

**ACTION RESEARCH**  
**In Defense of the Barrio**

**Interviews with Ernesto Galarza,  
Guillermo Flores and Rosalio Muñoz**

Collected and Edited by  
Mario Barrera and  
Geralda Vialpando

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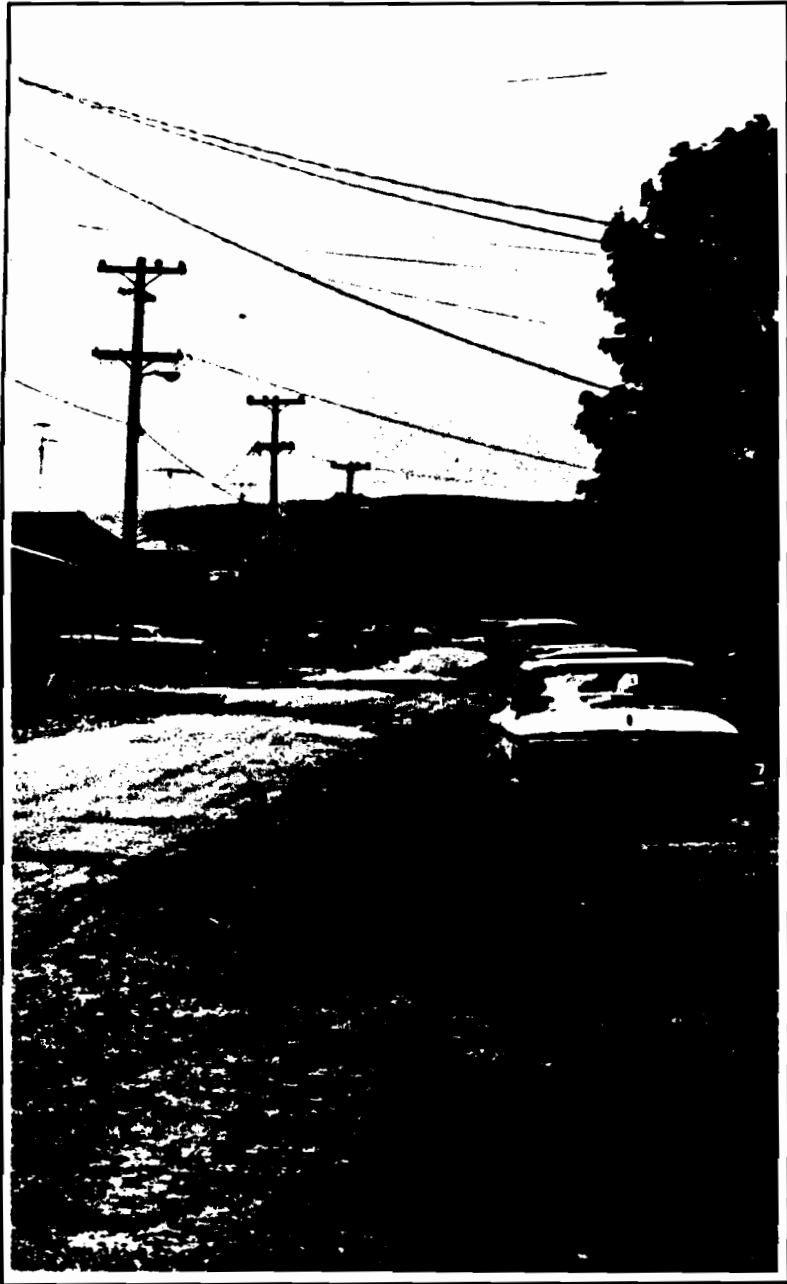
## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank George Ballis for the use of the cover photograph, and our respondents for generously contributing their time in answering our questions. Each of the respondents asked us to emphasize that they were not assuming the role of spokesman for their projects, and that each of them was but one participant in a collective effort depending on the efforts of many others.

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## INTRODUCTION

This pamphlet is a report to the Chicano community on a set of processes that are going on throughout the urban Southwest. The effect of these processes is to fragment and dislocate the barrios that exist in and around metropolitan areas, displacing the Chicano population and acting as a source of disruption and instability in the community.

The body of the report consists of three interviews that describe projects undertaken by Chicanos in three urban areas to counter these processes and to give the Chicanos in those areas some small measure of control over their own lives and communities. In the first interview, Ernesto Galarza outlines the efforts of a collective Study Team in Alviso, California, to keep that small, predominantly Chicano town from being swallowed up and transformed by the city of San José. In the second interview, Guillermo Flores describes how a cooperative effort between Chicano students and residents of Union City, California, has attempted to reverse trends that are threatening to displace the barrios in that Northern California town. In the concluding interview, Rosalio Muñoz reports on the efforts of the East-Northeast Committee to defend the barrios of East Los Angeles from forced dislocation.

The report has two closely connected purposes. The first of these is to call attention to a set of policies and processes that are having a very broad impact on Chicano communities, and whose significance has rarely been appreciated. By calling attention to this situation, and by presenting some information on Chicano counter-efforts, we hope to stimulate the formation of barrio defense projects in other areas that are being similarly affected. While each project must respond to local circumstances, there may be organizational ideas from projects reported on here that could be borrowed and adapted to other situations.

At the same time, calling attention to barrio displacement may lead us to a better theoretical understanding of the situation of the Chicano today. Since the dislocation of Chicano communities appears to be wide-spread rather than an isolated phenomenon, it is logical to assume that there are broad social forces at work here. A more detailed investigation of the topic may provide important clues concerning the relationship of Chicanos to the larger society today, and to ways in which that relationship may be changing or resisting change. If so, then we will be faced with

the problem of interpreting our observations theoretically. The three respondents whose interviews are presented here have somewhat different interpretations of what is going on in their areas. Galarza sees the pressures on Alviso as an expression of urban development processes linked to metropolitanization—the growth of super cities and the swallowing-up of smaller, more human communities that stand in the way of the developmental plans for the giants. Flores traces the predicament of the Union City barrios to a regional planning process guided by the interests of the large corporations and their allies, and to the subordination of other values to the profit motive inherent in capitalist societies. Muñoz stresses the role of political power considerations in Los Angeles, and secondarily such urban development processes as the “revitalization” of the inner city.

While these varying interpretations may in part reflect actual differences in the urban areas being examined, it may also be that they reflect our imperfect understanding of the forces affecting the Chicano, and our present inability to integrate the different aspects of the Chicano experience theoretically.

