Nuestras Historias: Mexican American/Chicano/Latino Histories in Denver

An Historic Context

Prepared for
DENVER
THE MILE HIGH CITY

Prepared by
Mead & Hunt
www.meadhunt.com
A Note on Terms

Latino identity is expressed through many different terms. This report uses “Latino” as an all-encompassing term to reference the communities in Denver that are Spanish speaking or descended from Spanish-speaking ancestors, acknowledging the multi-cultural and multi-national diversity of Latino communities in Denver. Definitions of terms used in this context include:

**Chicanos/as** – Term used by those of Mexican American descent who, in the 1960s and later, acknowledged the complexity of their history and identified with and expressed pride in their indigenous roots.

**Hispanic** – Term that became popular in the 1970s to refer to Americans with ancestral roots in Spanish-speaking countries. This term remains popular today.

**Hispanos/as** – Term that refers to people descended from Spanish-speaking New Mexicans and southern Coloradans.

**Latinos/as** – An umbrella term for those of Latin American ancestry—including non-Spanish-speaking groups. This is an inclusive term that includes Mexican Americans, Chicanos, and Hispanics. The term became popular in the 2000s.

**Latinx/e** – Term that avoids gender associations with Latino/a.

**Mejicanos/Mexicans** – Term sometimes used by Mexican Americans to express their Mexican roots. Often used in the early twentieth century as a derogatory term by Anglos to refer to Mexican Americans, leading many to refer to themselves as Spanish Americans.

**Mexican American** – Term adopted by the Mexican American community after World War II, signifying a stronger identification with Mexican roots, while also asserting a desire to claim an American identity.
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Glossary of Terms

This glossary defines terms used throughout this historic context.

Aztlán – Traditionally, the mythical home of the Aztec people, indigenous to Mexico. In the context of the Chicano Movement, it refers to the American Southwest, specifically the land ceded by Mexico in the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.

Bracero – In Spanish, “worker” or “one who works with their arms.” In this historic context, this term refers to Mexican laborers who entered the United States to work as part of the Bracero Program.

Bracero Program – A series of agreements that established an official immigrant worker program between the United States and Mexico between 1942 and 1964. More formally known as the Mexican Farm Labor Supply Program.

Chicano Movement/El Movimiento – The Chicano civil rights movement, a powerful social and political movement that began in the 1960s.

Chicano/a – Term used by those of Mexican American descent who, in the 1960s and later, acknowledged the complexity of their history and identified with and expressed pride in their indigenous roots.

Denver Landmark – A structure or district that has been designated by the Denver City Council as a local historic landmark significant for its history, architecture, geography, or culture. The ability to designate a structure or district for preservation was enacted in the 1967 Denver Landmark Preservation Ordinance to preserve, enhance, and encourage the use of historic structures and districts throughout the City and County of Denver.

Hispanic – Term that became popular in the 1970s to refer to Americans with ancestral roots in Spanish-speaking countries. This term remains popular today.

Hispano – Persons descended from Spanish settlers in the Southwest before it was annexed to the United States. In this historic context report, this term refers to Spanish-speaking residents from the region of Northern New Mexico and Southern Colorado.

Historic context – Background information gathered and used to frame and evaluate the significance of a historic property in terms of the history of the relevant geographical area, the history of associated historical themes or subjects, and within a historical and contemporary timeframe.

Historic preservation – The process of identifying, protecting, and enhancing buildings, places, and objects of historical and cultural significance. This process embraces many phases including the survey and evaluation of historical, architectural, and cultural resources in an area; the development of planning and legal measures to protect these resources; the identification of public and private funding sources applicable to preservation projects; the design for the restoration, rehabilitation, and/or adaptive use of historic structures; and the ongoing maintenance of these resources.

Indigenous – Persons representing culturally distinct ethnic groups with a shared national identity who are native to a place that has been colonized or settled by another ethnic group. In this historic context this term refers to the peoples and cultures existing in Mexico and the southwestern United States prior to European contact.

La Gente – Spanish term that means “the people, used often by the earlier generations of Mexicans and Mexican Americans who settled in Colorado, some of whom eventually migrated to Denver.

La Raza – Spanish expression that means ‘the people,’ ‘the community,’ and ‘the race.’ This expression was adopted by activists during the Chicano Movement.

La Raza Unida – National political party established in the 1960s to challenge Democrat and Republican political parties and advance Latino/Chicano issues and candidates.

Latino/a/x/e – An umbrella term for those of Latin American ancestry — including non-Spanish-speaking groups. This is an inclusive term that includes Mexican Americans, Chicanos, and Hispanics. The term became popular in the 2000s. Latinx or Latine variations avoid gender associations with Latino/a. In this historic context Latino refers to the general communities in Denver that are Spanish speaking or descended from Spanish-speaking ancestors, to acknowledge the multi-cultural and multi-national diversity of Latino people.
**Mestizo** – A general Spanish term to describe persons of mixed European and Indigenous backgrounds.

**Mexican American** – Term adopted by the Mexican American community after World War II, signifying a stronger identification with Mexican roots, while also asserting a desire to claim an American identity.

**Mejicano/Mexicano** – Term sometimes used by Mexican Americans to express their Mexican roots. Often used in the early twentieth century as a derogatory term by Anglos to refer to Mexican Americans, leading many to refer to themselves as Spanish Americans.

**Movimiento** – Spanish for “movement.” Commonly used to refer to the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s.

**Mutualistas** – Community-based mutual aid societies founded and operated by Spanish-speaking immigrants and migrants.

**National Register of Historic Places (National Register or NRHP)** – The official list of the nation’s historic places worthy of preservation maintained by the Secretary of the Interior under the authority of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. The National Register includes districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects significant in American history, architecture, archaeology, and culture. In tables in this document, properties are identified as Officially Eligible or Field Eligible, meaning they have been previously determined to be eligible for listing in the National Register.

**Native American** – Peoples living within what is now the United States prior to European contact. In the U.S., this term is sometimes replaced with American Indian or Indigenous American, depending on the individual preferences of native or indigenous peoples. In this historic context this term also refers to the peoples and cultures existing in, or descending from, Mexico and the southwestern United States prior to European contact.

**Tejano** – Texans of Mexican or Latino descent.

**Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo** – The treaty signed between Mexico and the United States in 1848, which ended the Mexican-American War and ceded all or parts of the states of Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming from Mexico to the United States.
Denver’s historic fabric comes from the stories of the diverse persons and groups who comprise its vibrant history. Led by Denver’s Landmark Preservation staff in partnership with the city’s I Am Denver storytelling project, this first-of-its-kind initiative in Denver uncovers and shares the deep history and historic places of Denver’s Mexican American, Chicano, and Latino communities. Through engaging public outreach and traditional historic research, this project creates a broad overview on the citywide settlement and development patterns of Mexican American, Chicano, and Latino communities in Denver up to the 1990s.

The community engagement proved to be an essential part of the project, both in the content it yielded and in the enthusiasm it garnered from Mexican American/Chicano/Latino communities. Throughout the course of the project, many people expressed a deep appreciation that their history was finally being recorded and honored. The content of the context is meant to be an overview and many sites and individuals who were not mentioned are not considered any less important than those that are included. The hope is that this project will spur other projects, leading to a richer understanding of the Mexican American/Chicano/Latino experience in Denver.

Dr. Nicki Gonzales, Professor of History at Regis University and the Colorado State Historian of History Colorado led the consultant team. Dianna Litvak, Ethan Raath, and Katherine Oldberg, historians from Mead & Hunt, Inc., synthesized the results of the community engagement, archival research, and interviews into a comprehensive historic context with a chronological and thematic overview. The document also includes maps and lists of sites and districts that represent Latino history in Denver.

