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Visions for the Suburban City in the Age of Decolonization: Chicana Activism in the Silicon Valley, 1965–75

Jeannette Alden Estruth

In the 1960s and 1970s, Chicana women organized to powerfully shape the future of what would become California's Silicon Valley. In the age of global decolonization, women of the Valley actively articulated their visions for the suburban city. They were both relentlessly local in their goals and, at the same time, powerfully inspired by and identified with Third World decolonization movements. This chapter will chronicle the visions of Silicon Valley's Chicana activists in the 1960s and the 1970s and examine the actions that organizers took in these rich years of political foment. It will then argue that these women's visions for the city embraced both the global political stage of Third World decolonization movements as well as California's suburban landscape as crucial sites of activism.¹

Foundational bodies of literature have established that Mexican Americans have been central to the life of the Silicon Valley for over three hundred years, that feminist spaces were central to the making of the Women's Liberation movement, that spatial concentration of people of color galvanized ethnic nationalist movements in the Bay Area in the 1960s and 1970s, and that social justice is deeply entwined with the urban environment for Chicanos in California.² This article will contribute to these studies by examining how Chicanas in the South Bay Area created spaces that were both antiracist and feminist by calling for increased community control of local suburban geographies, and how claims to these local spaces were made by mobilizing transnational and nationalist concepts of Chicano liberation and self-determination.

Chicanismo was an inherently transnational ethos, but its politics were enacted largely in place. Chicanos in the South Bay Area fused local spatial strategies with a transnational conception of liberation. Within these two interlocking, nested contexts, the smaller local scale became a proving ground for a larger, international scale that demonstrated that parallel sets of politics were possible in both contexts. As such, international ideological convictions animated a politics of pragmatism and feasibility on a local level. An urgency in the neighborhoods of the Eastside of San José interlocked with a sense of identity across the greater US Southwest, which interlocked

with solidarity with colonized women as far away as Vietnam and Cuba. In turn, that sense of transnational justice and power circled back to energize local organizing. The belief that things could change, and the imperative that they should, became part and parcel of the moment. A spatial conception of disenfranchisement, combined with a spatial concentration of power, animated Chicana activism in the California suburbs.

Transnational decolonization and local activism

California's Santa Clara Valley was in the midst of enormous economic, spatial, and demographic shifts in the 1960s and 1970s. The technology firms that would come to dominate the area's industry and reputation were beginning to grow and acquire property, workers, and power. At the same time, most residents of the region were still deeply linked to the Valley's agricultural economy and considered the area to be the environs of San José and the agricultural basin of the Santa Clara Valley. The future of the place as Silicon Valley was not yet a forgone conclusion.³

Chicana women's activism in the Santa Clara Valley at that time was highly localized in its tactics and demands. Injustices experienced in space were challenged spatially as well. Despite the highly localized and land-based nature of South Bay community activism, however, Chicana activists did not see their local struggles as geographically isolated. Rather, their local activism was transnational in nature by virtue of the United States' and Mexico's long shared history and territory, and by patterns of migration, labor relocation, language, and cultural practice. Like other radical movements in the United States at the time—such as the Black Power movement, Puerto Rican nationalism, and the more militant circles of the anti-Vietnam war movement—Chicana nationalists saw white racism and imperialist capitalism as global systems that created local problems.⁴ Thus, Chicana activists turned toward the local—the city, the schools, and the *barrio*—as both physical sites of struggle and sources of liberatory political power.

In the wake of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, Mexican American baby boomers were both inheriting and reimagining the Civil Rights legacy of the 1950s and the early 1960s. As the 60s wore on, young people began to identify with and support larger transnational ideologies of Chicano nationalism and the Black Power movement. Across the Southwest, the Chicano movement advocated for Mexican American political sovereignty, cultural recognition, and economic self-determination. The means of achieving this autonomy took many forms—political, social, and artistic. At its core, Chicano nationalism held that the shared history of the Mexican people bonded them to one another in experience, religion, and ancestry, and from their position as indigenous inheritors of the Americas, they strongly critiqued the United States' colonization of Mexico and the subjugation and exploitation of Mexicans. This, too, was tied to an understanding that American empire in general was a force to be fought against and condemned.

While a global claim to worldwide economic justice had been a liability for activists during the McCarthyism of the 1950s, when they had been targeted as communists, for a brief moment in the late 1960s the successes of decolonization movements around

the globe inspired a transnational claim to and belief in worldwide economic justice through various forms of nationalism. Many Chicana activists in the Santa Clara Valley identified as communists and supported the Soviet Union and socialist decolonization movements.⁵ Even activists who desired more moderate, liberal changes to US political structures still closely empathized with the Cuban revolution and dedicatedly followed news from Cuba and other revolutionary struggles in Central and South America. *Chicanismo* aligned the ideology and tactics of anti-imperial struggles in Cuba and other countries in South and Central America with the ideology and tactics of anti-oppression movements in the United States. It was an inherently transnational ideology: people of the Chicano movement self-identified as “Third World people,” colonized within the United States.

