La Raza Cósmica, *El Movimiento,* and a Legacy of Anti-Black Erasure

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Spring 2022

George Floyd's murder at the hands of Minneapolis Police Department Officers on May 25th, 2020 sparked a social recknoning in the United States and beyond. Black and Brown communities mobilized nation-wide, united in their call for racial equity and an end to police brutality. For what may have been the first time, anti-Blackness and Critical Race Theory became subjects of debate on mainstream news outlets leaving non-Black communities of color questioning their place in the American racial hierarchy. Mexican-American intercommunal dialogues questioned the community's role in perpetuating anti-Black violence and referred to Chicano activism for its articulation of the positionality of a community often overlooked and deemed ethnically and racially inferior by white Americans. The majority of literature discussing *Chicanos*' racial identity delves into the group's ethnopolitics and racial imagination of self. Of particular focus has been Chicanos' purposeful rejection of cultural assimilation into whiteness, instead opting for emphasizing a mixed Indigenous and European identity, a *mestizo* identity. Yet, little has been written about Chicanos' racial identity in relation to racial "Blackness," leading me to ask: *how did Mexican-Americans and Chicanos relate to Blackness and whiteness during the Chicano Movement Era?* Scholars who have chosen to engage in this particular conversation often analyze Black-Chicano relations from a theoretical perspective. In this paper, I allow Chicanos' activism and publications to speak for themselves by citing and analyzing archival newspaper publications by Chicano organizations. Interestingly, I find that Chicanos strategically distanced themselves from whiteness as well as Blackness, instead aiming to occupy a racial in-between. Chicanos employed rhetoric that served to "other" Black Americans and their activism, contributing to their strained relationship with Black activist groups. Further, Chicanos' fixation on a *mestizo* identity and emphasis on indigeneity, effectively furthered the erasure of Afro-Chicano narratives by assuming that racial homogeneity among

Chicanos. Finally, my research finds that relationships between Black and Mexican-American and Chicano communities were often tumultuous due to competition for limited resources as well as perceived racial slights. Writing on this topic will contribute to Latine understandings of historical intracommunal anti-Blackness, paving the way for the formation of interracial coalitions while driving inward reflection from Chicano Studies as an intellectual field.

Keywords: Chicanos, Mexican Americans, Anti-Blackness, Chicano Movement

LA RAZA CÓSMICA, EL MOVIMIENTO, AND A LEGACY OF ANTI-BLACK ERASURE

INTRODUCTION

Mexicans' racial positionality has long been an issue of intra-communal contention. From notions of *mejorando la raza* ("bettering the race") through marriage into white families, to explicitly discriminatory attitudes towards indigenous peoples and those of African descent, Mexicans residing in the U.S. have at points throughout history strategically aligned themselves with whiteness. This loyalty to the racial presentation of Mexicans as white has distanced people of Mexican descent from Blackness and Indigeneity in the American social racial imaginary. Prior to the 1960s, Mexican-Americans sought to be recognized as socially and legally white through political activism in a quest to affirm their civil rights. However, after continuous efforts to be deemed equal to white Americans failed, a distinct approach was adopted by younger generations of Mexican-Americans that stood in contrast with the legal and political strategies of organizations such as the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC). This younger generation, using the political and ethnoracial label of *Chicanos*, aimed to address systemic racism and cultural erasure, while working towards community empowerment and the redefinition of a Mexican-American racial identity in direct opposition to whiteness. "Chicano" was originally used pejoratively to refer to those of Mexican parentage born and raised in the U.S. but was eventually reclaimed by Mexican-American activists as a sign of political empowerment (Cuellar, 2001).

Existing scholarship analyzing Chicanos' and Mexican-Americans' racial identity demonstrates Chicanos' emphasis on mixed indigenous and european ancestry. Chicano identity would become the cornerstone of the Chicano Movement during the 1960s and 1970s.Of particular novelty during this time period was Chicanos' rejection of assimilationist goals, instead advocating for self-determination. This stands in stark contrast to the political and racial

ideology of Mexican-Americans, who in seeking to secure the political and economic promise of the "American Dream," deliberately claimed legal and social whiteness- though with mixed success. Still, both groups' rhetoric and activism created a strained relationship with Black communities and activists, particularly as racial Blackness was presented as foreign to the essence of *Chicanos* and Mexican-Americans (Hernandez 2003).

Despite its origin residing in resistance to whiteness, the movement's guiding ideological principles of *Chicanismo* and *mestizaje* have not gone unquestioned. In the decades following *El Movimiento*'s (the Movement's) peak, the gendered, racial, and political tenets of the movement have been closely scrutinized, with the rhetoric surrounding *mestizaje* (Spanish for racial mixing, specifically between Indigenous and European persons) and *la raza* (the race) in particular being subjected to criticism for their romanticization of Indigeneity. While *Chicanos'* racial redefinition of self in relation to indigeneity is well-documented, the movement's stances towards Black activist efforts and Afro-Mexicans are not, leading to *Chicanos'* and Mexican-Americans racial identity in relation to Blackness to be questioned.

Archival documents held by the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) Chicano Studies Research Center's archives shed greater light on Chicanos' racial self-definition. Photographs and newspaper articles in UCLA's archive reveal a deeply-ingrained *mestizo* identity and buy-in to the rhetoric of *mestizaje*. Such rhetoric contributed to the persistence of anti-Black sentiments in Mexican-American communities and Chicano activists. Furthermore, an examination of court rulings focused on the desegregation of public schools reveals Mexican-Americans' legal strategies often depended on courts' recognition of their status as legally white. These legal recognitions carried material and immaterial effects in the realms of employment, education, and activism. All this to say that Mexican-Americans' claim to

whiteness and Chicanos' emphasis on an indigenous identity contributed to the "othering" and erasure of Blackness in the Chicano Movement and among Mexicans more broadly.

In short, Mexican-Americans' legal and social activism aimed to differentiate said group as "white," and by extension as "non-Black." Such a distinction reflected the presence of anti-Black sentiments among Mexican-American organizations and leadership. Similarly, the Chicano Movement, in its quest to define the struggles of *La Raza*, would espouse ethnonationalist politics prioritizing persons of Mexican descent while dismissing the struggles of Black communities and activists through their rhetoric, organizing, and definition of self as *mestizos* and indigenous, leaving no room for the recognition of Afro-Mexicans and Afro-Chicanos.

This paper will analyze Mexican-Americans' and Chicanos' navigation of the American racial hierarchy in relation to white Americans as well as Black Americans. Of particular importance to this analysis are Chicano conferences and publications articulating the Chicano Power political platform as well as court cases and rulings involving Mexican-American individuals and communities. The analysis provided in this paper contributes to a self-reflective deconstruction of Chicano and Mexican-American activism with the aim of creating an understanding of the anti-Black harm each group perpetuated. Only through such an analysis and resulting discourse can historical racial divisions be bridged and a path towards interracial coalition-building be constructed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Contemporary texts discussing Mexicans', Mexican-Americans', and Chicanos' racial identity tend to track the historical developments that resulted in each groups' strained relationship with whiteness (Delgado 2007). Ariela Gross (2003) writes of the "other white" category Texan Mexicans found themselves occupying in the mid-20th century, with their legal status as "white" offering little protection or social recognition as such. National legal discourses and assessments of Mexicans' whiteness tended to focus on and present Mexicans as an inferior "race," yet several noteworthy legal cases advanced protections for students of Mexican descent thanks in great part to their alignment with whiteness. Still, this did not guarantee Mexican-Americans safety from segregation.