The terms used in this report are the result of the project team’s best efforts to acknowledge the complexity of identity terms and to use those terms that were most prevalent during the era that is being covered in each section of the document. While this approach is not perfect, it reflects an intention to be historically accurate within the time periods discussed. Our stories and our communities are complex and diverse, thus there is no universal agreement as to which terms should be used and why, including terms such as Latino, Mexican American, or Chicano.

Historic Overview

The history of Denver’s Latino communities is a story of building strong relationships and institutions in a new place, often in the face of adversity. Mejicano and Mexican American families came to Denver looking for new opportunities. They settled in older neighborhoods that had previously been home to European immigrant groups and founded churches, businesses, and organizations while working toward full participation in the economic and political life of the city. For the most part they stayed in these same neighborhoods for decades, infusing the city with their own cultures and traditions, creating a space where they could live and celebrate their unique history and heritage.

Denver’s Mexican history begins with the hundreds of small villages and ranches across New Mexico and southern Colorado that represented the foundation of Hispano society and a blending of Spanish, Mexican, and indigenous cultures. Hispanos were already here when the first gold discoveries occurred in the late 1850s. More Hispanics came to Denver to work with the railroads and smelting companies as the city industrialized in the late 1870s and 1880s. Immigration from Mexico also occurred...
Figure 1. Neighborhood clusters in Denver where Latinos settled. While Latinos were in Denver in the late 1850s, the decades after each cluster indicate when growing numbers of Latinos began to settle there. The map also includes an overview of sites and districts identified in this context.
during the nineteenth century, not only among the poor and working class, but also many upper- and middle-class professionals and merchants. In Denver, as in cities across the West, increased discrimination forced most Hispanics and Mexicans into culturally distinct neighborhoods. Most of Denver’s other residents did not distinguish between the different origins and backgrounds of Latinos. Hispanic migrants who came here were from families who had been in the region for generations. Their descendants explain, “We didn’t cross the border, the border crossed us.” Yet, they faced the same adversities as other Spanish-speaking immigrants in Denver.

The history of Latinos has not been well documented in Denver, and that of Latinas can be even harder to research. Latina efforts in building neighborhoods, businesses, and organizations cannot be overstated. These women nurtured their families, worked hard, upheld their faith and culture, and helped their families and communities thrive. They knew that to survive and keep their families and communities together, they needed to be always vigilant and smarter than others.

Latinos from a variety of backgrounds lived, attended church, and worked in neighborhood clusters on the west, north, and east on the edges of the downtown business district (see Figure 11). These clusters became known as the Westside, Northside, and Eastside. In the last half of the twentieth century, as part of Denver’s post-World War II growth, a large Latino community settled in the southwest part of the city. Demographic studies show a significant dividing line southeast of Broadway and East Colfax Avenue beyond which few Latino families settled. Figure 1 also includes sites and districts identified during the process of preparing this historic context.

**Religion and Spirituality**

Religious facilities are spiritual spaces where the sense of place and community is strong. Although three of every four Latino people identify as Catholic, a few other religions and beliefs of Latinos include Protestant, Methodist, Jehovah’s Witness, Judaism and non-denominational. Latino religious spaces in Denver provide a space to pray, find fellowship, socialize, and work on social justice issues. As Father José María Lara, an activist priest at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church on the Northside, said: “The church is where we meet friends. We get validated as a person. We get recognized in a world that is impersonal. Religious and social needs are closely intertwined, and [churches] represented and provided a social and political element for the people.”

Significant religious spaces in Denver include the St. Cajetan, Denver Inner City Parish, Our Lady of Guadalupe, St. Catherine of Siena, Centro San Juan Diego, Epworth Spanish Church, Sacred Heart, Annunciation and St. Anthony of Padua.

**Education**

Similar to the Catholic churches, Catholic schools offer a central space for Latinos to learn and participate in after school activities, sports and meetings. Latinos relied on the parochial schools to educate their children and

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in some ways protect them from the harsh realities of the lived experience in a racialized and discriminatory world. Although in some ways the schools protected and insulated the Latino students, many also discouraged students from speaking Spanish and cultivating Chicano culture. To fix this issue, Escuela Tlatelolco, established by the Crusade for Justice in 1970, provided bilingual education focusing on Chicano culture. During the 1970s Catholic schools in Denver closed or consolidated as more affluent parishioners moved to the suburbs and lower income families could not afford rising tuition. Segregated schools were a major issue in Denver in the late 1960s, when Latino, Black, and white families sued Denver Public Schools (DPS) (Keyes v. School District Number One), the first non-southern school desegregation case to be decided on by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1973. The courts found Denver’s tri-ethnic racial demographics of white, Latino and Black students unique when it came to the segregated schools in Denver. DPS students were bussed out of their neighborhoods to different parts of the city to meet the court-ordered ratio for integration and create a more diverse student population throughout the school district. The massive demolition of residences and businesses in the Auraria neighborhood on the Westside for the Auraria Higher Education Center in the 1970s destroyed a significant Latino neighborhood, yet the schools on the campus have also provided a path for higher education to many Latinos in Denver. Significant sites related to Latino education include Catholic schools, Escuela Tlatelolco Centro de Estudios, public schools including North, West and Manual high schools, and the Auraria Higher Education Center campus.

**Labor**

The industries of the United States have long depended on the labor of Latino workers—a dependence steeped with racialized exploitation. The fight for better labor conditions is founded on racial inequality and oppression as the worst jobs became synonymous with jobs usually reserved for Latinos, Blacks, and other historically marginalized groups. Latinos came in waves to Denver during periods of significant economic growth. This is no accident, as economic growth depended on cheap and accessible labor. The international policies between the United States and Spanish-speaking countries have further enforced and entrenched this pattern. Throughout U.S. history, Latinos have consistently faced intense discrimination evidenced by low pay, dangerous working conditions, and lack of advancement. Excluded from unions and other organizing efforts due to racial discrimination, these workers relied upon their own mutualistas (mutual aid societies) to support each other. For example, *La Sociedad Protección Mutua de Trabajadores Unidos* (the Society for the Mutual Protection of the United Workers, SPMDTU), which was founded in Antonito, Colorado, in 1900, is 122 years old and still has an active local Denver chapter: Concilio No. 7. It is the oldest active Hispanic mutual aid and civil rights organization in the U.S. As the communities grew, Latinos gained representation within unions and other organizations through strikes, boycotts, and self-organizing efforts. Beginning in the 1960s, labor

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leaders such as Tim Flores helped establish local chapters that focused on Latino struggles, such as the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), and El Obrero Chicano (the Chicano Worker).

The United Farm Workers (UFW), led by César Chávez and Dolores Huerta had a highly active presence in Colorado and Denver, and Denver hosted many strikes and boycotts to improve the conditions for agricultural workers. The Colorado chapter of the Latino veterans-rights group, the American GI Forum, initiated the boycott of Coors Brewery with many other groups, protesting Coors refusal to hire Latino workers, in addition to other discriminatory practices. Sites that represent this history include buildings where these organizations held meetings and other events, such as the Mile Hi Veterans building as well as other halls and meeting spaces.

## Commerce

While many of Denver’s Latinos were farm laborers, meat packers, or factory workers, others started their own businesses, many of which became highly profitable and provided stable employment to others. Nationally, there is a rich history of Latino entrepreneurs who opened restau-

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rants, pharmacies, clubs, grocery stores, hotels, theaters, and many other businesses. If they had a choice, many Latino families preferred to frequent Latino businesses and use Latino doctors, dentists, and lawyers because of their innate understanding of the cultural needs and desires of community members. Despite facing discrimination in their education and difficulties attaining the qualifications needed for these fields, Latino professionals throughout Denver built prosperous and essential businesses for Latinos and others of the community.

