2

THE OTHER MINORITY

From my perspective, community describes not a static, place-based social collective but a power-laden field of social relations whose meanings, structures, and frontiers are continually produced, contested, and reworked in relation to a complex range of sociopolitical attachments and antagonisms.
Steven Gregory, *Black Corona*

Fruitvale's grassroots-level mobilizations did not happen in a vacuum. Much of this activism had its roots in post–World War II organizing throughout the United States. In California, this activism blurred the boundaries between the urban and the rural—bringing the farmworker movements taking shape in rural areas of the Central Valley into intimate relationships with cities such as Oakland, San Francisco, and Berkeley. It also put different movements and racial groups into deeper conversations with one another. Mexican American leaders, for example, worked alongside civil rights struggles spearheaded by African Americans. They sought to show that as a minority group in the United States, Mexican Americans were equally worthy of civil rights and poverty alleviation programs.

These various encounters also fortified relationships between social movement activists and a newly constructed federal machinery for poverty alleviation that coalesced by the early 1960s as the War on Poverty. These complex and contested relationships transformed many social movement projects of neighborhood improvement into formalized 501(c)(3) nonprofit

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organizations. Through this institutionalization process, movement services and programming became even more rooted in place. In fact, funding was predicated on meeting the local needs of a particular community.

Federal poverty alleviation innovations in the 1960s transformed the state's relationship to urban communities and their respective social movements. On one hand, this intervention can be seen as state and philanthropic attempts to quell urban unrest and pacify movements. Scholars have shown that this new programmatic focus on urban issues also helped to pathologize urban youths and justify greater policing of the inner city.[1] At the same time, this historical process created the architecture of race-based nonprofit organizations like the Unity Council, Clínica de la Raza, and Centro Legal de la Raza. Many formerly grassroots organizing endeavors became routed through nonprofits, which differed from previous modes of mobilizing. This unprecedented change provided new opportunities and constraints for social movement activists.

In today's world, the institutional entity of the 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization is a staple in many cities. Community development corporations like the Unity Council, for example, abound in places like Los Angeles, Phoenix, San Antonio, and San Francisco. Community health clinics, legal centers, and even many workers' centers are also run as nonprofit organizations. Admittedly, many contemporary activists, and academics alike, critique this model of service delivery and urban redevelopment because of its level of institutionalization and disconnection from the grassroots. Yet we rarely question how and why the institutional entity of the nonprofit became naturalized as the principle mechanism to bring about social change. To understand this expedited and unparalleled level of social movement institutionalization, I analyze how Mexican American/Chicano nonprofit organizations came into existence.

My use of cartographic memory in this chapter and the next allowed me to better spatialize archival sources. I also supplemented archival materials with oral history interviews, which allowed me to give greater life to the historical actors and the spaces where they labored. As I reviewed memos, policy briefs, newspaper articles, and interview transcripts, I followed the consolidation of disparate organizations into larger and more recognizable institutions. I wasn't just thinking of some abstract place where funding and resources simply descended. In fact, many of the program reports that I reviewed included detailed demographics and characteristics, focusing on the patterns of specific neighborhoods and often showcasing bountiful photographs of program recipients. Grassroots mobilizations deeply rooted

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themselves in specific places through institutionalization. Activism literally went from the streets to activist homes, to borrowed church spaces, and finally into rented or owned buildings. I paid attention to the relationships that were built and the spaces that activists and community members forged. This is the nature of cartographic memory—the insistence that historical processes, and archival documents by proxy, are spatial. They carry with them the inscriptions not just of historical actors but also of the very spaces and emotional bonds that human beings produce in and through specific locations.

In their negotiations with state and federal agencies, Mexican American community leaders rendered Oakland's Spanish-speaking community legible as rights-bearing subjects and positioned the organizations they created as their stewards. This consolidated an important precedent for the role that Chicano nonprofits and other political action groups would play in guiding and helping to constitute the formation of Chicano communities. These social movement actors came to understand nonprofit organizations—like the Unity Council—as one modality through which they could advance their neighborhood improvement projects.

Oakland and the War on Poverty

Fearing a repeat of the Watts uprising (popularly understood as violent race riots) that occurred in Los Angeles in 1965, President Lyndon Johnson's administration targeted Oakland in the War on Poverty that same year. By 1968, 140 nonmilitary federal programs were spending close to $100 million a year in Oakland, an amount that overshadowed the city's own budget of $57.9 million (Orozco, Austin, and Beale 2008; Pressman 1975; Self 2003).[2] Designed to eradicate poverty, federal legislation between 1964 and 1971 provided generous funding for job, educational, and social service projects—all focused on a new agenda of human development rather than the improvement of decaying urban structures or the elimination of structural inequalities (Katz 1993; Self 2003; Weir 1988). The War on Poverty was fundamentally concerned with the "empowerment" of the poor—a concept that signaled a new understanding of poverty and how to fight it (Cruikshank 1999). Antipoverty experts introduced programmatic innovations such as Head Start, remedial instruction, elementary summer school, and neighborhood legal services to improve the quality of life in inner cities. The federal government's antipoverty agenda relied on empowering local communities to develop, organize, and implement federally funded

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antipoverty programs and to gradually devolve control for these to local communities (Kramer 1969; Marris and Rein 1967; O'Connor 1996).

War on Poverty policy and planning initiatives shifted the responsibility for poverty alleviation from the federal government to local communities and responsible self-governing urbanites, setting an important precedent in the management of urban racialized communities. They created a new way for a variety of stakeholders committed to the improvement of racial minorities to work together to fix what was deemed the "urban problem." At the height of civil rights struggles, minority communities protested overpolicing and government disinvestment in the inner city. Popularly understood as "riots," these forms of urban unrest brought national attention to racial segregation and economic inequality—a set of conditions that came to be referred to euphemistically as the midcentury urban problem. This led to the development of new and intimate relationships between state agencies, private philanthropy like the Ford Foundation, and social movement actors as these disparate forces worked collaboratively to create and implement antipoverty programs.

Mexican American activists fought to be recognized as a minority deserving of antipoverty programing. On April 15, 1966, for example, Oakland's Mexican American Unity Council held a press conference to present a six-point list of demands to city hall. The manifesto boldly called on the newly elected Republican mayor, John R. Reading, to appoint a representative of the Mexican American community to Oakland's city council. The *Oakland Tribune* (1966, 4) reported that the group also sought the hiring of an expert who could "train the city council and other civic leaders" to better recognize the problems of the Spanish-speaking community.[3] Activists delivered their declaration in a language of urgency that reflected their fierce determination. Collectively, these requests were attempts to secure equal War on Poverty funding for Oakland's Spanish-speaking residents. Mexican American leaders were concerned that federal antipoverty funding would be directed predominantly toward alleviating African American disadvantage, leaving the Spanish-speaking community without monetary support. Activists argued that "Oakland, whose motto is 'The All-American City' should be for all Americans: that the Treaty of Guadalupe [Hidalgo] should be honored to the letter as well as in spirit" (*Oakland Tribune* 1966, 4).[4]

These proclamations by Bay Area Spanish-speaking citizens stand in stark contrast to the traditional understanding of racial politics in Oakland as almost exclusively Black and white (Gregory 1999; Moynihan 1969; O'Connor 2001; Self 2003). In the early 1960s, little was known about the Spanish-

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speaking population in Oakland, and only a few studies and scattered reports even mentioned its existence. However, Mexican American activism had long existed in the city and flourished in the postwar period. As stakeholders focused on expanding their political influence, Mexican American organizations challenged the conflation of racial inequality and poverty exclusively with African American disadvantage. This coupling of poverty and blackness was in part constructed by an impressive list of poverty studies that focused on urban ghettos and "rendered technical" the needs, desires, and behaviors of the poor.[5] The focus of the War on Poverty as a solution to African American disadvantage also reflected white middle-class fears about the "threat" of Black radicalism and violence.

