

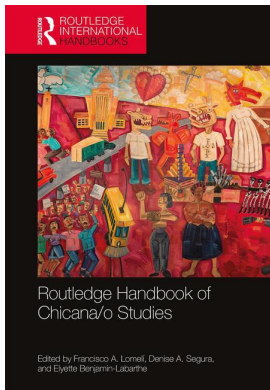
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# Chicana/o history

## A generational approach

Mario T. García

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When I first started to teach Chicano history (now often referred to as “Chicana/o” to incorporate gender explicitly vis-à-vis the term “Chicano”)<sup>1</sup> almost 50 years ago, there was no sense of the periodization of this history. When did Chicano history begin? What were the different historical periods? Did these periods coincide with the larger history of the United States? Fortunately, the work of Carey McWilliams, the “godfather of Chicano history,” provided a framework. As a journalist by profession, he had written the first history of Mexican Americans in 1948: *North from Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States* (1948, [1968], [2016]). He provided the initial generation of Chicana/o historians some sense of the historical periods. For example, he starts in the Spanish colonial era (1598–1821) in places later conquered by the United States that became the American Southwest from Texas to California, including states such as New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, and Utah. These were the initial Spanish settlements, thus locating the origins of what we would call Chicana/o history in this formative period. Later, given the Chicano movement’s emphasis on the Indigenous background, we historians began our discussion of Chicano history by introducing the Aztecs and other major Indian civilizations in Mexico prior to the Spanish conquest. McWilliams also focused on the U.S.–Mexico War (1846–1848) and the post-war period up to the late nineteenth century. Into the twentieth century, he noted the beginning of mass immigration from Mexico, mainly into the Southwest between 1900 and 1930, linked to the extension of American capitalist economic activities in the region, such as the development of railroads, mining, and agriculture. The effects of the Great Depression, particularly the deportation of thousands of Mexicans from the United States, is still another period he described. Finally, he not only covers the effects of World War II on Mexican Americans as thousands went to war, but also the racial tensions of the war as witnessed by the Zoot Suit Riots in Los Angeles in 1943. He concludes his periodization with thoughts about the conditions and aspirations of Mexican Americans following the war and the beginning of the Cold War. As early Chicana/o historians we could not have taught our early classes without McWilliams; *North from Mexico* became our bible.

### A generational approach to Chicana/o history

Over the years I have come to develop a generational model to more concretely periodize Chicana/o history. With McWilliams as a point of departure, we can better appreciate historical

changes among Mexicans in the United States through generational changes. A generation is not only biological generations, but also historical or political. There are certainly other ways to periodize Chicana/o history, but this is one way of trying to get a handle on significant historical changes within the Mexican-origin communities (García 1989). First and foremost I am interested in how Chicanas/os make history. I am not an advocate of victimization history, which primarily focuses on how Chicanas/os have been victimized in history through racism, labor exploitation, and other forms of discrimination and exclusion. Generational studies put the emphasis on groups of individuals and how they respond to historical forces. This reaction can assume the forms of reacting against victimization through protests, rebellions, and even revolution. But the emphasis is on historical agency, meaning people taking control of their lives and instigating changes for themselves and by themselves. By generation is meant, at one level, biological facts concerning an age cohort, while putting a stress on historical and political generations that can be trans-generational, even though they are bound by common historical and political ties. Indeed, I was initially influenced not only by McWilliams' historical arrangement but also by Marxism or the class struggle. I wanted to see historical changes not imposed on Chicanas/os, but those that they instigated themselves as much as possible.

### The Conquered Generation

In devising a generational model, I called the first-generational historical cohort the Conquered Generation, which is more than a biological one, including a political and historical one as well. It encompasses those Mexicans who after the U.S.-Mexico War found themselves on the new American side of the border and effectively became the first Mexican Americans. For the next four decades they felt the brunt consequences of the U.S. victory and the incorporation of Mexico's former northern provinces into the United States. The American conquest defined this generation that encompassed more than one biological generation and hence represented a larger political and historical generation centrally affected by a major historical event – such as the American conquest of *El Norte*. This is where, as Rodolfo Acuña stresses, Chicano history begins.

In his landmark *Occupied America* (1972) and one of the first textbooks on Chicano history that went beyond McWilliams, Acuña begins his history, unlike McWilliams, not with the Spanish colonial past, but with the U.S.-Mexico War. Influenced by the theory of internal colonialism promoted by the Black Power movement (Ture & Hamilton 1992) and by scholars such as Robert Blauner (1972), Acuña (1972) proposes that the war produced the first generation of Mexican Americans. Hence, the origins of Chicana/o history are one of being a conquered or colonized people. Internal colonialism suggests that Chicanas/os are colonized similar to other Third World people but with the caveat that they represent a colonized people within the colonizing power or within the “belly of the beast,” as Cuban liberator José Martí puts it.

*Occupied America* represented a more radical and oppositional history than McWilliams' that was a more pluralistic approach to American history. The text was a Chicano movement narrative representing the militant ideology of the movement. The Chicano movement and the Chicano Generation – the activists and supporters of the movement – represented themselves as a “people of color” challenging the previous political generation, the Mexican Generation, for utilizing a whiteness strategy to attack segregation and discrimination against Mexican Americans. The whiteness strategy posited that if American society at least nominally through the census and other governmental sources classified Mexican Americans as “whites,” then there was no racial or legal basis for segregation and discrimination (Haney López 1997). As “whites,” Mexican Americans were legally entitled to all privileges and opportunities afforded to other

white Americans. This strategy made sense given the liberal and pluralistic politics of this generation and sometimes it worked and other times it did not (Foley 2010).