Family businesses gave their owners and the community a feeling of pride and ownership of their own lives. Their businesses offered an escape from the dangers, hardships, and discrimination of the labor force and inspired others to become business owners. As one Denver resident stated, “Latino business owners made a difference by showing others that it was possible to achieve such success.” Latinas were the backbones for many of these successful businesses. Because Latinos represent a relatively late immigrant group in Denver, they generally utilized the existing buildings in their neighborhoods for commercial strips, adding to the historic and cultural significance of these structures. The most centralized Latino commercial districts in Denver include Santa Fe Drive on the Westside, Federal Boulevard connects the Northside and Westside, West 32nd Avenue and West 38th Avenue on the Northside, Larimer Street on the Eastside, and Morrison Road in Southwest Denver.

**Politics**

The fight for political representation and civic inclusion began when Latinos first arrived in Denver. Latinos were courted by Democrats and Republicans for their votes, but without Latino and Latina candidates representing their needs, progress was slow. Latinos formed and relied on their own grassroots organizations to improve their communities in the 1940s and 1950s including the Denver Chapter of the Latin American Council and the Good Americans Organization. Lawyer Bert A. Gallegos became the first Latino elected to represent Denver in the Colorado General Assembly from 1957 to 1963. In the 1960s and 1970s statewide election rules changed, finally allowing leaders from Denver’s Latino communities to achieve influence at the state and national level. Latinos helped elect numerous state representatives and senators in the 1960s and 1970s, including Paco Sanchez (1969), Ruben Valdez (1971), and Betty Benavidez (1971), the first Latina elected to the state legislature. The 1970s saw a significant rise in Latino political power at both the state and

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11 Colorado Legislators with UFW Leader César Chávez, 1979, Denver Public Library Digital Collections.
city level through the Colorado Chicano caucus. Within the city, many individuals and organizations helped their neighborhoods and shaped Latino politics. The local War on Poverty program, Denver Opportunity, created five neighborhood action centers as part of its program. Local groups mobilized to take advantage of the funding and it had lasting impacts on Latino neighborhoods, such as in La Alma Lincoln Park with the West Side Improvement Association and West Side Action Council. A few sites that represent this history include the Curtis Park Community Center, the West Side Action Center, West Side Coalition Office, Auraria Community Center, and the Good American Organization Hall.

**El Movimiento: The Chicano Movement**

Frustrated over the lack of political representation, pervasive poverty, and systemic racism, many Chicanos and Latinos joined protests during the civil rights era of the 1960s. They demanded reforms in education, farm worker rights, policing, healthcare, and housing. The high numbers of Latinos, Blacks, Native Americans and other ethnic groups who went into the military and were killed during the Vietnam War became a rallying point for many. The Chicano Movement in Denver, or El Movimiento, consisted of grassroots organizing by numerous activists, including the Crusade for Justice, established by Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales and many others.

When the Chicano Movement began in the 1960s, it represented a revitalized Chicano identity and the need for radical, revolutionary changes in U.S. society. Chicano leaders represented El Movimiento as a groundbreaking departure from the efforts of previous generations, who worked within the established system rather than agitating for changes outside of the system. One of the most successful aspects of El Movimiento in Denver was tapping into the energy of young urban Chicanos, who sought a revolutionary approach to changing society instead of following the same tactics of their parents and grandparents. While El Movimiento had a strong patriarchal flavor, with men getting the credit as the leaders and founders, women were involved in all aspects of the movement. Sites that represent El Movimiento include the former site of Crusade for Justice, La Raza (formerly known as Columbus Park), La Alma Lincoln Park Historic Cultural District, Servicios de la Raza, Escuela Tlatelolco, and the Mi Casa Resource Center.

**Arts**

The history of Latino artistic expression in Denver is expressed through architecture, visual arts and murals, music, dance, theater, and literature. Music specific to Latino culture includes conjunto music (an accordion-led ensemble), jazz, classical, folk, rock and roll, rap, hip hop, flamenco guitarists, and mariachi. Mariachi music originated as a form of folk music specific to the Jalisco region of Mexico and dates to the mid-nineteenth century. Cath-

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13 Joseph Chavez, Cesar Chavez Peace and Justice Committee, Photograph, 2015.
olic priests were the first to use the term “mariachi” to describe musicians who performed at social gatherings and celebrations. Traditional folklórico is a style of dance that is traced back to ceremonial and social dances of Indigenous people living in present-day Mexico. Today folklórico incorporates influences from Spain, Germany, France, Asia, and Africa. Local and touring folk theaters have long been a mainstay of artistic expression for Latinos. Traditionally, local theater groups are organized by ordinary citizens and perform stories that connect directly to the experiences of their audience.

Several prominent and historically significant Latino art collectives active in the city include the Chicano Humanities and Arts Council (CHAC), Museo de las Americas, Su Teatro, and mariachi and folklórico groups. The renaissance of Chicano music, literature, art, poetry, dance, and theater, which started during the 1960s as an integral part of El Movimiento, remains a crucial component of Latino culture in Denver. Indigenous imagery, religious iconography, and contemporary styles blend to create distinctive styles. Significant locations that represent the diversity of Latino arts in Denver include buildings with Maya-inspired architecture such as the former Mariposa Health Clinic and Del Pueblo Elementary School, spaces where Latino art is performed, displayed, or taught including Museo de las Americas, the Aztlán Theatre, Su Teatro, Grupo Folklórico Sabor Latino, the Chicano Humanities and Arts Council, and murals found throughout Denver at parks, recreation centers, community buildings, libraries, and schools.

**Neighborhood Life**

Strong neighborhood networks connect Latinos throughout the city, and Denver’s historic neighborhoods are the backdrop for day-to-day activities, gatherings, and
significant milestones. Denver’s neighborhoods feature countless essential places for Latinos, where people have fostered a strong sense of belonging, developed deep relationships, and feel connected and accepted. For example, the vibrant and profound Chicano and Latino murals found throughout the city have become beloved neighborhood gathering spaces, and many were created by artists from the community and included children to help paint under their direction. Another vital aspect of Latino culture in Denver is cruising and lowriding events in spaces such as Barnum Park, which bring people together to celebrate a wide range of creative expression in bikes, cars, art, music, and clothing and is an important lifestyle for many. Denver community celebrations and festivals such as Cinco de Mayo, Diez y Seis de Septiembre, Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead), and Ceremonia Xupantla (summer solstice) have been happening for decades and continue to bring people together to celebrate and learn about Latino cultures. Sites that represent Latino/Chicano neighborhood life include Barnum Park, Troy Chavez Peace Garden, La Alma Lincoln Park Historic Cultural District, Mestizo-Curtis Park, and La Raza (formerly Columbus) Park.

Conclusion

The context study provides an overview and framework to better understand the deep and rich history of Latinos in Denver. All of this resulted from simply asking people: “What places in Denver matter to you, and why?” Based on a public meeting and online survey, oral interviews, and archival research, the context does not cover every individual, site, or topic, given the sheer volume of the history. It is the start of a process for Denver citizens to understand, celebrate, and preserve the unique and vibrant Latino and Chicano history of the city, and begin to identify sites and districts that could be landmarked for their contribution to Denver’s history. This historic context involved gathering and synthesizing an overwhelming amount of material collected through community engagement and archival research. The goal is that the context sparks a number of related projects that will continue to uncover the significance of Denver’s Latino history.