Like their African American counterparts, Mexican American organizations mobilized to become agents in the rapidly expanding market of federally funded, place-based solutions to poverty. They reinterpreted the War on Poverty agenda and helped guide their community by marshaling a commitment to efficient care of the growing Spanish-speaking population. Although these processes are often explained as an antagonistic competition for scarce resources, my analysis details the collaborative ethos that defined the coalitions Mexican Americans built with African Americans.

The Ford Foundation: A New and Important Stakeholder

Many of innovative features of the War on Poverty stemmed from the increasing role of private foundations in urban affairs. By the 1950s, the Ford Foundation committed itself to issues of racial and ethnic inequality through its efforts to influence public policy regarding the "urban problem" (O'Connor 1996). The Ford Foundation saw itself as activist and interventionist in relation to urban and regional development (Magat 1979; O'Connor 1996). The initial planning for the War on Poverty emerged out of the Ford Foundation's Gray Areas program. Oakland was also the first site where these ideas were tested.

In 1962, the *Oakland Tribune* enthusiastically reported that Oakland had been selected as one of three pilot cities to receive a $2 million grant to help forge an "all-out attack on the social problems of minority groups and the proper assimilation of new citizens into the community" (1). The program targeted the Castlemont district of East Oakland, which was deemed a "transition area" due to the out-migration of white middle-class residents and their replacement by lower-income Blacks, resulting in what analysts of the time called "social disorganization" (Rhomberg 2004, 135; Salzman 1963). The Castlemont neighborhood was rapidly becoming home mainly

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to African American residents, like many Oakland districts located in and around the inner city. The program's objective was to prevent this neighborhood from becoming a "Negro ghetto" and subsequently falling into decay. The Gray Areas program channeled resources into the Castlemont district and made local community members responsible for the implementation of programing and management of funds. The participation of local residents was required through a formalized citizens' advisory committee, and the coordination of existing city services was also expected through the Oakland Interagency Project. This type of participation from neighborhood residents coupled with the coordinated support of city agencies became the cornerstone of the Gray Areas program. The local community was both the target of intervention and the agent responsible for bringing about the desired change (O'Connor 1996, 1999).

The Gray Areas program, according to Alice O'Connor (1996), signaled the first shift away from structural and economic reform as a way of alleviating poverty. Instead, reform was to come from changes in individuals and their behaviors. The War on Poverty was built on this kind of devolutionary process that transferred the problem of poverty from the federal government to local communities and ultimately to individual subjects.[6] As sociologists Peter Marris and Martin Rein (1967, 9) argue about War on Poverty efforts, the "devolution of power extends beyond any formal jurisdiction to the citizen himself. He is expected, ideally, to be an active promoter of the well-being of his community—his children's school, the amenities of his block, neighborhood affairs." Focused on assimilating formerly rural Black populations to urban life, the object of antipoverty programs was to transform what were viewed as "deficient" Black subjects into self-governing urbanites.[7] Many of these new Black urbanites were part of the Great Migration of Blacks from southern rural areas to industrializing cities such as Oakland. The Gray Areas program and subsequent War on Poverty, explains O'Connor (1996, 617), "perpetuated the notion of poverty as a problem confined to *other* people and diverted attention from its links to economic restructuring, population movements, racial discrimination, and government policies that perpetuated inequality." Black migrants from the South were seen as unfit for urban life because they lacked experience with city dwelling and overwhelmingly struggled to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps. Their impoverishment was their fault and not a result of the legacies of slavery that influenced Jim Crow segregation and unequal distribution of resources and wealth. A shift in focus to individuals and in changing peoples' behaviors required the recruitment of different local

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agencies—both state and nonstate—to run projects to govern the conduct of the poor and other subjects who were viewed as deficient.

The Community Action Program and the Architecture of Nonprofits

The Community Action Program (CAP), established in 1964 by the Economic Opportunity Act, was the centerpiece of this agenda and mobilized community members through nonstate, usually private nonprofit organizations, known as community action agencies (CAAs) (Cruikshank 1999; Jackson 1993). Instead of sending War on Poverty moneys to states or to municipalities as grants, the federal government allocated them to the newly established, independent CAAs (Clark 2000; Marwell 2004, 268). The CAA theoretically administered a diverse collection of more than a thousand federally funded, local, neighborhood-based antipoverty agencies whose mission was to coordinate existing social services and bring new services closer to the poor. As in the Gray Areas program, the federal government privileged associationalist practices that promoted a new and powerful role for nonstate agencies like CAAs in combating poverty (O'Connor 1999). At the local level, federal policies also encouraged newly formed community service organizations to expand their existing activities by contracting with the Office of Economic Opportunity and to compete for federal grants.

The devolutionary practices of the War on Poverty, however, were fundamentally limited from the onset. Employing the famous motto of "maximum feasible citizen participation," these efforts used an unrealistic language that sought to empower communities and individual citizens to become agents in the development of their own communities (Kramer 1969; Moynihan 1969). According to a workbook prepared by the Office of Economic Opportunity (1965, 10), CAAs were organizations "established at the local community level to direct and coordinate the attack on the complex of poverty problems found in the given community" and were to serve as "catalyst and coordinator, acting to bring about change and to mold diverse activities into a smooth, effective instrument for reducing and eventually eliminating poverty in the local community." This dual role of catalyst and coordinator bestowed individual CAAs with enormous responsibility and required that community members, most of whom had minimal educational and organizational training, act as a cohesive administrative entity (Kramer 1969). This was an unreasonable expectation from the onset and paved the way for enormous challenges for CAAs.

Oakland's CAA was troubled from the start. Its staff was poorly trained, it was unable to act as a cohesive entity, and it was engaged in many disputes

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with city government. Black middle-class leadership, which dominated the CAA, also came into conflict with working-class Black sentiments and goals (Pressman 1975, 63). As O'Connor (2001, 133) writes, the federal government never fully clarified the meaning of "maximum feasible citizenship participation" or articulated how much decision-making power would be granted to individual citizens. In fact, the idea of mobilizing communities as political and programmatic entities was an ideal without much of a proven record (Kramer 1969; O' Connor 1996; Williams 1975). According to Ralph Kramer's (1969) study of War on Poverty programs in the San Francisco Bay Area, this mobilization of the local community proved to be a disaster in practice. However dystopic the devolutionary practices were, though, they represented a moment of opportunity for community-based organizations and existing leaders to render poverty in Oakland as an identifiable, researched, and necessary target of governmental improvement programs. African American middle-class professionals took control of Oakland's CAA. According to Rhomberg (2004, 139), this "facilitated their own political entry into the new institutional forms of the regime."