Two points do emerge from these interviews that may provide clues for linking barrio displacement to a broader conception of the Chicano's status in the society. One lies in the common observation of Chicano powerlessness and exclusion from decision-making processes, a reflection of a system of racial stratification that some writers are now referring to as “internal colonialism.” The other lies in the role of Chicanos in the labor force. If it is true that many of the existing barrios were formed in their present locations as a consequence of Chicano concentration in certain industries (agriculture, railroads), then tendencies towards fragmentation and dislocation may be a reflection of the dispersion of Chicano labor in the urban areas. In any case, it seems clear that in a complex industrial society the forces affecting the Chicano are not always apparent, and the need for research and theory has never been more pressing.

The second major purpose in presenting this report is to provide some examples of the integration of action and research. The projects described here, especially in Alviso and Union City, illustrate the way in which social action and social research can reinforce each other. Social science research for too long has been carried out to serve the interests of established elites, or has had no clear policy or action orientation. The research reported on here was consciously designed to benefit the poor and the

powerless, who can least afford to fund research, and whose interests may in many cases be opposed to those of dominant elites. It is research at the service of the community, intended to provide the essential knowledge base from which more effective social and political action can be mounted.

At the same time, the action component of the projects made an important contribution to research. The projects were formulated in such a way that action becomes a kind of probe of reality, generating information that broadens our understanding of the situation. Thus one can discover the strength of interests supporting a given state of affairs by challenging that state of affairs, and taking note of the response, as was done in the case of Union City. This technique is a kind of participant observation, as Galarza notes, but goes beyond participant observation as it is generally understood.

These projects then, present a method for establishing a reciprocal relationship between research and action, in the interests of developing the theoretical perspectives necessary to develop long-range strategies for changing present distributions of wealth and power.

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#### A NOTE ON THE FORMAT

The body of the report was left in an interview format rather than presented in a more formal style in order to emphasize the tentativeness of the formulations. It was felt such a format, which is very personal in nature, would better emphasize the personal involvement which is so essential to such projects, rather than the abstractions which predominate in academic publications. Too often we lose sight of the fact that, in the final analysis, people shape events.



## BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION ON THE RESPONDENTS

### ERNESTO GALARZA

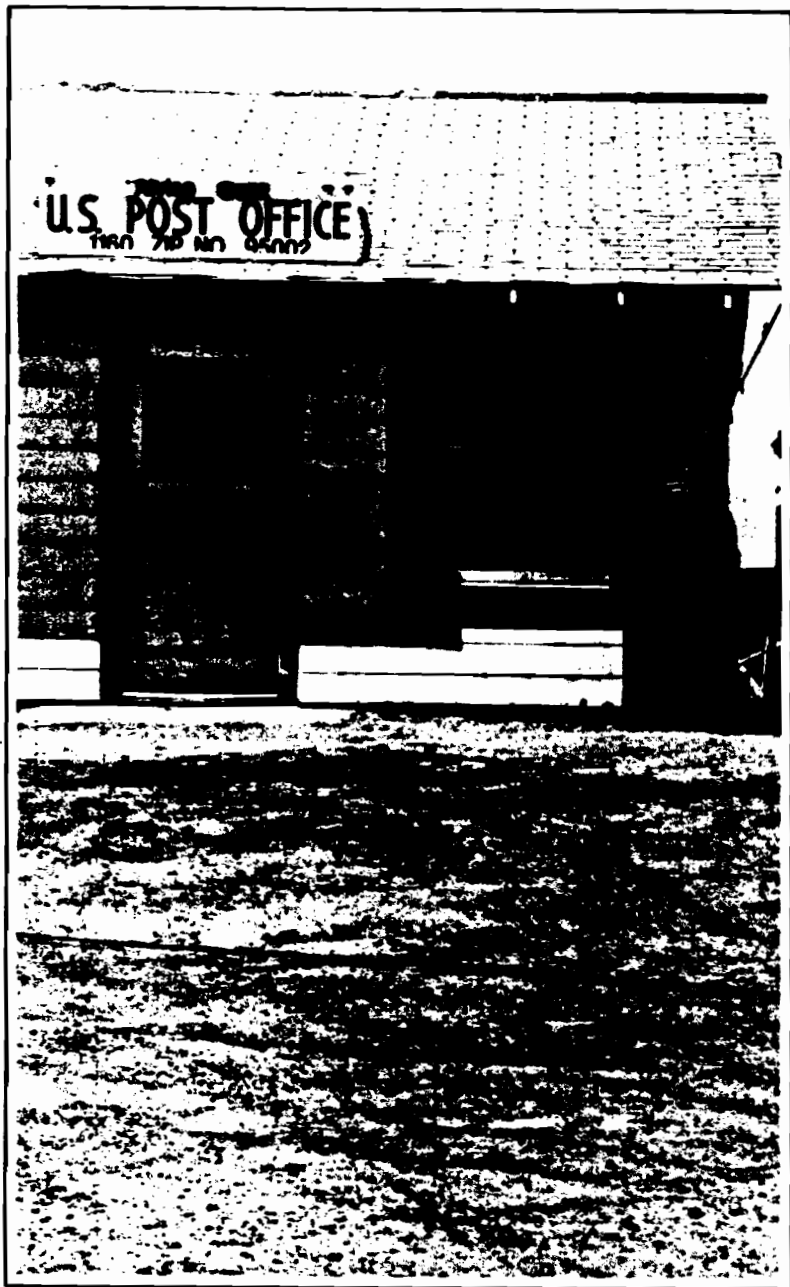
Dr. Galarza was born in México and came to the United States with his family during the Mexican Revolution. He attended schools in Sacramento, California, and received advanced degrees from Stanford and Columbia universities. He has been a farm worker, teacher, and field organizer and research director for the National Agricultural Workers Union. He has been associated as a researcher and faculty member with Notre Dame University, San José State College, and the University of California, San Diego. Among his books are *Merchants of Labor*, *Spiders in the House and Workers in the Field*, and *Barrio Boy*. He is currently living in San José, California.

### GUILLERMO FLORES

Guillermo Flores is currently living in northern California and completing work for the Ph.D. at Stanford University. He has taught courses at Stanford and California State University at Hayward, and has been involved in a number of community action and research projects in both northern and southern California. He collaborated with Reynaldo Macías, Donaldó Figueroa, and Luis Aragón in publishing *A Study of Unincorporated East Los Angeles*.