Central to the Chicano movement’s political formation was a conceptual map of North America that transcended the contemporary territorial boundaries between Mexico and the United States, underscoring a spatial understanding of colonizing power. Indeed, adopted at the 1969 National Chicano Liberation Youth Conference in Denver, Colorado, and widely circulated and rhetorically mobilized thereafter, the concept of *Aztlán* spatialized the geographic boundaries of the Chicano Nation. The transnational imaginary of *Aztlán* drew on local contexts of the Mexico-US border, while also creating a “third space” for Chicanos to occupy, conceptually and physically. *Aztlán* not only served as a reminder of the United States’ vast divestment of Mexican people’s land, but also reclaimed for Chicanos living in the greater US Southwest a physical core to their independent power and nationalist claims. This new geographic standard for thinking about territories and belonging heightened the movement’s spatial understanding of colonizing power.

In the Santa Clara Valley, many Chicanas placed their political struggles within this larger transnational colonial geography. In a San José speech attributed to Esther Perez and Rudy Coronado, most likely delivered in 1969, Perez declared “*Mexicanismo* knows no *fronteras*, civic, economic, or social. We are Mexicans first, there are no lines that divide us, and if our brothers suffer, we united can help those who know not how to defend themselves.”⁶ Such statements appeared frequently in Chicana pamphlets, newspapers, and speeches, and reveal the inherent transnationality of Chicano identity, an identity that both transcended borders and created new ones.

Indeed, these years saw the emergence of a defined Chicana political identity itself and the rise of explicitly “Chicana” activism in the Santa Clara Valley. In the early 1970s, the San José Chicana Caucus of *Mujeres de Aztlán* released a statement defining that “[t]here exists a triple exploitation, a triple degradation. Chicanas are exploited as women, as poor people, and as RAZA. Because of the nature of this oppression of *mujeres*, there lies within us a tremendous potential for commitment to serious struggle. Our participation, if all obstacles are eliminated, will accelerate and strengthen our struggle to the highest degree.”⁷ Chicana identity thus came to encompass an awareness of gendered, economic, and racist marginalization, but also a conception of power borne of that marginalization itself. By the late 1960s San José Chicana pamphlets declared with pride that “the Chicano revolution has brought about great changes in the Mexican American community and family structure. Women have stepped out of the kitchen and into the spotlight as spokesmen at

the various public meetings.”⁸ Within local branches of the Black Berets and La Raza Unida Party, Chicanas occupied positions of strategic and tactical power and respect, at times constituting fully 50 percent of leadership positions, and even greater numbers among the general membership. The issues taken on by these newly formed Chicano political associations reflected the conception that many of the instantiations of this injustice took place within the context of the physical urban environment. By entering public spaces and claiming political authority within them, Chicana activists implicitly made feminist claims by “stepping out of the kitchen” and into public life, and made anticolonial claims by fighting for public space for Chicano people.⁹

In the Santa Clara Valley, Chicana women mobilized the spatial rhetoric and philosophy of this transnational political movement to address their local concerns within physical urban space. Mexican American women's efforts demanded equality in housing and transportation, shaped urban and environmental policy, and sought community control of schools. In the South Bay Area, hundreds of powerful women like Sofía Mendoza and Ernestina García, and organizations like the Confederación de la Raza Unida, United People Arriba, the Chicana Coalition, the Mexican American Political Association, the Mujeres de Aztlán, and various neighborhood associations emerged to connect labor advocacy, Women's Liberation ideology, transnational Brown Power, and Catholic calls for social justice through activism that reshaped the very landscape of the city.¹⁰

Claiming rights to space

Chicanas of the South Bay Area saw rights to fair and affordable local housing as a struggle aligned with anti-oppression movements all over the globe. In 1973, the Tenants' Association of Story Apartments, a federal housing project that sat at the main intersection of San José's historically Mexican-American Eastside, went on a rent strike. The location of the apartments on the city's Eastside was highly symbolic. The Eastside's neighborhoods were christened with Spanish language nicknames, like *Sal Si Puedes*, or “Get out if you can.” The famed intersection of King and Story Roads, where the Story Apartments sat, was known for having housed César Chavez' family in the 1930s, and it had long been the heart of impromptu street parties and gatherings during Mexican holidays and Catholic holy days. The neighborhood's grocery stores were the first in the country to adopt the terms of the Delano Grape Strike, begun by Filipino agricultural workers but soon joined and led by Chavez' National Farm Workers Association (later the United Farm Workers) in 1965. Working within the context of this widely understood historical meaning, the Tenants' Association struck against rent increases and against the firing of the complex's well-loved superintendent. When announcing the strike, the Association placed printed bulletins around the complex that read: “Our struggle at Story Apartments (a federal housing project) is connected to all other struggles of poor and working people for justice in this country, especially Black and Chicano people. It is connected to the struggles of oppressed people all over

the world against the United States Government. And, no matter what the government says, most of these people (like the Vietnamese) are winning.”¹¹

Indeed, the Tenants at the Story Apartments did win, and on September 10, 1973, after two months of rent striking, they settled their strike. The Tenants’ Association made agreements for no increase in rents at all, for the termination of the management firm, and the rehiring of their super, a Mr. Lopez. In addition, they reached a settlement for \$65,000 from the owners of the complex and from the Department of Housing and Urban Development for improvements to the apartments. The Tenants’ Association also received a three-acre plot of land next to the complex to develop into a park.¹² Their determined strike, and the bulletin’s statement, clearly aligned the territorial struggles of Eastsiders, and their right to determine their living conditions, with the rights of Third World people “oppressed all over the world.”