Challenging the Coupling of Poverty and Blackness

African American dominance in Oakland's War on Poverty efforts was consistent with national trends. The federal government envisioned the War on Poverty, at its creation in 1964, as a program of empowerment aimed at the "poor" (Cruikshank 1999). While the "poor" brought together disparate racial, gendered, and generational segments of the population, numerous scientific and authoritative studies of the time came to define poverty as synonymous with African American disadvantage (Marris and Rein, 1967; Nichols 1966; Record 1963; Salzman 1963; Wood 1968).[8] Studies overwhelmingly reported that "Negroes" suffered far higher unemployment rates than whites as well as diminishing incomes; these studies employed a culture-of-poverty analysis that justified creating a coordinated front of job, educational, and other skills development programs intended to transform deficient subjects into respectable urban dwellers.[9]

Within these poverty formulations, researchers deemed Mexican Americans a nebulous third group in between Blacks and poor whites. Categorized as "whites with Spanish surnames," by 1960, 6.5 percent of Oakland's population had Spanish surnames and constituted one-fourth of the nonwhite minority group (Bernardi 1965, 1). Compared with African Americans, Mexican Americans were far more dispersed and not confined to a single

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geographic region. Gene Bernardi (1965, 4) found that Mexican Americans, like African Americans, were overrepresented among the unemployed and poor and had the lowest levels of educational attainment of any group. A very large portion (80 percent) of the California Spanish surname population in 1960 had been born in the United States, its territories, or possessions. California had a larger Spanish surname population in 1960 than any other state in the Southwest, a total of 1,426,538.[10]

By 1965, prominent Bay Area researchers acknowledged the importance of studying the growth of the Mexican American population and poverty. However, influential studies such as those conducted by Wilson Record of the University of California, Berkeley, and research director of Oakland's Gray Areas program identified "Negro" poverty and disadvantage as most pressing. As Record (1963, 1) wrote, "The Negro population is relatively new to the Bay Area, whereas Mexicans have been a familiar sight for a long time." As new migrants from the South and Southwest, he argued, "Negroes . . . have a salient conspicuousness, their semi-rural traits standing out even more sharply against the Bay Area urban backdrop because of their color" (1). Based on his findings, Record recommended that Blacks merited more immediate consideration in poverty studies.

Poverty researchers and program administrators also explicitly overlooked Oakland's Spanish-speaking residents because they were not perceived to symbolize the same threat that Blacks did. As early as 1963, for example, the *Oakland Tribune* reported on Record's study in which he warned that San Francisco Bay Area communities had either to "make room" for Blacks or face the threat of a "growing number of angry black men" (Irving 1963, 8). Estimating a doubling of the Black population by the 1980s, Record (1963) argued that Black-white relations would become the most critical racial tension within San Francisco Bay Area communities. What was particularly worrisome, he noted, was the "social and political militancy of Bay Area Negroes, in contrast to the passivity or mild protest of the Chinese, Japanese, Indians, and Mexicans" (2).

Cities like Oakland with a prominent African American population officially equated poverty with blackness and accordingly funneled antipoverty funds predominantly toward alleviating Black disadvantage. Members of Oakland's Spanish-speaking community quickly understood this and organized to prevent their continued marginalization in the contest over federal War on Poverty resources. They did this by building on a long history of community-based organizing and by allying themselves with important sectors of the African American Democratic Party establishment. Organizations

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such as the Community Service Organization (CSO), the Mexican American Political Association (MAPA), the American GI Forum, and religious groups had represented the Mexican American population for decades, primarily in West Oakland. These organizations came into existence focusing on small-scale, membership-run, neighborhood improvement campaigns aimed at citizenship participation and leadership development. During the War on Poverty era, these organizations accelerated their mobilizations by working collaboratively to fight for greater federal resources.

Post–World War II Mexican American Organizing

Oakland's postwar organizing had its roots in an active Spanish-speaking Catholic movement that focused on developing religious and social services for Mexican Americans. Established by radical priests such as Father Gerald Cox, Father Charles Phillips, and Father John Ralph Duggan, this church-based movement began by hosting Spanish-language masses and fostering self-help projects, including after-school programs for youths and assistance for poor families such as job placement programs and access to legal counsel. Consistent with the liberation theology movement unfolding throughout Latin America, these priests fought for the poor and the oppressed. They did so by linking Oakland's Spanish-speaking residents with Mexican Americans throughout California focused on setting up congregations in rural and urban areas (Cox 2006). Through these activities, Oakland church groups networked with the Spanish-speaking residents of rural towns throughout California, many of whom were farmworkers, and became familiar with their struggles. These church-based mobilizations set forth the organizational base through which secular organizations such as the CSO emerged in Oakland.[11]

Postwar church-based mobilizations inspired an entire generation of leaders who found in the language of liberation theology the tools they needed to expedite community improvement projects. Many of the Mexican American leaders had grown up Catholic, but it was not until the 1950s and 1960s that they were introduced to this new kind of Catholic-based movement. As postwar Mexican American activist Herman Gallegos detailed: "These priests had the courage to talk to us about social change and to deal with the same concepts that basically, Gustavo Gutierrez did in liberation theology. That it's not your place in life to simply pray to God, accept it and say well that's the way it is but to simply get up and do change."[12] The clergy modeled for these emerging leaders how the church could advance social

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movement causes. Additionally, the clergy's dedication to the Spanish-speaking population taught them valuable strategies for gaining community trust. It is therefore not surprising that priests were generally invited to bless organizations and meetings, and that leaders such as Cesar Chavez often called upon the support of the church. As long-term activist Elvira Rose recounts, the priests "used to go up and down California's Central Valley organizing people in the small towns."[13] The church-based groups, according to Rose, also provided meeting spaces for some of the first CSO meetings: "So in those times we didn't have buildings and so the church . . . that's how they allowed us to meet there at their building and gave a lot of support services."[14] By building these localized connections with community members and subsequently linking the struggles of disparate congregations up and down California, these church-based mobilizing strategies demonstrated the importance of collective organizing. This kind of organizing required not just politicizing congregations but also connecting them with the kinds of services they needed. Therefore, service provision was an essential arm of the organizing model that this group of clergy set in place. As Herman Gallegos nostalgically recalled: "They spoke Spanish, they were very caring for our community and . . . some nuns started Catholic schools, parochial schools and there was a safety net that was pretty much service oriented."[15]