The Chicano Generation defied this strategy and noted that it had not succeeded in removing the subaltern and second-class citizenship that Chicanas/os occupied (Haney López 1997). Hence, this generation shunned the concept of whiteness and asserted that Chicanas/os were Indigenous and mestizas/os or mixed-race people who were not only people of color, but also Third World people such as those in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Moreover, as Third World people they also represented a colonized people but one colonized within the United States. Hence, the Chicano movement embraced the concept of internal colonialism and Acuña's text provided the historical justification by arguing that the roots of Chicano history began with the U.S.-Mexico War (Barrera 1979).

Chicanas/os knew little about the U.S.-Mexico War and how it influenced their history within the United States. They assumed, like most other Americans, that the history of the country was a history of immigrants since many Mexicans in the country were either immigrants themselves or the children of immigrants. Noted Harvard historian Oscar Handlin in his 1951 classic book *The Uprooted* made this contention and it stuck. Yet while it is true that for the most part the history of this country is the history of immigrants, it is not completely true. Native Americans were not immigrants; African slaves were not immigrants; and the first generation of Mexican Americans were also not immigrants. They were already here – here being Mexico's northern frontier and the area annexed by the United States. Chicanas/os did not know this history because it was rarely taught in schools.

The history of the U.S.-Mexico War is not emphasized in our schools, the Southwest, or even in colleges and universities. When I worked as a teaching assistant in U.S. history at the University of Texas at El Paso in the mid-1960s, the course covered the colonial era to the Civil War. Because the professor was running late in his lectures, he decided to bypass the U.S.-Mexico War to sufficiently discuss the Civil War. Lacking an ethnic or political consciousness at the time, it somehow still felt odd. Close to half of the students was of Mexican origin. Half if not more of El Paso was too; and El Paso was the result of the U.S.-Mexico War. Yet, the professor did not see the value of discussing the war? Something was not right.

It is not surprising then that most Chicanas/os knew little about this history or its implications for Chicanos. In his epic poem in 1967, *I Am Joaquín*, Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales refers to the war and the conquest and the violence unleashed against Mexicans in the new Southwest in the post-Mexican War period (Gonzales 1967, [1972], [2001]). However, he also notes the resistance to the conquest by so-called social bandits such as Joaquín Murrieta. At the same time in New Mexico, Reies López Tijerina, the charismatic leader of the land grant movement, stressed the historic loss of lands by Hispanos in northern New Mexico and the need to regain them. He provided an indirect history lesson to the new Chicano Generation by teaching them that Chicanos had a historic land base during the Spanish colonial era, but that land was largely taken from them as a result of the U.S.-Mexico War. In his research on these land grants, Tijerina studied the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) that ended the war along with also providing citizenship for the conquered Mexicans and an indirect guarantee that their lands would be honored and protected. Tijerina (2000) used the treaty to argue for the regaining of the lost lands that had been, according to him, honored by the treaty. All of this brought attention to the importance of the U.S.-Mexico War to Chicanos.

In thinking about the importance of this conflict within Chicano history, I proposed the Conquered Generation to represent the history of this first generation of Mexican Americans in what became the Southwest. Political and historical generations are characterized as being affected by a central experience. In this case, it is the American conquest that affects all aspects

of Mexican American life and culture from 1848 to the end of the century. In some places these changes were immediate and in others they were more gradual. However, the results were the same: the disempowerment and marginalization of the Mexican-origin populations. In Northern California, for example, the entrance of gold-seekers, the Forty-Niners, a year after the end of the war overwhelmed the landowning *Californio* population. Their lands were stolen or contested in the new Anglo American courts. Even if they won in court, they had to pay their Anglo American attorneys in land. The same would ultimately occur in Southern California. Outside of California, Mexican Americans in the last half of the nineteenth century likewise experienced as noted in New Mexico the loss of land and subsequent second-class citizenship. As they lost their economic foundation, their political and cultural status was also affected. Only in northern New Mexico, due to their larger numbers than Anglo Americans, did the Hispanos there hold on at least to their political power longer; however, into the twentieth century much of this was also eroded or at least compromised. These forms of subjugation provide the grounds for the argument led by Acuña (1972) that internal colonialism characterizes initial Chicano history and gives rise to the Conquered Generation.

This subordination did not mean that there was not resistance by Mexican Americans. There is the example of the social bandits of California, such as Murrieta and Tiburcio Vásquez, among others. In South Texas, Juan Cortina led the Cortina Rebellion against Anglo-Texans who attempted to steal the lands of Mexican Americans and to murder them. In New Mexico, the *Gorras Blancas* or White Caps rebelled against encroaching Anglo ranchers and the railroads by cutting fences and destroying track. Thus, some Mexican Americans reacted to the Anglo takeover by overtly rebelling. But one can also note forms of covert resistance in the form of Mexican Americans continuing to practice their cultural traditions, including the use of Spanish and practicing their form of Catholicism as a way of resisting Anglo cultural influences and penetration. The Conquered Generation may have been conquered but they also resisted as best they could.