Like those three acres of the Story Apartments, neighborhood associations also fought for physical changes to the city around them. In 1968, the Tropicana-Hillview Organization (THOU) successfully picketed San José City Hall to make demands for more traffic control infrastructure in their neighborhood.¹³ THOU’s work echoed earlier mobilizations of Mexican American Civil Rights groups, like the Community Service Organization (CSO), for physical resources in underserved neighborhoods. A decade before, the papers of the groundbreaking Latino civil rights group, the CSO, had documented that official neglect on the Eastside of San José was “everywhere in evidence . . . in the curbless, lightless roads and dirt sidewalks, and the absence of adequate facilities for medical care, housing and recreation.”¹⁴ In the last years of the 1950s, the CSO successfully pushed city officials to install streetlights throughout some underserved neighborhoods and constantly petitioned for paved roads, improved drainage, and the furnishing of sidewalks to the Eastside.¹⁵

The Tropicana-Hillview neighborhood was a relatively new housing tract where a small African American population lived alongside a Mexican American and Anglo community. Up to 30 percent of residents of this neighborhood were African American and Hispanic.¹⁶ It was a largely lower-income tract, in which about 15 percent of the families received Dependent Aid assistance (AFDC). The neighborhood’s largest intersections were unsafe for pedestrians, so THOU joined forces with Black Parents United, a South Bay family advocacy group, and Jack Ybarra, a longtime Mexican American community organizer. THOU demanded an audience with city officials, and soon after picketed city buildings. In response, the city installed a stop sign, a stop light, crosswalks, and traffic islands. This made streets safer for public transit, students, the elderly, and other pedestrians. By wresting greater control over cars, and thereby securing more safety for people who could not afford them, this infrastructural step physically expressed the neighborhood’s united vision for a more community-controlled, egalitarian, and accessible suburban city.

For neighborhood leader, school organizer, and United People Arriba founder Sofía Mendoza, urging Chicanas to take steps to shape their own local urban spaces was crucial to learning about their own potential political power. In this way, the self-determination of a people over territory—a foundational tenet of nationalism—became applied to localized urban space, and the political lessons learned in space lent

credibility and credence to the wider promise and efficacy of Chicano nationalism. Mendoza recalled later:

We took people down to City Hall and we would say that these are the people that you know, are responsible for what's going on that corner. These are the people who represent you, and [Chicanas] didn't know who their representatives were . . . And we said that these people are responsible for all the holes in the street and the lack of lights and bad garbage services and the people were really angry about all that stuff and the bad services. So boy [the people] were happy, they were anxious to go to the City Council meeting, and so we got our stop light there and after we got our stop light, see, we started talking to people and kept saying see how powerful you really are you know. If you really organize, you have a voice, and they can hear. And that's how you bring about all those changes.¹⁷

National power in a colonial city

Rights to space were seen not only as affordable rents, self-controlled housing, and safer streets, but also read within the spatial logic of the colonized suburb. In 1968, an independent newspaper described "East San Jose [as] a chaotic mosaic of prewar homes and recently built cheap housing tracts, decorated with drive-in movies and hot dog stands. This 'slurb'—suburban slum—began to develop after the war, when new people and industries moved into a formerly stable Mexican-American barrio."¹⁸ In this formulation, "industries," meaning the technology industry, referenced the several recently constructed computer hardware factories in South San José, like Fairchild Camera and Instrument Group, later Intel, and International Business Machines (IBM).¹⁹ As young Chicanos saw it, the technology industry had displaced and disrupted a formerly calm, peaceful barrio as a spatial location of concentrated Third World power and stability.²⁰

This description of a "suburban slum" also points to a particular vision of the city held by "East San Jose's increasingly alienated young Mexicans."²¹ The word "slurb" described an impoverished community ensconced within suburban physical architecture. Taking a spatial form—the suburb—that was typically associated with upward economic mobility, a high level of material consumption, and exclusion of nonwhite residents, youth of the era renamed the suburb a "slurb" in order to more accurately reflect the neighborhood's poverty and collective experience with systemic racism. In doing so, they both rejected a pat and marginalizing definition that only served to obscure their lived reality and highlighted the ways in which urban space was organized to instantiate racial inequality in the city. The "slurb," here in rhetorical contrast to the *barrio*, was a geographic logic meant to separate community members from each other and to isolate Chicanos from resources like good schools, good roads, and good jobs, while at the same time placing them closer to polluting blights like heavy industry. Indeed, in their case, they blamed the technology industry itself for creating the "slurb." The Chicano movement saw the segregated city as a colonial product, while at the same time the

movement had a vision of a better suburban city—the stable, just, unified Mexican American *barrio*.

