La Cucharacha, July 1976.
\textsuperscript{158} “Forum,” Pueblo (Colo.) La Cucharacha, July 1976.
Binkley, the VP of Academic Affairs who originally denied the need for a Chicano Studies program. All concerns outlined in this letter focused on the status of the Chicano Studies program. To ensure a proper budget and push the administration to grant department status to Chicanos Studies C.U.F.A activists proposed that Chicano Studies receive $60,000 for the fiscal year and be staffed with a full time director and a minimum of two full time faculty members. The college would also hire a Chicano Artist in residence a Chicano Poet in residence. On the same day, May 13, David Vigil also sent a letter to university president Dr. Harry Bowes in which he wrote “It is our hope and expectation that you as President of this Institution, make the needs of the Southern Colorado area a Priority and that you take action on these concerns.” The concerns mentioned in the letter include the lack of support for the expansion of Chicano Studies, the lack of Chicano recruitment in athletics and academic areas, and general alienation of the Chicano community at large. By this time, college activists had learned the lesson of being proactive on as many fronts as possible. To push their agenda, campus Chicanos wrote letters and held meetings with as many college administrators as deemed necessary. They also began to utilize media sources by sending copies of official correspondence to campus and local newspapers as well as using editorials to take their case directly to the Chicano public living in Pueblo. The success of the Chicano Studies program at S.C.S.C and the work of student activists within Pueblo’s Chicano community inspired the creation of Chicano Studies programs in the city’s high schools.

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160 David Vigil to Dr. William Binkley, May 13, 1975, in David Vigil Papers, University Library, Colorado State University-Pueblo, Pueblo, Colorado.
161 David Vigil to Harry P. Bowes, May 13, 1975, in David Vigil Papers, University Library, Colorado State University-Pueblo, Pueblo, Colorado.
162 David Vigil to Harry P. Bowes, May 13, 1975, in David Vigil Papers, University Library, Colorado State University-Pueblo, Pueblo, Colorado. These letters were cc’d to a number of individuals on campus as well as in the community. The Board of Trustees received copies as well. C.U.F.A. members mailed letters to the Pueblo Star Journal and Chieftain and when the Chicano newspaper La Cucaracha began production in 1976, C.U.F.A. often wrote editorials printed in the forum section and distributed for free throughout the Chicano community.
David Marquez, a teacher and activist wrote “the M.E.Ch.A students hoped that education would be the panacea that would cure the ills of the Chicano people.”\textsuperscript{163} The reality of the Chicano Studies program at S.C.S.C. and the funds allocated for the purpose of admitting Mexican American students to that institution gave Chicano youths living in Pueblo a connection to the college community and the means to pursue higher education. Marquez continued to argue and explain that M.E.Ch.A members valued any work done to improve education because “In a retrospective analysis of their personal experiences in the Pueblo school system...[they] recognized the glaring disparities that existed between Anglo and Chicano students attending District 60 schools.”\textsuperscript{164} However, at this point in time Pueblo had a defunct school system which grossly underserved minority students.

Census data from 1970 demonstrated that a large portion of Chicanos in Pueblo lived in poverty, lacked a basic high school education, and had more difficulties finding employment than their Anglo counterparts. A third of Mexican Americans did not even complete an eighth grade education before they entered the workforce. Across the board, the median number of school years completed by Chicanos sat at 9.5% and nearly one out of every five Chicanos in Pueblo lived below the poverty line. Only 2.8% of Chicanos earned college degrees and the unemployment figures showed that 8% could not find work in the city and county of Pueblo.\textsuperscript{165}

\textsuperscript{163} David Marquez, “The Chicano Wars, Advent of the Chicano Movement in Pueblo, Colorado,” in the Colorado Chicano Movement Archives, University Library, Colorado State University-Pueblo, Pueblo, Colorado. This manuscript was written by David Marquez in the early 1980’s. After graduating from Colorado College in 1974, Marquez was hired by Pueblo School District 60 to teach Chicano Studies at Central High School. He was one of four founding teachers hired to teach CS after the D60 school board had been pressured to meet the demands of Chicano activists within the city of Pueblo. He named his work "The Chicano Wars" because he felt as if he had to wage battle on a daily basis to justify to Anglos the importance of Chicano Studies, as well as battling to convince Chicano students that they could achieve academically beyond the limits that Pueblo society had placed upon them. After teaching for more than two decades in D60, Marquez moved on to teach Chicano Studies at USC (now CSU-P) before retiring in 2010.

\textsuperscript{164} David Marquez, “The Chicano Wars, Advent of the Chicano Movement in Pueblo, Colorado,” in the Colorado Chicano Movement Archives, University Library, Colorado State University-Pueblo, Pueblo, Colorado.