### The Immigrant Generation

By the end of the nineteenth century, Mexicans in the Southwest had been reduced to a demographic minority with the exception of Northern New Mexico and South Texas. They had also on the whole been displaced economically, politically, and culturally. They would have become a simple footnote in American history except mass immigration from Mexico began in the early twentieth century. Between 1900 and 1930 over a million Mexican immigrants crossed the border and assured that people of Mexican origin would continue to have a presence within the United States. This first wave up to the beginning of the Great Depression I call the Immigrant Generation. The reason is that no other cohort of immigrant groups from Mexico that followed would come to totally dominate the Mexican experiences in the United States as did the first wave. With the exception of northern New Mexicans, these immigrants overwhelmed the existing Conquered Generation at all levels. Demographically, they became the majority of Mexicans. Economically, they became the major labor force in the Southwest. Politically, they became the dominant leadership within the Mexican communities. Lastly, they revitalized Mexican culture by their sheer numbers. No other later immigration generation would so thoroughly dominate the Mexican experience in the United States. These later immigrants after 1930 had to co-exist with an equally growing number of U.S.-born Mexican Americans, the children of the immigrants. In fact, by 1940, Mexican Americans outnumbered Mexican immigrants and this demographic characteristic has continued into later years including today.

Why did this first wave of immigrants cross the border? They came as a result of dual forces: the so-called push-and-pull forces with respect to immigration. That is, what are the conditions

in the home country that push people to emigrate and become immigrants in another land? What are the conditions in the receiving country that explain and pull immigrants to a specific new land? In the case of the Immigrant Generation, these immigrants faced two major conditions in Mexico that pushed them out. One involved significant economic changes that took place in Mexico under the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz (1877–1910), referred to by historians as the Porfiriato Era, which transformed the Mexican economy.

Porfirio Díaz understood that in order for Mexico to develop it needed a semblance of peace that it had not had in the past due to civil unrest and foreign intervention. He wanted to attract foreign investors to help build Mexico's infrastructure, such as railroads and power grids, in order to open up the country for the development of an export economy based on agricultural products and mining. Through a strong-armed dictatorship, Díaz imposed peace and order and provided the security for foreign investment. His policy worked and American and British investors, both corporate and financial, poured millions of dollars into the Mexican economy to develop agri-business and large-scale production of crops such as corn, tobacco, sugar, and henequen. In addition, foreign investment revitalized the mining areas and led to American mining companies producing large amounts of industrial metals such as copper, silver, zinc, and lead. This new revitalization of the Mexican economy became known as the "Mexican Miracle." But it was not a miracle to all. Thousands of farmers lost their lands as Díaz stole their land and turned it over to his supporters who engaged in a new form of agri-business production. Small farmers, the *campesinos*, along with Indian villagers lost their lands, were dislocated, and had to look to new sources of economic survival. Many of these internal migrants soon became immigrants as they followed the trail north to the U.S.-Mexico border in the hope of finding jobs in the United States.

The second set of push forces had to do with the Mexican Revolution of 1910, Mexico's major civil war that raged from 1910 to the 1920s. The revolution toppled Díaz, but internal disagreements within the revolutionaries led to a renewed civil war for a decade. Thousands died but thousands also fled the country as political refugees. These included both poor and middle-class citizens seeking refuge in the United States. Together, both economic and political refugees constituted over a million immigrants from Mexico who entered the United States between 1900 and 1930.

By the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, the United States had become a major industrial power: in transportation (railroads), mining, oil production, industrial construction materials, meatpacking, automobile assembly, etc. For this new economy, so-called captains of industry needed additional sources of labor, mostly unskilled labor in assembly lines. Some of this labor was found in an increased rural to urban migration within the country, but this migration still did not fill labor demand. Consequently, employers began to encourage and contract immigrant workers from Europe, especially from eastern and southern Europe such as Russia, Poland, and Italy. These immigrants became known as the "New Immigrants." Immigrant labor soon came to dominate many industrial jobs in the United States.

This industrialization, at the same time, necessitated new and additional sources of industrial ores and food, such as in cattle and agriculture, to feed these industrial armies in the North and Midwest. Faced with the difficulty of encouraging many of the New Immigrants to go west due to the great availability of jobs in the industrial regions and affected by the prejudice against Asian labor that led to the exclusion of Chinese and Japanese immigration, Southwestern employers began to turn to Mexico to recruit needed laborers. The extension of railroad lines, new mining enterprises, and agri-business, as well as other related industries, all began to recruit and hire Mexican immigrant workers. This new labor supply, of course, coincided with the dislocation of Mexicans from rural Mexico due to Porfirian economic policies plus the chaos of the Mexican Revolution. Therefore, the push-and-pull forces



that impacted increased Mexican immigration came together. It was American capital, in part, that financed the extension of railroads into Mexico, such as the Mexican Central from El Paso-Ciudad Juárez to Mexico City. The railroads, in turn, aided in the restructuring of Mexican agriculture for export by providing the transportation link to the border for Mexican products and in the process aided in dislocating many rural Mexicans who in time migrated and crossed the border seeking jobs in the new southwestern industries. A new transnational economy was formed that led to mass Mexican immigration, whose members became the Immigrant Generation in Chicano history as part of the labor foundation for a new southwestern economy.

The Immigrant Generation contributed their blood, sweat, and tears in laboring in this country. They maintained the railroad lines throughout the Southwest; they picked the fruits, vegetables, cotton, and sugar beets in Texas, California, Colorado, and other states, as well as in the Midwest and the Great Plains. They extracted the industrial metals in Arizona, Colorado, and New Mexico. In the emerging cities such as El Paso, San Antonio, and Los Angeles, they worked in construction and in factories. Women likewise contributed with some working in the fields, in packing houses, in canneries, in laundries, and others working as domestics. The children of these immigrants further added to the labor force by joining their parents in the fields and in service jobs in the cities. Together, this generation contributed to the economic development of the Southwest and California. At the same time, despite their hard work, they did not reap the full fruits of their labor. Instead, employers segregated them in “Mexican jobs,” the lowest skill labor available, and they paid them “Mexican wages,” the lowest wages in the southwestern labor market – what was termed the “dual wage system” for Mexicans in the nineteenth century (Barrera 1979). Mexican immigrants, on the whole, did not protest this exploitation for fear of deportation. Others, however, resorted to labor strikes, joining labor or political organizations, such as the militant Industrial Workers of the World, or engaging in passive resistance by slowing down their work or simply leaving their jobs. Despite their harsh conditions, the immigrants exercised some historical agency to control as best as possible their conditions.