For Chicanas, the burgeoning high-technology electronics industry in the South Bay area in the late 1960s and early 1970s effected profound shifts in the city and in their lives. For all the wealth being produced by new technology companies, Chicanos were excluded from this growth and restricted to the lowest-paying assembly and service jobs. The explosion of the technology sector combined with the rapid suburbanization of the Santa Clara Valley created a city in which large electronics and housing development firms rapidly purchased land for white-collar business parks and industrial and residential purposes. This influx of wealth quite literally undermined the abilities of Chicano people to pay rising rents and disrupted a long-standing and hard-earned social fabric. In turn, Chicanas resisted the emerging power of the tech industry through a particular spatial oppositional advocacy politics.

At this time, the technology industry was inflicting two major changes on the historically Mexican American Eastside. First, it was accumulating property in the foothills surrounding the Eastside to develop into corporate parks and industrial plants. The jobs that the technology industry created on the Eastside were replacing sporadically unionized jobs in the fruit packing and railroad industries with low-paying, nonunionized, dangerous electronics jobs. These corporations often hired only women for the extremely detail-oriented work, making “the East Side a ‘female ghetto’ in the eyes of some observers.”²² On both the local and transnational level, the Chicano rights movement shared the explicitly anticapitalist conviction of many global decolonization movements. Jorge T. Acevedo, former executive director of the Economic Opportunity Commission of Santa Clara County, was quoted as saying that “The waste of resources in the Mexican-American community is due, in great part, to industry. In some cases the corporate leaders simply neglect the Mexican-American community; in other cases we are victims of deliberate serfdom. In any case, we are taken as a matter of course; we are thought of as part of the scenery in the southwest, like the cactus plant.”²³

The *Midpeninsula Observer* took this to mean that Acevedo understood “industry” as the military and scientific companies based out of Stanford University, north of San Jose.²⁴ Known for not hiring minority workers, Stanford and its resident technology sector was implicated in the “deliberate serfdom,” “neglect,” and “waste” of the local Mexican American community. The invocation of “the scenery in the Southwest” further aligned Bay Area Chicanos with Chicanos all over Aztlán. And indeed, Stanford’s supply of engineering and weapons expertise to the US military during the Vietnam War further animated the critique that the university was a transnational colonizing force. South Bay Chicanas and other students up and down the Valley supported the mass movement for Stanford University’s divestment from war industries on the grounds of supporting self-determination for the people of Southeast Asia, while at the same time condemning Stanford for not hiring minority workers local to the Bay Area.²⁵ Thus, the critique that institutions like Stanford were racist and colonial both at home and abroad strengthened transnational critiques of the war, as well as local activism opposed to such colonization.

Chicana activists imagined several direct correctives to this internal colonization of the city's Eastside neighborhoods. As early as 1969, Chicano activists had identified San José city government's urban policies as disadvantageous to the Mexican American community. That year, activist Sal Alvarez told an audience at a symposium at West Valley College, located in the ethnically white suburbs on the other side of the Valley, that "Mexicans in San Jose got cheated out of land under urban renewal."²⁶ Around 1971, La Confederación de la Raza Unida, headed by president and Chicana activist Ernestina García, formally proposed policy steps to halt or reverse some of the damage done under the urban renewal of the 1950s and the 1960s. The women of La Raza Unida opposed a study "conducted by the Association of Bay Area Governments and the Metropolitan Transportation Committee because . . . the study proposed accelerated and increased urbanization of the south county without taking into consideration the displacement of the poor and minority people living there, as well as assessing the economic and environmental need for preserving prime agricultural land and open space."²⁷ Instead, the women of La Raza Unida suggested a great number of equalizing urban policies. These included land-banking for affordable housing, running express buses twenty-four hours a day on major traffic corridors, creating an extensive bikeway system, furnishing dial-a-ride service for senior citizens and the physically handicapped, upgrading and extending commuter rail service, prioritizing a local light rail system, increasing gasoline taxes, and halting expansion of freeways or major arterial highways other than for conversion into public transit or bikeway use.²⁸ These land use proposals embraced the suburban landscape as a place in which historic disinvestment and environmental racism could be ameliorated by advocating for more racially and socioeconomically equal systems of housing and transit.

Liberation in education

In addition to fights for housing and access to space, local activists also made serious demands for educational representation and equality in the suburban city. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Chicano nationalists all around the US Southwest demanded the hiring of Chicano teachers and administrators, Spanish language instruction, equal access to education, campus cultural centers, Chicano history instruction, cessation of discrimination against Chicano students in class placement, an end to physical punishment, and financial assistance with college. In large part, their demands were about creating cultural space and visibility for Chicano students through linguistic appreciation and institutional resources and leadership. This focus on history, culture, and language grew out of the understanding that Anglo American nationalism had been based in the domination of Mexican American and Chicano people and land. Moreover, US state education reflected the purposeful erasure of Chicano history and language and violence toward Chicano culture and territory. In restitution, Chicano nationalism advocated for respect, rights, and representation.