It is important to situate this organizing in a context of national postwar activism among communities of color in the United States. Throughout the Southwest, organizations such as the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), the American GI Forum, and the CSO emerged in the post–World War II period to safeguard rights for Mexican Americans. LULAC was officially funded on February 17, 1929, in Corpus Christi Texas, with the mission of alleviating the appalling conditions of poverty and civil rights abuses facing Mexican Americans. As historian David Gutiérrez (1995, 77) writes, LULAC's constitution emphasized that the best way to overcome these conditions was to organize as American citizens, even to the extent of excluding unnaturalized Mexican nationals (see also Acuña 2004). The GI Forum was established by a group of Mexican American veterans in 1949; like LULAC, Gutiérrez (1995, 155) reports, it argued strongly that civil rights efforts must be focused on US citizens of Mexican descent. Founded in Los Angeles in September 1947, the CSO was the first organization that promoted cooperation between Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants. Unlike the GI Forum and LULAC, the CSO had no citizenship requirements for membership and often encouraged noncitizens to join. The CSO made naturalization of noncitizen members a priority and radically expanded its

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organizing campaigns to incorporate undocumented Mexican migrants, who were viewed by the organization not as sojourners but as integral members of the Mexican American community (Gutiérrez 1995, 170). As David Gutiérrez further argues, developments during the post–World War II period marked "a significant victory for Mexican American activists and organizations that had pursued an integrationist civil rights strategy. These organizations shrewdly manipulated a wartime rhetoric shaped by discussions of human rights and the self-determination of peoples that dominated domestic and international political discourse" (152). This agenda shaped the claims-making process of an expanding collection of organizations, advocacy groups, and mutual aid societies that began to dot the US Southwest.

Building on the work of radical priests in the Catholic Church, the CSO played a large role in organizing Mexican Americans after 1945. Founded by Fred Ross, Antonio Rios, and Edward Roybal with the support of Saul Alinsky's Industrial Areas Foundation, the CSO became the training ground for the first generation of Mexican American leaders, including Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerta, and Gilbert Padilla (Acuña 2004; Gallegos 1989; D. G. Gutiérrez 1995; Orozco, Austin, and Beale 2008). The CSO attracted a large contingency of wartime veterans who returned home in the postwar period to find that they were subjected to discrimination despite their service. As long-term Bay Area activist Alex Zermeño recalled, the membership consisted of disgruntled veterans: "World War II started CSO. You know, poor Mexicans they went to war and they became sergeants and lieutenants. They came back with self-respect, a whole different opinion of themselves. Then they went back to Salinas and Oakland and they want to treat you like they were treating you before when you went to the service and that pissed them off!"[16] These veterans became involved with the CSO in order to fight against discrimination. They demanded to be taken seriously as rights-bearing citizens who had fought a war for the preservation of freedom.

The CSO grew rapidly in California as a grassroots organization. Acuña (2004, 279) writes that by the early 1960s, it had thirty-four chapters with a total of ten thousand dues-paying members, but as a grassroots organization it had little institutional support and meager funds. Portrayed by reporter G. W. Sherman of the *Nation* in 1953 as the source of the "political awakening" of the Spanish-speaking minority, the CSO endeavored to transform a "relatively voiceless element in the community into an integrated responsible segment of society" (256). It did so by concentrating primarily on the training of local leaders who were taught to engage in self-help efforts such as neighborhood physical improvements, voter registration, education,

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housing, and other civil rights projects.[17] The CSO believed that community development happened only by first building internal leadership.[18] In a classic integrationist civil rights move, the CSO leadership hoped to enlist its members in a democratic project and to guide them to participate fully in all aspects of American society. The CSO was committed to giving voice to Mexican Americans as virtuous agents of societal change.

In 1954, the CSO became a national organization whose objectives, as reported in the *Los Angeles Daily News* (1954, 3), were "to coordinate efforts for the common good of the community" and "encourage active participation of neighbors in civic life and to improve relations among all races, nationalities, and religions." Believing in the power of the vote to leverage demands and reap the promises of democracy, the CSO equated voter registration with progress.[19] It maintained that voter registration drives would "build sufficient community bargaining power throughout the Spanish-speaking neighborhoods to command the attention of the public and private officials who [were] in the position to assist in the neighborhood improvement and group advancement."[20] Voter registration and voting, for the CSO, were the conduits to obtaining help. The organization, however, was not in the business of running political campaigns. Instead, it leveraged the Mexican American vote to support demands from government representatives and elected officials.[21]

The CSO is an understudied organization, and scholarly literature on it focuses primarily on its work in Los Angeles. Yet in Oakland, it had a sizable membership and had tremendous power in mobilizing its members to make use of county and state services and to understand the importance of their vote. Education was a prominent component of the organization's activities, which included citizenship classes, basic English as a second language instruction, and Spanish-language classes led by the head of the educational committee, who was a teacher in the Oakland public schools. By 1956, the Oakland CSO chapter had 143 dues-paying members and a regular attendance of about 75 people at general assembly meetings. The chapter's services included a voter registration program that worked with the Voters League of Alameda County.[22] As in other areas of the US Southwest, Oakland's CSO was focused on building the Mexican American electorate. As CSO activist Elvira Rose recalled: "I walked with the CSO in Oakland when they were pushing the Spanish-speaking people to get out and vote 'cause a lot of them were citizens but they didn't vote."[23]

The CSO focused on creating the next generation of leaders by helping to organize community members to advocate for themselves. Leaders like Alex

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Zermeño had come to Oakland from Salinas. As a child from a farmworker family, he was eager to escape the challenging life that his parents endured. As a teenager, Zermeño got involved with the CSO, working as what was called a "bird dog"—he would walk ahead of canvassers going from door to door in order to talk to people and make them feel more comfortable to register to vote. Zermeño attended the CSO's first statewide meeting in Monterey in 1954. He and his parents were impressed by the charismatic leaders they met: Cesar Chavez, Fred Ross, Dolores Huerta, Herman Gallegos, Saul Alinsky, and Jimmy Delgadillo. From that time on, Zermeño remained active in the organization and held various leadership positions. As he described: "My greatest satisfaction of CSO was to see a person realize they were in power. To see somebody you were involved with . . . help them look for answers and see them get up in front of a city hall and make their presentation, man, when they walked away from that podium they were ten feet tall!"[24] Although the CSO trained several high-profile leaders, its real mission was to create a sense of leadership among all its members.

Elvira Rose was a CSO leader with a natural skill for working with people. The daughter of a Costa Rican father and a Mexican American mother, she grew up in West Berkeley, where she served as a broker for her parents and community members alike. As one of the few English speakers in her community, she became the unofficial neighborhood translator at a young age. As she detailed: "Ever since I was little the people would come to my parents and say 'Can Elvira go with me to help me translate . . .' I always liked to help in the community. So people would come and ask me to help them translate . . . they trust you if you are part of the community." In the 1940s, Rose attended UC Berkeley and expanded her work with the Mexican American community through her affiliation with Oakland's CSO chapter. As she described: "We really had to start by having meetings in our house. That's how they start trusting you. They don't come into a building and . . . you know, you gotta build in this confidence in them, like, 'Hey, I'm just like you and I'm trying to help' because it is hard to speak a different language and you just don't trust anybody." When I interviewed Rose, she lived in Berkeley and was under the care of a nurse. We sat in her living room, and I could tell it was difficult for her to remember events and details. She evidenced memory loss, often repeating something she told me a minute before. Despite this, her eyes lit up and her face glowed when she spoke about her work with the church and the CSO. I watched as she once again recalled her youth and the work that shaped her political subjectivity. This politicized work demonstrated how organizations like the CSO cultivated in their lead-

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ership a commitment to the improvement of the Mexican American and broader Latino community.