Claire Jean Kim's (1999) theory of racial triangulation contributes to an understanding of racial groups' positionality in relation to one another. The application of Kim's work to Chicanos' and Mexican-Americans' placement in the American racial binary is revealing of the aforementioned groups' perception by white America. Critically, Mexican-Americans and Chicanos can be understood to occupy a "non-Black" and "other-white" space in the American racial imaginary. Such placement granted Mexican-Americans in particular protections not afforded to other ethnic and racial groups residing in the United States in the 19th and 20th centuries, yet did not provide social guarantees of safety.

Neil Foley (1997) writes of the racial "in-between" category occupied by Mexican agricultural workers in Texas and in the United States more broadly. According to Foley, Mexicans were rarely recognized as "Americans" in the early 20th regardless of their citizenship status as the label was understood to be an indication of racial whiteness, which many of the agricultural laborers toiling the land in the U.S. were not understood to possess.

Yet, Mexicans' acceptance as racially white by white Americans was not completely unheard of according to Foley, with light-skinned Mexicans stereotyped as "clean" enjoying a higher social status in comparison to dark-skinned members of the same group. Of particular concern for the American white power structure in regards to the racialization of Mexicans was their role as an exploitable labor force. Because of racist stereotypes portraying Mexicans as especially-fit for labor-intensive tasks, the matter of immigration as related to Mexicans has served as the focal point of debates occurring in state and federal legislatures.

Thomas Guglielmo (2006) continues the conversation about Mexicans' and Mexican-Americans' "in-between" placement in the American racial order. Guglielmo concedes that despite being subjected to racist attacks, receiving lower wages, and being subjected to countless more forms of social and political exclusion, Mexicans' and Mexican-Americans' racial trajectory in the United States differed in their recognition as "caucasian" by the American legal system. Interestingly, Guglielmo writes of Mexicans' and Mexican-Americans racialization and the expansion of protections afforded to white Americans during World War II. With persons of Mexican descent being subjected to racialized violence in Texas in the 1940s, the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) urged the Texas legislature to pass the Caucasian Race Resolution in May 1943 so as to prohibit discrimination towards persons of Mexican descent in Texas (Guglielmo 2006). Said resolution was not the first attempt made by Mexican-Americans to guarantee social protections against racialized violence. In fact, action against racist attacks was only secured from the Texas legislature after the Mexican government threatened the Texas legislature with prohibiting participants of the Mexican Farm Labor Program Program (colloquially known as the *Bracero* Program) from entering the Lone Star State. Still, as Guglielmo (2006) states in a sharp

criticism of Mexican-American legal activism, Mexican-Americans "made a calculated, if often unspoken, decision: to fight for Caucasian (and, in 1945, Indian) rights for some, not equal rights for all."

Kelly Lyttle Hernandez (2017) writes of agribusinessmen and congressmen who advocated for the relaxation of anti-immigration policies. Unsurprisingly, the defence of Mexican immigrants (both sanctioned and undocumented) by businessowners was not due to their strong moral compass, but rather their concern that they might be denied a cheap, expendable work force. In fact, Mexican immigrants were compared to migratory birds who only resided in the United States for a short period of time before voyaging back to their mother country. In pushing forward their defense of Mexican laborers, lobbyists and agribusinessmen would emphasize the deportable nature of Mexicans' presence in the United States, a measure which would later be enacted in mass deportations from 1929 to 1939 under President Herbert Hoover's administration. In any case, laborers of Mexican descent were seen as preferable to Black persons who were viewed as a constant problem. This differential racialization of Black Americans and Mexican-Americans, manifested itself in tumultuous relationships between the two groups and would carry on to Black-Chicano relations.

School districts cited supposed cultural and linguistic inferiority as well as assimilationist objectives to defend their discrimination (Martinez 2000). This legal recognition as "white" would then be weaponized by school districts throughout the nation to combat desegregation. For example, the Houston Independent School District's (HISD) treatment of Mexican students clearly positions them as an undesirable section of the white population, with Mexican students being sent to integrate schools in Anglo students' stead (Quiroz 2003).

Overall, the legal strategies employed by Mexican-American legal organizations in courtrooms were based on the Black-White racial binary. In their pursuit of legal protections and guarantees of civil rights, Mexican-Americans mobilized so as to secure their racialization as "white" (Behnken 2011). Increasingly frustrated with the stagnation of progress and driven by the social "othering" of the Mexican-American and *pachucos* generation, a new ideology would arise inspired by ethnonationalist politics- *Chicanismo*.

Much has been written about Chicanos' need to distinguish themselves racially from white Americans, resulting in the popularization of the *mestizo* identity (Lopez 2001). Still, there is much debate regarding *El Movimiento*'s decision to emphasize a mixed indigenous-European identity. Critics of mestizaje point towards the erasure of Afro-Mexicans from the ethnoracial discourse (Hernandez 2004) while its proponents praise the concept's value in communicating Chicanos' experiences in inhabiting a racial gray area (Johnson 2011). Jose Vasconcelos' *La Raza Cosmica*, considered to be a seminal text of the Chicano Movement, has also been discussed at great length for its romanticization of racial mixing and its explicit denigration of Black and Indigenous peoples as "inferior" racial groups (Banks 2006).

Literature on *mestizaje* and Afro-Mexicans underlines the tension and erasure resulting from the centralized *mestizo* identity upon which the Chicano Movement relied. With *La Raza* becoming a colloquial term meant to summon group unity during the Chicano Movement, it is crucial that its use be inspected and its racial connotations interrogated. The matter of group unity is continuously presented as a contentious topic in Mexican-American race relations, given the vastness of experiences and identities residing in Mexico, as well as Mexican enclaves in the United States (Torres-Saillant 2003). While critics of *mestizaje* have presented

the ideology as violent on the grounds of its denial of Blackness, little has been written regarding *El Movimiento*'s complicity in de-legitimizing Black activist efforts and the deliberate dismissal of Blackness in Chicano organizing spaces and ideologies (Hernandez 2003). In fact, rather than taking a passive role in questioning the strategies of Black activist groups and individuals, it was not unheard of that Chicano leaders would actively resist and shame Black liberation efforts (Henry 1980). Taking these comments into account, it is of little surprise that Black activists and organizations remained unconvinced of Mexican-American activism, with some Black leaders believing that Mexican-American activists had co-opted Civil Rights activists' strategies without much care for perpetuating anti-Black violence (Yamamoto 1999).