### ROSALIO MUÑOZ

Rosalio Muñoz has lived and worked in Los Angeles most of his life, and is a graduate of UCLA, where he served as student body president. He was one of the main organizers of the Chicano Moratorium Committee, a major Chicano anti-war organization. He has worked with La Raza Unida Party, and has most recently been active in the L.A. barrios on issues of housing and immigration.



## **ERNESTO GALARZA**

### **Alviso: A Town Besieged by "Progress"**

**Interviewer:** Dr. Galarza, in what Chicano community have you been working recently?

**Galarza:** During the last couple of years I've been working with a Study Team in the town of Alviso. Alviso is a predominantly Mexican community located close to San José at the southern tip of San Francisco Bay.

**Interviewer:** What can you tell us about the history of Alviso?

**Galarza:** Well, back in the 1860's, Alviso served as a transportation link between northern and southern California. It appeared for a while that it would become a major urban center. But the major railroads passed it by, and it stayed a small town in a largely agricultural area. Then from the 1890's to the 1940's it was a marginal area, used for sewage treatment plants and the like. In the 1940's Mexicans who were being displaced from jobs in agriculture and railroads started to settle in the area because the land was cheap and because it was close to other kinds of jobs. Like many of the other barrios, it became a labor pool for seasonal farm work and low-wage and part-time crafts and services. The story of other barrios in the Bay area, from Gilroy to Union City, was pretty much the same.

**Interviewer:** What are some of the present characteristics of Alviso as a community?

**Galarza:** Alviso covers some 14 square miles of shorelands and orchards, but the residential area is much smaller than that. There are about 1800 people who live in Alviso, two-thirds of Mexican background. Most of the Mexican population is quite poor, and many are on public assistance. There are a number of small business enterprises such as boat-building and restaurants, but these are not owned by the Mexican residents in Alviso. They are owned by Anglos who live elsewhere. Most of the Mexicans who live in Alviso actually work in surrounding communities, as gardeners, in the assembly plants, and similar occupations. Recently a public health clinic was set up in Alviso, and it has become the major employer in the town. As to the way of life,

Mexican customs and culture are still strong in Alviso. Most of the residents share a common language, religion, class status, and a closely-knit family structure.

**Interviewer:** It is our understanding that the existence of Alviso has been threatened recently by annexation proceedings and other processes operating in urban areas. Can you give a description of what has been going on?

**Galarza:** Keep in mind that the barrios and colonias here have existed on what might be called marginal living space. The Mexicans settled land that was not highly valued by others at the time, for very understandable reasons. Since then, though, cities such as San José, Santa Clara, and Hayward have been spreading out into the surrounding areas. A megalopolis is forming in the Bay area. Land values have been going up steadily. You can imagine the effects on these local communities. Places like Alviso have become very attractive for development by private and public interests. These corporations and the public agencies haven't cared about the survival of the communities, the social organisms that are in their way. Alviso itself is now in the process of being swallowed up by the expansion of San José. In 1968 there was an annexation election in Alviso, which was intensely pushed by developmental interests. In a very close vote, the residents of Alviso voted in favor of being annexed by San José. I don't think most Alvisans had been made aware of what the consequences would be for their town. Already at that time some very ambitious plans had been drawn up for Alviso by San José planning agencies. These plans included new marinas, apartment complexes, a trade mart, light industry, new transportation routes, and tourist facilities. Since 1968, the annexation proceedings have been tied up in court, but this was simply a defensive strategy, something to buy time. It seems certain now that it will be a losing battle. The result will be that the present Mexican residents of Alviso will be dislocated and dispersed.

**Interviewer:** You mentioned the planning process. Were efforts made to include the Chicano community of Alviso in that process?

**Galarza:** The plans that were drawn up were of the familiar urban renewal type. Before the annexation election there was no

involvement of the Alviso residents. Since then a few residents have been co-opted as planning advisors for the San José planning agencies. But the goals and direction continue to be set by and for San José interests.

**Interviewer:** How would you characterize the interests that stand to benefit from the processes at work in Alviso?

**Galarza:** In general, I would say that there is a community of interests between property owners in Alviso and the political and economic interests in San José. Within Alviso there existed an informal coalition of the larger agriculturists, the small industrial entrepreneurs, the homeowners, and other landowners. Their interests in the economic development of Alviso coincided with the interests of San José in taking over and developing Alviso. Of course, as I've tried to emphasize, this is not an isolated phenomenon. It is part of a broader process that is going on in many urban areas.

**Interviewer:** Could you tell us how the project you were involved in was related to these processes you have described?

**Galarza:** The Alviso Study Team that I worked with was intended as a group of committed professionals who could assist the Alvisans in addressing the critical problems facing the community. There were seven of us, and while we were not Alvisans ourselves we were all residents of the county and had some previous experience and knowledge with what Alviso was going through. We were all committed to the idea of Alviso as a community that could be brought to the point of dealing with its own problems, rather than always being manipulated from the outside. Our first task was to gather all of the relevant information we could find and make it available to the citizens of Alviso. We were constantly on guard to prevent ourselves from becoming manipulators as well. We were hoping that our efforts could help the residents of Alviso to create an institution or institutions that could legitimately represent the interests of the community. Of course, such institutions would have to involve the residents in a very active way.

**Interviewer:** How was your project organized?

Galarza: The team came into existence in 1971. We concentrated during the first ten months of the project on basic research, that is, gathering information connected to Alviso's immediate problems. We felt this was vital, since the planners and other outside interests had a kind of monopoly over documents and information, and were using this monopoly to their advantage. The team met once a week. At these meetings we would exchange and analyze information, and make future assignments. Each of us had his own contacts in Alviso and in the surrounding cities. We also carried on discussions with the Alvisans and involved ourselves in the public affairs of the town. We put out several information bulletins, printed both in Spanish and English, and which were circulated to the citizens of Alviso. Then in early 1972 we set up a temporary office in Alviso and entered into closer contact with the residents. At that time we discussed more actively with the Alvisans the possibility of setting up some type of representative community institution that would more adequately carry on the fight to defend their interests. Partly as a result of these discussions an Ad Hoc Committee of residents was set up. This could have been an important step towards the kind of representative institution that was needed. From that point on the Study Team was to provide technical assistance and counsel to the Ad Hoc Committee in the actions that they undertook.