As part of their experience in the United States, Mexican immigrants, in becoming ethnic Americans, built communities in both rural and urban areas. The barrios became staging areas for immigrant adjustment and for self-protection against racism and discrimination. In their communities, Mexicans brought and adjusted their cultural traditions as a way of cushioning the cultural shock of their new American experience. This included family traditions and practices such as celebrating birthdays and feast days; reestablishing their religious, mostly Catholic, rituals including baptisms and weddings and, of course, the homage to Our Lady of Guadalupe, the patron saint of Mexico (Griswold del Castillo 1979). Familiar recreational activities including music and dances all added to a sense of continuity at the same time that immigrants changed to accommodate living in a new country by learning some English, adopting new consumer practices, and sending their children to American public schools. Although called “Mexican schools,” they represented segregated and inferior schools that nonetheless helped to acculturate this new generation (González 1990; San Miguel 1987). Barrios and even rural *colonias* or farm labor camps on the surface appeared to be inward-looking where the immigrants fell back on their culture and on themselves; however, in fact, they were outward-looking in transitioning, along with their children, to a new society and culture. This transition became even more evident as the children came of age to represent a distinct new cultural and political generation.

### The Mexican American Generation

Following research on the Immigrant Generation, I was curious about their U.S.-born or-raised children and how this contrasted with their immigrant parents. This led to several studies on the

Mexican American Generation. These included for the most part the children of the first large wave of Mexican immigrants to the United States who came of age in the 1930s and 1940s. It was a generation sandwiched between the Great Depression, World War II, and the beginning of the Cold War. In this sense, it was a biological generation, but it was also a historical and political generation. It was historical because of the time frame and a political generation because it produced a new political generation of community and civil rights leaders who struggled to obtain full rights for both Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants, although the focus was on the U.S. born. The very term Mexican American comes out of this period

They knew they were not immigrants like their parents and that they were American citizens. They also understood that due to racism they were not accepted as full citizens. They came to realize their unique situation similar in some ways to other second-generation ethnic experiences, such as Italian Americans, Jewish Americans, Polish Americans, and others. They too were a hyphenated generation, but one that had to deal also with racism that stigmatized them as being of an inferior race unlike the northern European second generation. Part of the characteristics of the Mexican American Generation in seeking their own niche and cultural position is that they became bilingual and bicultural. They learned English in the schools and American culture and traditions as well as being influenced by American mass culture through movies and music. Because of their immigrant households, they retained much of their Spanish and Mexican cultural traditions, encompassing a hybrid culture. Although some historians later scolded this generation for losing their “authentic culture” and implying that cultural authenticity lay with their immigrant parents, the fact is that their mixed culture, another version of *mestizaje*, was just as “authentic” because it represented who they were. All cultures change, including that of immigrants, as noted, and they are “impure” to the extent that they incorporate influences from other cultures. As they accommodated to dual and in some cases multiple cultures, including African American influences in cities such as Los Angeles, most Mexican Americans adjusted as best they could given tensions between cultures.

But this was not true for all. Some, especially in the hardcore urban areas, experienced more traumas and became alienated from both Mexican and Anglo cultures. Instead, they forged a totally new street culture for themselves that went beyond that of other Mexican Americans. These cultural outliers were the *pachucos* or zoot suiters of this era, especially of the 1940s. They created a totally new language for themselves called *caló* as well as a new style best exhibited by the zoot suit, borrowed from African Americans. This cultural manifestation included both young men and women (*pachucas*) (Ramírez 2009). Some developed gangs although not all engaged in conflicts with the police. Still there was no love lost between the *pachucos* and the police as well as the military during World War II. These tensions erupted in June 1943 in Los Angeles in the Zoot Suit Riots when hundreds of U.S. military, mostly naval, descended upon downtown Los Angeles and attacked any Mexican Americans they identified as *pachucos* and zoot suiters (Monroy 1999). The riots spilled into East Los Angeles, the large Mexican barrio, where Chicanos, in turn, attacked the sailors. The riots finally abated due to pressure from civil rights groups including Mexican Americans, and President Franklin Roosevelt ordered the sailors and other military personnel back to their bases. Ironically, the conflict occurred during World War II, a war against fascist racism. Yet on the home front, many Americans could not overcome their own racism. Not only was this expressed towards Mexican Americans, but of course, infamously Japanese immigrants and Japanese Americans were forced into concentration (internment) camps after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. Moreover, African Americans not only continued to contend with segregation and discrimination, but this manifested itself in the military when African Americans had to fight in segregated units.