Contributing to the insight of Chicanos' complicated relationship with Blackness, this paper explores Chicanos' relationship to Blackness and whiteness as expressed by their activism, newspaper publications, and use of rhetoric. At present, little work has been done covering this topic, allowing for erroneous or shallow understandings of Chicanos' political framework and racial ideology in relation to "Blackness." Further, I challenge the reduction of racial dynamics in the United States to a Black-White binary, instead extending Kim's understanding of Asian-Americans' racialization via racial triangulation to Mexican-American and Chicano communities. I find that in their quest to escape the horrors of racial violence in the United States in the 20th century, Mexican-Americans contributed to and perpetuated anti-Black social attitudes in the United States through their legal activism. In arguing that Mexican-American persons ought to be understood as members of the "caucasian race," Mexican-American persons and organizations were effectively arguing that they should be viewed as "non-Black" and thus granted the privileges associated with whiteness. My analysis

of Chicanos' newspaper publications reveals a rhetoric and ethnopolitical platform which distanced and isolated Chicanos from Black activist efforts, contributing to the "othering" of Black Americans.

RESEARCH METHODS

In determining the Chicano Movement's attitudes towards Blackness-- intra-communally as well as in relation to perceptions of Black Americans-- my research was primarily archival in nature. The primary sources referred to here were gathered from UCLA's Chicano Studies Research Center- which houses photographs and newspaper publications by Mexican-American and Chicano figures and activist groups- as well as from the Houston Public Library's Digital Archives. The Brown Berets' newspaper, *La Causa*, as well as Ruben Salazar's news reporting proved central to this study as they revealed the thinking of the Chicano community in the 1960s and 1970s. By analyzing newspaper articles and court rulings, I gathered an understanding of El Movimiento's racial perception of self. I focused on twenty-seven pieces by Chicano and Mexican-American journalists, movement leaders, and notable organizations. Of particular interest were those pieces published by: Ruben Salazar in the *Los Angeles Times*, publications by the Brown Berets, and statements made by the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC). Understanding Mexican-Americans' and Chicano's racial perception of self was central to my work, as by comprehending each group's political stances and core tenets, friction between the two was revealed exposing their larger political objectives as contextualized by the American racial hierarchy.

In analyzing speeches, photographs, and other crucial documents, I made use of Critical Race Theory's framework to contextualize Chicanos' racialization in relation to white supremacy and anti-Blackness. Critical Race Theory's assessment of racism as a systematized

and codified legal and social phenomenon provides insight into the "othering" process of peoples of color as well as the structural barriers these groups face. This sociohistorical contextualization was immensely revelatory of Chicanos' positionality as a result of differential racialization, and as enforced socially and legally through court rulings and legislation. Claire Jean Kim's theory of Racial Triangulation also helped guide my analysis of Mexican-Americans' and Chicanos' differential racialization in relation to white and Black Americans. Ruben Salazar's reporting as published by the *Los Angeles Times* provides first-hand accounts of the cross-racial animosity attributed to perceived racial slights as well as competition for limited resources. Salazar's work was selected for this study for his influence as one of the only journalists of Mexican descent working for the Los Angeles Times at the height of the Chicano Movement. The Brown Berets' newspaper, *La Causa*, also shed light on the ethnopolitical platform of an organization often referred to as the brawn of the Chicano Movement, allowing for insights into Chicanos' racial perceptions of self.

All documents gathered were also analyzed for indications of Black-Chicano divisions and tension, Mexican-American aims of whiteness, Chicanos' self-image as non-Black, and differences in Chicanos' and Mexican-Americans' political platforms. My findings and analysis have been organized into a historiography tracing the development of Mexican-Americans' racial identity and employment of legal arguments presenting persons of Mexican descent as members of a white race and Chicanos' ethnoracial ideology and political platform in relation to whiteness and Blackness. In tracing the evolution of each groups' ideology and vision for their community, differences in Chicanos' and Mexican-Americans' The clear instances of Black-Chicano animosity became much more revealing when contextualized by the material reality of each group, with limited access to social welfare programs, job opportunities, and political cleavages

serving to magnify racial divides. Additionally, perceived racial slights served to fan the flames of historical racial tension between Chicanos, Mexican Americans, and Black Americans.

CHAPTER I: CREATING "MEXICAN-AMERICANS" and Escaping Blackness

Understanding Mexican-Americans' and Chicanos' relationship to racial Blackness necessitates an understanding of their racialization and positionality in the American racial hierarchy. One of the earliest legally-binding documents establishing Mexican-Americans' placement in the national racial imaginary is the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, signed in 1848. Negotiated by the Mexican and American governments, said treaty officilized the end of the Mexican-American War while re-defining U.S. territories to include parts of present-day Arizona, California, New Mexico, Texas, Colorado, Nevada, and Utah. Alongside its expansionist victory, this accord between the U.S. and Mexico provided a pathway to citizenship for Mexican nationals residing in newly-acquired U.S. territories. Article VIII of this treatise reads:

> Those who shall prefer to remain in the said territories may either retain the title and rights of Mexican citizens, or acquire those of citizens of the United States. But they shall be under the obligation to make their election within one year from the date of the exchange of ratifications of this treaty; and those who shall remain in the said territories after the expiration of that year, without having declared their intention to retain the character of Mexicans, shall be considered to have elected to become citizens of the United States.

It is important to note that at the time of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo's ratification, citizenship and its privileges in the United States were reserved for white Americans. In 1790, the United States Congress passed the first Naturalization Act,

which offered a path to naturalized national citizenship only to "free white persons," effectively denying citizenship to free Black persons, Native Americans, enslaved Black persons, and persons of Asian descent. Thus, this extension of U.S. citizenship to Mexican nationals and those of Mexican descent residing in the newly-acquired U.S. territories is one of the earliest indications of Mexicans belonging to the "white" legal racial category. This denial of a pathway to citizenship for all non-Mexican persons of color reveals the racial placement of Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the national legal system to be in proximity to whiteness. In other words, in offering U.S. citizenship to Mexican nationals, the U.S. government was establishing "Mexican" to be synonymous with "white." Such a racial redefinition also indicated that through virtue of being offered citizenship (and being recognized as "white" by extension), Mexicans were to be distinguished from enslaved, free, and formerly enslaved Black persons.