In California, the most widely used tactic for succeeding in these demands was the walkout. The tactic of collectively walking out of school classrooms *en masse* at an

agreed-upon time was employed by a Chicana mother of San José junior high school students who saw her children being denied a quality education.²⁹ Sofia Mendoza was raised in Campbell, California, at the time a small farming town bordering San José. She grew up under the tutelage of her father, a union organizer, and continued to draw inspiration from Cuba and the Cuban Revolution throughout her life, making annual trips there with her family well into her sixties. She would go on to head the United People Arriba and the influential anti-police brutality organization, the Community Alert Patrol.³⁰

In 1967 the mother of four began a string of walkouts that would reverberate across the Bay Area and eventually throughout California. Mendoza confronted racist violence in her children's San José public schools with a spatial tactic that would become a hallmark of the Chicano movement.³¹ One of her mentees, activist Karl Sotero, fondly remembered that she "became involved in the events at Roosevelt Junior High School, where the kids were being called names and were being disciplined with paddles. They were being harassed and made to feel like they weren't/shouldn't be in school. Being called 'retards' and things of that nature." In response to these outrages, Mendoza "lead [*sic*] the first student walk-outs out of Roosevelt Junior High School. Out of that process, the very first two Chicano teachers in East San José were hired."³² In July 1968 the Tropicana-Hillview Organization United, a neighborhood group representing primarily Mexican American residents, also organized a large walkout of a local high school that ultimately resulted in the appointment of a Chicano principal.³³ This spatial tactic, which used the evacuation of a physical, suburban landscape to assert political power, proved widely effective. Through mass refusal to share a space in which their needs were not being respected nor met, Chicana spatial tactics in the South Bay Area showed that physical spaces and self-determination over them were central to the movement.

Inspired by Mendoza in San José and a wave of school walkouts in Los Angeles, the year 1968 saw walkouts at the university level as well. In June of that year, the Mexican American Student Confederation (MASC) of San José State University, backed by the official support of the United Farmworkers, staged a "stalk-out" of the University's Commencement ceremonies to demand a mandatory, school-wide Chicano Studies Curriculum. Earlier, MASC had presented several demands to the administration of San José State, threatening a walkout during the commencement ceremonies if those failed to be met. They demanded that undergraduates be required to take a Liberation Workshop on Chicano Culture in order to graduate, that prominent local Chicano experts be hired to conduct workshops, that the San José State President and all department heads attend Chicano history workshops, and that a Chicano Cultural Center be established on campus by fall of that year.³⁴ MASC and other critics took particular issue with the fact that the university had not sufficiently prepared people who worked with students most often—"teachers, social workers, policemen [*sic*], counselors, journalists, [and] social scientists"—in Chicano cultural fluency. These "experts" had a great deal of control over the lives of Mexican American students, they argued, but the US higher education system only "perpetuate[d] the myths and misinformation which insure[d] a second-class citizenship status for Chicanos."³⁵ In this way, Chicano students saw themselves as butting up against a hostile colonial state,

one in which all authority was constructed not only to exclude people of color, but constituted *by* excluding people of color.

The "stalk-out" garnered wide support from across the South Bay community. It was "actively supported by Cesar Chavez and by the Black Student Union of San Jose State and its advisor Harry Edwards."³⁶ Another supporter of the walkout was Luis Valdez, a graduate of San José State and the director of the groundbreaking Chicano traveling theater troupe El Teatro Campesino. Valdez accused San José State and other educational institutions of perpetuating cultural genocide.³⁷ The Associated Students of San José State, the student body's government and a largely Anglo organization, also endorsed all of the stalk-out's demands except for the cancellation of commencement ceremonies.³⁸ In their demands, Chicano students had made a critique of structural, racist inequality within the higher education system and understood the local suburban university as a site for resistance to globally experienced cultural and physical erasure.

To a large extent the university "stalk-out" worked. To this day San José State maintains the tradition of a Chicano graduation ceremony. The University founded a Chicano Cultural Center on campus, albeit in the 1980s. San José State would later have the first graduate program in Chicano Studies in the nation. Most importantly, at the time, the students' conviction proved contagious: on December 13, 1969 the Third World Liberation Front held a rally with similar demands at the College of San Mateo, a community college about 35 miles north of San José.³⁹ In this moment, students upheld the importance of an education that represented them, that taught them curricula that valued the transnational history of Chicano people, and that made physical, designated space for students of color. The goals and momentum of school walkouts continued when, in March of 1968, the Black Berets and other high school students boycotted the busing system of the Eastside Union High School District.

Buses were stark representations of the spatial inequities of the South Bay's education systems and the geographies of suburban racial segregation. The city used busing as a stop-gap solution for integrating Anglo and Mexican American schools and for relieving overcrowded classrooms at underfunded, predominantly Chicano high schools. This approach to school integration depended on busing students over long distances at early hours, cutting into teenagers' sleep, and daily removing them from their residential neighborhoods. In this instance, many students of color had to rise around dawn to be bused from their homes to their schools because those same buses made their "regular" runs to pick up the mostly Anglo students, who lived closer to school, after the Eastside students had already been dropped off on campus.