\textsuperscript{165} Autobee, 18.
Anglos, on average, completed twelve years of schooling, had approximately three times as many college graduates as Chicanos, and lower rates of unemployment. Clearly the lack of educational attainment by Chicano youths enrolled in the local school district lead to a host of other socioeconomic issues confining Chicanos to a second class lifestyle.

During *El Movimiento*, Pueblo Chicanos challenged the local school board to implement Chicano Studies at the local high schools and diversify hiring practices district wide in order to improve the education received by the Chicano youth of the city. Educational activists Deborah Martinez-Martinez explained that at that time, Chicanos had few, if any, Chicano role models teaching in the schools that they attended. In addition to this lack of Chicano teachers, minority students were often directed towards labor or service oriented careers. Martinez-Martinez recalled her experience as a high school student in Walsenburg, Colorado when she approached her guidance counselor about college opportunities and immediately had her inquiry redirected. The guidance counselor told Martinez-Martinez to look into attending a community college where she could enroll in a secretary training program. For Chicano students, secondary education often meant developing a vocation and hoping to become a secretary at best rather than preparing for college.

A product of Pueblo, David Marquez was practically an anomaly as he attended college directly after graduating from high school. His first college experience occurred at Southern Colorado State College but after his freshman year Marquez transferred to Colorado College at the urging of a close Chicano friend and earned a bachelor’s degree in 1974. Chicanos in Pueblo had long been the recipients of a subpar education which essentially prepared them to enter the military, work in the steel mill or ordinance depot, or failed them completely. With low

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166 Deborah Martinez-Martinez, interview by author, Pueblo, Co., 26 March 2012. Deborah Martinez-Martinez earned a B.A. in journalism and later earned a Ph.D in Educational Leadership and Innovation. She currently writes non-fiction stories for school aged children and operates her own publishing company called Vanishing Horizons.
expectations for success at public or private institutions of higher learning many Chicanos felt that colleges and universities throughout the state “had academic standards designed to keep out minorities” because high schools systematically failed to prepare them for the rigors of college work. However, examples like David Marquez demonstrated that “Chicanos” who broke into the universities “could compete and succeed academically if given the opportunity.”¹⁶⁷ This new spirit of hope energized Chicanos on college campuses throughout the state and many developed Mexican American student organizations designed to aid those students in attaining academic success.

This is how David Marquez became involved in the Chicano Movement. In 1972, as one of fifty Chicano students on the campus of Colorado College recruited through an educational opportunities program, he attended a M.E.Ch.A meeting. Through his participation in the Colorado College M.E.Ch.A organization Marquez augmented his social life but, more importantly, he participated in boycotts to support Cesar Chavez and La Causa, pressured the university administration to hire more Chicano professors, and pushed for more financial aid earmarked to allow minority students to attend Colorado College. However, David Marquez received his biggest opportunity to become an activist when Pueblo School District 60 recruited him to become a Chicano Studies teacher at Central High School.¹⁶⁸ As a college educated Chicano, Marquez embodied several ideals fundamental to the success of El Movimiento when he returned to his hometown in order to improve the lives of Chicano youths through education. Improving the education Chicanos received from District 60 meant diversifying faculty and adopting the Chicano Studies curriculum. After teaching Chicano Studies for twenty eight years Marquez expressed the impact he felt that he made in the lives of his students when he described

¹⁶⁷ David Marquez, interview by author, Pueblo, Co., 12 September 2011.
that “It [teaching] was probably the most satisfying career path I could have chosen...” and no matter how difficult the task became “by the end of the work week I always felt like I had made a difference.”

Making a difference in the lives of Chicanos attending high school in Pueblo would be a difficult and challenging assignment.

The battle for implementing Chicano Studies courses in Pueblo City high schools began in 1970 when parents and community activists focused their attention and efforts on improving the educational environment for Chicano youth. In May of that year the climate at Pueblo’s high schools became so toxic that racially inspired fighting erupted on the campus of Centennial High. Chicano students battled with their Anglo counterparts as well as with school staff and administrators when they tried to interfere with organized walk-outs. Open hostilities between Chicano and Anglo students certainly sent the message of dissatisfaction and cultural misunderstanding, but ultimately the fighting lead to little change. Chicano community leaders in Pueblo understood that to improve schools for Chicano students they had to force a fundamental shift in the educational system as the school district represented the racist power structure throughout the city and the Anglos in power understood that if they allowed the school board to be defeated by the Chicano Movement that other establishment structures, both political and economic, would follow.

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170 David Marquez, “The Chicano Wars, Advent of the Chicano Movement in Pueblo, Colorado,” in the Colorado Chicano Movement Archives, University Library, Colorado State University-Pueblo, Pueblo, Colorado. Marquez writes that Chicano students specifically targeted the school’s principal and a teacher who made frequent racist statements such as labeling a pinto bean drawn on the chalk board as a “Mexican Brain” during the race riots. Chicanos clashed with a cohort of white athletes as well. In addition to the fighting, 300 students walked out of the school to protest.