The CSO was also concerned with making sure that Mexican Americans were getting elected to positions of power and holding various commissions and agencies accountable. For example, they pressed for interpreters at the local courts, advocating for this to both the Alameda County Board of Supervisors and the district attorney's office. The CSO newsletter of June 1964 featured an open letter to the Alameda County Board of Supervisors questioning why a Mexican American candidate who had scored as the number one applicant was not selected.[25] The CSO's demand to increase the Spanish-speaking electorate also proved to be a way to push its demands for greater representation in city agencies and elected office. Through both its educational programs with youths and adults and its voter registration drives, the CSO had an immense responsibility not just to provide for the Mexican American community but also to direct this community in a particular fashion. It did so by creating relations with already existing city services and by guiding its membership in the use of these services. It also joined other organizations to protect and defend the Mexican American community.

Coalitional Politics

Mexican American groups accordingly navigated a social movement terrain already heavily contoured by African American protest, which influenced Mexican American forms of activism. To effectively speak the language of racial and ethnic rights in the 1960s, Mexican American activists understood they had to ally with African Americans as racialized subjects. They also carefully crafted a history of their experiences of inequality based on an existing language of civil rights and protest that African Americans had codified through negotiations with the state. Mexican American groups celebrated and in fact emulated both the civil rights gains of African Americans and the urgency of the emergent Black Power movement. However, they understood both the potential openings of each movement strategy and the limitations of militant and radical practices. While they supported a direct linkage with African American civil rights struggles and in fact collaborated with certain groups and campaigns, they also saw the limitations of this movement that did not place their own issues of language and immigration at the center of discussion.

In the postwar years, African Americans made tremendous inroads into city offices and the Democratic Party and garnered substantial political clout in Oakland (Rhomberg 2004; Self 2003). According to historian

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Chris Rhomberg (2004, 123), this development was symbolized by the 1954 founding of the Men of Tomorrow, a civic service club of Black business, professional, and religious leaders. In addition, as Gallegos (1989, 33) recalls, African Americans had institutionalized groups like the Urban League and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), which accomplished a plethora of civil rights gains that helped them garner legitimacy among the white establishment. In Oakland, prominent Black businessmen and politicians were committed to ensuring the advancement of Blacks and understood the War on Poverty to be the fruit of their civil rights struggles.

Mexican American leaders who observed examples of African American institutional power were encouraged at the possibility of developing greater clout for their own community. The idea was not to compete with African Americans. Instead, Mexican Americans had little institutional power and were not seen as a major political force in the city of Oakland. Herman Gallegos and other CSO leaders understood that to start building their own institutions, they had to create alliances with African American groups and also make a claim for the special needs of the Spanish-speaking population. As Gallegos told me: "African Americans had an emerging leadership. There was a group called the Men of Tomorrow, and they used to meet at a restaurant in West Oakland called Slim Jacobs; they would meet there once a month. These were guys that became future mayors, judges. I remember going to one of those luncheon meetings and they were very bright, and I kept thinking: Where are we? We are not anywhere! We are not visible!" Invitations to meetings like those described by Gallegos stemmed from long-term relationships between the two communities, given that they shared political circles and even grew up close to each other. Before the building of the freeway system in Oakland, most Spanish-speaking residents lived in West Oakland, which by the 1960s had become a predominantly African American neighborhood.

Mexican Americans in Oakland accordingly turned to African Americans leaders with whom they had worked and whom they considered friends (Gallegos 1989; Grillo 2000). They relied on two key figures in their community—Jimmy Delgadillo and Evelio Grillo—who both had affiliations with the CSO and the City of Oakland.[26] A community leader extraordinaire and a competitive boxer, Delgadillo was born in West Oakland and grew up with many of the Black leaders of the time. As Alex Zermeño described him: "Jimmy Delgadillo was one of the key guys. . . . [He was] born and raised in West Oakland. You see, West Oakland before it was a Black neighborhood, it

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used to be a Chicano neighborhood. He talked like he was a Black from West Oakland; he had the street talk, the slang. He went to Saint Mary's Church there in Oakland, which was the center of Chicano activity."[27] Delgadillo worked closely with Fred Ross in Oakland to help with the consolidation of the CSO and became its first chairman. He also was one of the founding members of what would become the Unity Council. He had a long and illustrious politically active career, much of which stemmed from his affiliations with prominent African American political leaders. For example, he was a childhood friend of William Byron Rumford, the first Black elected official in Northern California, and others who represented Black Democratic power. Like Delgadillo, Evelio Grillo was an Afro-Cuban immigrant who spoke Spanish and was well connected with the city's African American elite; he served as assistant to D. G. Gibson, who became one of the foremost leaders of the California Democratic Party (Grillo 2000, 133). These two figures, because of their African heritage and having grown up alongside African Americans, facilitated alliances between the two communities. This, according to Zermeño, entailed learning to marshal the language of civil rights: "Our only power was to join with the Black community, and their agenda was the same as ours. You know, civil rights, civil rights, civil rights!"[28]

Mexican American organizations such as the CSO joined forces with other groups to push for civil rights legislation. In the 1950s, CSO representatives were part of a civil rights coalition that regularly met with Jewish, Black, Anglo, and trade union leaders to frame their collective strategy for public policy involvement in California. This formal coalition was partially responsible for passage of the Rumford Fair Housing Act in 1964 and earlier, in 1958, the establishment of the Fair Employment Practice Commission (Orozco, Austin, and Beale 2008). In 1963 the Oakland CSO chapter publicly aligned itself in a united front with the NAACP and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) against discriminatory practices. The CSO formalized this position in 1963 during its executive board meeting in San Jose where it reaffirmed its national policy and openly advised that a violation of civil rights, or the denial of equal protection under the law, was a matter of historical concern to the CSO, both nationally and at the chapter level.[29] As a result of the CSO's work, twelve families received waivers of the citizenship requirement for admission to low-cost housing managed by the City of Oakland Housing Authority. The CSO committed itself to continuing the struggle for the elimination of this type of citizenship requirement, which it claimed served to "intensify the inequitable burdens on minorities who contribute to the growth and progress of the community."[30]

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In addition to Mexican American leaders collaborating and learning from African American leadership models, they also took part in educating their membership about the two groups' shared struggles. Oakland's CSO chapter saw civil rights abuses as a priority and justified alliances with African Americans based on their shared experiences with discrimination. A 1963 Oakland CSO newsletter, for example, acknowledged the formal partnership in antidiscrimination claims through a special feature titled "El Momento Actual" (The current moment), written entirely in Spanish.[31] Utilizing the imagery of brutality against African Americans in Mississippi and a language of compassion and urgency, the piece declared that Mexican Americans should be committed to supporting African American civil rights. In 1963, CSO leaders endeavored to convince their constituency that African American civil rights efforts were equally their struggles:

> It should be noted that this is not a struggle of Negroes against whites, although it might appear this way on the surface. This is something that affects all minority groups, and it is fitting that we the members of other ethnic groups also make this struggle our struggle. Because we are all treated alike we must all identify with this struggle. We must not be mute witnesses or insensitive to another group's pain. Their pain is our pain at the same time that their gains are our gains. It is not just that we abandon that brave race.[32]

This is an example of how Mexican American organizations attempted to construct a shared sense of discrimination by a white oppressor, which they hoped would propel their constituents to defend the civil rights of all minority groups. Oakland's CSO chapter argued that in the Southwest, Mexican Americans overwhelmingly benefited from "Negro" antidiscrimination efforts, such as sanctions against housing discrimination and employment discrimination cases. Similarly, it acknowledged that Mexican Americans shared a parallel experience of police brutality and excessive surveillance by law enforcement. Oakland CSO members were encouraged not just to sympathize with African American struggles but also to analyze experiences of disadvantage through the lens of their own civil rights abuses.