One morning in March 1968, thirty-two students in the Alum Rock neighborhood of San José's Eastside, who were usually bused to a more affluent high school, purposefully missed their bus. Instead, they walked the long way to school together, and when they arrived, their principal suspended them and called the police. Nonetheless, when their neighborhood mounted fierce opposition, the school board's lawyers were forced to sit down with the students' parents, who successfully pressured the district into purchasing a new seventy-passenger school bus. The brave students were eventually readmitted to school without penalty.⁴⁰ Chicano students had not only boycotted a system that instantiated their inequality in space, but they also highlighted that system as a meager, insufficient, and racist attempt to simply move children between schools

instead of restructuring the systems that segregated the schools to begin with. And they had won. Their tactics had revealed that suburbia presented an unequal landscape, but also that Chicano nationalism could present resistance to that reality by engaging with that landscape itself.

In addition to curricular representation and equal access across suburban space, Chicana students struck for just treatment inside school walls. Just a month after the Alum Rock walkout, the students of the Tropicana-Hillview neighborhood's Overfelt High School marched to protest conditions in their school. Over 400 students staged a walkout of school over the foods served in the vending machines, which had maggots, ants, and hair in the food. The vending machines were students' only option for buying lunch because the school entirely lacked a cafeteria, illustrating the shabby conditions of the school at large and the inattention paid even to students' most basic physical needs.⁴¹ When the students made a near-universal turnout for better food access, the high school administration retaliated by immediately suspending all 400 students.⁴² Though the walkout for food justice ultimately did not win students' demands, their numbers reveal a striking level of politicization of Chicano students at this time, and a notable commitment to community control and bodily self-determination.

Gender through generations

By focusing on women's actions within the Chicano movement, family and community emerge as critical vectors for consolidating identities and fostering successful intergenerational organizing within the movement. From knowledge of union tactics passed down through generations, to THOU's alliance with Black Parents United, to the mothers of the Eastside supporting their children's bus boycott against the San José School District's lawyers, parents repeatedly inspired and supported their children's protests in these instances of organizing around neighborhoods and schools. Filmmaker Karl Sotero highlights the centrality of the inherited wisdom, increased economic opportunity, and the transmission of institutional knowledge between the baby boomers and their parents.

The groundwork was laid by the activists in the 50s, that was the blueprint, the template. Activists in the 60s took it from there and expanded into areas such as hiring in San José, and in Santa Clara County, in terms of getting a bigger student population at San José State. For example, I know in the early 50s, there was perhaps 10, 20 students of Mexican descent or Latino descent on campus at San José State, by the late 60s, early 70s, there was approximately 1,000 or 1,200 Chicano or Latino students on campus because of the EOP [Educational Opportunity] program. This was part of the outcome of the efforts these people made in the 50s who laid down the ground work ... So the 60s and the 70s were even more dynamic than the 50s because at the same time, people had to work in the 50s, and also had their family lives, and also doing these community activities, so you can imagine, by the late 50s early 60s, there was burnout. So the next generation comes up in the mid, late,

60s, the children of these people, who were able to take advantage of the fact that for example, they didn't have to live the migrant lifestyle and follow the crops. They were able to settle down with their families, get middle-class jobs, and go to school. And so the lessons that that next generation learned, they were able to apply and to refine these skills and tactics to make sure that their civil rights were protected.⁴³

Other observations support the conjecture that one of the keys to the movement's success on a local level was the strong intergenerational ties fostered between parents, children, and families. In the late 1960s, seasoned Mexican-American activist Jorge T. Acevedo stated that "support for the Chicano student movement is unequivocal: 'The student movement is the apex of the Mexican-American community; it is a sign that the community has come of age.'" ⁴⁴ Indeed, the newspaper said that the younger generation returned the admiration: "The respect is mutual; Acevedo is highly regarded by members of the Mexican-American Student Confederation at San Jose State."⁴⁵ This intergenerational strategizing, admiration, and mutual support must necessarily enrich how historians have chronicled the Chicana Baby Boomers' opinions of their parents' politics and successes.

Conclusion

In closing, South Bay Area Chicana politics encompassed a holistic vision of social justice that combined a critique of racism, sexism, and poverty with spatial prescriptions for change. From neighborhood infrastructure drives, to demands for community control of education, to struggles for equal access to dignified homes and transportation through the spaces of the city, from Northern California to Northern Mexico, Chicana activism in the South Bay Area continuously and simultaneously addressed local issues animated by the transnational discourse of Chicano nationalism. Chicana activists mobilized this global rhetoric to bring political pressure to bear locally, calling for worldwide racial and economic equality expressed in specific suburban issues. Their actions point to the importance of maintaining holistic goals and drawing strength from global imaginaries in order to produce a more socially just future on a local level. In doing so, they add to our understanding of the 1960s and 1970s not just as a moment in which identity struggles came to the political fore, but in which those identities were put in service in the anticolonial fight for economic and social justice. Out of local Chicanas' contributions to transnational discourse, the region that would become the Silicon Valley would publicly adopt larger visions of global community, an emphasis on self-determination, and a deep valuation of human freedom and liberation. Through their greater sense of worldwide purpose, Chicana political actors shaped not only the history of California cities, but their own fates as well.