Despite these racial tensions, thousands of Mexican Americans and other Latinos such as Puerto Ricans participated in the military during the war (Morin 1996; Rivas-Rodríguez & Zamora 2010). For some it was a way to show their patriotism and, of course, many had no choice due to the draft. Nevertheless, they fought with great courage and bravery. Perhaps as many as half a million Latinos, mostly Chicanos, were in the military during the war, per capita winning more Congressional Medals of Honor for bravery beyond the call of duty. They became known as the so-called Greatest Generation that fought the war and defeated the fascist threat, although unfortunately not regarded as such by mainstream historians. Many never returned and those who did suffered injuries both physically and emotionally. In returning, however, they still had to confront racism (Zamora 2009). Some even wearing their U.S. military uniforms were refused service in restaurants and other public facilities at home. Yet, World War II proved to be a major socialization for Chicanos in the military that included women who also joined in non-combat service. For the first time, Chicanos traveled to other parts of the country for basic training and, in so doing, interacted with other ethnic Americans, which allowed them to develop a larger sense of themselves as Americans. They had put their lives on the line for their country – the United States not Mexico – and they were not going to be treated as second-class citizens. They were determined to fight a second war at home for their rights as American citizens.

This second front in the homeland had actually commenced prior to World War II. The coming of age of the Mexican American Generation in the 1930s led to the first major civil rights movement by Mexican Americans in the United States. As second-generation Americans, they had a much greater sense of their rights than their immigrant parents. Mexican Americans attended American public schools, where they learned English, American history and civics, and, like everyone else, memorized the Declaration of Independence (“All men are created equal”). They knew that they were citizens of the United States and that therefore they had protected rights. At the same time, they faced overt discrimination not only in the schools, but also in access to a variety of public facilities, such as movie theatres, public swimming pools, restaurants, and even cemeteries. Recognizing these contradictions, some of this generation transformed themselves into a political generation of new civil rights leaders. They formed civil rights groups to combat racism and discrimination in the Southwest and other locations. In 1929, Mexican Americans in Texas organized the League of United Latin-American Citizens (LULAC), which became the leading Mexican American civil rights group (Márquez 1993). After the war, returning *veteranos* organized the American G.I. Forum as a reaction to the continuing discrimination faced by the veterans (García 1989).

Many other community organizations also sprang up from the 1930s to the 1950s to advance the civil rights of Mexican Americans. One of the key areas that they focused on was educational discrimination. They moved to eliminate separate Mexican schools and to promote the integration of Mexican American children with Anglo or white children in the public schools. They did this primarily by going to the courts and in particular the federal courts. In 1946 they scored a major victory in the *Méndez* case in Orange County, California when a federal court ruled that the segregation of Mexican American children was unconstitutional based on the Fourteenth Amendment, where every citizen was given equal protection under the law (Strum 2010). Some believe that the *Méndez* case became the forerunner of the more famous *Brown* case in 1954, where school segregation was deemed unconstitutional. While integration was slow or even non-existent, the important change was that Mexican Americans now had the rule of law on their side (Strum 2010). Mexican Americans, through community struggles and legal ones, further challenged other discriminatory practices in the Southwest, including in jobs and wages. Some joined the progressive Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) unions of

the 1930s and 1940s to achieve these goals. In addition, Mexican Americans, especially after the war, likewise saw political representation as a civil right and many more began to vote and run for office. A major breakthrough occurred in 1957 when Mexican Americans in El Paso, Texas elected Raymond L. Telles as mayor of the city and the first Mexican American to be elected as mayor of a major Southwestern community in the twentieth century to that time (García 1998). Others would later follow.

## The Chicano Generation

The Chicano Generation represented the activists and adherents of the Chicano movement of the late 1960s and 1970s. The Chicano movement was the largest and most widespread civil rights and community empowerment movement by Mexican Americans in the United States up to that time (García 2014a). The Chicano Generation comprised those who came of age in the 1960s and self-referred as “Chicanos” as a result of the movement. The term Chicano actually has a long and remarkable history first recorded in the 1920s and it was not until the 1960s that the term became largely popular. By World War II, the term was used by young U.S.-born Mexican Americans in hard core barrios of the Southwest, such as those in Los Angeles and El Paso. It was likewise a term especially re-discovered by the *pachucos* and zoot suiters, both men and women, and so you could be a Chicano and a Chicana. The term then later in the 1960s became politicized as the new generation associated with the Chicano movement expropriated it and raised it to a political level. To be a Chicano in this period was to be an activist in the Chicano movement.<sup>2</sup>

The Chicano movement and the Chicano Generation also represented a more militant manifestation of political activism. It was more radical than the Mexican American Generation that stressed reforms and integration because the Chicano Generation arose in a radical and militant period in American history (Navarro 1995, 1998; Oropeza 2005). The so-called Sixties (that actually spilled over into the 1970s) was one of the most volatile and oppositional political periods in U.S. history. It was defined by Black civil rights struggles led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the later Black Power movement with groups such as the Black Panther Party (Behnken 2011; Chávez 2002; Muñoz 1989). The U.S. intervention in Vietnam led to the largest anti-war movement and protests never before seen in the country. There was the second wave of the women’s movement as well as other ethnic movements, such as among Native Americans and Asian Americans in addition to a growing environmentalist movement. Moreover, many young whites became radicalized and counter-cultural as well. All this including a reactionary and conservative backlash movement against civil rights by some whites led to a highly charged era. The Chicano movement was influenced by the politics of its time while also contributing to it.

In addition, the Chicano Generation was at the same time reacting to the continuation of poverty and discrimination of Mexican Americans. These varied influences created a social movement aimed no longer at integration, but for the empowerment of the Chicano communities, self-determination, and the assertion of a new-found pride in one’s ethnic and cultural heritage. The movement focused on cultural nationalism or Chicanismo as its main ideology (García 2015). The movement was brought together by the common ethnic history and culture of Mexicans in the United States. Chicanismo disguised the heterogeneity of Chicanas/os as it emphasized race and class-based oppression in order to build a movement, although numerous Chicana feminists articulated an eloquent gender critique that contested male privilege in the movement and larger Chicano community and advocated Chicana-centered politics and programs (Nieto-Gomez 1974; Ruiz 1998; Blackwell 2011).