Oakland CSO activists were so adamant in their shared civil rights agenda that they ridiculed Mexican Americans from other regions who were allegedly hesitant to ally with African American struggles. A 1964 CSO newsletter featured an essay titled "What Is the Mexican American Doing in the Civil Rights Movement?" that critiqued the statements of an unnamed Mexican American attorney from Los Angeles who worked for

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the state attorney general's office. The attorney described the sentiments of Los Angeles Mexican Americans regarding civil rights struggles in the following fashion: "With the tremendous Spanish surname population our group could be a potentially powerful force in the civil rights movement. However, in the past there has been a lack of participation by the so-called grassroots. [T]here are some who have stated that the Mexican-Americans have no problems, others who have stated our problems are different from those of the Negro, and finally we have those who state that if we do have problems, that we should be left alone to solve them in our own manner."[33] Members of the Oakland CSO chapter were outraged by the article and declared that it was ridiculous to suggest that Mexican Americans in Los Angeles remained "selfishly concerned with what is or is not Mexican American, Spanish speaking vs. the problem of the Negro." The Oakland CSO newsletter editors declared that these Mexican Americans had truly lost sight of the problem confronting them and asked: "Have they not seen discrimination in Public Housing, Accommodations, Education and Employment?" The editors were so concerned that they jokingly stated: "Perhaps, it is the music from the Mariachis that blinds them."[34]

The scolding tone of these newsletters can also be read as illustrating the reservations some Oakland-based Mexican Americans had about allying themselves with African American movements. It is not at all surprising that Oakland Mexican American organizations would support African American civil rights struggles, given the extent of friendships and formal relations members of these organizations had with prominent African Americans. More revealing are the Mexican American organizers' emphatic and dedicated attempts to convince their constituents that such alliances were not only necessary but also a matter that directly affected them.

Some organizers feared that associating too closely with African American civil rights would render issues of language discrimination, culture, and immigration of less import. Representatives of the CSO agreed that while the problems of Spanish-speaking groups were not as "exacerbated as the Negro's," their concerns were complicated by the additional fact that many spoke mainly Spanish and thus required different kinds of mobilizing strategies and agendas.[35] As former CSO leader Herman Gallegos (1989, 35) noted: "The issue of color discrimination was much more severe for blacks. . . . Hispanics were an unknown quantity. We had to overcome the language barrier and the citizenship barrier to become a potent political force so as to get attention. It wasn't because blacks didn't want it; it was just simply that we had to do our own development." Although most Mexican

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Americans thus did not question supporting a shared civil rights agenda with African Americans, certain sectors were cautious of the organizational means employed.

Emphasizing their rightful participation as citizens in all aspects of American society, these integrationist Mexican American leaders urged their constituents not to embark on a radical separatist approach akin to the Black Power movement. They wholeheartedly critiqued organizational practices that did not respect an integrationist approach centered on active citizen participation through formal political processes. In a 1966 MAPA newsletter, for example, president Eduardo Quevedo cautioned an expanding constituency about engaging in a separatist radical movement: "Much is heard today of Black power, non-violence versus violence or self-defense . . . for us Mexican Americans and other Spanish-speaking people in California the idea and slogans of Brown Spanish-speaking Mexican American Power [are] being suggested as a new slogan." While welcoming a new militancy in demanding Mexican American appointments to government and policy-making positions, MAPA admonished militant leaders who discouraged voter registration campaigns. As Quevedo warned: "Today we are hearing many well intentioned Mexican Americans shouting 'we are not going to register any voters unless we get money from the party." He warned of the danger of this approach: "MAPA [was formed] because we had not the 'power' to bring about some significant changes about our living conditions and relationships in our society." For Quevedo, change was only possible "through active political participation" and exerting pressure "by the Mexican American community in the area of policy making."[36] True to this integrationist agenda of the post–World War II period, MAPA readily privileged formal political processes and rightful participation in democratic lobbying as the core values of Mexican American organizations. MAPA and other organizations constructed this idealized practice of citizenship, which they argued could only be employed in a manner that respected the democratic and peaceful principles of the movement.

Building a Mexican American Institutional Presence

At the height of federal investment in the War on Poverty, Mexican American organizations sought recognition and compensation for their labors in community development. Mobilizing on the success of their postwar activism, these organizations expanded their sphere of influence. Given that the federal government distributed War on Poverty funds at the local

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level and encouraged community organizations and local state agencies to vie for these moneys, Mexican Americans were concerned they did not have enough of an institutionalized presence to effectively compete. At that time the existing organizations, like the CSO, were grassroots membership-based groups without state or private foundation fiscal support. They therefore worked together and consolidated to represent a more coherent and organized voice for Mexican Americans.

One of the initial actions was to consolidate existing organizations. As Orozco, Austin, and Beale (2008) quote from an interview with Arabella Martinez, the first executive director of the Unity Council, "The concern underlined the need for [Mexican American] leaders to collaborate and form a united front and build a local movement. The Mexican American Unity Council was designed to bring together activists and groups and build a cohesive agenda."[37] Building a critical mass required transforming groups such as soccer clubs, church congregations, and brotherhood associations into politicized entities that fit the federal requirements necessary to qualify as War on Poverty Community Action Programs. The Unity Council unified a multiplicity of organizations and committed itself to mobilizing Spanish-speaking residents as a group. The partner organizations included the CSO, the Guadalajara Club, the Neighborhood Project, the People's Institute for Education, the Women's Council of the East Bay, the American GI Forum, MAPA, the Women's Auxiliary, the Organización Mexicana y Comite Pro-Fiestas Patrias de Oakland, the Latin-American Library, the neighborhood Advisory Committee, the Oreden Fraternal Hijos de Puerto Rico, the Club Social Puertoriqueño, the Cooperative Puertorriqueña, and the Filipino American Political Association.[38] Some of these organizations were not exclusively Mexican American; they included Puerto Rican and Filipino organizations, given the shared experiences of both groups with the Spanish language. Furthermore, Filipinos labored alongside Mexican Americans, especially as farmworkers.

The idea of bringing together different groups was not completely new. Activists often wore multiple hats and generally supported a number of groups. As described by many of the activists from this period whom I interviewed, they were at once active with the CSO and the Unity Council and employed by a specific state agency. Elvira Rose, for example, was employed by the California State Department of Labor and was also active as a volunteer with different political action groups. Given that most services were becoming concentrated in Fruitvale, it was easy to facilitate this kind of dynamic interaction with different groups. This was a critical strategy for holding

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state agencies accountable to the needs of the community. Like Rose, other Mexican American leaders "infiltrated" different government agencies in order to guarantee that resources would be channeled to the community.