The context will be used by the city in the following ways (and other ways yet to be identified):

• Identify significant locations and buildings within Denver affiliated with Latino/Chicano history
• Preserve and protect Latino and Chicano cultures and places
• Actively engage members of Latino/Chicano communities to nominate historic landmarks
• Ensure that all aspects of Denver’s history are recognized and preserved
• Diversify the Denver Landmark portfolio with more sites and districts for underrepresented groups
• Inform the citywide building survey, Discover Denver, a joint project of the City and Historic Denver, Inc.

• Inform the production of the I Am Denver mini-documentary on Denver’s Latino/Chicano history
• Guide the development of neighborhood plans, planning practices, and projects
• Guide future historic contexts on underrepresented groups that explore the diverse ethnic and cultural history of Denver
• Support the city’s equity and inclusivity vision

The Denver Mexican American/Chicano/Latino Historic Context is the first in a series of historic contexts developed by the Denver Landmark Preservation Program to understand and recognize the diversity of histories represented by historically marginalized communities. For more information on this series and the full historic context report in English and Spanish, visit denvergov.org/landmark.
Introduction

Purpose of the project

The Denver Mexican American/Chicano/Latino historic context, a project of the Landmark Preservation Program of the City and County of Denver’s Community Planning and Development Department (City), recognizes the importance of Mexican American/Chicano/Latino history in Denver. This context celebrates this heritage and the contributions Mexican Americans/Chicanos/Latinos have made to Denver and provides a starting point for the City and other partners to undertake more research, conduct historic surveys, and designate Mexican American/Chicano/Latino historic landmarks and districts throughout Denver.

While this document highlights some of the individuals, sites, and events that help tell this story, it raises more questions and highlights more gaps in the story than it answers. Denver’s Mexican American/Chicano/Latino history is complex and layered, consisting of many stories and many voices. This report is an important first step and its authors encourage others to dig deeper. While this project focuses on Denver, it is critical to recognize that the city’s boundaries place artificial constraints on telling the full Mexican American/Chicano/Latino story. There were connections and migration patterns that extended to places throughout the state and region, such as Boulder, Weld and Larimer Counties, Pueblo, the South Platte River region, the San Luis Valley, and Northern New Mexico.

The terms used in this report are the result of the project team’s best efforts to acknowledge the complexity of identity terms and to use terms that were the most prevalent during the era that is being covered in each section of the document. While this approach is not perfect, it reflects our intention to be historically accurate within the time period discussed. Our stories and our community are complex and diverse, thus there is no universal agreement as to which terms should be used and why, including terms such as Latinos, Mexican Americans, or Chicanos.

For the purposes of this context, “Latino” is an all-encompassing term, acknowledging the multi-cultural and multi-national diversity of numerous Latino communities in Denver. Latino is an umbrella term for those of Latin American ancestry—including non-Spanish-speaking groups that became popular in the 2000s. This is an inclusive term that includes Hispanics, Mejicanos or Mexicans, Mexican Americans, Chicanos, and Hispanics.

Hispano refers to the descendants of Spanish-speaking New Mexicans who migrated north into Colorado. Mejicano or Mexican is sometimes used by Mexican Americans to express their Mexican roots. Often used in the early 20th century as a derogatory term by Anglos to refer to Mexican Americans, leading many to refer to themselves as Spanish Americans. Mexican-American is a term adopted by the Mexican American community after World War II, signifying a stronger identification with Mexican roots, while also asserting a desire to claim an American identity. Chicano refers to those of Mexican American descent who, in the 1960s and later, acknowledged the complexity of their history and identified with and expressed pride in their indigenous roots. Hispanic is a term that became popular in the 1970s to refer to Americans with ancestral roots in Spanish-speaking countries that remains popular today. Immigrants from a specific country are referred to by their nationality of origin. All these identities are essential to the rich cultural tapestry represented in Denver’s Latino communities. The glossary at the beginning of this document defines these and other terms used throughout this historic context.

The literature review and research phase of the context development referenced both primary and secondary sources related to the history of Latinos in Denver. The review of secondary sources focused on local histories of Denver, historic contexts of specific neighborhoods to provide direction for the research of primary sources, and identification of potentially significant locations within the city. This phase also included review of the broad literature related to the Latino experience in the United States to place Denver’s story within a wider national context.
This literature review and research phase was distinct from the community outreach and engagement, which took place between April and August 2021 and is summarized in Section 1.D below. The resources, collections, and repositories noted below were guided by the results of the community engagement efforts.

This project was funded by the City and County of Denver Community Planning and Development Department (CPD), the offices of Denver councilmembers Jamie Torres and Amanda Sandoval, History Colorado's State Historical Fund, and the Peter Grant Preservation Services Fund for Colorado of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

The City contracted with Mead & Hunt, Inc. (Mead & Hunt) to complete the Latino historic context report. Dianna Litvak, Ethan Raath, and Katherine Oldberg were the staff assigned to the project. Mead & Hunt partnered with Dr. Nicki Gonzales, Professor of History at Regis University and the Colorado State Historian of History Colorado. Dr. Gonzales assisted planning and facilitation of community engagement in partnership with Landmark Preservation staff and the I Am Denver storytelling project and actively assisted with the research and writing process.

Themes and chapters related to Latino history in Denver

The following chapters focus on a central theme, including a summary of the important events, organizations, and people associated with the theme, as well as a map and list of sites that are discussed in each chapter. Not every individual, site, or topic could be covered, given the sheer volume and depth of the history. Readers can read the context as a whole or reference those sections of interest. Cross references within the chapters are provided so readers can understand where to find additional information on the topics and people discussed in this context study.

Please refer to the following chapters for these themes:

- Chapter 1: Historic Overview of Latino History in Denver and Colorado
- Chapter 2: Religion & Spirituality
- Chapter 3: Education
- Chapter 4: Labor
- Chapter 5: Commerce
- Chapter 6: Politics
- Chapter 7: El Movimiento (The Chicano Movement)
- Chapter 8: Arts
- Chapter 9: Neighborhood Life

Project team

City staff and primary project stakeholders include Jennifer Buddenborg (project manager), Evan Schueckler, Abigail Christman, and Kara Hahn in CPD's Landmark Preservation; Rowena Alegria of I Am Denver in the Human Rights and Community Partnership Agency; Valerie Herrera in CPD's Planning Services; Kim Desmond and Jessica Calderon of the Mayor's Office of Equity & Innovation; Pauline Herrera of the Denver Architecture Foundation; and community advisors Ramon Del Castillo, Nita Gonzales, Rosemary Rodriguez, and Alicia Cuarón.

Scope of Work

Mead & Hunt and Dr. Gonzales conducted a comprehensive literature review and historical research using primary and secondary sources, conducted community engagement, and participated in interviews with subject matter experts, and in the planning for I Am Denver storytelling project. The project team synthesized the research and results from the community engagement and interviews into a comprehensive historic context providing a chronological overview of Latino history in Denver.

Community engagement

From April to August 2021 Dr. Gonzales worked closely with the Landmark Preservation staff and the City’s I Am Denver storytelling project team to craft and implement an engagement plan. This community engagement portion of the project team’s research proved to be an essential part of the project, both in the content it yielded and in the enthusiasm it garnered from Latino/Chicano communities. Throughout the course of the project, many people expressed a deep appreciation that their history was finally being recorded and honored. The project team received numerous inquiries and offers of support for this project. While the parameters of the project limited how many interviews were conducted and leads followed, the goal is that this project will spur other projects, leading to a richer understanding of the Latino/Chicano experience in Denver. Due to COVID-19 restrictions and precautions, all meetings and interviews were conducted virtually.
While a more intimate setting of in-person interviews, without technological glitches, would have been preferred, the virtual format did provide some advantages, namely accessibility for interviewees.