Legal racial understandings of Mexicans as "white" reflect social understandings of Mexicans as occupying an "other white" category. Mexicans were racialized as a white subgroup due to white Americans' understanding that Mexicans' European descendancy was the redeeming factor of an otherwise racially-inferior people (Whitaker 2012). The American legal system's designation of Mexicans to be members of a "white" race also follows larger racial dynamics as a given group's racial category is externally imposed and defined through court rulings, legislation, and social attitudes (Martinez 2000). This process of racialization effectively gives legal and social systems the power to subjugate persons seen as a racial "other" to oppressive systems. Because of this external perception, Mexican-Americans would be racialized as an exploitable workforce worthy of compensation, no matter how insignificant. This stands in stark contrast with the

racialization of Black persons in the United States who, from the beginning of the enslavement industry were viewed as "inhuman" and undeserving of citizenship. Writing the majority opinion in *Dred Scott v. Sanford* (1857), Chief Justice Roger Taney expressed this view:

> [Black people] are not included, and were not intended to be included, under the word "citizens" in the Constitution, and can therefore claim none of the rights and privileges which that instrument provides for and secures to citizens of the United States. On the contrary, they were at that time considered as a subordinate and inferior class of beings, who had been subjugated by the dominant race…

Chief Justice Taney's opinion clearly placed Black persons at the bottom rung of the American racial hierarchy, de-humanizing an entire group of people. With this ruling in mind, it becomes clear that the racialized history of persons of Mexican descent and Black persons residing in the United States differs in their recognition as human or inhuman. Yet, each group's treatment in the United States would eventually exhibit similarities as, despite being legally recognized as citizens, Mexican-Americans would not enjoy the social benefits of said recognition. Jim Crow segregation was unforgiving of those perceived as racially inferior, and though designed to discriminate against Black Americans, most Mexican-Americans would also be impacted by state and local laws enforcing racial segregation (Whitaker 2012). Signs reading "Whites Only, No Mexicans Allowed" or "No Negroes, Mexicans, or Dogs Allowed" were not uncommon in Arizona, Texas, and California (Whitaker 2012). Business owners' proclamations of racial exclusion in these states were based on and reinforced racial hierarchies. And as time passed, Mexican-Americans' claim to legal whiteness would be subjected to legal

scrutiny, motivating organizations advocating for the social inclusion of Mexican-Americans to mobilize.

Indeed, the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), primarily composed of Texas' Mexican American middle-class, argued that Mexican Americans ought to be treated as white people before the law and in society. LULAC was established in Texas as an assimilationist organization seeking to advance the social and political positionality of Texas Mexicans (Gutierrez 1995). Concerned with securing Mexican-Americans' legal recognition as white, LULAC would employ legal arguments identifying those of Mexican descent as white individuals as per the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848 (Gross 2003). By arguing that Mexican-Americans should be socially and systemically understood as white, LULAC and Mexican-American activists sought to secure the material gains and social protections associated with whiteness (Gross 2003). The material benefits and physical safety afforded by whiteness have been analyzed at length (Harris 1993), which when contextualized by the violence of Jim Crow Era Texas, represented safety from the physical harm and racially-motivated lynchings of Mexicans living in the American southwest (Hall 2020). Such was the animosity towards those of Mexican descent, that several states in the American southwest extended the application of Jim Crow Laws to Mexicans and Mexican-Americans, barring them from entering restaurants, businesses, and from utilizing public accommodations. Such discriminatory practices were not isolated to adults either, as schools often segregated children based on the color of their skin and biased perceptions of linguistic or cultural inferiority. These realities shed light on the legal strategies employed by LULAC who sought to ensure Mexicans' and Mexican Americans' safety from legal and social harm.

One of the issues taken up with urgency by the League was the matter of Mexican

Americans' racial classification by federal agencies. LULAC's President General in 1946, Arnulfo Zamora, listed among the organization's resolutions the need to "correct the wrong classification of people of Mexican extraction as other than white by the War Department and other Federal Agencies" (Zamora 1946). Though perhaps seeming insignificant, federal racial categories were perceived as expressions of Mexican Americans' racialization in the United States, with federal legal recognition as "white" being one of LULAC's primary objectives.

Mexican Americans found some success in courtroom rulings. For example, in *Roberto Alvarez vs. the Board of Trustees of the Lemon Grove School District* (1931), Judge Claude Chambers ruled that the segregation of Mexican children into separate schools was unlawful as they too were "caucasian", meaning that those laws allowing the segregation of Asian, Indigenous, and Black children were not applicable to children of Mexican descent (Donato & Hanson 2012). Unsurprisingly, racism adapted. School districts disguised their racially-motivated segregationist practices as being in the best interest of Mexican American students' supposed linguistic limitations. In placing Mexican American students in separate schools, districts argued, more individualized support would be provided which would allow for the development of Mexican American students' understanding of the English language. This of course followed the assimilationist objectives of American education in the southwest, which viewed Mexican culture and the Spanish language as inferior and "backwards." When pressed about their continued segregation of schoolchildren, districts would deny all accusations on the pretense that they were not segregating on solely racial grounds, but were doing so based on linguistic and cultural differences.

Mendez v. Westminster School District (1946) returned a similar decision to the Lemon Grove case. In *Mendez v. Westminster,* Gonzalo and Felicitas Mendez presented a lawsuit

against the Westminster Elementary School District after their children were prohibited from enrolling in the district's schools on the basis of their skin color. US District Court Judge Paul J. McCormick ruled in favor of the Mendez family as he found that the segregation of Mexican school children was not allowed by any statute in the state of California as Mexican-Americans were members of the white race (Donato & Hanson 2012). In this way, *Mendez v. Westminster* fell short of challenging the legal segregation of all communities of color, necessitating a legal response from proponents of desegregation, resulting in the eventual victory of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954).

These are but two cases centered on the same issue- whether or not Mexican American children could be segregated from their white schoolmates. In both cases, the respective Judge found that Mexican American children were to be understood as being legally white. With the ruling of *Mendez v. Westminster*, the social and material benefits of whiteness may have been expected, yet the social nature of racialization said otherwise. With legal whiteness secured, social whiteness still proved elusive for most Mexican Americans.

All this to say that in determining the value of Mexican-Americans in the American racial hierarchy, their positionality has not been shaped in a vacuum. Rather, Mexican-Americans' presence in the American racial order is largely impacted by the racial tension characteristic of racialization and Claire Jean Kim's (1999) theory of Racial Triangulation. Kim describes the two processes by which racial triangulation occurs:

> (1) processes of "relative valorization," whereby dominant group A (Whites) valorizes subordinate group B relative to subordinate group C on cultural and/or racial grounds in order to dominate both groups, but especially the latter, and (2) processes of "civic ostracism," whereby dominant group A (Whites) constructs

> subordinate group B as immutably foreign and unassimilable with Whites on cultural and/or racial grounds in order to ostracize them from the body politic and civic membership.

In occupying an "other-white" category in the American racial order, Mexican-Americans were subjected to the subordination of whites, while being granted legal and social privileges unheard of for other communities of color. Consider the previously-mentioned legal cases concerned with the segregation of Mexican-American students in the classroom. In securing legal recognition as white, Mexican-American communities were able to secure their children's admission to all-white academic institutions with facilities and faculty superior to the schools Black students were forced to attend. The courts' rulings in *Mendez v Westminster* and *Roberto Alvarez vs. the board of trustees of the Lemon Grove School Distric*t were also reflective of larger views and attitudes towards persons of Mexican descent.

As debates raged on in Congress in the 20s and 30s regarding the regulation of Mexican immigration into the United States, agribusinessmen fiercely lobbied national legislators to dismiss the notion of limiting unrestricted Mexican immigration. Vocal in this endeavor, George P. Clements, a lobbyist for agribusinessmen, urged congressmen to consider the alternative, offering employment opportunities to Black persons. In Clements' eyes, Mexican immigrants and Mexican-Americans were the preferable group to serve as a labor force to the United States. According to Clements, Black persons would represent "a continual social problem and a growing menace" because "you can not deport him" (Hernandez 2017).