Notes

- 1 I would like to thank Ian Baldwin, Elizabeth Banks, Thomas Bender, Maria Cotera, Joshua Fattal, Johanna Fernandez, Andrew Friedman, Joan Flores, Linda Gordon,

- Dylan Gottlieb, Barbara Molony, Alaina Morgan, Andrew Needham, Jennifer Nelson, Guy Ortolano, Lana Povitz, Stuart Schrader, and Matthew Shutzer for early suggestions for this article.
- 2 Stephen J. Pitti, *The Devil in Silicon Valley: Northern California, Race, and Mexican Americans* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); Anne Enke, *Finding the Movement: Sexuality, Contested Space, and Feminist Activism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); and Laura Pulido, *Environmentalism and Economic Justice: Two Chicano Struggles in the Southwest*, (Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press, 1996).
 - 3 The South Bay, the Santa Clara Valley, the Silicon Valley, and the county of Santa Clara all describe a similar geographical space, but each can denote a very different political, temporal, or imagined space. All, however, refer to the land and population that sit at the southern end of the San Francisco Bay, cradled between the foothills of the Santa Cruz and Diablo Mountain Ranges in Northern California. This article uses all terms relatively interchangeably.
 - 4 The terms “Chicano” and “Chicana” are political identifiers most often used by people of Mexican descent in the United States. As the historical actors discussed here most often described themselves as Chicanos and Chicanas, I follow them in their use of that terminology. According to Ramon Macias’ article, “Evolution of the Mind and a Plan for Political Action,” a Chicana consciousness is often anchored in a “self-determination, priority of personal commitment to La Raza, seeking of basic institutional change, and a sense of urgency and immediacy in bringing about this change.” Alma García, *Chicana Feminist Thought: The Basic Historical Writings* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1997), 65.
 - 5 Indeed, prominent San José activist Sofía Mendoza pushed for reforms to the US education system and literacy rate on the Cuban model, and began visiting Cuba in the late 1960s, continuing annual visits with her family until she reached old age. The oral history of Sofia Mendoza. Box 5, Folder 25, p. 24, 1988–90; Chicano Oral History Collection (hereafter COHC), Archives and Special Collections, San José State University, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library, and Sofia Mendoza, Memorial Service Speeches, Sunday, May 17, 2015, Mexican Heritage Plaza, San José, California.
 - 6 Speech by Rudy Coronado and Esther Perez, estimated 1971, Box 4, Folder 12, COHC. The original text read, “El Mexicanismo nó conoce fronteras, estatales, cívicas económicas or sociáles, somos Mexicanos primero no hay líneas que nos divider, y si nuestros hermanos sufren nostros unidos podremos ayudar a los que nó saben defenderse.” (Spelling errors occur in the original text.)
 - 7 Chicana Caucus of Mujeres de Aztlán to la Confederación de la Raza Unida, date estimated 1970 or 1971, Box 4, Folder 11, COHC. Language very similar to this appeared in the Party Platform on Chicanas of the La Raza Unida Party of Northern California in 1971. It is possible that this language was written by the San José Mujeres de Aztlán and made its way into the Party Platform, or that this language was adopted from the general Northern California Party Platform into the Caucus’ memo. The Party Platform on Chicanas was found in *El Grito del Norte* 4, 4/5 (1971); J-K in García, *Chicana Feminist Thought*.
 - 8 Linda Peralta Aguilar, “Unequal Opportunity and the Chicana,” date estimated 1970 or 1971, Box 4, COHC.
 - 9 As of August 1975, Chicanas comprised “close to 50% of La Raza Unida Party leadership. At the National Convention of the eighteen states participating, six were