On October 14, 1970 Chicanos formally presented a list of nine demands to the District 60 Board of Education and Superintendent Dr. Lee Williamson. Collectively, all of the demands worked towards producing a climate within District 60 schools that would be more inclined to provide Chicanos a better education. It is the second demand listed which eventually lead to the recruitment of David Marquez to teach at Central High school in 1974 allowing him to become an educator and activist within the community. The second requirement stated “We demand classes in Chicano History of the Southwest and we also demand...these classes be...taught by Chicanos.” The acceptance of these demands by Dr. Williamson and the School Board did not occur instantly but local Chicano organizations like the Brown Berets, a group known for its militant style, coordinated student efforts to change racist environments at local high schools. Marquez wrote “The strategy devised by...the Berets was to disrupt the school system by creating a degree of chaos that would prevent the schools from functioning. This could be most effectively accomplished by organizing mass walkouts of Chicano Students at the high school level.”

The Berets usually coordinated student walkouts to coincide with Mexican holidays such as El Diez y Seiz de Septiembre and Cinco de Mayo in addition to attending school board meetings and making their displeasure known publicly. The activities of the Brown Berets in the local high school and at public meetings did not go unnoticed as “Every Anglo parent dreaded the prospect of using the schools as a social battlefield.” By the spring of 1974 the activism of

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172 David Marquez, “The Chicano Wars, Advent of the Chicano Movement in Pueblo, Colorado,” in the Colorado Chicano Movement Archives, University Library, Colorado State University-Pueblo, Pueblo, Colorado. At the time Jeanne Hickman, a reporter for The Pueblo Star Journal, wrote an article which listed all of the demands Chicano activists presented during the school board meeting.


174 David Marquez, “The Chicano Wars, Advent of the Chicano Movement in Pueblo, Colorado,” in the Colorado Chicano Movement Archives, University Library, Colorado State University-Pueblo, Pueblo, Colorado. In the
the Brown Berets in addition to the work of Chicano students and parents, convinced the District 60 Board of Education to implement a Chicano Studies program scheduled to start in the fall semester in 1974. These activities coordinated by the Brown Berets in Pueblo were similar to events that the organization coordinated in California, Texas, and other states in the Southwest. Nationally, the Brown Berets received the most attention from law enforcement agencies which feared the Berets could produce some type of government overthrow. At some locations, these fears lead to the infiltration of the Berets by law enforcement agencies attempting to invalidate the Brown Berets in the public eye. 175 To Chicanos living in Pueblo however, the Brown Berets offered security and a comforting presence for all activists working to create change in the city of Pueblo. 176

In the fall of 1974 when David Marquez, one of four newly hired Chicano Studies teachers in Pueblo School District 60, entered the classroom at Central High School he found overt inadequacies. Mexican American students comprised approximately 40% of the school’s population at that time but Marquez noted “It was mostly the Anglo students that were benefiting [from the educational programs offered]...The Chicano kids were essentially there to take up space.” 177 Prior to the Chicano Movement Pueblo city high schools offered remedial education to Chicano children. This remediation created an atmosphere in which Chicano students felt inferior to Anglos despite personal aptitude and it also kept a majority of Chicanos from taking the courses required to prepare them for college. The historic treatment of Chicano students as second class learners by the school district systematically pushed those youths towards labor

manuscript Marquez describes the tactics used by the Brown Berets in as the “Chinga factor” as these tactics usually shocked and intimidated community Anglos.

175 Acuna, 304.
176 Deborah Martinez-Martinez, interview by author, Pueblo, Co., 26 March 2012
intensive employment or worse, criminal activity. Prior to the community battle to improve the education received by Chicanos in Pueblo city schools Spanish-surnamed youths made up a majority of the juvenile court cases despite the fact that Spanish-surnamed individuals comprised only one third of the city’s population.178 Youths are no doubt, better served by educational institutions rather than correctional facilities.

Deficiencies in social inclusion prior to the adoption of the Chicano Studies curriculum served as part of the force driving Chicano students out the doors of local high schools without receiving a proper education. The school system discriminated against Pueblo Chicanos by discouraging their participation in non-academic extracurricular activities. In 1970, when race based violence broke out at Centennial High School, the school’s athletes joined forces against a portion of the 300 Chicano students participating in the walkout.179 Chicanos often did not have the privilege of participating in athletics during their high school careers. This exclusion was not specific to athletics, as Anglos dominated other school programs such as cheer and pom teams, student council, and the school newspaper.180 These disenfranchised Chicano youth drove the movement after they had been organized. David Marquez and other Chicano Studies teachers made it their missions to get Mexican American students to run for student council, to participate in cheer and sports teams, and to challenge themselves academically. These changes would lead to better educational opportunities and set up the next generation of Chicano youth for success and prosperity beyond that of their parents. Despite the positive effects of ethnic studies courses, today classes like Chicano Studies are being defunded or cut out of curriculums.