Once a strategy was crafted, the project team kicked off with a virtual community meeting, advertising through the City’s and project stakeholders’ and advisors’ networks and social media. The team also distributed hard copies of fliers to local businesses serving the Latino/Chicano communities. Just under 200 individuals signed up for the virtual community meeting, with approximately 100 in attendance. The meeting introduced the project and featured its supporters, including Councilwomen Jamie Torres and Amanda Sandoval; Laura Aldrete, Executive Director in Community Planning and Development; and Mayor Michael B. Hancock. Jennifer Buddenborg and Dr. Gonzales facilitated the meeting. In addition, during the community meeting the project team introduced Maptionnaire, a community engagement platform for collecting stories, images, and geographical locations of important historical places. Throughout the research phase of the project, people were invited to submit their stories of important historical places through Maptionnaire, which provided a steady stream of data to complement the oral interviews and archival research.

Following the community meeting, the project team began conducting interviews. The project team identified and interviewed six community advisors, who were leaders with broad influence and knowledge, that served as an “inner circle.” The project team also formed eight groups of community connectors, divided up by thematic expertise, and conducted group interviews with them in groups of five or fewer individuals. In total, 19 interviews with 34 community advisors and connectors were performed. Many of the interviewees identified multiple other potential people to interview, but in the interest of completing the interview phase during the summer, these names were reserved for future phases.

These 60- to 90-minute interviews with community advisors and connectors yielded invaluable material for the project. The advisors and connectors represented a broad range of occupations, geographical locations, and experiences. The project team designed a set of standard questions, for consistency, but gave the interviewees the freedom to take the conversation into other directions, always prioritizing the rich stories they recounted. Dr. Gonzales led the interviews, with at least one representative from the City of Denver and one from Mead & Hunt in attendance. Mead & Hunt historians found this to be valuable in focusing archival research efforts.

In most cases, the interviews yielded histories that have been previously unpublished in the mainstream narrative. They touched upon the social, cultural, and political history of Latino/Chicano communities and enabled the project team to craft a history that had not been part of the general narrative of the city of Denver. The team learned of neighborhood associations, businesses, and households that were critical to the thriving of communities, and discovered places that facilitated the formation of community, even in the face of widespread discrimination against Latinos/Chicanos. Interviewees discussed the importance of churches in educating youth and serving as spaces of resistance, and revealed a history of survival against the odds and vibrant expressions of culture that have stood the test of time and of gentrification. While there are newspaper archives and personal papers from many key Latino/Chicano leaders in various archival repositories in Denver, the interviews allowed the project team to uncover stories of ordinary families, of historically marginalized populations within Latino/Chicano communities, of trailblazers in civil service jobs, and of a vibrant youth culture. The richness of the information shared by interviewees was of immeasurable importance and allowed the project team to use this information to construct Denver's Latino/Chicano history through the decades, complementing, enriching, and sometimes challenging what was found in the course of archival research.

Archival research

Mead & Hunt conducted online searches of local archives, educational institutions, museums, and libraries with major collections related to Latino history in Denver. Initial research and inquiries resulted in the identification of a large volume of primary and secondary source documents related to Latino history in local and state archives. Access to some collections was limited due to COVID-19 restrictions but the project team worked with archives staff to either scan materials or make special appointments to view collections.

The results of these research inquiries are listed below, including previous studies that were utilized, a description of the types of primary sources that were reviewed, and summaries of major collections available at various repositories. Please refer to the bibliography at the end of this document, which includes a thorough list of all resources consulted during the research phase.
Previous studies
Although no comprehensive studies of Latino/Chicano history in Denver have been completed, Mead & Hunt consulted several previous studies on local neighborhoods and Latino history across Colorado as a starting point for this Research Plan. These include La Alma Lincoln Park Historic Cultural District Application for Historic District Landmark Designation completed by Historic Denver, Inc. with Fairhill & Co. (2021); the Highland, Sunnyside, and Chaffee Park neighborhood historic contexts completed by Mead & Hunt (2021); Hang Your Wagon to a Star: Hispanics in Fort Collins, 1900-2000 prepared by SWCA Environmental Consultants for the City of Fort Collins (2003) and Latinos of Boulder County, 1900-1980, prepared by Dr. Marjorie K. McIntosh (2016). In addition to these reports, previously developed research and resource guides were consulted to guide primary source research, including the Latino History Project, a program at the University of Colorado that provides information on Latino history to teachers and classrooms and includes primary source materials and photographs, Hispanic Colorado Resource Guide prepared by Dana Echohawk for the Auraria Library (2018) and Insights: Hispanic Collection Survey and Resource Guide prepared by Alisa DiGiacomo and Michelle Sawyer for History Colorado (2019). Projects outside of Colorado were also consulted as examples of previous historic contexts, including the American Latino Heritage Theme Study prepared by the National Park Service, Latinos in Twentieth Century California: National Register of Historic Places Context Statement prepared by the California Office of Historic Preservation, and the Survey LA Latino Los Angeles Historic Context Statement prepared by the City of Los Angeles Department of City Planning in 2015.

Summary of major collections
Primary source documents
The following types of primary source documents were consulted during the research phase.

- Manuscript collections in local libraries
- Archival photographs of significant locations and persons
- Historical maps of Denver
- Reports prepared by local Latino/Chicano organizations
- Historical newspaper clippings
- Oral histories

The following lists identify the major primary source collections that were researched. For a list of secondary sources, please refer to the Bibliography.

Denver Public Library Hispano And Latino Collections
The Denver Public Library is home to more than 50 collections of publications, correspondence, and other materials representing significant persons and organizations within Denver Latino communities. Research focused on collections associated with prominent politicians, organizations, artists, and other influential individuals. Selected collections include:

- Latin American Research and Service Agency (LARA-SA) Collection
- Chicano Humanities and Arts Council Records, 1920-1999
- Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales Papers, 1930-2006
- Federico Peña Papers
- Su Teatro Records
- Tim Flores Papers
- Hispanic League of Denver
- Adelante Mujeres Records
- Sam Sandos Papers
- Colorado Hispanic family photographs
- Congress of Hispanic Educators Records
- Don Etter, Auraria Photograph Collection
- Auraria Remembered Collections
- Helen Lucero Papers
- Priscilla S. Mares Papers
- Paco Sanchez Papers
- Alfred Sanches Papers
- Emanuel Martinez Papers
- Magdalena Gallego Papers
- Abelardo “Lalo” Delgado Papers
- Martha M. Urioste Papers
- Neighborhood Clipping Files

History Colorado
The Stephen H. Hart Research Center at History Colorado holds an extensive collection of oral histories along with books, periodicals, newspapers, and manuscript collections relating the lived experience of Latinos throughout Colorado. A number of these resources, including the Globeville-Elyria-Swansea Neighborhood Memory Project, are available online. Selected collections include:

- Comercio: Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Newsletter, c.1988
- Juan Espinosa Photographs, 1970-1974
- La Voz Bilingue, 1976-2008
- Latin American Research and Service Agency (LARA-SA) Collection
Colorado State University (CSU) Pueblo
The CSU Pueblo Library is home to the Colorado Chicano Movement Archives. This collection is dedicated to the history of the Chicano Movement in Colorado with a focus in Pueblo and Southern Colorado. It comprises over 25 individual collections of correspondence, publications, oral histories, and other materials representing significant people and organizations within Colorado. Research focused on collections associated with prominent politicians, organizations, activists, and other influential individuals in Denver. Selected collections include:

- La Cucaracha Newspaper, 1976-1983
- Juan “Freddie Freak” Miguel Arguello Trujillo Chicano Movement Collection, 1965-2009
- Rick F. Manzanares Papers, 1965-1992
- Voices of Protest Oral History Collection, 2008-
- Juan Espinosa Oral History and Papers (including photographs), 1976-1983
- Carmen Arteaga Audiovisual Collection
- CSU-Pueblo Digital Repository (https://mountainscholar.org/handle/10217/231938)

Archdiocese of Denver
The Archives of the Archdiocese of Denver serves as a repository of parish sacramental registries and historical materials of the Catholic churches in Denver and the greater Northern Colorado area. Research focused on the churches and publications associated with Denver’s Latinos. Selected collections include:

- Denver Catholic Register, 1900-2014
- Colorado Catholic, 1884-1899
- Denver Catholic, 2015-2020
- Denver Catholic Magazine, 2020-present
- El Pueblo Catolico & Denver Catholic En Espanol, c.1900-present
- Historical church records and papers for the following parishes:
  - Annunciation
  - Assumption
  - Centro San Juan Diego
  - Holy Family
  - Holy Rosary Church
  - Our Lady of Guadalupe
  - Our Lady of Visitation
  - Sacred Heart
  - St. Catherine of Siena
  - St. Cajetan’s
  - St. Dominic
  - St. Joseph
  - St. Rose of Lima
  - St. Anthony’s
  - Presentation of Our Lady
  - Our Lady of Grace – Elyria/Swansea

Auraria Library
The Auraria Library holds several secondary sources including monographs, anthologies, and reference materials related to broader trends of Latino history in Colorado and the United States. The digital collections include photographs and theses and dissertations specific to Latino history in Denver. The Special Collections include archival materials related to the creation and history of the Auraria Campus and other themes of Latino history in and around Denver. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic the special collections were closed to the public and were not accessible for research. The project team received assistance from the library in accessing theses, dissertations, digital collection items, and items that were only available in the special collections reading room.

Online repositories
In addition to the collections housed at the Denver Public Library, History Colorado, the CSU Pueblo Library, and the Archdiocese of Denver, Mead & Hunt consulted several websites that focus on collecting and sharing Latino history across Colorado. These include The Latino History Project (https://latinohistoryproject.org/), an online collection of primary source material related to Latino history with an emphasis on making information available to PreK-12 teachers, the Colorado Chicano Movement History Portal (https://chicano.cvlsites.org/), a website devoted to providing online access to archives, libraries, and museums with research collections related to the history of the Chicano Movement in Colorado, and The Chicano/a Murals of Colorado Project (https://chicanomuralsofcolorado.com/), a project focused on promoting, preserving, and protecting the legacy of Chicano/a murals within the state of Colorado. The City and County of Denver’s I Am Denver (https://www.denvergov.org/Neighborhood/I-Am-Denver) project also contains valuable oral histories and interviews of local residents.

Research limitations
A few limitations were encountered during the research phase. A large number of primary sources were identified at the repositories listed above. Due to the nature and scope of this project it was not possible to review all of them, and more research should be completed on additional individuals, organizations, and themes that represent sites important to Denver’s Latino history. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Archdiocese of Colorado, Auraria Library, and at the CSU Pueblo Library were not open to the public during the research phase, but librarians at these institutions provided scans of materials upon request.
Results

Community engagement included a public meeting, selected interviews with people knowledgeable of Latino history in Denver, and a Maptionnaire public survey. The results of the community engagement were used extensively to prepare this historic context. Interviewees and survey respondents helped to identify numerous historic places and spaces across Denver significant to Latinos. In addition, these people also provided stories and memories that reflect the rich variety of experiences of these communities in Denver. The interviews and public survey were completed in August 2021 and informed the research and writing, which took place between September and December 2021. In addition to using oral histories and survey responses, the preparers used archival resources described in Section 1.F above and additional primary and secondary resources included in the Bibliography at the end of this document to develop the historic context. City staff, project stakeholders, community advisors, and the State Historical Fund reviewed the draft context and provided comments. The consultant team incorporated these comments into the final report, which was translated into Spanish.
Introduction

This historic context focuses on the neighborhoods where Latinos, as a broad group, settled and built their communities in Denver as well as the historic figures from very diverse backgrounds who were instrumental in Denver’s history. Numerous interviewees and public respondents from Denver’s Latino communities gathered during this study insisted that these neighborhoods keep them tied to the past. These places help remind them that their lives and experiences do not just belong to the present but stretch back generations to those who built the community and brought their heritage to Denver.19

The history of Denver’s Latino communities is a story of building strong relationships and institutions in a new place, often in the face of adversity. As described by historian Rebecca Ann Hunt, community is built within a space by the residents.20

Community is a process that occurs within a space. It is an evolutionary process involving multiple generations with each group developing its own set of institutions, including businesses, churches, schools, and associations which allow its members to take control of the rate of their acculturation to American society.21

Latino families came to Denver looking for new opportunities. They settled in older neighborhoods that had previously been home to European immigrant groups and founded churches, businesses, and organizations while working toward full participation in the economic and political life of the city. For the most part they stayed in these same neighborhoods for decades, infusing the city with their own cultures and traditions, creating a space where they could live and celebrate their unique history and heritage.

Defining Latino communities in Denver and the United States overall is a difficult task. The group of people broadly defined as “Latino” or “Hispanic” make up the largest non-white population in the United States. They represent a broad mix of cultures with a mix of European, Native American, Mexican, Central American, South American, African, and Caribbean backgrounds. They are also the second-oldest group, after Native Americans, to live in the United States with deep roots dating back over 400 years. But there are also new immigrants arriving yearly to the United States, adding cultural dynamism and identity complexity within the cultures of their home countries.22

There are many terms used to describe the Latino population, and individuals within the same community can choose different identities, sometimes focusing on their American heritage, or their country of origin, or their

19 Jamie Torres, Video Interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales, June 23, 2021.
connection with Indigenous People. As stated earlier, we have used the identity terms that were most prevalent during the era that is being covered in each section of the document, reflecting our intention to be as historically accurate as possible within the time periods discussed.

Hispano history in New Mexico and southern Colorado, 1500-1860

Denver’s Latino history begins with the hundreds of small villages and ranches across New Mexico and southern Colorado that represented the foundation of Hispano society and a blending of Spanish, Mexican, and indigenous cultures. Prior to European contact, indigenous people lived in distinct communities with their own languages, practiced agriculture along the Rio Grande, and had extensive trade networks. After Hernán Cortés colonization of the Aztec people in 1521 in Tenochtitlan, which later became Mexico, Spanish explorers continued north and colonized the people they encountered. Juan de Oñate led the first mission into what is now northern New Mexico in 1598, and the primary Spanish settlement Santa Fe was established in 1610. Over the next 200 years a mestizo culture steadily evolved in New Mexico, blending Spanish and Native American culture and ancestry. The mestizo population of New Mexico later identified themselves as Hispanos, emphasizing their Spanish heritage. Their population is estimated at 24,000 by 1800. Hundreds of small villages and ranches across New Mexico and southern Colorado represented the foundation of Hispano society well into the twentieth century.

Southern Colorado became an important center of economic and cultural exchange in the early nineteenth century as a borderland between the United States, Mexico, and the resident Native Americans. The Santa Fe Trail followed the Arkansas and Purgatoire Rivers between Kansas and New Mexico and lured many Americans to the region. After Mexico won its independence from Spain in 1821, the government encouraged further trade with the United States along its northern border. Hispano traders worked at trading posts all along the Santa Fe trail. Ciboleros, Hispano buffalo hunters, were also common on the southern plains of Colorado. One of the largest trading posts on the southern plains was Bent’s Fort near present day La Junta, established in 1833, where European, Native American, and Hispano cultures intermingled.