**Interviewer: What were your main sources of information?**

Galarza: In an operation like this there are very few standard sources of information. A lot depends on the local circumstances and the nature of your project. One of our main sources, of course, were the various planning agencies at the local level. Some of this information was readily available, some had to be pried loose. Some information came to us from contacts within the public agencies. Various kinds of public records were consulted for information on property ownership and other characteristics of Alviso and the Alvisans. A lot of our information came from our being involved on a regular basis with the activities that were going on in and around Alviso, from discussions and observation. Since the members of the Study Team were from the general area, we had a considerable amount of background knowledge already.

**Interviewer: Where did you find the necessary resources to carry on your work?**

Galarza: As you know, funding for this kind of project is always a problem. There are certainly no government agencies committed to the survival of genuine human communities as such. Our own funding came from the Whitney Foundation, which was interested in our concept of a team that would orient itself to the critical problems of a community as a community. In my view, the kind of effort we engaged in is only a first step. What would be needed to carry on a longer-term resistance would be a Community Assistance Team, adequately funded over a period of years. Such a team would have to be skilled in areas such as legal assistance, research, community organization and education, and urban planning and development. I'm not very hopeful about the prospects for a significant effort along these lines. America is much more concerned now with super-urbanization than with livable communities on a human scale.

**Interviewer: How did the relationship work out between the Study Team and the community groups?**

Galarza: The community group with which we had the closest contact was the Ad Hoc Committee that I've already mentioned. The formation of this group was stimulated by the presence of the Study Team, but it was soon able to carry on a range of activities of its own. We continued to serve as advisors and technical consultants. The Ad Hoc Committee formed a number of working sub-committees, and they were very active in calling meetings and disseminating information among the townspeople. They participated very significantly in the lawsuits that were filed to try to overturn the annexation election. With the help of the Study Team they began to draft proposals for a more permanent representative type of institution for the town. The general idea was that of a Mesa Redonda, or a Cabildo de Vecinos. We were very encouraged by these developments, although we were always aware that the preponderance of power lay on the other side.

**Interviewer: How did things turn out?**

Galarza: Unfortunately, the progress that the Ad Hoc Committee seemed to be making could not be sustained. They became involved in another matter that diverted their attention and took up their energies. You see, in 1969, a health clinic had been started in Alviso with a Ford Foundation grant, and then



expanded with a federal grant from OEO. In a short period of time it had become the town's major employer, and was providing medical services for surrounding communities as well as Alviso. It also became involved in all kinds of other activities within Alviso: economic development, urban planning, community organization. It was funded by the federal government for programs in child care, job training, housing, and so on. Of course, the clinic did not have the specialized staff to administer all these types of programs. More importantly, it didn't have the mechanisms for regularly consulting with the citizens of Alviso and acting as a real representative of their interests. Yet the governing board of the clinic was more and more entrusted with important powers and functions. The result was that it became a tight circle of privilege and control. It became the new Establishment of Alviso.

In 1972 the Ad Hoc Committee with which we were working decided to contest control of the clinic by running candidates for the governing board, although the Study Team felt this was a mistake. The Ad Hoc Committee members felt that they could make the clinic more responsive to the needs of Alviso. They did, in fact, succeed in taking over control of the board. But then they became tied down by the administrative demands of running the clinic and all its associated programs, and they became embroiled in charges against the old board of improper use of funds. In short, the progress that the Ad Hoc Committee had been making in protecting Alviso and giving it some self-direction was halted. It appears now that it is only a matter of time before Alviso ceases to exist as a community. And not much time at that.

**Interviewer:** Dr. Galarza, you've given us a very interesting description of what has been going on in Alviso. I'd like to ask you a more general question now, and that is: to what extent do you see the preservation of the barrios as a desirable thing?

Galarza: My answer to that question is that it doesn't make much difference what we think about the preservation of the barrios as communities. I think the important thing is to look at what's changing them.

**Interviewer:** Doesn't the fact that you became involved in an action project of this sort in Alviso imply that you did see the preservation of the barrio there as desirable?

Galarza: No, that doesn't imply that at all. I didn't go there to preserve. Whenever you get into a study project of this sort you're in the presence of major forces, and you can't see what those forces are unless you're in the action. But the preservation of a barrio is not the ultimate answer to anything. It's the same sort of thing you get when people talk about preserving a way of life. It's a pretty meaningless phrase. It doesn't tell you anything about what's going on in the present world today. Now there are always sentimental reasons for wanting to help people not lose their homes. These are powerful feelings but they don't give you much of an intellectual idea of what's going on.

**Interviewer:** Well, do you think that most of the people in Alviso would have wanted to preserve Alviso?

Galarza: That's their home. They want their homes preserved. They face the danger of being kicked out. So you go in and help them, but that's not the ultimate answer. What happens after you save a barrio? It's still a bad place to live in. It's still an unattractive place to live in. If you stop there you haven't gone very far.

**Interviewer:** What do you think then that Chicanos should be doing to improve their situation? Is it possible to improve the situation of Chicanos without retaining some degree of geographical concentration?

Galarza: It's a question of how you get a people and how you get them to move together. And having five hundred thousand Mexicans in one place doesn't necessarily tell you that they're going to be able to act successfully. Maybe you can do more with five hundred thousand organized people than you can with a thousand, but the question is "How do you organize five hundred thousand people?" You've got two hundred Mexican communities in the Southwest, and you've got two hundred situations in which that question is applicable. Who is there in X community trying to organize? How's he trying to do it? What help does he need? Once he gets organized, to what end? What's the purpose of organizing?

The political question as to what the Mexicans are doing with whatever time they can buy hasn't been answered. There's "La Raza Unida" and a thousand other razas unidas. Each one working in its own way, its own little circle. But these are all experiments

in the way of political organization. Maybe that's the way it has to be for a long time.

**Interviewer: One final question: how do you see the long term trends affecting the barrios and colonias? What will become of them?**

**Galarza:** I see what has been happening in Alviso as part of a very broad trend towards the super-urbanization of America. The urban giants being created now are not "communities" in any real sense. The people there feel no sense of community. This process is in fact destroying what does remain of human communities. The Mexican communities are very vulnerable to this kind of cannibalism. They've been cut off for many decades from their cultural and institutional roots. What is happening in Alviso has already happened to many barrios in the Southwest. The forces favoring development see them as obstacles in their path. Federal agencies supposedly concerned with their welfare see them as "targets" rather than as human communities. So in general the forces in American society seem to be arrayed against the existing Mexican communities in the Southwest.