178 David Marquez, “The Chicano Wars, Advent of the Chicano Movement in Pueblo, Colorado,” in the Colorado Chicano Movement Archives, University Library, Colorado State University-Pueblo, Pueblo, Colorado. These probation statistics are from 1968 and 1969 and were included in an editorial written by Pueblo Chicano activist Martin Serna and printed in the El Zapatista newsletter.
This paradigm shift within the school community did not occur without encountering some form of Anglo obstruction. After jump starting the Chicano Studies program at Central High and encouraging his students to participate in a greater number of school sponsored activities David Marquez felt the ire of the Anglo establishment when a petition arose during the 1975 school year to have him removed from his position. Marquez believed that he became a target when his work “disrupted the status quo so badly” that Anglo students felt compelled to seek his removal. The white students were not alone in their attempt to eradicate his presence at Central High school as Marquez noted that when the school principal, Mr. Halsey Cook made him privy to the information and showed him the petition, a number of his fellow staff members had signed it. Though he cannot remember the specific statement that preceded the signature pages as Principal Cook threw the petition in the trash and both publicly and privately supported Marquez, the petition essentially charged that “[Marquez] was personally responsible for creating a...polarizing environment based on race...[and] that [he] was dividing the school and the community because there was no racism at Central High School until [he] showed up.” After painfully reflecting on the charges pronounced against him by the Anglo students and the professional affront of having his colleagues sign their name to a petition seeking his removal, Marquez replied “Well, when I showed up I shined a glowing spotlight on the racism. I made them see it.”

Because of the systematic changes brought about by Chicano Studies and teacher activist like David Marquez Mexican American students at Pueblo School District 60 schools began to receive a better education as they experienced higher graduation rates, higher college entrances rates, and reduced the number of high school drop outs.

Chicano students demonstrated their new found confidence and devotion to the Chicano Studies program at the high school level when they clashed with the administration at Centennial High School during the spring semester of 1977. Chicano students in Pueblo had actively participated in organized demonstrations prior to February 25, 1977 however, on this occasion they acted to maintain the Chicano Studies program and teacher the Chicano community had won just three years earlier. The administration at Centennial High school proposed the transfer of Chicano Studies teacher Ernie Martinez which the students opposed by taking over the cafeteria with a staged sit-in. After attending their homeroom classes, three hundred Chicano students met in the cafeteria and stayed there until community leaders, parents, and the students agreed to a meeting with Centennial’s principal, Carl Wilkerson. The actions of the students reflected the sentiments of fellow Chicano Studies teacher Leonard Roybal when he said “We need more Chicano teachers...we must unite before the administration. *Le Gente* is not important to them. We must push for Chicano principals, not puppets.”

The meeting, the Chicano students and their parents agreed to have with Principal Wilkerson, occurred on March 2, 1977. Empowered, the students brought a list of demands to the meeting and lobbied the school administration to accommodate them. Chicano Studies activists understood the importance of the student’s actions as the outcome would likely affect the Chicano Studies programs at the other highs schools in town. David Marquez said when interviewed by *La Cucaracha* “...if this situation at Centennial can be followed to a successful conclusion, then other Chicano projects in the other high schools will also be successful.” The Chicano students at Centennial clamored for the following: First, Chicano Studies teacher Ernie Martinez would not be transferred to a different location within the district. Principal Carl

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Wilkerson would investigate the possibility of transportation for students following school activities. Chicano speakers would be able to address Centennial’s student body. To this, Principal Wilkerson reasonably requested that he be notified in advance if Chicano students planned any speaking dates or activities. And lastly, the students asked for artwork, perhaps a mural depicting Chicano culture be displayed at Centennial High School. At the conclusion of this meeting Carl Wilkerson agreed to meet the student’s requests. Mr. Ernie Martinez retained his position and eventually taught Chicano Studies at two Pueblo city high schools. Speaking of his collaborative work and friendship with Ernie Martinez, fellow teacher David Marquez said “We had such a successful Chicano Studies program in the high schools here in Pueblo.” Students felt that the schools belonged to them and Chicanos increased their participation in athletics, student government, as well as social activities such as cheer and pom teams and yearbook and newspaper publications. Most importantly students challenged themselves academically, graduated at higher rates, and went to college. Ultimately, the efforts of the Chicano students throughout Pueblo School District 60 demonstrated self-empowerment and upward mobility through education which made the goals of the Chicano Movement come to fruition.

Through Chicano Studies programs at both the high school and college level, activists in Pueblo used the classroom as a crucial platform to educate and reach students which proved essential to the success of El Movimiento in the 1970s and beyond. The Chicano student movement in Pueblo started because Mexican Americans “wanted their piece of the pie” and in order to get it, they focused on improving the conditions of the Chicano community.