It can be said then that in attaining rulings recognizing legally them as white,

Mexicans and Mexican-Americans distanced themselves from racial Blackness in the American racial hierarchy, approximating entry into the racial bourgeoisie- though that too proved elusive. Still, Mexican-American leaders and organizations would carefully position themselves in opposition to Blackness in pursuit of acceptance from white Americans.

LULAC National President, Felix Tijerina stated in 1957: "Let the Negro fight his own battles! His problems are not mine. I don't want to ally with him" (Behndeck 2011). Hesitance to collaborate with Black civil rights organizations characterized much of LULAC's legal activism as such coalitions would associate Mexican-American with Black Americans, a result considered unacceptable and regressive by LULAC. Tijerina, however, was not opposed to the assimilationist impact of association with white Americans, expressing to Marie Moore (1955) of the Houston Post that:

> There are natives of this country who still think of themselves as 'Mexicans' instead of 'Americans. That is not right; if they are going to live here, they must become Americans, just like the English and the Swedes and French and Italians who have come to this country.

To Tijerina, being "American" was more closely related to Whiteness than to Blackness, driving him to urge his fellow Mexican Americans to 'Anglicize,' adding:

> If the children of the next generation begin living like real Americans when they are very young, they will grow up to be more substantial citizens and there will be fewer on our charity rolls (Moore 1955).

LULAC's assimilationist goals, however, pre-dated Tijerina Jr.'s time in charge of the organization as even in discussing external threats to the United States, LULAC

diligently pushed a platform of American patriotism among its followers. Reflecting on a supposed Communist threat in 1933, M.C. Rodriguez urges readers:

> Let us, therefore, undertake this patriotic campaign as we started it, unselfishly, wholly free from taint of political motives, in order that LULAC may be one of Uncle Sam's most effective agencies not only to americanize its citizens in this part of the county, and to awaken amongst them a consciousness of citizenship duties, but fight vigorously against the spread of communistic propaganda that is so destructive of the basic principles of Democracy and of American ideals.

That Rodriguez was so quick to criticize Communism while praising American ideals and democracy is ironic, given that U.S. systems did little to improve the positionality of Mexican Americans in the first half of the twentieth century. Yet, for all their irony, Rodriguez's words highlight the League's assimilationist goals by urging readers to stand against communism and serve the United States. It can be said then, that assimilation was one of the League's primary occupations, with one of the organization's followers even describing the phenomenon as an "ideal situation" (Romero 1947). Consider two of LULAC's explicitly-stated aims in the November, 1934 edition of LULAC News:

> 1- To develop within the members of our race the best, purest and most perfect type of a true and loyal citizen of the United States of America.
>
> 18- We shall oppose any radical and violent demonstration which may tend to create conf•icts and disturb the peace and tranquility of our country.

The organization's concern with maintaining Mexican Americans' respectability in the public eye captures LULAC's view of American society as well as Mexican Americans' perception of self in relation to the U.S. racial hierarchy. In short, it was LULAC's

perspective that Mexican Americans' integration into the American mainstream would be the result of exemplary, respectful behavior and silence in the face of racial violence. Overall, LULAC's legal strategies consisted of arguments labeling persons of Mexican descent as "white," effectively distancing Mexican Americans from Black Americans and other persons of color, deepening the divide between both communities.

Mexican-Americans' concern with racial identity in the American racial binary extended beyond the courtroom. Writing in 1963 for the *Los Angeles Times*, Mexican-American journalist Ruben Salazar took note of the racial animosity overshadowing Black-Mexican-American relations. Of particular concern for Mexican-American community leaders was the material ramifications of progress in Black Americans' struggle for civil rights. Job availability provoked the strongest response from leadership figures who expressed concern with employers' apparent dismissal of Mexican-American employees in preference to Black Americans as a result of social pressure (Salazar 1963). Such tension and competition extended to financial resources beyond jobs. Indeed, Black Americans and Mexican-Americans often found themselves at odds over access to financial assistance provided by federal government programs, with the perceived unequal distribution of "War on Poverty" funds proving a contentious issue for Black-Mexican-American relations (Bauman 2007). This competition for jobs and resources in Los Angeles at a time in which racial barriers were being redefined contributed to the perception of racial slights between Black and Mexican American groups, leaders, and communities- drawing the two groups apart.

CHAPTER II: BIRTH OF THE *CHICANO*

Chicanos' identity was defined by their youthful composition, protest politics, and espousement to a racial redefinition of self. After decades of unsuccessful attempts to claim

social recognition as white, younger generations of Mexican Americans grew to question their positionality in the American racial system. Confronted with the realization that equal protection under the law would not be so easily granted by the American legal system, and driven by *Pachuco*[1] discourses of resistance to assimilation, Chicanos would grow to refute Mexican-Americans' claims to whiteness. Instead, Chicanos preferred to center a *mestizo* identity, emphasizing their indigenous heritage (no matter how distant) and Spanish lineage (Lourdes 2016). The Brown Berets would describe Chicano Power, *El Movimiento*'s political platform as follows:

> Chicano power is not white reform, but is a thought that cries for a self-determined community. So far the cries of "Chicano Power" are being prostituted by politicians and poverty programs. Chicano power is not American politics, and does not mean more poverty programs…They have bought off the potential leaders of our community for twenty dollars a day, so that these people will forget the hurt of the people…Poverty programs are the answer to keeping people in poverty, and are not the answer for change.

Perhaps surprisingly, Chicanismo distinguished itself from other ethnonationalist movements and organizations- namely the Black Power Movement and Black Panther Party- through its lesser focus on an economic platform. Weary of the racial politics the Mexican-American generation was forced to navigate, Chicanos would identify the American racial hierarchy as its principal enemy and self-determination of Chicanos and Mexican-Americans as its ultimate goal. As written in La Causa in 1970, "Chicano power is a thought that cries for a self-determined community."

[1] For a more in-depth discussion of Pachuco politics see Ramirez (2002).

Embracing a non-white identity, Chicanos were quick to mobilize and extend racial, social, and political awareness to their communities. Conferences in Santa Barbara, San Diego, and Davis were utilized by Chicano organizers to speak on the difficulties Mexican-American and Chicano communities were forced to confront. Inspired by the growing movement, members of the Mexican American Youth Association (MAYA) in San Diego State University (SDSU) and the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) hosted the First Annual Chicano Student Conference in 1968, attended by more than 500 high school students from neighboring communities. With an emphasis on pursuing higher education, speakers at the conference would encourage Chicano students to apply to colleges and universities so as to challenge negative stereotypes and 'bring freedom for the Chicano' by ending the political and social domination of white Americans. Eliezer Joaquin Risco Lozada, editor of *La Raza* and director of the Mexican-American Studies Program at California State University, Fresno leaned into mestizo messaging when, in his keynote address, he called on Chicanos to end Europeans' domination of the U.S.