## **GUILLERMO FLORES** **The Struggle for Community** **Control: Some Lessons**

**Interviewer:** Could you tell us something about yourself—your background, present and past positions?

**Flores:** I was born in San Diego. Lived in Lemon Grove and Spring Valley, and went to UCLA for undergraduate work and was involved in working with MEChA and a number of groups while I was in Los Angeles. In my senior year I was involved in a research project, basically a feasibility study for annexation or incorporation in the unincorporated county section in east Los Angeles, and in the process I began to get familiar with economic and political mechanisms for control of the barrio. Naturally, I worked with many Chicano organizations in the area. Then I came to Stanford in 1970, and last year—1971-72—I was a Chicano Teaching Fellow at Stanford and I was also teaching at Cal State Hayward. I taught a course on the political economy of the Bay Area at Stanford and the students did various research projects. One of the projects was on city planning and urban Master Plans. From that we began to get information about the whole Bay Area—how decisions are made, how transportation systems operate, and who compose the basic power elite in the Bay Area. Later, I taught a course at Cal State Hayward on Chicano Politics, and in order to make the study of power relationships more concrete, we started to apply it to conditions within the local barrios. The students became interested and wanted to do more research, so we developed a group that worked for the rest of the term; this later group became the backbone of an attempt to organize against the local city council.

**Interviewer:** Which of the Chicano communities here in the Bay Area have you concentrated on?

**Flores:** More than anything on Mountain View, and on Union City.

**Interviewer:** Are there separate barrios in each of these areas?

**Flores:** Yes, in Mountain View the population is scattered in



pockets, basically because of urban development programs that have gone on to such a degree that they have broken up most of the barrio—although there are still Chicanos scattered all over the place. In Hayward there are Chicanos in several areas. In Union City there are two distinct barrios, one being the DeCoto area. Originally that whole area was called DeCoto and when Union City became a city that section which was the oldest became the DeCoto barrio because it was where most Chicanos were living. Across the freeway is another barrio which is Alvarado, and in Alvarado there are a lot of Chicanos, some Puerto Ricans, some Portuguese, and some other groups. The whole area is mixed but those are distinct barrios. There are something like 18,000 people in the Union City area and about 6,500 are Chicanos. Actually some of these are Chicano, some are Latino, and there are some Portuguese.

**Interviewer:** Are there any other social or economic characteristics of these barrios that you think is relevant?

Flores: Let me tell you a little bit of the history of the city, without going into too much detail. Union City is an area like many of the areas in California. When the railroads were built a lot of land was given to the railroads and became the property of Southern Pacific. This is exactly the case of Union City, as a matter of fact. Much of the land is owned by the railroads—even the City Council building and the police station rest on property owned by the railroad. The railroad owns an industrial park which is leased out to other companies. As a result, in the past, the railroads, especially Southern Pacific, have been able to dictate a lot of things to the city. Railroad interests have had considerable impact on land use and urban development in Union City.

Still, Union City has had a long history of Chicano labor activity going back to the early part of the century. Chicanos have been involved in a long series of agricultural strikes here. The region has had a long history of struggle, even though many of the current residents may not be aware of that past.

**Interviewer:** And today where are most of the Chicanos employed who live in the area?

Flores: There's a lot of unemployment in the DeCoto and Alvarado barrios. Most of the employment is outside of the city,

scattered across the Bay Area. Many have jobs in San José or Oakland. There is an industrial park in Union City but it doesn't hire too many local Chicanos. The same is true with the police force and the city council. There are a lot of public employees but very few are Chicanos. When we began doing research, we found out that in Oakland, where they had a large population of Blacks, they hire many Chicanos from the city of Hayward. In the city of Hayward, where they have an industrial park, they hire many Blacks from Oakland, and Chicanos from other areas. It's a way in which corporations are able to separate community struggles from class struggles. This is something the corporations have learned from history. As industry developed in this country worker housing was often built right next to the factories, in fact often owned by the factory (this is still the case with many mining towns and most farm labor camps). It was a way of increasing factory power over the workers, but it was also easier for workers to organize that way because they not only worked together in the assembly line but they lived together. Capitalists, if only in a very sort of sluggish way, attempt to learn from their past mistakes.

**Interviewer:** Do you think this kind of hiring practice is done as a conscious policy?

Flores: Generally yes, although it is hard to prove. But it is taking place, whether it is conscious or not. This is not to say that the industrial park doesn't hire Chicanos, there are some there. But most of them are not from DeCoto.

**Interviewer:** What has been happening to the barrios in this area that you have been describing?

Flores: Union City was incorporated about 1956-57. At that time it was essentially a rural area. There was some farm land, a lot of migrant labor, and a lot of Chicanos that lived in the area had also worked in the farms. Alvarado and DeCoto were unincorporated areas, little towns; but at that time they were not divided by the freeway. The incorporation took place and a few years later Highway 17 went through the middle and broke the barrios, Alvarado on one side of the freeway, DeCoto on the other. Then a few years later considerable construction began and expensive housing was built, some of which requires that you earn a thousand dollars a month to live there. Obviously most Chicanos

can't live in places like that. That's right next to Alvarado, and they have similar plans for Alvarado. So they want to get rid of the older houses there. In the meantime Union City, through its general plan, decided to make the Chicano barrio like L.A.'s Olvera Street—a nice Mexican Plaza with very few Chicanos around but lots of curios and things like that. There were plans for condominiums and duplexes. In the process the nature of the DeCoto barrio would be transformed. The city was also planning on strictly enforcing the housing codes in that area. That would mean that the 26% of the housing in the area which is dilapidated or deteriorated would probably be demolished or the owners would be forced to take out loans to renovate their houses up to standards. The net effect would be to completely change the community atmosphere of the barrio. It would also mean higher tax levels which would force most present residents out of the area. Families that weren't forced out because their houses were destroyed, probably would be forced out because of the high taxes.

**Interviewer:** What you've been describing sounds like a number of processes designed to fragment the barrio and displace Chicanos. Is that correct?