Hispano settlers also migrated north from New Mexico into the San Luis Valley of Colorado. These settlers essentially replicated the small villages of northern New Mexico. They established complex irrigation systems, called acequias, based on communal organization and ownership to turn the arid valley into a thriving agricultural community. These villages formed the core of Colorado’s Hispano community. The town of San Luis, Colorado’s oldest surviving town from 1851, was one of these early Hispano settlements.

The increasing economic and political interests of the United States in the Southwest led to the Mexican-American War from 1846-1848, in which the United States invaded Mexico and claimed all Mexican territory north of the Rio Grande. After Mexico and the United States signed the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848, nearly 75,000 Spanish-speaking residents of El Norte (The North) from Texas to California became United States citizens. The Mexican-American War had profound effects on the Spanish-speaking population in the Southwest. Over the following decades American settlers encroached more and more on the Spanish land claims. They also brought the modern capitalist economy of resource extraction to the Southwest. Particularly in New Mexico and southern Colorado, the economy had been based largely around family subsistence rather than a desire to turn a large profit. After railroads arrived in Colorado in 1870s, the introduction of industrial mining and large-scale ranching had profound impacts to the agricultural society. American investors bought up or seized previous Mexican land claims and displaced the residents who had been living for generations on the same plots. Many Americans also brought racist attitudes toward the former Mexican citizens, seeing them as racially inferior to whites and excluding them from participation in the economy and society. As the American capitalist extractive economy grew in the Southwest, displaced native-born and immigrant Latinos were exploited as a cheap labor base in almost all industries, and particularly in the railroad network, mining, smelting, agriculture, and ranching. This culminated in a catastrophic loss of economic status and inequality for Latinos living in the southwestern United States that persists to the present day.

Earliest Mexican communities in Denver, 1850s–1900

For centuries, nomadic Indigenous groups such as the Apache, Arapaho, Cheyenne, Comanche, and Ute, lived in the area that became Denver. Beginning in the nineteenth century, Spanish, English, French and American fur traders frequented the region, building relationships with the Tribes. A handful of Mexicans involved in the fur trade also settled in the region in the 1830s and 1840s, trading goods at several small forts and farms on the South Platte River that supplied trappers, traders, and Native Americans in the region. A collection of traders with Mexican and Native American wives built a small post, El Pueblo, at present-day Pueblo in 1842. When gold seekers first arrived at the future site of Denver they met Jose Merival, who lived here with his Lakota wife. Mexicans were the first to find gold in the South Platte River during the summer of 1857 at the confluence with Little Dry Creek, near the current intersection of Dartmouth Avenue and South Platte Drive. While most histories of Denver claim the William Russell Party as the first gold seekers in the Denver area when they arrived in the winter of 1857/1858, Russell’s first mining claim on the South Platte River included the 1857 “Mexican diggings,” verifying the Mexicans’ prior residency and discovery.

The Russell Party established the town of Auraria in 1858 and William H. Larimer followed a month later, creating the town of Denver City on the opposite side of Cherry Creek. In 1860 the two towns merged into the current City of Denver. While the earliest residents failed to find riches in gold from the rivers, Denver quickly grew as a supply center for mining activities in the nearby Rocky Mountains. The closest major city to Denver at the time was Santa Fe, New Mexico, located 300 miles to the south. The Mexicans and other traders who knew the Santa Fe Trail and the Trapper’s Trail that connected Denver to Santa Fe helped supply essential goods to residents of the new city and ensured their success in Denver’s earliest years. Jesus Aubreyo was one of these merchants who opened a store in Auraria in 1859. There was certainly some element of racial segregation in early Denver, but conflicts between whites and Mexicans were generally rare. In such a new and small settlement anyone who was willing to help build Denver was generally accepted.

When Colorado became a territory (1861) and later a state (1876), Mexican politicians from southern Colorado traveled to Denver to participate in the state legislature. The participation of Mexicans, most of them wealthy landowners, in the territorial government shows the extent of their influence, as well as the limits imposed upon their participation. In 1868, despite opposition from Mexicans, the Colorado Territorial Supreme Court officially prohibited the Spanish language from use in the courts. This decision drastically limited many residents of southern Colorado from full participation in the state government. However, Mexican leaders in southern Colorado, including Casimiro Barela, Jesus Maria Garcia, and Agapito Vigil, played important roles during the 1876 State Constitutional Convention and were able to represent the interests of Mexicans against the white domination of the state government. They successfully lobbied for the constitution to be written in Spanish, German, and English.

Based on available records, Mexicans made up a very small percentage of Denver’s population in the nineteenth century. After 1870 railroad transportation and freighting replaced trade along the Santa Fe Trail. As Mexican commerce and agriculture in southern Colorado adjusted in response to the railroads, many families traveled to newer industrial cities such as Trinidad and Pueblo to work in the mines, smelters, and railroads. Some Mexicans moved to Denver and also found work with the railroads and smelting companies, but they made up a small minority of that workforce. In addition to taking over commerce, the railroads opened Colorado up to masses of European immigrants to work in Denver’s growing industries.

Mexicans continued to come to the western United States during the nineteenth century, not only among the poor and working class, but also middle-class merchants interested in developing international trade. In cities across the West, increased discrimination forced Mexicans and Mexicans into culturally isolated neighborhoods. Denver generally followed this same pattern. Mexicans lived, attended church, and worked in separate areas of the city. However, whites did not distinguish between the two groups, and while Mexican migrants came from families that had been in New Mexico or Colorado for generations, they faced the same conditions as Mexicans newly arrived in the new industrial city.

Denver’s urban geography also influenced where Mexicans could live within the city. Central Denver has two city grids. The original downtown grid is laid out facing the South Platte River and forms a diagonal intersection with the newer, north-south grid that covers the majority of the city. The newer grid was laid to attract new and wealthier settlers to the city, and streetcars made new neighborhoods accessible. As the city grew the outer neighborhoods were seen as more desirable. The older grid was ignored and seen as a place for industry and the lower classes. Racial discrimination relegated Mexicans and other immigrants to these neighborhoods, which were largely ignored by white society in Denver for decades.

Denver’s Mexican population generally settled near flood-prone bottom lands of the South Platte River, near the railroads, warehouses, and other industries where they could find employment. Some established truck farms to sell produce to the markets of Denver. They shared neighborhoods with other immigrant groups, establishing their own small enclaves of a few blocks within the neighborhood.

The earliest recognizable neighborhood in Denver was located north and east of downtown Denver along Lawrence and Larimer Streets, near the South Platte River bottoms in an area that became known as the Eastside. This small community included Mexican migrants, Tejanos from Texas, and Mexicans representing the spectrum of class from wealthy merchants to industrial workers. The community was built around Sacred Heart Catholic Church (2760 Larimer Street, extant). Bishop Joseph Machebeuf welcomed these newcomers to Denver with Spanish-language services. Those families who could afford parochial education sent their children to Sacred Heart School. A small commercial corridor on Larimer Street also catered to these residents. Denver’s Mexicans also settled near the railroads, factories, warehouses, and smelters in Auraria and Lincoln Park on the Westside, and in neighborhoods on the Northside during the nineteenth century, but these communities did not fully emerge as cultural neighborhoods until changes in industrial and agricultural practices led to a massive influx of Mexican migrants to Denver in the twentieth century.