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186 David Marquez, interview by author, Pueblo, Co., 12 September 2011.
Understanding the methods used by Chicano activists in Pueblo to improve their education during the 1970s allows for historical understanding of how grassroots efforts can improve the lives of minority peoples. The effectiveness of the Chicano Movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s increased the number of Chicano activists in the professional ranks. Because more Chicanos were able to attend college and earn degrees during this particular era they were given positions of power within the community.\textsuperscript{187} The rise of college educated Chicanos in southern Colorado directly confronted the status quo preferred by the Anglo establishment. In Pueblo, Mexican American students experienced forced remediation, degrading school lunch programs, and the dominance of Anglo students in school organizations. This type of discrimination, though not specific to Pueblo alone, required immediate action. Activists in Pueblo chose to confront the school system which considered them “upstart Mexicans” for demanding change.\textsuperscript{188} Although efforts made by M.E.Ch.A. and later C.U.F.A. activists fell short of creating a Chicano Studies department which offered students the opportunity to earn a bachelor’s degree in the discipline, they laid the foundation for a program which exists to this day. The \textit{Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan} organization exists as well and engages in meeting the needs of Twenty-first Century Chicanos.

\textsuperscript{187} David Marquez, interview by author, Pueblo, Co., 12 September 2011.
\textsuperscript{188} David Marquez, interview by Jesus Hernandez, CD recording, 20 November 2008, The Southern Colorado Ethnic Heritage and Diversity Collection, University Library, Colorado State University-Pueblo, Pueblo, Co.
The above photograph was taken on January 2, 2012 in Fountain, Colorado. Flanking the large plywood signs captured above flew two large flags. Directly to the north a red, white and blue American flag flapped in the wind, while to the south a green, red, and white flag from Mexico thrashed in the stiff breeze. In Colorado the hardships, conflicts, and events that have shaped the relationship between the land and its inhabitants has created a complex historical narrative. The conflict over land documented in this thesis is not over. As the sign reads “2012 is here! Pay me for my land! Return my hard earned future to me! You Traitors, Judas’, and enem[ies] of our nation. Kiko—I am a True American.” The land is the lifeblood of the Chicano population living in southern Colorado and as far north as El Paso County, land remains an issue.
In the 1970s Chicanos formed the Land Rights Council to secure the historic and customary use of the land which Mexican Americans living in the San Luis Valley had enjoyed for generations. A legal solution would not come quickly even after the Land Rights Council filed a lawsuit against Jack Taylor for denying Chicanos access to the Mountain Tract or *La Culebra*. Co-founder of the Land Rights Council, Shirley Romero-Otero stated that in 1981 “…a reasonable amount of time would have been ten years, never, never envisioning it would take three decades.”\(^\text{189}\) However, justice required that Romero-Otero and other land rights activists wait for twenty-one years spanning over three decades before a resolution would be reached. On June 24, 2002 the Colorado Supreme court ruled in a four to three decision that San Luis Valley residents had the right to access the Mountain Tract to graze their livestock and to gather wood to heat their homes. And as Romero-Otero stated, even though the legal battle has ended, “…the battle to maintain that mountain for future generation is just beginning.”\(^\text{190}\)

*El Movimiento* attempted to change the lives of migrant farm laborers by improving their working and living conditions. Colorado Chicanos participating in strikes and boycotts to support farm workers like the lettuce strike in 1970, were part of a larger movement throughout the region that started with the unionization efforts of Cesar Chavez. Activist Lalo Delgado commented that Chicanos in Colorado “…were in a hurry to make social change…” but Chavez communicated “…that we weren’t’ going to change four-hundred years of oppression in two years…” and if you want to change the way things are “You’ve got to change it two ways, peacefully and within the law.”\(^\text{191}\) The August 1970 march from Pueblo to Denver served as


public drama and brought media attention to the plight of the farm workers. It raised collective awareness throughout the region in both a peaceful and lawful way and endeared Chicanos with a sense of pride and purpose in helping their fellow citizens. The Center Lettuce Strike lead to walkouts in fields in Arizona and California and served as the precursor to the nationwide lettuce boycott. The boycott efforts attached to the lettuce strike offered Colorado Chicanos the opportunity to contribute to *El Movimiento* in a broad sense while focusing on educating the public on the poor conditions faced by farm laborers and their families.