**Flores:** Perhaps not explicitly, but the results are the same. To really answer that we have to look at the nature of the whole Bay Area, which can be seen as one political-economic unit. After World War II the Bay Area Council was formed. It is like the Council on Economic Development at the local level, in that big business uses government to look after its interests. Most of the construction firms, most of the large and middle range businesses in the Bay Area are members of the Bay Area Council. By no coincidence, the person who was chairman of the Bay Area Council (until recently) also happened to sit on the Board of Directors of the Bay Area Transportation Study Commission which sets up the Master Plan for transportation needs for the entire Bay Area. The Bay Area Council sets its priorities in terms of how much "economic growth" (i.e. profit) they want, where they want their workers to come from, and how they are going to move them back and forth. Then the Bay Area Transportation Study Commission formulates its feasibility studies based on the needs that the Bay Area Council develops. What they have done in the most recent Bay Area Study Commission report is to divide

the Bay Area into four or five sectors. San Francisco is the financial sector. Oakland is the transportation sector (the port of Oakland; the airport; and a lot of big trucking companies, grocery chains and canning companies, have their headquarters there). Areas like Redwood City and Palo Alto have light industry (especially electronics), and San José is basically the heavy industrial center. Everything not included, such as parts of Oakland on the east side, provide a sort of reserve labor pool from which workers can be moved very easily. Union City fits into this last category, although its own Master Plan does include construction of a "Mexican" commercial area. By this plan, many old residents would be displaced, and the residents of the new apartments and condominiums would be conveniently located close to the freeways and the new Bay Area Rapid Transit System. Thus, housing, transportation, and the needs of the regional labor market would all be neatly coordinated so that the workers could "easily" travel to their jobs.

**Interviewer:** So then the major employers in the Bay Area have developed a kind of Master Plan, and many of the things that are happening in the barrios are a kind of by-product of the processes that are set in motion by those plans.

**Flores:** It's not a direct thing, it's not as if the head of the Bank of America says "OK Union City, here's what you do." But the large economic interests control the regional processes, and places like Union City can only accept projections from some regional authority who has the facilities to say, "In fifteen years this is what your population is going to be, this is probably what the unemployment rate is going to be, this is what the industrial growth is going to be." Of course, the projections are based on the economic requirements of big business.

**Interviewer:** What has been the response of local Chicano organizations or groups to the processes that you describe?

**Flores:** La Raza Unida Party (El Partido) was the group that took up the struggle. They fought the freeway and took leadership. Chicanas and Chicanos that were in my Hayward class, some of whom were members of the Partido, made a presentation to La Raza Unida Party in Union City, and we all thought, "What can we do?" Together we sat down and worked out a strategy. The

first and most important job was getting the information to the people, and not just to La Raza Unida Party, but to the whole community. We managed to get hold of some documents of the city and duplicate some of the maps which they were going to be presenting to the City Council, as their proposed Master Plan. We duplicated them in large numbers. On the back we explained what the projects were for, the individual houses in a given block and when there would be a meeting of the City Council to discuss this Master Plan. The Partido leafleted the entire barrio and the day the City Council was to discuss this Master Plan something like four hundred people showed up in a room that holds about 100. That pretty well terrorized the City Council as the people were very upset. After that meeting we held several more community meetings, and several groups were organized. The DeCoto Residents Association developed from a series of meetings held to force the City Council to have community representation on revamping the Master Plan. So we began the mobilization process and a lot of people participated. The problem was that it sort of broke down after a while because enthusiasm had started to wane, and we weren't certain as to how to go about fighting it. The City Council also started to ask us "What do *you* want to do?" and everybody said "well we just want to keep it the same," which of course, is impossible. We finally got together with some people from the Confederación de la Raza in San José and had them make some presentations as to what type of planning could be done, what type of alternative plans could be drawn up. A group of Chicanos were picked by the community to be their spokesmen on a citizen's review board. But it turned out to be a postponement of the thing rather than the solution. The city said "OK, now we'll allow the board to review and make its recommendations," and as those things go, the recommendations which were finally presented were not too different from the recommendations which the city had first developed. There hasn't been as much destruction as the city was going to do, and in fact a lot of good changes were made, but still there were a lot of compromises. It became clear to a lot of people that it's very difficult to have a fight at a level like that when you're taking on a county-and-state-wide apparatus—in fact a nation-wide apparatus in terms of the large corporations. The lesson is clear: struggles for self-determination on a community level are bound to win only small concessions. Only when the present system, capitalism, is replaced can we hope to have true self-determination.

**Interviewer:** Were there any conflicts within the Chicanos themselves with respect to the proposed changes within Union City? Were there any Chicanos that felt that perhaps the proposed changes were in their interests?

Flores: There were some, although the majority were against the changes. Those few who did support the plan did so because of economic interests. Some Chicanos who owned land and thought that it would be useful to sell the land so that someone could build a multi-dwelling apartment complex felt that the plan should be accepted because that would mean that their land values would go up. I'm not saying that there was total community unity but for the most part most of the people were against it.

**Interviewer:** Can you identify any long-term trends affecting the future of the barrios?

Flores: In areas like these a lot of poor people are being forced out of the more expensive areas but still they're functionally necessary. You can't have factories without workers, and the workers have to live someplace. What appears to be happening in Union City, for example, is not that the community would be destroyed so much as they might be relocated and forced into other areas. In Union City the DeCoto barrio might be totally destroyed but Hayward would be dealt with differently, or Gilroy where there's a large Chicano labor force.

**Interviewer:** In terms of your own involvement and those working closely with you, how did you organize your project?

Flores: Beginning the research was relatively easy although it was quite difficult in practice. First, we began with two simple assumptions: that there are classes in U.S. society and that big business (the capitalist class) acts to promote its own interests—especially to make more profits. In practice, that usually means that they use whatever government agency or unofficial body which they can get control of. So we began by taking for granted the existence of a local ruling class which makes many of the decisions which affect the entire area—in this case the Bay Area. Our task then was to spell out which groups constituted that ruling class and to find out how they made their decisions and what existing decisions have they already made which will

influence local barrios in the future. Finding out who constitute the ruling class in any given area can be started very easily. Usually in any city or barrio the major land owners are known or at least their names are. But in an area like the Bay Area the task is harder so we began by looking at who sits on the Board of Regents of the local colleges and universities (that's always a quick way of finding out who make up the local ruling class because they are almost always the most influential capitalists—the directors of banks, construction firms, real estate associations, large corporations, etc.). Then we found out what governmental agencies and advisory boards make decisions regarding planning and transportation. Almost invariably the people which sit in appointed positions in these agencies are representatives of those firms and interests which will benefit the most from favorable decisions. This was not hard to find out and in fact, it didn't take us long to get hold of many of the written reports of these agencies. Usually, they are public record but often the most relevant are marked "draft" and are not made available to the public. But we were able to get access to summaries of these reports from local city planners and consulting agencies. Planners especially have a good sense of the power structure because they know what their limitations are and who sets those limitations. So we talked to planners and in the case of Union City to the city manager.