The Chicano movement rejected the melting pot theory and Americanization. These, according to the movement, were dominant ideologies meant to control racialized minorities

such as African Americans and Chicanas/os and allow them to believe in the American Dream (Acuña 1972). But that dream had failed Chicanas/os, the movement proclaimed, and had denied them awareness of their own historical and cultural backgrounds. The schools and mass culture had regarded everything Mexican to be bad and to be discarded if one sought social mobility. The movement attacked this falsehood by pointing out the continued discrimination and lack of significant mobility even after they had acculturated. The system prized Mexicans for one basic thing: cheap labor. To this the movement said “Basta!” – enough. Chicanos would now control their own communities and their own future by struggling to eliminate this “internally colonized system” (Barrera, Muñoz & Ornelas 1972).

The Chicano movement had various manifestations. Clearly, the farm workers’ struggles in California led by César Chávez and Dolores Huerta served as a major inspiration (Levy 1975). Chávez, a great organizer, shaped the struggle of farm workers more as a social movement than a labor movement. The fledging union that became the United Farm Workers (UFW) demanded higher wages and better working conditions for union members. Meanwhile, Chávez insisted that the struggle transcended that: a fight for social justice and the human dignity for farm workers. This emphasis not only galvanized farm workers themselves, but others who supported the union, especially after it called for a national and international boycott of table grapes as a way of forcing the large grape growers to the bargaining table. But the struggle also excited and influenced many Chicana/o youth and students. Knowing that the large majority of farm workers were Mexican, either U.S.-born or immigrants, Chávez attempted to reach out to them ethnically and culturally. He wanted to let them know that this union was their union and not composed of outsiders. Chávez was a farm worker as they were. He also used in the banner of the union what people perceived as a modified symbol of the eagle on the Mexican flag. He used terms such as *huelga*, the Mexican term for strike, and referred to the struggle as *La Causa*, or the cause – the cause for social justice.

Chávez’s use of ethnic symbols and “Mexicanizing” the struggle, in turn, encouraged younger Chicanas/os to begin to explore their own ethnic identity that had been marginalized in the schools, which led many to become ashamed of it. Many of the new Chicano Generation throughout the Southwest received their baptism of activism by supporting the farm workers. Chávez’s references to ethnic symbols clearly influenced the cultural nationalism or Chicanismo of the Chicano movement. Besides, the farm workers’ struggle encouraged the Chicano Generation to question their social commitments. If the farm workers – the lowliest of the low – had the courage to fight for their rights and dignity and take on the power structure, shouldn’t Chicanos in the cities follow suit based on their grievances as a result of discrimination and other ills? Because of his influence on the emergence of the Chicano movement, César Chávez is considered the godfather of the movement.

Another important early influence on the movement was the land grant struggle in northern New Mexico led by Reies López Tijerina (Gutiérrez & Tijerina 2000; Busto 2005). In the mid-1960s this brought attention to the historic loss of land by Chicanas/os over the years since the U.S. Conquest of the 1840s. This occurred not only in New Mexico, but also throughout the Southwest, as lands belonging to Mexican Americans had been stolen or taken by force by incoming Anglo Americans or the new territorial and state governments. In northern New Mexico, this particularly affected small Hispano (the term used in the region) sheep ranchers who lost not only portions of their land, but community grazing lands available to all small ranchers. New Anglo cattle ranchers confiscated these lands, as did the federal government, which transferred these lands to national forest preserves. Reies López Tijerina, originally from Texas and a former Pentecostal preacher, brought attention to this deterritorialization and called for the rural Hispanos to join his land grant movement, called *La Alianza* (The Alliance), to force

the federal government to restore the lost lands, particularly the communal ones. Charismatic and militant, Tijerina engaged in confrontational politics, including a symbolic takeover of a portion of the Kit Carson National Forest and the attempt to carry out a citizen's arrest of a local district attorney for allegedly harassing La Alianza. In the latter case, it led to a shootout at the Tierra Amarilla courthouse north of Santa Fe, which in turn led to a widespread manhunt for Tijerina by the New Mexico National Guard until he was apprehended. He would later be imprisoned for the use of these tactics.

Because of his actions, Tijerina became like César Chávez, a hero to the new Chicano Generation, which admired his courage and were smitten by his charisma and militant tactics, which seemed more in tune with the developing militancy of the Chicano movement. Tijerina also influenced the Chicano Generation in other ways: he taught them history – Chicana/o history. He taught them about the importance of the U.S.-Mexico War and how that led to the loss of land not only by Mexico, but also by the Mexicans who became part of the American conquest in the Southwest. He taught them about the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848 and its implications: it ended the war and falsely promised to honor the lands previously held by Mexicans residing in newly conquered states.

Tijerina reminded young Chicanas/os that Mexican Americans had historic lands that became lost lands. This had two consequences. The reminder of historic lands came to be an inspiration for Chicanas/os to declare that due to their Indigenous background, their historic lands went as far back as the original northern homeland of the Aztecs, which the Chicano movement conveniently located in the Southwest where they lived. This became *Aztlán*, the name of the Aztec northern homeland and which now under the movement also became the historic homeland of Chicanas/os. As Tijerina stressed, this had now also become the lost homeland that needed to be recovered in one way or another. Hence, Tijerina in a sense represented a public historian by directly and indirectly bringing attention to the Chicano Generation of this legacy of an ancestral land. Chicanas/os realized their condition of “internal colonialism” as a colonized people due to the U.S.-Mexico War and the subsequent loss of their lands. Therefore, the Chicano movement was a struggle for decolonization and self-determination, contributing to a new state of a militancy.