The politicization of Chicanos in the 1970s through the *La Raza Unida* political party served a dual purpose of giving activists a public platform to pursue societal change and allowing them to gain political inroads within the two major political parties. *La Raza Unida* ran candidates for political office in state and local elections throughout the 1970s especially in places like Pueblo. Candidates continued to use the campaign trail as a platform. In the fall of 1976, running for the Pueblo County District 1 County Commissioner's seat Eddie Montour stated that “his campaign would be concentrating on those issues affecting the community, including area health centers and attacks directed towards professional Chicanos.” This statement coincides with the financial issues and establishment attacks faced by Dr. Ricardo Rivera and the Pueblo Neighborhood Health Centers. Another *La Raza Unida* candidate from Pueblo named Fred Archer used his Congressional bid to travel throughout the southern part of the state to discuss issues important to the Chicano population of the region like financial aid for poor students, prison reform which emphasized rehabilitation, providing health care based on need, and addressing unemployment. Ultimately, these efforts never lead to wide-ranging

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political success for La Raza Unida as a party which got its candidates elected. Despite appearing on Colorado election ballots La Raza Unida never earned the required 10% of the popular vote in any given state-wide election to earn official third party status. La Raza candidates utilized grassroots efforts to appear on ballots by use of petition. 195

Chicanos, motivated by the spirit of activism circulating throughout the southwest in the 1970s, engaged in a battle with educational institutions throughout the city of Pueblo in order to make positive changes for all individuals. As many members of the older generation had less than an eighth grade education the upward climb out of poverty required Chicanos to achieve greater academic success. Chicanos attending Southern Colorado State College organized and forced the university’s administration to adopt fairer hiring practices and implement a Chicano Studies program. The implementation of Chicano Studies also occurred in the city’s four local high schools. Chicanos battled Pueblo School District 60 to improve the education of their children and this decision proved vital to the treatment of all other socioeconomic issues plaguing the Chicano community.

Chicano activists also looked to improve Pueblo’s barrios by providing services that would allow for upward mobility by improving the quality of life for all of those mired in poverty. Chicano communities involved themselves in endeavors that built a sense of commonality as well as increased awareness among Chicano youth. Starting as an offshoot of Chicano activism on the campus of S.C.S.C., Project Adelante became paramount in providing Pueblo with social and legal services which reduced crime and drug use in the city of Pueblo while simultaneously preparing the next generation of college bound Chicanos. During this same time the Pueblo Neighborhood Health Centers directed by Dr. Ricardo Rivera operated to

provide high quality health services to those in need. Providing the poor with health care incrementally leveled the playing field as healthy Chicanos could better compete and succeed in school and work.

Chicanos living in Pueblo set in motion activities designed to improve their quality of life and they used the alternative media newspaper, *La Cucaracha* as a catalyst to continue to agitate and inspire the movement in Pueblo and the southern Colorado region as a whole. *La Cucaracha* successfully provided southern Colorado with local, regional, and national stories pertinent to the Chicano Rights Movement. In today’s society when anyone with a computer and internet access can become a hack on the web the skill, knowledge and dedication to creating a newspaper may be lost. However, as college educated journalists the creators of *La Cucaracha* consistently produced a quality and professional product. As true activists, the producers of *La Cucaracha* distributed the newspaper for free so the message of the Chicano Rights Movement in southern Colorado could reach the widest audience possible.

In researching the history of southern Colorado a few individuals have provided a great deal of help in examining the impact of Chicano activists in the region. Among these are George Autobee, David Marquez, Dr. Deborah Martinez-Martinez, and Juan and Deborah Espinosa. They provided detailed oral histories about their experiences, dutifully answered an array of questions, and shared work they had written in the past. In the 1960s and 1970s improving the education received by Chicanos became a foundational goal of *El Movimiento*. The activism carried out by these individuals in 2012 is a direct result of the college education they received in the 1970s. Having spent time with these individuals it is clear that activism has continued to shape their lives and drives much of their current activities.
George Autobee, author of *A Study of the Barrios de Pueblo*, a statistical evaluation of the socio-economic conditions facing Pueblo Chicanos based on the 1970 federal census still utilizes census data in his current line of work to provide population statistics for businesses requesting information about particular regions of the country. He is the President and CEO of World Demographic Research LLC which specializes in that type of work. He uses demography to help businesses reach Latino consumers. Through World Demographic Research LLC, Autobee has been involved with several Chambers’ of Commerce that focus on improving Latino business opportunities. He has also worked as a legislative advisor for the American G.I. Forum. While working in this capacity Autobee lived in Washington D.C. and lobbied lawmakers to propose and pass legislation that would benefit veterans and focus on improving educational and employment opportunities for Latinos. Autobee, now retired, teaches Chicano Studies as an adjunct professor at Colorado State University-Pueblo using his vast experience to educate a new generation of students about the struggles of Chicanos during the 1960s and 1970s.

David Marquez spent his professional life educating an entire generation of Pueblo youth at both the high school and college level. As a retired teacher he now feels the satisfaction of a career well spent and is proud of the efforts he made each day, each week, and each year in the classroom but he is still keenly aware of all the trials he faced as a Chicano Studies teacher. He explained “It was a fight every year” teaching Chicano Studies and in reflection he repeated “Every year it was a fight.”