Continuing this recognition of the need for a platform created for and by Chicanos, members of the University of California, Davis' United Mexican American Students (UMAS) would host a Chicano Symposium in 1968 to discuss *El Movimiento*'s demands, obstacles, and ideas for progress. Among the topics discussed were the grape boycott being led by the United Farm Workers Organization Committee (UFWOC), the Civil Rights Movement in relation to the Chicano Movement, and the necessity for legal defense funds and bilingual instruction in California schools.

Perhaps the most famous of these Chicano-led conferences was held at the University of California, Santa Barbara in 1969 and produced what is considered by many scholars to be the

guiding document for the foundation of Chicano Studies departments in universities nationwide- *El Plan de Santa Barbara*[2]. The Chicano Coordinating Council on Higher Education held in *El Plan de Santa Barbara* that "the institutionalization of Chicano programs is the realization of Chicano power on campus." Among its demands, *El Plan* called for: the creation of a collegiate curriculum covering Chicanos' history and social conditions, initiatives designed to increase the enrollment of Chicano students in colleges and universities, support for research focused on Chicano populations, and the establishment of cultural, social, and community support programs. The Council's demands, thus, encapsulated one of *El Movimiento*'s primary concerns of the Chicano in the 60s and 70s- educational attainment. Paired with the institutional mobilization being spearheaded by UCSB faculty and staff, university students would lead their own efforts to advance *El Plan*'s vision through the foundation of *El Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán* (MEChA), a student-led organization.

In such events, it was not uncommon to hear Chicanos speak of the need to resist Anglo domination in pursuit of Chicanos' right to self-determination and security. Such rhetoric made it abundantly clear to all attendees that the primary enemy of Chicano communities was white Americans, who in their greed and pursuit of capitalism did not hesitate to oppress those of Mexican descent. *La Causa*'s ethnopolitical ideals and separatist politics would be enshrined in 1969's National Chicano Youth Liberation Conference (NCYLC). Organized by Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales, founder of the Crusade for Justice, the NCYLC served as one of the earliest events outlining the ideals and politics of the Chicano. Carlos Munoz (1989) writes:

The conference participants developed a series of resolutions outlining the goals of

[2] Spanish for "The Plan of Santa Barbara."

> Chicano liberation within the context of the nationlaist ideology that Gonzales put forward. The resolutions exhorted students to take up a struggle to unite all Mexican Americans regardless of social class. The bases for unity would be their pride in Mexican ethnicity and culture. It was reasoned that all Mexican Americans, regardless of how indoctrinated they were with the dominant values of U.S. society, ultimately nurtured such a pride. Nationalism, therefore, was to be the common denominator for uniting all Mexican Americans and making possible effective political mobilization.

The end product of Gonzales' NCYLC would serve as the reference point for Chicanos' political activism and ethnoracial ideology. Alurista, another notable Chicano poet and activist, captured the essence of the burgeoning Chicano Movement and the Chicanos' demands at the NCYLC in *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlan*, declaring:

> In the spirit of a new people that is conscious not only of its proud historical heritage but also of the brutal "gringo" invasion of our territories, we, the Chicano inhabitants and civilizers of the northern land of Aztlan from whence came our forefathers, reclaiming the land of their birth and consecrating the determination of our people of the sun, declare that the call of our blood is our power, our responsibility, and our inevitable destiny… Aztlan belongs to those who plant the seeds, water the fields, and gather the crops and not to the foreign Europeans.We do not recognize capricious frontiers on the bronze continent.

Notions of indigeneity and struggles against colonialism became the primary political and racial emphasis of the Chicano Movement in the 60s and 70s, with nationalism being employed as a unifying force in an effort to build the movement. "Temporarily occupied Mexico. Love it, or leave it!" reads an issue of the Brown Berets' newspaper publication, *La*

Causa. Many issues of this same publication also addressed American imperialism directly, with one such issue explaining that "anglos have been here for over 400 years. Anglos are the devils that all Latin Americans have come to recognize and know so easily without mistake" (La Causa, March 1971). According to this narrative adopted by the Chicano leaders, the white man was the enemy and all Mestizos should be united in racial resistance- a call eerily reminiscent of Jose Vasconcelos' work.

Indeed, in their eagerness to distinguish the Mexican-American experience from narratives of whiteness, Chicanos came to fall for the trap of *Mestizaje* laid by Jose Vasconcelos (1997) decades earlier. Vasconcelos was a well-known politician, having served as Mexico's first Secretary of Education. The platform afforded to him by his political influence facilitated the dissemination of his racial ideology, ensuring that the anti-Black roots of Mestizaje would be given a place in the national narrative and in Mexico's nation-building. Racial mixing was presented by Vasconcelos as a utopian and colorblind strategy for the unison of all Latin American peoples:

> The future race will not be a fifth, or a sixth race, destined to prevail over its ancestors. What is going to emerge out there is the definitive race, the synthetic race, the integral race, made up of the genius and the blood of all peoples and, for that reason, more capable of true brotherhood and of a truly universal vision.

However, Vasconcelos would also incorporate his own anti-Black views characterizing Black peoples as "eager for sensual joy, intoxicated with dances and unbridled lust" while perpetuating reproductive stereotypes about persons of Chinese descent, stating that "under the holy counsel of confucian morals [the Chinese] multiply like rats." Vasconcelos posited that racial mixing would allow for the voluntary and gradual elimination of Black and Indigenous

peoples while affording collective society the possibility of progression (Vasconcelos 1925):

It should be of no surprise then, that in adopting Vasconcelos' idealized *mestizaj*e as a guiding racial framework, Chicanos would adopt the very attitudes responsible for violence against Black peoples in the United States (Hernandez 2004). Nationalized notions of mestizaje, as pushed forward by the legacy of Vasconcelos' political influence, contributed to the erasure of afro-Mexican experiences, communities and individuals. Such was the extent of this erasure that afro-Mexicans were unaccounted for in Mexico's first census (Gomez 2020). Instead, the first Mexican census only listed four options: *raza indigena* (Indigenous race), *raza mezclada* (mixed race), *raza blanca* (white race), and *otra raza* (other race). That the options for self-identification were so limited by the Mexican government speaks to the national ideology that possessed the nation at the time. After all, The social ramifications of such explicit erasure would reverberate throughout Mexican communities residing in the United States and would become invisibilized by the racial ideology of *Chicanismo* and its belief in a *mestizo* identity.

Closely related to this romanticized indigenous identity was the notion of *Aztlan*, which imagined the homeland of the Chicano to extend from southern Mexico to the American southwest:

> Brotherhood unites us, and love for our brothers makes us a people whose time has come and who struggles against the foreigner who exploits our riches and destroys our culture. With our hearts in our hands, and our hands in the soil, we declare the independence of our mestizo nation. We are a bronze people with a bronze culture. Before the world, before all of our brothers in the bronze continent, we are a nation, we are a union of free peoples, we are Aztlan" (*La Causa*, March 23, 1969).