Drawing from these inspirations provided by the farm workers and the land grant movement and by the leadership of César Chávez and Reies López Tijerina, the Chicano Generation in the cities began to organize and challenge their own particular circumstances. Historians consider the 1968 “Blowouts” in East Los Angeles to be the commencement of the urban Chicano movement (García 2011). In early March 1968 thousands of Chicana/o high school and middle school students engaged in a massive walkout of the East Los Angeles schools to protest decades of segregated and inferior education for them within the “Mexican schools.” A system of education had developed that largely produced student with limited education to replenish the cheap labor force that their immigrant parents constituted (Blanton 2014). The legacy of separate Mexican schools had persisted for several decades and was still alive and well in 1968, although no longer called Mexican schools but now labeled “inner-city schools.” However, the same pattern of mediocre education still characterized these schools throughout the Southwest. This included the tracking system that placed most Mexican Americans into vocational classes rather than college preparatory ones, high dropout rates, low reading scores, overcrowded classrooms and schools, punishment for speaking Spanish on the school grounds, lack of academic or college counselors, and worst of all teachers who had low expectations of their students (San Miguel 1987).

Such circumstances explain why the students engaged in what is perhaps the largest high school student strike in American history. They were led and inspired in this dramatic action

by a charismatic and committed teacher, Sal Castro. Castro and the students concluded that the only way to confront the conditions in the schools was by a strike. Efforts to meet with school administrators and the school board were fruitless or rebuffed. Consequently, for a week in March 1968 perhaps as many as 20,000 students walked out of their schools. The urban Chicano movement had erupted. The Blowouts forced the Los Angeles school board to begin a process of reforms that would not have occurred without the walkouts. The Blowouts also revealed an important aspect of the Chicano movement aimed at empowering the Chicano Generation. Using direct action strategies, such as the walkouts, marches, and mass rallies, they soon realized how much power they possessed by taking to the streets. This was people power. It was Chicano Power! Chicanas/os changed from feeling inferior, weak, and marginalized to feeling that they could change the world or at least their world (García 2011).

The heyday of the Chicano movement was between 1965 (the start of the farm workers grape strike) and 1975 (the end of the Vietnam War). During this period and led by the new Chicano Generation, the movement began to address social issues in the urban areas. Following up on the Blowouts (other walkouts occurred throughout the Southwest), Chicana/o students in colleges and universities began to demand not only more recruitments of Chicanas/os, but also Chicano Studies programs. These resulted from the movement and many programs and departments sprang up in California and other Southwestern campuses. This also influenced the recruitment of Chicanas/os into doctoral programs that created the first significant cohort of Chicana/o professional intellectuals in American history, humanities, or social sciences (Gándara 1982, 1999). One of the impetuses for Chicano Studies came from the historic 1969 *Plan de Santa Bárbara*, a manifesto blueprint drawn up at a statewide meeting of Chicana/o students, faculty, and staff at the University of California, Santa Barbara, which called for the formation of Chicano Studies at all campuses (Muñoz 1989). It also called for the unification of Chicano student groups into a new state and regional organization to be called MEChA or *Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán* (Chicano Student Movement of Aztlán) (Muñoz 1989).

Besides education, the movement focused on various other political issues, including the Vietnam War (Oropeza 2005). The United States' unfortunate intervention in South Vietnam during that country's civil war regrettably led to the draft of thousands of American military combat soldiers. Thousands of Chicanos were drafted and the only way to avoid the draft was to continue one's education, namely college. Due to the nature of the inner-city schools, many Chicanos were not encouraged to go to college and, in fact, many dropped out from high school. This created a large pool of draft-eligible young Chicano men, many of whom were sent to Vietnam. It is estimated that some 300,000 Chicanos fought in the war, at that time proving to be the longest war in U.S. history. Many Chicanos opposed the war and became involved in anti-draft movements, such as Rosalío Muñoz, whose story is part of the Chicano Generation (García 2015). Muñoz, after graduating from UCLA, was called up for the draft. However, he refused to be inducted and in a public display of opposition to the draft accused the U.S. government of "genocide" against Chicanos for the disproportionate number of Chicanos being drafted. In what became known as the Guzmán report, Ralph Guzmán, a political scientist at California State University, Los Angeles, researched draft records for the Southwestern states and discovered that while Chicanos represented 10% of the region's population, they represented almost 20% of the casualties in the war (Guzmán 1970).

A number of Chicana/o activists realized that the best way to oppose the draft was to oppose the war itself. Led by Rosalío Muñoz, Chicanas/os organized a National Chicano Anti-War Moratorium Committee to protest the war and call to its end. It organized protests throughout the Southwest highlighted by the National Chicano Anti-War Moratorium on 29 August 1970 in East Los Angeles, where some 20,000, mostly Chicanas/os, marched against the war. It was

the largest protest during the Chicano movement and against the war by any minority group in the country. But what turned out to be the apex of the movement also turned into a nightmare when hundreds of Los Angeles County sheriffs and police attacked the demonstrators at Laguna Park (now Rubén Salazar Park). What had been a non-violent demonstration comprised of young Chicanas/os and also older people and their families soon turned into a police riot. Chaos ensued and three Chicanos were killed. One was Rubén Salazar, the most prominent Mexican American journalist of his time. The police attack injured the movement, but did not stop its continued opposition to the war. The attack also led to protest against police violence.