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students with ranging levels of motivation, skills, and personal baggage. And it is easily understood when Marquez describes education as a satisfying career path which always provides you with an opportunity to make a difference. Marquez continues to make a difference by contributing to the history of southern Colorado and the Chicano movement by answering the call undergraduate and graduate students make when conducting oral history interviews.

Documents unseen and memories not shared rob a region of its past. By sharing the story of his work and past manuscripts he has written, Marquez continues to engage in the conversation from which history is derived.

Juan and Deborah Espinosa involved themselves in activism through their work. After nearly a decade of publishing La Cucaracha for absolutely no profit, Juan Espinosa transferred to the newsroom of The Pueblo Chieftain and as a writer for the Chieftain Espinosa continued to cover stories pertinent to the Chicano population in southern Colorado such as education, health, and law and order. He has recently retired and now spends much of his time working on media productions which utilize his vast personal collection of photographs and film from events all over the Southwest. He has made a multimedia presentation which coincides with the performance of “The Song of Pueblo” an original musical composition which tells the history of Pueblo. Deborah Espinosa remains active in the region as the director of El Pueblo History Museum and as a historian she has published historical writing which describes the founding of Pueblo.198 She understands that history is a powerful tool and that it is important “to always appreciate the history of individual” and there are benefits “to be aware and not afraid of people that are different of have different experiences.”199 The Espinosa’s have been gracious in

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198 She is the author of “Teresita Sandoval: Woman in Between,” which is the first chapter of La Gente: Hispano History and Life in Colorado, a monograph edited by Vincent C. De Baca.
allowing access to their home, their private collection of documents and photographs, and their time.

Dr. Deborah Martinez-Martinez, the one-time reporter for *La Cucaracha*, received her doctoral degree in Educational Leadership and Innovation from the University of Colorado at Denver in 2001. Over the course of four decades she has worked towards improving the education received by Latino students and although she has retired from her many positions in higher education where she actively recruited minority students to college campuses in Colorado she continues to work in education. Martinez-Martinez spends time as a historical reenactor and interpreter at the El Pueblo History Museum. She also established her own publishing company called Vanishing Horizons and has recently written a children’s history book with meets the needs of Colorado education standards for fourth and fifth grade called *Trade on the Taos Mountain Trail*. The book investigates live in the region between the years 1598 and 1859 and offers children a multicultural view of Colorado’s past.

*Reclaiming Aztlan: Southern Colorado and Chicano Activism of the 1970s* explores how these activists, and countless others, organized at the grassroots level to address a myriad of community issues. The argument of this thesis highlights how Chicanos in southern Colorado pursued land rights, greater access to healthcare, and better educational opportunities. The words of the activists themselves have been used to write this history. Publications from the Chicano press have been utilized to better understand how Mexican Americans in the 1970s learned about issues important to their communities. The activities of southern Colorado Chicanos typified the importance of the Chicano Movement and through study of their efforts a template or framework for understanding social movements can be garnered.
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La Cucaracha 1976-1984, privately owned by Juan Espinosa, Pueblo, Colorado


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Appendix: Pueblo, the Home of the Heroes

After fighting in Vietnam, many Colorado Chicanos returned to Pueblo and began to focus their efforts on combating issues of discrimination which affected Mexican Americans. For several of the men whose memories and voices find themselves represented in this work, the Vietnam War served as a catalyst for their involvement in the Chicano Movement once they returned to Colorado. The war in Vietnam had a large impact on the Mexican American population throughout the Southwest. Regionally, Mexican Americans comprised 12% of the population but made up 20% of the Southwest’s war casualties. This grim reality forced many Chicanos to ask why they should fight and die in Vietnam, when the battle for Chicano rights raged here at home. Marine veteran George Autobee stated “We got back from combat and this (the city of Pueblo and Southern Colorado State College campus) was like the playground. We were ready for action.” It is significant to note that the experience of young Chicanos fighting in Vietnam did not make them militant, rather the experience opened their eyes to the injustices felt by Mexican Americans here at home.

George Autobee described Vietnam as “...a poor man’s war” in which Chicanos “Were represented in the combat units disproportionately.” The death rate among Mexican Americans skyrocketed because “It was...the poor who were in the front lines fighting.” In Autobee’s experience rifle units almost always consisted of minorities and poor whites. Those in the rifle units did the fighting, and subsequently the dying as mortar and artillery units filled their ranks.

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200 Hector Galan, “Quest for a Homeland" Chicano! History of the Mexican-American Civil Rights Movement (Austin, Texas: PBS, 1996), DVD. The Los Angeles War Moratorium occurred in August of 1970 and an estimated 20,000 to 30,000 participants arrived to march against the war in Vietnam. it was the largest organized antiwar demonstration by Chicanos. The peace demonstration turned violent when the Los Angeles Police department attempted to clear the streets. Rioting broke out which lead to several arrests, the use of tear gas and beatings left hundreds injured and three killed. Journalist Ruben Salazar was among the dead, when a tear gas canister fired into a building by police decapitated him.