**Interviewer: How many of you were there that were involved?**

Flores: When we started the thing there were four of us. One of the first things we did was to visit the Pacific Study Center, and that was a big help. They were doing studies on the Bay Area Council and regional transportation. From then on we could do other research on our own. We spent a lot of time just getting together a lot of material before we had any idea how to assess it. The first thing, which I think is crucial, is to get some sort of history of the community. So we studied the community and its history. We had some people that knew the community inside-out writing down what type of things were happening there. As the pieces started falling together, we began to get an understanding, a clear sense of what information we needed. Then we got some idea of where to get it. We started talking to people, and each one recommended you to somebody else. It took a lot of digging out but after a period of time we began to build up quite a bit of material.

**Interviewer: Were there any kind of documents or public records that were useful?**

Flores: To begin with we had the original Master Plan which exists for the city and we got that from the Public Library. We found out that we couldn't get it from the city manager or the city planner's office so we got it through indirect means. That's the way the Partido finally got it. You find out that you know people that know people, that know people that can get the material, and that's basically the way the information is obtained.

**Interviewer: How important was the connection between research and action in this project?**

Flores: That's crucial. It's very important that we had people that knew the politics of the thing. The people from the Partido, young as well as old, have been involved their whole life in that community. So it's much better to have them do the research because they know what's important. They may ask a couple of us who were research advisors in some loose sense of the word: "We have these four or five leads, which ones do you think we should investigate?" But the people were very capable themselves. So for the most part we worked basically as a collective, we decided collectively what the priorities were, we decided what areas to look at. Our strategies might change overnight, but we met constantly, every day. At the end of each day we would pool the information we had gotten as individuals and review it collectively. At that point there were about eight all together that were doing the research. We would get together and try to make everybody else aware of the information, and once we had made that information available to the Partido, we would make it available to the community.

**Interviewer: Did you find that you needed any particular kind of resources to carry on this kind of project, and did you have any difficulty in getting the necessary resources?**

Flores: This project was obviously not funded; we did this on our own. I was able to give students some credit for it and this is what they were doing for my class. Every student in class was required to do some project, and to either write it up or to make an oral presentation. Some of the students wrote up some bits and pieces

of the thing. Also we were able to use some xeroxing from the school and some mimeo from a couple of friendly offices. We had problems in financing but, for the most part, the community took care of it. Students can be a tremendous resource to any community. But they have to put their skills to use, combining theory and practice. This should be the object of all Chicano Studies Departments—not only to study society but to change it.

**Interviewer:** To what extent do you see the preservation of the barrio as a desirable thing?

Flores: I think the existence of the community is very important for the sense of collectivity which comes through Chicanos living together and maintaining their culture. When developers come and try to disperse people it breaks that cohesiveness. Of course it can also serve to unify various barrios that were at each other's throats before, by bringing them together for the first time to fight a common enemy. I think it's very difficult to get some sense of what Chicano communities will be like in the future. Obviously if this economic system is overthrown, a different type of social system would be established, and it might be possible to talk about real community control. As it is now, we do not control the economic base of the community and so we're dependent in every sense of the word; for our labor, on government authorities, on public agencies. For the time being, I think the struggle to maintain the physical existence of the community has acted to solidify the spirit of the barrio and increased the determination to make it a real Chicano community.

But we must never lose sight of the fact that our enemy ignores boundaries—be they community, state, or national frontiers. So we have to develop a national strategy. We don't simply want community control. We want to take control of the economic base of this society—to take the power from the few and give it to the many. That's how we will preserve the barrio and that must be the lesson of our struggles for community control.





## **ROSALIO MUÑOZ** **Our Moving Barrios**

**Interviewer:** In which Chicano communities have you been working recently?

**Muñoz:** Mostly in Lincoln Heights, and in the East Los Angeles area.

**Interviewer:** You mentioned in your recent article that there was a committee called the East-Northeast Committee to Stop Home Destruction. Is this the organization you've been working with?

**Muñoz:** Yes, that's active in Lincoln Heights.

**Interviewer:** What are the general characteristics of the Chicano communities in this area?

**Muñoz:** Well, there are about a million people living in a 4 to 6 mile half circle from downtown L.A., to the north, east and south, and it's really a city of Chicanos and Latinos—of Raza. And it's a comfortable, nice city, except for the lack of political power and the condition of economic dependence. Spanish is spoken by most people, especially in the core parts of the community. There are Chicano restaurants, Chicano theaters, nearby hospitals with Spanish speaking staff. Freeways and hills divide the Chicano community into several barrios, such as Lincoln Heights, Boyle Heights, Maravilla. Ten years ago people wouldn't have thought of Lincoln Heights or El Sereno as Chicano communities. Chicanos have been moving into many areas in the last few years.

**Interviewer:** In an area like Lincoln Heights, for example, what percentage of the residents are Chicanos?

**Muñoz:** About 90-95%. Boyle Heights is basically the same. Unincorporated East L.A. is about the same. El Sereno is about 75%, I would say, Highland Park probably 50-55%. Huntington Park as a whole is about 55%. The city of Commerce is small but is about 80-90% Chicano, Monterey probably 40-45%, Alhambra around 35-40%. Glendale and Echo Park are about 45-50% or more Chicano. Pico Rivera must be close to 60%. Lincoln Heights has become more Mexicano than Chicano, with many recent

arrivals from México. Generally the more you depend on Spanish the closer you live to downtown.

**Interviewer:** One of the things that you mentioned in your article was that about two-thirds of the homes are owned by barrio people.

**Muñoz:** Basically one-third or more of the homes in these areas are owner occupied, but then a Chicano may own one or two or three other lots. Two-thirds may be an exaggeration—it may be between 50% and two-thirds.

**Interviewer:** What about the ownership of business in the barrio?

**Muñoz:** The mom and pop stores are largely Chicano but the rest are mostly outside owned. Some of the proprietors are also Jewish, Oriental or Cuban.

**Interviewer:** Can you tell us something about the history of Lincoln Heights?

**Muñoz:** Lincoln Heights was built around the turn of the century. It was a middle class community and was basically Anglo. Then it became an Italian neighborhood and around the 1930's it became more and more Chicano. After the war Chicanos were being dislocated from the main downtown area barrios by urban renewal, the freeways, and Dodger Stadium, and they began moving to Lincoln Heights. Then in the 60's it began to get people that were migrating from México.