At its core, *mestizaje* perpetuates the violent anti-Black and anti-Indigenous violence characteristic of white supremacy, assuming that all persons would benefit from the process of *blanqueamiento* (whitening). Further, Vasconcelos' work has carried the extended effect of creating an illusion of racial homogeneity in the Mexican diaspora. By relying on rhetoric presenting all Mexicans as *mestizos*, the presence of Indigenous communities and afro-Mexicans has been obfuscated from the national eye. This erasure was palpable and present in the activism of Chicanos in the 60s and 70s with their racial presentation of self being heavily centered on the myth of homogeneous *mestizaje*. *Chicano Student News*, one of the first Chicano-focused newspapers published in Los Angeles, referred to Chicanos as "a people of bronze, a raza de bronce," language explicitly taken from Jose Vasconcelos' *La Raza Cosmica* to describe his idealized race resulting from racial mixing (Vasconcelos 1925).

By erroneously portraying Mexican-Americans as racially homogenous, some Chicano activists actively participated in the erasure and "othering" of afro-Mexican experiences while distancing themselves from racial Blackness (Hernandez 2003). This presentation of Blackness as "foreign" to the Chicano experience made itself present in rhetoric engrained in hyper-*Chicanismo*. Corky Gonzales, an influential Chicano activist, once asked:

> Why do Blacks riot? Because they see no way out because they feel trapped in the ghettos, because that is how mass society acts. I respect the suffering of the Blacks. We both have suffered. We work together. But we work differently because we are different people. Our culture is such that we don't like to march or protest. We don't like to be conspicuous. We don't like to seem ridiculous in the public eye. That is machismo. We are not nonviolent. But in the barrio, self-determination means that every man, every people, every barrio has to be

able to take care of themselves, with dignity. We are men of silent violence.

(Henry 1980, 226)

Gonzales' characterization of Black activism as "conspicuous" and "ridiculous" provides insight into Chicanos' perceptions of Black activists. Such characterizations reveal a dismissal on Gonzales' behalf of the systemic obstacles faced by Black Americans in striving towards progress. Furthermore, Gonzales is careful to draw a distinction between Chicanos and Black people, presenting the two groups as mutually exclusive of each other. This presentation serves to simultaneously "other" Black Americans as well as Blackness among Chicanos (Hernandez 2004). Interestingly, Gonzales' articulation of Chicano activism is reminiscent of the attitudes held by older generations of Mexican Americans who hoped to assimilate into mainstream society by engaging in establishment politics rather than protest politics. Additionally, Gonzales' emphasis on acting with "dignity" and disapproval of marching and protesting effectively positions Chicanos in diametric opposition to Black activism and protest.

CHAPTER III: BLACK-CHICANO DIVIDE

Anti-Black attitudes underlined many Black-Chicano relations, such as those alliances driven by the "war on poverty." Declared by President Lyndon B. Johnson in March of 1945, a "national war on poverty" was declared with the passage of the Economic Opportunity Act (EOA) in August of that year. As part of the EOA, Community Action Agencies (CAAs) were to be created to address poverty, with the Economic and Youth Opportunities Agency (EYOA) being selected as Los Angeles county's official CAA in 1965. One of the organizations the EYOA oversaw was the Neighborhood Adult Participation Program (NAPP), which was directed by Opal C. Jones, a Black woman. The NAPP established thirteen offices throughout Los Angeles County, in areas identified by the Los Angeles Welfare Planning Council to be in

need of antipoverty programs (Bauman 2007).

Yet, the NAPP would quickly become the battleground of Black-Chicano tensions. Racial divisions rose to the surface very early in the NAPP's lifetime, with Chicanos and Mexican Americans skeptical of the placement of the organization's outposts. It was Chicanos' and Mexican Americans' belief that in establishing only three NAPP outposts in predominantly Mexican American communities, the NAPP was perpetuating the underrepresentation of persons of Mexican descent and inequitable distribution of assistance programs (Pulido 2006). Racial tension in Los Angeles County and the NAPP would boil over after Jones' firing of Gabriel Yanez for insubordination and his role in deepening Black-Chicano divisions. At the time of his firing, Yanez served as director of the NAPP's outpost in Boyle Heights, a primarily- Mexican American community in Los Angeles County (Pulido 2006). In response to Yanez's dismissal the NAPP's Mexican American membership and Boyle Heights community members would stage protests outside the NAPP's headquarters. As part of this response, Irene Tovar, the Mexican American Director of the NAPP outpost in Pacoima submitted her resignation and shared her insight that "what's good for Watts and the civil rights movement is not necessarily good for the Mexican-American community" (Bauman 2007). Tovar's words employed racially-coded language to launch an assault on Black leaders and communities, with Watts and the Civil Rights Movement used as racist dog whistles for Black Americans. Her words embodied the racial divisions engulfing Los Angeles during this time period and continued the pattern of distinguishing the Mexican American and Chicano condition from the Black condition in Los Angeles.

Ethnonationalist politics, such as those endorsed by Chicano activists and organizations did not help mend existing divisions as Chicanos carried their anti-Black attitudes into

collaborative efforts with Black organizers. Pulido (2006) notes that Chicano and Mexican American members of El Centro de Accion Social y Autonomo (CASA) called Black members of the Coalition Against Police Abuse (CAPA) racial slurs, a result of the internalization of anti-Blackness and the growing separatist sentiment driving the Chicano Movement. CAPA presented a unique development in Black-Chicano relations as it represented the foundation of a united front meant to combat police brutality, one of the few issues which Chicano and Black activists agreed on. The impact of officer abuse in Chicano communities was a central topic for Chicano politics as the phenomenon was understood to be a form of racial violence. Responding to the police violence which took the life of Manuel Moreno, *La Causa* published an article stating:

> Never again will that dead pig raise his gun at one of Moctezuma's children. Never again will he take another chicano into an empty lot for the purpose of beating him senseless because he looked "suspicious" (*La Causa*, February 1971).

The author's characterization of the murdered Moreno as one of "Moctezuma's children" encapsulates the Chicano identity as firmly rooted in indigeneity. Moreno's murder was just one of the many deaths Chicanos utilized to galvanize their communities as a prime example of racial violence by "pigs." It is worth noting, that for all the attention Chicanos gave police violence towards persons of Mexican descent, the murder of Black community members at the hands of officers was rarely mentioned.

Chicanos' failure to highlight their shared struggle with Black Americans against police brutality should be interpreted as a sign of division between the two groups. This is surprising considering the fact that organizations such as the Brown Berets, Black Panther Party, Black

Congress, and Friends of the Panthers were all officially deemed "violent or subversive in nature" by the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) (Salazar 1970). Yet, anti-Blackness among Chicanos persisted, along with Black activists' perception that Chicano activism had arrived too late to the struggle for civil rights- views and attitudes which deepend the rift between the two groups (Salazar 1970). Ethnonationalism then, functioned to the detriment of liberatory efforts, with the Brown Berets writing:

> The revolutionary stance of non-Chicanos assumes that since we all have a common oppressor, we must consider each other as brothers. After all, none of us can do it alone. However, this position ignores some very essential points. Part of the problem is reflected in the non-Chicano's contention that Chicanos are too "conservative, religious, obstinate, racist." Calling us these things shows an ignorance of who and what we are, of our history and of our essential worth as children of the earth. This kind of talk by Black of white so-called revolutionaries is, inshort, patronizing…
>
> Black Nationalists, unfortunately, haven't had time to develop an autonomous direction in terms of culture and non-European ways of struggle. They are in danger of being swallowed up by the very culture that robbed them of their own atavistic rites and replaced them with psalm-singing and with one of the most impressive displays of economic competition to be found in a capitalistic society. To the American Black, Mother Africa has been replaced by stepmother America, who although evil and more monster than mother, is nevertheless more familiar and somewhat easier to deal with...Our struggle is not merely to gain political power. Our struggle is to gain control of the land: the only basis for revolution. White or Black Nationalists cannot relate to that, because their land is long ago and far away. Our land is here and it is today. (La

Causa, March 1971).