Consequently, the Chicano Generation expressed disillusionment against the two-party system that it believed did not work for the interest of Chicanas/os and other minorities. The movement then created its own independent political party, La Raza Unida Party (United People's Party), and ran candidates in elections throughout the Southwest. It held its first and only national convention in El Paso, Texas over Labor Day in 1972. However, due to internal disagreements and conflicts, plus the difficulties in any third party taking on the dominant political system, La Raza Unida ceased to function by the late 1970s (I. García 1989).

Immigration also became a major issue for the movement as the late 1960s and the 1970s saw an increase in undocumented immigration from Mexico and mass deportation efforts. The movement helped to organize efforts to support the immigrants and to organize them for their own protection. Key to this leadership was La Hermandad Mexicana Nacional (The National Mexican Brotherhood) in Los Angeles led by older, but progressive, community leader Bert Corona (García 1994). Chicanas, the women of the Chicano Generation, also played very active roles even though they faced gender discrimination and sexism within the movement. Consequently, they organized Chicana organizations within the movement to advance the interests of female activists. The roots of Chicana feminism manifested itself through their groups, conferences, and publications. They played key leadership roles on many campuses and organizations but often had to fight for equality between men and women (A. García 1997). Chicana and Chicano artists likewise found a place and an inspiration within the movement. We soon saw a flourishing of Chicana/o art including mural art, poster art, poetry, fiction, essays, and journalism in what came to be called the Chicano Renaissance. Movement artists placed their art at the service of the movement to help build a political conscience without sacrificing their artistic imaginations (Griswold del Castillo, McKenna & Yarbro-Bejarano 1991). All of these manifestations, especially in a variety of locations, together represented a dynamic period in the history of Chicanas/os.

The movement laid the basis for today's Latina/o political power. Although it considered itself revolutionary, in fact it created many reforms that opened and widened new opportunities for Chicanas/os and other Latinas/os in the United States in education, professional occupations, politics, the media, and business. It helped to create a new middle class of Chicana/o professionals that has continued to grow (Vallejo 2012). This, combined with an increasing Chicana/o population through larger birthrates than other ethnic groups plus large-scale immigration from Mexico and Central America likewise made for the first time Chicanas/os and other Latinas/os into national political leaders.

It is challenging for historians to evaluate the post-Chicano movement since it is much closer to us and therefore more difficult to have a historical perspective. This period from the 1980s to today is characterized by the demographic increases, the expansion of a professional middle class, many more elected Latino political officials at all levels, a significant Latina/o cultural influence in American culture, and the greater spread and diversity of Latinas/os in all 50 states. More recently I have attempted to capture this period by expanding the generational model to include what I call the Latino Generation (García 2014b). This is the Millennial generation – Latina/o



style. Part of understanding this new historical generation is that Latinas/os, while still recognizing themselves as Chicana/o, Mexican, Salvadoran, Guatemalan, Puerto Rican, Cuban, etc., often articulate a pan-Latina/o identity that links their future and progress to other Latinas/os. This is greatly aided by new means of communications that bond Latina/o groups together, such as Spanish-language media, but even more importantly, social media. They are becoming Latinas/os at a national scale (García 2014b).

## Conclusion

It is difficult in a brief survey article to do justice to the lengthy and complex history of Chicanas/os. There are many kinds of Chicanas/os with their many stories. They represent both new and old generations. As a Chicano and American historian, I have attempted to provide an understanding of this fascinating history through a generational perspective that allows us to better perceive and analyze historical change both at a group and individual level. The approach might not be the best form of analysis, but it is a viable way to formulate the writing of Chicana/o history. While having worked over four decades on Chicana/o history, I hereby pay homage to the men and women, our families, who have made history – American history – through their blood, sweat, and tears. Chicana/o history is American history.

## Notes

- 1 Ethnic identifiers for people of Mexican descent that I use in this chapter vary depending on the historical era discussed. Ethnic identifiers are often political choices by individuals. As I indicate in *The Mexican American Generation*, “Mexican refers to a person who is either a U.S. citizen or a Mexican national; Mexican American refers specifically to a U.S. citizen of Mexican descent; *mexicano* refers to a Mexican national residing in the United States, and Anglo refers to a U.S. citizen of European descent” (García 1989, p. 2). Rubén Salazar in a *Los Angeles Times* article, “Who is a Chicano? And what is it that Chicanos want?” refers to Chicanos as a “Mexican American with a non-Anglo image of himself” (6 February 1970, p. B7) and notes that the term “Chicano” is a “barrio word” whose use is an “act of defiance.” García and numerous historians note that the term Chicano came into broader usage during the Chicano movement, where the term was reclaimed in much the same way as “Black” was by African Americans. The rise of a gender critique of masculinist politics within the Chicano movement led to more frequent use of the term “Chicana/o” when referring to both genders. The term “Hispano” is often used in New Mexico. Latina/o is a broader term that emerged in the later twentieth century to refer to people claiming descent from a country in the Latin American hemisphere. Hispanic is similar but also includes people claiming heritage from the Spanish peninsula.
- 2 For a critique of the masculinist politics of the Chicano movement, the powerful articulation of Chicana feminisms and the Chicana movement, the reader is referred to the chapter by Miroslava Chávez-García in this *Handbook*).

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