**Interviewer:** Recently a number of people have been talking about efforts to disperse or dislocate the barrios. Can you describe what has been going on here?

**Muñoz:** Yes, the process operates through the city's master plan, which is projected to 1990. I think this is going on all over California. The underlying concept is that of "recycling" the inner city, revitalizing the downtown area. L.A. people have always felt they lacked a true "downtown," so now they're trying to create one by building convention centers, skyscrapers, and so on. If Chicanos are in the way, they're moved out. Here in this area they want to put in apartments in place of the single family homes that exist here now.

**Interviewer:** Apartments for the Anglo middle class?

**Muñoz:** Well, let me put it this way. Part of the plan was to set up a hospital and medical complex just on the other side of the freeway. One of the maps indicated that the people who would work there—technicians, professionals—would be able to find housing in Lincoln Heights. Of course we don't have many Chicanos in those specialized medical industries. So that was one kind of indication.

When we really started looking into the plans for high density development in this area we found out about the Housing Development Corporation, that was really run by people that were friends of the Mayor and the local councilmen. It was run completely by outsiders, people from the Planning Commission, the Community Re-development Agency, people that worked for the city. The Model Cities corporation was being used to implement the plan. So we knocked at the plan and the city council pulled it back and was forced to make some changes. Then we went after the corporation, and eventually took it over. We educated the community about the corporation's by-laws. We put out leaflets in English and Spanish and sometimes even in Italian and Chinese, because it involved the whole community. We got some 300 people into one of their Board meetings and our people knew their by-laws and constitution better than those flunkies from City Hall. We filled all the vacancies in the Board of Directors and took it over. So the City Council cut off its funds and that was the end of it.

One way in which this process works is that the city will make local improvements—roads, lighting, etc.—and then drive up taxes and force out the marginal homeowner. Or they'll sponsor a development—a hospital or "Mexican" market center—that pushes up the value of the surrounding land, again forcing out the small homeowner through higher taxes. The developments are justified as creating jobs, but the only jobs they create for local residents are menial service jobs.

**Interviewer:** You've described these processes which have the effect of dislocating and removing Chicanos from the area. What do you see as the basic causes or forces behind these processes?

**Muñoz:** There's too many of them Mexicans. They're spreading all over the place. It's too hard to keep them gerrymandered,

they're going to start electing politicians, they're going to start taking over the city and getting political power.

**Interviewer:** You see the motivation as being largely political?

Muñoz: Well, this is happening with Blacks too, and it's happening all over the Southwest. The Supreme Court's one man-one vote decision played an important part. Blacks, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans are becoming important political forces in the cities. A Black mayor has just been elected in L.A., a Puerto Rican is running fairly well in New York, Detroit is 50% Black. So the powerholders have decided that they want to prevent that, and one way is to disperse the minorities. There are also economic causes—such as declining tax bases in the city as whites and factories move to suburbia. So there's an attempt to reverse the process and again make the city the place for the middle class white person. So there is a mixture of economic and political causes.

**Interviewer:** The planning process seems to play an important role in the trends you've been describing. Is there any provision for Chicano involvement in the planning process?

Muñoz: I think they have a Chicano hired in city planning now but they don't have one yet in the County. I don't think that who the planner is makes a difference. He who pays the piper calls the tune. The important thing is to change political structures and acquire more political power for Chicanos.

**Interviewer:** Are there any significant number of Chicanos who identify their interests with the "development" of the barrio, as it is seen by the planning agencies?

Muñoz: Oh yes, there are a lot of Chicanos who are getting money coming down from Washington. The groups that are getting money now are what you might call the developmentalists, who want to develop the economic power, develop housing power. But they're working with programs and financing that represent gabacho interests. When you work within that you just get caught up into gabacho related kinds of things. I don't usually like to talk in public about these kinds of things and start saying, well, these guys are all vendidos. But developmentalism doesn't work without

political power behind it or without the say-so of the people that are being affected.

**Interviewer:** I think it's important for Chicanos to be aware that it's not always just the Anglo who is doing this type of thing—that there are Chicanos who cooperate.

Muñoz: Well, you know they're puppets. A lot of them are motivated out of good conscience. We want to get something done, we want to fix up the neighborhood. But they don't always see all the consequences, and often they're out of touch with the community.

**Interviewer:** Going on to a somewhat different topic; information and research seem to play an important role in community action these days. That is, in trying to counteract the things that are going on one of the critical factors is to what extent you can command information. How do you feel about this?

Muñoz: So far we have not been as research oriented as we should have been. The research that we've done is research that we've done on our own. The more research we can do ahead of time the better we can schedule plans. Some of the research that we need and do use is just snooping around and spying, finding out what kind of schemes the agencies are cooking up, so that we can anticipate their actions. But the kind of research that we really need is research to counter the propaganda that is being put out by the city. We could use a lot of research on home ownership patterns, on which financial institutions control mortgages, on the condition of existing housing.

**Interviewer:** Is the information that you need difficult to get, confidential. . .

Muñoz: Most of that information is public record.

**Interviewer:** So it's just a matter of putting in the time and effort?

Muñoz: And that's not attractive to most academic cats. . .I've approached them and they're not interested. Because the community's immediate need is not some innovative concepts in sociology.

**Interviewer:** Maybe some people don't see the significance of that type of research and for that reason they don't find it interesting. Maybe they don't see the connection between that and the broader trends affecting the Chicano.

**Muñoz:** Well, yes. And the money is on the other side as well. To do a study for the community is one thing; doing it for the city or a large corporation is something else.

**Interviewer:** I gather from most of your comments that you see the preservation of the barrio as being a desirable thing. Could you elaborate on that a little?

**Muñoz:** Well, being concentrated in a barrio provides a base for getting political power. It's harder to get singled out and divided and conquered. There are economic reasons too; people have equity built up in their present homes, and the suburban houses usually are not built for large families. The barrios here are close to downtown L.A. and jobs. Also, it's a way of maintaining our culture. Personally, I'm not for acculturation—I'm not for becoming white. A middle class Chicano may move out of the barrio to get better schools for his kids, but these kids are going to run into a lot of problems in the mostly white schools also. And they may grow up being Americans of Mexican descent rather than Raza, and I don't want that.

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