This collaborative ethos also had roots in proving the importance of Mexican Americans as a rising voting bloc. Representatives from MAPA and CSO, including James Delgadillo, Bert Corona, and Edward Quevedo, organized Mexican Americans to vote and command greater attention from elected officials. MAPA was formed in 1959 and committed itself to providing an environment "through which the Mexican American can channel his political efforts and demands."[39] The organization's leaders envisioned themselves as stewards in the proper political guidance of the Mexican American population. According to James Delgadillo's letter of July 16, 1965, to Anthony Barbieri of the US Department of Labor, MAPA possessed "special resources which consist of organized statewide rank-and-file citizens, who have had useful work experiences within and offer real hope for the progress of a million Americans of Mexican descent in California."[40] MAPA claimed it could mobilize a "million Americans of Mexican heritage," which it argued constituted "organized rank-and-file citizens [which included] . . . a considerable number of young and determined leaders . . . capable of transposing the responsibilities of citizenship to persons of bilingual cultural background and instill in said persons the incentive to contribute to the fullest extent of their abilities in furthering the vitality of our economical and social betterment."[41]

The fact that Mexican American leaders so eagerly mobilized to qualify for War on Poverty funds did not mean they were not critical of federal funding. In fact, groups held different stances regarding affiliations with the federal government, as can be seen in how leaders shaped Mexican American participation in War on Poverty programs. Leaders were strategic in deciding how organizations would be directly affiliated with the federal War on Poverty. First, they created the Spanish Speaking Citizens Foundation to serve as the sole recipient of federal funding. Many leaders feared that federal money would derail organizations from their mission of empowering Mexican American community members. As Alex Zermeño described, the rationale for setting up a single entity to receive federal funding was to protect the movement's autonomy: "[The Spanish Speaking Citizens Foundation] would get antipoverty money, and it was fine, that was their function. Ideally that's a temporary thing [because when you get federal funding] Uncle Sam owns your ass! And the antipoverty agency for the city owns your butt because if you don't play along, you don't get the money,

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and if you don't get the money, you don't exist."[42] Leaders like Zermeño were critical of the new kinds of relationships with the federal government primarily because they feared that funding would come with strings. Along with these strings came dependency on federal government funding. As Zermeño details, organizations not only would have to "play along" to sustain their daily operations but also would depend on federal funding in order to simply exist. This critique of the potential for federal co-optation had roots in many of these leaders' activism in the CSO. The CSO's main mission was to respect the concerns of the "indigenous-based community organization" and not have any issues be predetermined by the national office organizers.[43] The CSO staunchly refused federal money in order to remain independent.[44] Ultimately, according to Zermeño, "the idea was to be in a position where you could turn down money, because lots of money comes with strings, officially and unofficially."[45]

The farmworker movement is perhaps the best example of where the War on Poverty had a devastating impact on organizing. According to Erica Kohl-Arenas, the War on Poverty brought substantial resources to the Central Valley where Cesar Chavez and the UFW were organizing. However, it also introduced a plethora of "institutional barriers, organizational turf battles, and limited definitions of farmworker self-help" (Kohl-Arenas 2016, 53). Disparate organizations and leaders in the Central Valley had to navigate this new terrain of funding and programmatic restrictions that ultimately failed to achieve transformative social change.

Crafting Mexican American Spaces

Mexican Americans worked to develop their own linguistically and culturally autonomous spaces for community organizing. As early as 1964, the Unity Council encouraged the City of Oakland to create a program for the development of leadership within the Mexican American community. Additionally, it requested a leadership conference for Mexican Americans, followed by weekly seminars to train and develop leaders. As was reported in a CSO newsletter, this form of leadership development validated Mexican American traditions: "One of the methods of bridging the gap between the Mexican American community and the general community is to create pride and confidence in the Mexican cultural background and to use this added confidence in the individual's respective group and in the broader community."[46] The Unity Council encouraged the creation of these kinds of spaces to foster a greater sense of engagement in the Mexican American community. It did

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not want to create a separatist form of community organizing. Instead, the goal was to create a strong Spanish-speaking citizenry that could be better advocates for their own linguistic and cultural needs.

This type of leadership development created a sense of ownership in democratic processes. By 1966, the Unity Council had created a Spanish-speaking advisory group specifically geared toward War on Poverty negotiations and programing. According to Jack Ortega, then chairman of the Unity Council, "For the first time, the poverty program was explained to these people, and they were made to feel that there was a place in it for them."[47] In a letter to the head of the Oakland CAA, Ortega extolled the success of the newly created meeting space: "The group is expanding rapidly, and wishes to continue on this basis—not because we want to isolate ourselves from other minority groups, but rather because we feel that, in this way, we can best resolve the problems of communication and cultural differences that are peculiar to the Spanish-speaking people of this area."[48] As Ortega detailed, Mexican American community groups understood that their cultural and linguistic differences made it difficult for them to fully participate in the larger society. By representing the Mexican American community and fostering culturally inclusive meeting spaces, leaders sought to address and direct the demands of this population.

In addition to the creation of the Spanish-speaking advisory group, Mexican American organizations pushed the City of Oakland to establish a Spanish-speaking Target Area Advisory Committee (TAAC). This was a significant accomplishment given that Oakland's TAACs were originally designed to represent communities in four geographic areas: East Oakland, North Oakland, West Oakland, and Fruitvale. The fifth TAAC, which became known as the Fruitvale Spanish-Speaking Committee, was the only one defined by language and culture. This committee ultimately challenged the geographic definitions of antipoverty programs and demanded the recognition of Oakland's Spanish-speaking population. Mexican American groups argued that unlike African Americans, Spanish-speaking residents were not confined to one specific geographic location; they were dispersed widely throughout the city and beyond (Brasher 1966; Wood 1968). Although War on Poverty stipulations privileged "community" as the unit of analysis, they emphasized a geographic, place-based understanding of organizing and belonging. For Mexican American leaders, community was far more than geography, uniting an ethnic/racial collective that cohered around a shared agenda of social, cultural, and political improvement throughout the Southwest. Clearly, Mexican Americans and other Spanish speakers were already congregating in Fruitvale, but this was not a bounded, insular terrain.

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Mexican American admission into War on Poverty programs quickly transformed organizations like the Unity Council and altered their activities. Oakland's Unity Council started as a political action group. With the advent of the War on Poverty, it became an institutionalized social services provider. As a service-providing organization, it attained antipoverty funding to create various programs, including Education for Advancement, which offered ESL classes. The centerpiece of the Unity Council's transformation was the creation of Fruitvale's Latin American Library, which offered books in the Spanish language and was funded through a direct grant of $100,000 of federal antipoverty funds (Pressman 1975, 59). In fact, most of the activists I interviewed remember the Unity Council's first Latin American Library, which was the first of its kind in Oakland to offer books in Spanish and dedicated to Mexican American culture. It also became an important meeting place for events and gatherings. Additionally, the California Department of Labor established one of its employment service centers in Oakland's Unity Council office, working with the council to ensure that Spanish-speaking residents could access the deluge of job training programs created by War on Poverty funding.[49] The Unity Council became an institutionalized presence in Oakland, serving as both an advocacy group and a meeting point for different community services.