201 George Autobee, interview by author, Pueblo, Co., 24 October 2011.
with more Anglo soldiers. Stereotypes and racism existed along the front lines of the war as Autobee remembered “When we got there, they [whites] looked at us, as Chicanos [as] being part Indian” and stuck Chicano soldiers at the point. Autobee’s combat experiences in Vietnam lead him first to support the antiwar movement and then the Chicano Movement. Autobee said “My feelings about the war...they were wasting our people. And that was one of the reasons why, when I came back I took a stand against the war.” Upon his return to Colorado, Autobee became a Chicano student leader at Southern Colorado State College in Pueblo and involved himself in forcing the college to adopt a Chicano Studies program and provide greater financial aid to Chicano youths living in Pueblo who wanted an opportunity to earn a college degree.

Juan Espinosa had a similar experience in Vietnam and came away from combat feeling uneasiness towards a country that devalued Chicanos as people at the same time it demanded them to fight. Juan Espinosa experienced this epiphany while still in Vietnam. He did not have these hard feelings prior to the war as he stated “I volunteered all the way. I volunteered for Vietnam. I was as gung ho as you could get.” However, the reality of the fighting sapped his vigorous outlook on the war as he described “…I kind of hit a wall. I really felt like it [the war] was wrong and we had no business there. And I was still there!” Having just been honorably discharged from the Air Force in December of 1969, Espinosa believed he was “a law abiding citizen” but his participation in a September 16, 1970 walk out in Grand Junction, Colorado turned him into an activist as he noted “That’s when I became part of the movement.” As a Chicano activist Espinosa documented the progress and struggles of El Movimiento with his

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204 Juan Espinosa, interview by author, Pueblo, Co., 11 September 2011. As a student at the University of Colorado he played a significant role in the occupation of TB-1 and traveled the country to document events inspired by Cesar Chavez’s hunger strikes or the La Raza Unida convention in El Paso, Texas. Juan Espinosa’s experience as a Chicano Rights activist began unintentionally on September 16, 1970 and has continued for the rest of his life.
camera and typewriter. For nearly twenty years Espinosa published newspapers that served as alternative media outlets for the Chicano Movement in Colorado first as a student at the University of Colorado and thin in Pueblo as the creator of La Cucaracha.

Another veteran and Chicano activist, Eddie Montour shared his experience in Vietnam by explaining “It was not at all like I thought it was going to be. And being [in Vietnam] was probably my first time dealing with racism.” Montour also volunteered to fight in Vietnam. When he was just seventeen years old he asked his parents to sign the paperwork which would allow him to enlist six months prior to his high school graduation. When Montour returned home he “had a lot of coraje” or anger and he “made a lot of enemies...because [he] came home...and...started speaking out against the war.” These veterans returned from Vietnam and focused their energy on improving the condition of the Chicano people. Montour said “I came home from a war, to a war, and I’ve been fighting ever since.”

Montour ran for political office as a resident of Pueblo and a La Raza Unida candidate. He worked with organizations such as the Crusade for Justice and the Brown Berets and has spent the better part of his life as an activist working to improve the social conditions of Chicanos living in Pueblo.

Many Veterans, like George Autobee and Juan Espinosa, used their service to help pay for a college education and in addition to Vietnam veterans, the activities of Chicano students on college and high school campuses provided the Chicano Movement in Colorado the bodies and minds needed to work towards social change. According to historian Rodolfo Acuna, the youthfulness of the Chicano population in the 1960s contributed to the overall success of El Movimiento during that decade. Acuna cites demographic information about the ‘Baby Boomer’

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generation and notes that compared to other ethnicities on a regional scale, Chicanos were younger and that this youth played a role in “leveling” society.” Juan Espinosa noted that as an activist he was able to observe, photograph, and participate in key events such as the end of Cesar Chavez’ hunger strike in Delano, California or attend the 1972 national convention for *La Raza Unida* held in El Paso, Texas, because of his status as a student. Espinosa succinctly stated that as a student he did not have the responsibilities of full time employment and he could “hop in a car or on a plane and go anywhere” as professors usually agreed to extend time for grades and allow make-up work.

Once they returned home Veterans used their experiences in Vietnam to organize and improve the lives of their fellow Chicanos. By standing up for their beliefs and by standing up against a system that failed them, veterans demonstrated great patriotism. *El Movimiento* happened in part because of grassroots recognition of American problems by Chicanos, especially the ones returning from the war. Mexican Americans made a national political impact because of the momentum provided by the simultaneous organization of grassroots activism throughout the Southwestern states. This momentum did not originate with one organization, one person, or one cause; rather it existed because of the accumulation of many organizations, people, and causes into the whole.

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207 Acuna, 286.
208 Juan Espinosa, interview by author, Pueblo, Co., 11 September 2011.
Vita

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