- led by women." Quoted from *La Comunidad* (August 1975), 5–6, as it appeared in García, *Chicana Feminist Thought*, 180.
- 10 Mendoza estimated that membership in these organizations each numbered in the "hundreds." Oral history of Sofia Mendoza. Box 5, Folder 25, p. 30, 1988–90, COHC.
 - 11 "Tenants Win at Story Apartments," *Sedition*, September 19, 1973, Volume 2, Number 1/2–7/8, Roll 143–5, Library of Congress Underground Newspaper Collection, Washington, DC.
 - 12 Ibid. Annelise Orleck, *The War on Poverty: A New Grassroots History, 1964–1980* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press), 2011.
 - 13 "New S. J. Militant Group Faces Struggles," *Midpeninsula Observer*, June 3–17, 1968, Roll 12–12, Library of Congress Underground Newspaper Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.
 - 14 Pitti, *The Devil in Silicon Valley*, 163. One estimate in 1968 placed the number of Mexican Americans at 12 percent of the county's population.
 - 15 "We're All In This Together," *San Jose Mercury News*, June 5, 1957.
 - 16 A Census Tract Map from the 1970 census listed this neighborhood as having between an 11.6 and 30 percent minority population. Census of Population and Housing, "Map 18: Minority Population," 1970 Census Tracts, Report PHC(1)-190. San Jose, California. SMSA, Tables P-1, P-2; Second Count Summary Tape, From "Profile '70: A Socio-Economic Data Book for Santa Clara County," Library of Congress, Washington, DC, Geography and Maps Division.
 - 17 Mendoza places this event as having happened after the Roosevelt School Walkout. She estimates that United People Arriba had around 130 members. Oral history of Sofia Mendoza. Box 5, Folder 25, p. 66, 1988–90, COHC.
 - 18 "Deep Unrest at S. J. Schools," *Midpeninsula Observer*, April 22–May 6, 1968, Volume 1, Number 17–21, Roll 12–12, Underground Newspapers Collection, Washington, DC.
 - 19 Later, Fairchild Camera and Instrument would be renamed Fairchild Semiconductor.
 - 20 Here I am referencing the arguments of Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).
 - 21 "Deep Unrest at S. J. Schools," *Midpeninsula Observer*, April 22–May 6, 1968, Volume 1, Number 17–21, Roll 12–12, Library of Congress Underground Newspapers Collection, Washington, DC.
 - 22 Pitti, *The Devil in Silicon Valley*, 177.
 - 23 Bob Coats, "Chicanos on the Move," *Midpeninsula Observer*, February 26–March 5, 1969, 7, Volume 2, Number 15–29, Roll 23–4, Library of Congress Underground Newspapers Collection, Washington, DC.
 - 24 Ibid.
 - 25 "No Minority Hiring Scandal at SRI Building," *Midpeninsula Observer*, July 1–July 15, 1968, Volume 2, Number 1–3, Roll 12–12, Library of Congress Underground Newspapers Collection, Washington, DC.
 - 26 David Naguib and Lisa Sun-Hee Park, *The Silicon Valley of Dreams: Environmental Injustice, Immigrant Workers, and the High-Tech Global Economy* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2002), 63.
 - 27 La Confederación de la Raza Unida Newsletter, estimated 1971, Box 4, Folder 9, COHC.
 - 28 Ibid. These suggestions—for urban plans like better light rail and extensive bike path—were not implemented by local governments when they were initially

suggested here in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Rather, the City of San José and other municipalities in the area would implement them about twenty or twenty-five years later under pressure from environmentalists.

- 29 Here I refer to the walkout as a school reform tactic, not as a tactic used by labor unions and workers to slow production or protest wages and working conditions, which has a long-standing history.
- 30 Oral history of Sofia Mendoza, Box 5, Folder 25, p. 30, 1988–90, COHC.
- 31 Oral history of Sofia Mendoza, Box 5, Folder 25, 1988–90, COHC.
- 32 Karl Sotero, “Story Corps Interview,” 12:00–13:05, Library of Congress American Folklife Center, CD.
- 33 Arturo Villareal, “Black Berets for Justice,” Master’s thesis, San José State University, 1991, 2. High school actions were often organized by militant youth organizations like the Black Berets, and also tended to bring in intergenerational family support and neighborhood support. The Black Berets modeled themselves in structure and style on the Black Panthers, but identified themselves as a cultural, political, and social club as opposed to a political party. San José’s chapter of the Black Berets was the first of its kind in the nation, and as a social network, built broad coalitions with other South Bay Chicano groups like Sofia Mendoza’s United People Arriba to do wider work in schools and in the community. Other Chicano nationalist groups of the era, many of whom similarly donned dark-colored berets in the style of Che Guevara, were also known as Brown Berets in other parts of California and around the country. I use the term Black Berets to refer to the groups that were most active in the Santa Clara Valley during this period, because scholar and specialist Arturo Villareal does so in his seminal ethnography and collections of interviews with these South Bay activists, all of whom refer to themselves as such.
- 34 The “Chicano experts” that the students suggested to conduct these workshops included Sofia Mendoza, head of United People Arriba of East San José, Dave Santos of the Brown Berets, Corky Gonzales of the Crusades for Justice in Denver, and César Chavez.
- 35 “Chicanos Plan ‘Stalk-Out,’” *Midpeninsula Observer*, June 3–17, 1968, Roll 12–12, Library of Congress Underground Newspapers Collection, Washington, DC.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 “Hoover Interviewed,” *Midpeninsula Observer*, January 6–13, 1969, Volume 2, Number 15–29, Roll 23–4, Library of Congress Underground Newspapers Collection, Washington, DC; and Arturo Villareal, “Black Berets for Justice,” Master’s thesis, San José State University, 1991, Paper 174, 2.
- 40 “Deep Unrest at S. J. Schools,” *Midpeninsula Observer*, April 22–May 6, 1968, Library of Congress Underground Newspapers Collection, Washington, DC.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 Karl Sotero, “Story Corps Interview,” 16:35, Library of Congress American Folklife Center, CD.
- 44 “Chicanos on the Move,” *Peninsula Observer*, February 26–March 5, 1969, Volume 2, Number 15–29, Roll 23–4, Library of Congress Underground Newspaper Collection, Washington, DC.
- 45 Ibid.