Chicanismo's overarching themes of indigeneity, racial separatism, and economic and political self-determination may have been effective in mobilizing a generation seeking to understand their place in the American racial order, yet ostracized *El Movimiento* from potential mutually-beneficial coalitions in southern California. Such was the extent of the Brown Berets' ethnic pride that they explicitly refused to recognize their shared oppression with other communities of color. The potential destabilization of white supremacy in the United States represented by a Black-Chicano united front can only be speculated upon.

Interracial animosity was also present in Black-Chicano student relations. Salazar (1969) recounted the events which transpired during an educational opportunity workshop at UC Santa Barbara. During said meeting, Chicano students expressed their frustrations with Black university students. Salazar quotes the Chicano caucus present at the conference as raising their concern that "the Black, because of his national push, has gotten the lion's share of the 'goodies." This sentiment is echoed in Salazar's (1970) reporting as well, writing that "Chicanos complain that blacks get most of the government help in the fight against racism."

It can be concluded then, that the structural nature of race created a cleavage between Chicano and Black activists by placing them in direct competition with one another for limited resources, while simultaneously furthering the marginalization of each group. Chicanos believed their struggle to be distinct from the Black struggle for liberation, while Black activists viewed the Chicano Movement as riding on the laurels of the Civil Rights Movement, paving the way for decades of tension rooted in systemic racism, white supremacy, and anti-Blackness.

CONCLUSION

Chicanos' and Mexican-Americans' racialized experiences and histories have served as a point of contention among academics. Manifestations of each groups' activism continue to be the subject of debates regarding *El Movimiento*'s impact. Of particular interest has been each groups' racial and ethnopolitical identity. The extent to which each group associated or dissociated from whiteness has been the focus of much of the scholarship focusing on these two groups. However, not much has been written about their relationship to or perceptions of Blackness. This paper contributes to existing scholarship by answering the question: *how did Chicanos and Mexican Americans relate to Blackness?* An analysis of twenty-seven Chicano newspaper publications as well as publications by *Los Angeles Times'* Ruben Salazar, and Mexican politician Jose Vasconcelos reveal Chicanos' and Mexican Americans' racial identity in relation to Blackness and whiteness.

Mexican-Americans' political and legal activism as well as sociohistorical context allows for analysis of their racial identity. Historic cases involving the segregation of Mexican and Mexican-American schoolchildren reveal how they identified racially.

First, from cases such as the Lemon Grove Incident and *Mendez v. Westminster School District* (1946), it can be determined that the Mexican-American families involved in these cases preferred to associate themselves to racial whiteness rather than be grouped with Black people as a means of escaping the racial hostilities of the time. *De jure* segregation as enforced by Jim Crow Laws made legal association to other people of color undesirable to Mexican-Americans who sought safety from racial discrimination. Still, in their efforts to secure their own well-being, Mexican-Americans furthered and legitimized the "othering" of Black Americans. By presenting Mexican-Americans as a people eager to assimilate and

participate fully in American society, Mexican-Americans portrayed themselves as deserving and entitled to being legally and socially recognized as "white." This self-image could be seen in organizations like LULAC who sought the full incorporation of Mexican-Americans into mainstream society. Still, despite earning legal victories and recognition as legally white, Americans of Mexican descent continued to be perceived as a racial "other," laying the groundwork for the Chicano Movement.

Second, an examination of Chicanos' activism, rhetoric, and political ideology reveals a strained relationship to Blackness at best. In seeking to build a movement focused on a *mestizo* identity, Chicanos centered and claimed indigenous roots, obfuscating the presence of Afro-Mexican persons and experiences within the movement. Furthermore, *Chicanismo* as an ethnopolitical ideology committed itself to the inherently-flawed ideology of *mestizaje*. Fabricated by Mexican politician, Jose Vasconcelos, his vision of a "cosmic race" and support of *mestizaje* deepened racial inequities and biases in Mexican society. Racial inequities in Mexico were then disguised by the Mexican government's emphasis on the creation of a united nation. In continuing the use of this racial rhetoric, the Chicano Movement was complicit in the erasure of Afro-Mexican experiences and narratives. Instead, Chicanos' political and racial views necessitated that they absorb all possibility of racial diversity within the movement into the catch-all identity of *mestizo*. In this way, the comments of figures like "Corky" Gonzales are a better reflection of Chicanos' and Mexican-Americans' perceptions of Black activism and Black Americans in general. Furthermore, Chicanos' ethnonationalist political platform inhibited the formation of interracial coalitions and collaboration with liberatory organizations, such as the Black Panther Party whose struggle the Brown Berets viewed as distinct from Chicanos' quest for self-determination.

Thirdly, Black-Chicano relations were impacted by competition for limited resources. Jobs and federal funding to alleviate poverty proved to be the primary battlefronts for clashes between the two groups. Chicanos accused Black organizations of receiving a larger portion of federal funds based purely on their media presence, while Black activist organizations viewed Chicanos as clamoring for governmental recognition they did not fight for. Such tension was not entirely due to the at-the-time recent passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 but instead had been building for decades in cities such as Los Angeles where Mexican-Americans' sense of nationalism and endeavors towards legal whiteness placed said community at odds with Black communities. In the end, pre-existing tensions intensified over these accusations, ostracizing each group from each other.

In writing on this topic, I hope that intra-communal conversations regarding anti-Blackness will be expanded to interrogate the material and ideological impact and legacy of *Chicanismo*. Racial divides continue to limit the potential for change communities of color can lead. Modern organizations holding an ehtnopolitical ideological platform and with roots in the Chicano Movement may greatly benefit from questioning the racial politics of the time period. Such introspection may allow for an expansion of their perspectives and potentially lead to strengthened relationships and coalitions with other people of color.

Still, my contributions to this discussion can be built upon through regional analyses of Chicanos' political views and interracial coalitions. An evaluation of a greater volume of archival documents may also produce new questions on this topic or provide further insight on Chicanos' attitudes towards racial Blackness. The number of archival documents analyzed in this paper was greatly limited by the social impact of COVID-19, with many archival libraries closing nationwide to limit the mitigation of the virus. Additionally, the primary focus of this

paper has been on Mexican Americans and Chicanos. Future research would do well to incorporate the views and attitudes of Black activists and organizations on a grander scale.

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