Institutionalization allowed the Unity Council to quickly gain a sense of permanence in the Fruitvale community. In 1967 the Unity Council officially became a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt nonprofit organization. By 1970 it purchased its first building, located at 1470 Fruitvale Avenue, at the heart of the Fruitvale community where Mexican Americans were quickly becoming the majority. This form of institutionalization was therefore a spatial endeavor. Along with the Unity Council, other organizations began to emerge in Fruitvale (see chapters 1 and 5). The Unity Council became a kind of community anchor, setting in motion the creation of other organizations and routing resources into the community.

Given the invisibility of Mexican Americans in government-funded poverty studies, Mexican American organizations also conducted their own research. They leveraged their authority on the needs of Spanish-speaking residents to forge a cohesive programmatic agenda for their constituency and in the process created a distinct target of government—the Mexican American community. As early as 1965, for example, representatives of MAPA, the CSO, and the Unity Council worked together with the City of Oakland to produce a report titled *Staff Report of a Mexican American Community Development Survey and Resulting Proposal*.[50] The report was

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the product of months of interviews and collaboration between different Mexican American organizations and City of Oakland staff members. It revealed the lack of access Mexican Americans confronted in gaining city services and recommended the creation of bridging programs to connect Mexican Americans to existing services. In this proposal, Mexican American leaders envisioned a comprehensive package of care rooted in cultural revitalization, empowerment, and inclusion in the broader US culture. Their proposal sought to "inculcate in the Spanish surname community a pride in its historical and cultural heritage."[51] To do so, leaders hoped "to create in the people an awareness that their forebears played an outstanding role in the exploration, settlement and development of this country and in contributing to the establishment of its institutions."[52] Mexican Americans did not need to feel excluded from access to civic services; they were entitled to these benefits because they themselves had helped to create them, armed with a sense of pride in their culture and their rightful claims as citizens. In their negotiations with the City of Oakland, leaders thus gave coherence to the term *Mexican American community* for the first time and articulated a set of mutually shared interests, needs, and desires.

The formalization of this designation was at once a valorization of Mexican culture and language heritage and also an homage to the important contributions Mexican Americans had made in the United States. This was a specific response to official US Census use of identifiers such as "whites with Spanish surname" that leaders claimed led to the undercounting of the Mexican American population. In Oakland, Mexican Americans' widespread identification as Spanish-speaking allowed them to ally with other groups such as Puerto Ricans and Filipinos that spoke a common language. The Unity Council therefore changed its name to the Spanish Speaking Unity Council in 1967 in order to portray its solidarity with other Spanish-speaking groups and to significantly expand its constituency. However, this language-based identifier did not adequately portray the racial/ethnic experiences of discrimination and inequality particular to Mexican Americans. Like African Americans, Mexican American leaders also understood the War on Poverty to be a form of compensation for racial injustices of the past. The term *Mexican American community* solidified their position as a group that shared experiences of racialized oppression and inequality.

Mexican American organizations took seriously their role as mediators between the Mexican American population and different state agencies. In their exchanges with state agencies such as the California Department of Employment, the City of Oakland, and federal antipoverty offices, Mexican

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American leaders requested that these agencies be sensitive to the needs of a rising Mexican American population but also informed them that they were prepared to guide the community to vote in a particular fashion and to empower Mexican Americans as citizens for full civic participation. Newly created nonprofit organizations, as embodied by groups like the Unity Council, emerged as the principal stewards of the Mexican American community. Furthermore, these institutions became concentrated in the Fruitvale neighborhood—a place that was quickly becoming Mexican American and predominantly working-class.

Conclusion

Though War on Poverty programs had many limitations from the onset, they constituted unique political and institutional openings for local-based organizations and political action groups. As a devolutionary governmental program, the War on Poverty set up the architecture for the inclusion of nonstate entities—community-based nonprofit organizations—into a new schema of welfare provision. This served to transform grassroots movements into institutionalized federally recognized tax-exempt nonprofit agencies. This process shifted organizational goals from leadership development and advocacy to the proper management of programs and community development projects and aided in subduing the urgency and rising militancy of grassroots protest.

Robert O. Self's *American Babylon* (2003, 200) argues that for African Americans in Oakland, War on Poverty efforts "constituted a discrete phase in the evolution of black political capacity" and transformed Oakland's political culture. The War on Poverty equally catapulted Mexican Americans into political action. Not unlike their African American allies, Mexican Americans also deployed the War on Poverty agenda of empowerment to build leadership capacity and to consolidate disparate Spanish-speaking organizations into a united Mexican American movement. The War on Poverty did not initiate Mexican American activism; rather, it served to consolidate already active political organizations that together transformed themselves into institutionalized entities that guided the Spanish-speaking population and leveraged their pastoral technologies of government to represent, care for, and constitute the Mexican American community.

Through different culture-based projects of empowerment, Mexican American community-based organizations set in place specific power relationships. As Barbara Cruikshank (1999, 69) reminds us: "Whether inspired

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by the market or by the promise of self-government and autonomy, the object of empowerment is to act upon another's interests and desires in order to conduct their actions toward an appropriate end." Bestowed with responsibilities of care that included bridging relations between the state and the Mexican American population, organizations enacted governmental technologies of their own. These political techniques deployed the language of "empowerment" prioritized by federal antipoverty programs but rendered it Mexican American by suturing it with a project of cultural revitalization.

Enacting diverse culture-mediated technologies of citizenship, community-based political organizations sought to educate Mexican Americans about their shared interests, many of which parroted the state's integrationist agenda of democratic civic engagement. However, whereas War on Poverty programs focused on individual attainment, whether through job training, educational advancement, or self-development programs, Mexican American groups insisted on achieving collective improvement. These organizations thus enacted relations of government that both constituted and fundamentally transformed not a universal citizen-subject but a collective of Mexican American subjects. This collective of Mexican American subjects as well as their demands, organizational tactics, and relationship to the state emerged through a carefully crafted relationship with the civil rights movement and Black radicalism of the time.

Mexican American political mobilizations of this period unsettled the geography of both race and poverty in Oakland. Through their activism and institution-building endeavors, they also consolidated Fruitvale as a Mexican American community, with Mexican American organizations as its principle stewards. They challenged the automatic conflation of poverty with blackness and began to articulate their own unique experience of racial inequality and poverty that differentiated Mexican Americans from Blacks. By stressing the importance of issues of language and culture discrimination as well as experiences of international migration, Mexican American leaders cultivated their own organizing agendas and programmatic efforts. This historical account of the political formation of the Mexican American community offers a window into the study of changing racial/ethnic dynamics in post–World War II Oakland beyond the Black and white binary. The War on Poverty was thus an important period for the consolidation of Mexican American institutions such as the Unity Council and other community-based organizations that continue to provide services and guide Mexican American and other Latino constituents in Oakland.

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