Denver’s Mexican communities grew on the edges of the downtown business district to the west, north, and east (see Figure 11). There are many smaller neighborhoods within each of these clusters. The interviewees and public respondents consistently referred to the broader regions of the Westside, Northside, and Eastside. Figure 11 also includes sites and districts identified during the process of preparing this historic context, and more detail on these sites can be found in the maps at the end of each thematic chapter. While the boundaries of these areas are somewhat loose, for this study the Westside roughly extends from Broadway to Sheridan Boulevard, between W. Alameda Avenue and W. Colfax Avenue. The Northside is bound by the South Platte River and Sheridan Boulevard, between W. Colfax Avenue and W. 52nd Avenue. The Eastside covers the area from 20th Street and the South Platte River to Monaco Parkway, between E. Colfax Avenue and E. 52nd Avenue. Mexicans also settled in Southwest Denver between the South Platte River and Sheridan Boulevard south of W. Alameda Avenue. Demographic studies show a significant dividing line southeast of Broadway and E. Colfax Avenue beyond which few Mexican families settled.

Growth of Denver’s Latino communities, 1900-1940

From 1900 to 1940 Denver’s Mexican population grew steadily to become the largest non-white group in the city. At the beginning of the century, the decline of the agricultural economy in New Mexico and southern Colorado spurred thousands to leave their small towns, some for industrial jobs in Denver and others to the exploding sugar beet industry in northern Colorado. The

Figure 11. Neighborhood clusters in Denver where Latinos settled and an overview of the sites and districts identified in this context. For more details on the sites and districts, refer to the maps at the end of each chapter. While Latinos were in Denver in the late 1850s, the decades after each cluster indicate when growing numbers of Latinos began to settle there.
Mexican Revolution in the 1910s, coupled with corporations recruiting workers from Mexico during World War I, caused a massive influx of Mexicans to come to Colorado. Forced by discriminatory practices, the Hispano migrants and Mexican immigrants established strong and cohesive communities in Denver’s neighborhoods and steadily built an identity in Denver that would later flourish in the post-World War II (postwar) era.

The decline of New Mexico and southern Colorado’s agricultural villages and economy that began in the nineteenth century continued into the twentieth century. By 1900 the Western industrial economy had fully matured, including corporate agriculture, which left little space for the small villages to compete. Hispano society, which had been based on subsistence, barter, and cooperation to ensure the general success of the community, did not blend well with the modern cash-based economy. Many Hispanic farmers were forced to take out credit at the beginning of the season, and rarely made enough from harvest to cover their debts, initiating a debt cycle that became nearly impossible to escape. Natural disasters and discriminatory practices combined to push more families from their land. As described by Colorado historians Tom Romero and Nicki Gonzales, “Crop failures, a poor cattle market, unscrupulous Anglo creditors, lawyers, and land speculators all contributed to this loss of land, forcing Mexicans to seek work in other industries.”

Many men began taking seasonal migratory work to send money back to their families in the home villages. Eventually, as it became clear that migratory work would continue indefinitely, their families often moved with them. Many whites at the time perceived this migratory work pattern as a flaw in the character of Mexican workers. In his 1908 report, Mexican Labor in the United States, workers, and land speculators all contributed to this loss of land, forcing Mexicans to seek work in other industries.

In addition to the spread of migrant Mexican laborers across the state, Colorado also experienced an influx of immigrants from Mexico during the early twentieth century. Estimates indicate that nearly ten percent of Mexico’s population came to the United States between 1900 and 1930, including 45,000 Mexican nationals who moved to Colorado. This was prompted by the violence and instability of the Mexican Revolution between 1910 and 1920. Most of these people were refugees who had little interest in politics and attempted to create new lives for themselves in the United States. Wartime mobilization during World War I also opened job opportunities for Mexicans in the major industries, and companies began to actively recruit laborers among the refugees in Texas and later directly from Mexico. The Colorado Fuel & Iron Company in Pueblo was reportedly the first major company to begin recruiting Mexican laborers, but the sugar beet industry in northern Colorado had the largest effect on Denver’s Mexicans.

The Great Western Sugar Company (Great Western), established in 1900, was the controlling interest in northern Colorado’s sugar beet industry, with factories in Fort Collins, Fort Morgan, Greeley, Longmont, and Loveland, among other farm towns. Great Western initially recruited Volga-Germans and Japanese immigrants to work in the beet fields, but by World War I these groups were transitioning from migrant work to farm ownership, resulting in a labor shortage in the fields and factories. Additionally, the 1907 ban on Japanese immigration and the war in Europe prevented Great Western from hiring more Japanese or Russian-Germans from their homelands. In response, the company looked to Mexican migrant workers to take their place. Great Western preferred to hire and move entire families because they were more likely to remain in Colorado and create a stable workforce. Unlike their predecessors, ethnic hostility prevented most Mexicans in northern Colorado from moving beyond their status as farm laborers. Although the company provided housing, education, and financial credit during the off-season, wages were not increased, and social segregation relegated Mexican workers to the same social caste generation after generation. In fact, Great Western actively recruited Mexican laborers hoping they would not assimilate, and therefore provide a continual work force. Mexican workers continued to work in the beet fields into the 1950s, when their labor was phased out by mecha-
zation and the decline of the sugar beet industry.44

Work in the beet fields was backbreaking labor that required constant stooping or working on hands and knees for days on end in 12-hour shifts. While Great Western recruited migrant workers, beet farmers were responsible for housing them. As described by historian Eric Twitty, migrant worker housing “ranged from poor in quality to abysmal,” and were often little more than poorly constructed shacks of timber or corrugated metal.45 In the 1920s Great Western developed a few colonias, neighborhoods of simple adobe houses, for the migrant workers near the factories.46 Among the difficulties of work in the sugar beet fields was its seasonal nature. Mexicans were generally considered field laborers and had difficulty finding work in the sugar factories during the winter season. The debt cycle described in southern Colorado continued in northern Colorado, and even Hispano migrants could not afford to return to their villages in Southern Colorado or New Mexico. As a solution, many Mexican migrant workers came to Denver to find winter employment. During the 1920s Denver’s Mexican population could double or triple in the winter months. However, the meager wages of beet work were barely enough to support oneself in the city. Migrant workers earned an average of $600 a season in the beet fields, while the cost of supporting a family in the city averaged around $2000 a year. While many continued the debt cycle of borrowing money against the next year, making what money they could in the winter, others eventually left field work and moved to the city permanently for more consistent employment and slightly higher wages.47

Westside, Northside, Eastside, and Southwest Denver neighborhoods

The total number of Mexicans in Denver remained small until after World War I, and other groups did not see them as competing for jobs or other resources, which meant there were few inter-ethnic conflicts or clashes.48 Still, a constant level of distrust and prejudice existed between these groups. Mexicans attended the same churches as other immigrant groups, but their services took place in the basements and at different times and days as the other groups. In the 1920s Denver’s Mexican population was less than 3,000, which increased slightly to more than 6,000 in 1930 and 12,000 by 1940.49 As more Mexicans came to Denver, Latino-only churches and schools opened.

In the 1920s the Mexican population in Denver steadily grew into established neighborhoods with the influx of more immigrant and migrant workers. These workers faced many of the same challenges as previous immigrant groups in establishing communities with sufficient support networks, building commerce, and developing a measure of political power in the city. Even for the native-born Hispanics, life in the city was drastically different from the family-centered life of the villages and required major adjustments. Denver was the regional center of the highly mobile Mexican workforce. While some Mexicans maintained familial connections in the city, most were unfamiliar with their new neighbors and took some effort to build a community. The Catholic Church remained the most solid pillar in the community, but newcomers also assisted each other in the transition. Mexican nationals and Hispanics saw themselves as distinct communities at this time and had their own clubs and mutualistas (mutual aid societies), such as the S.P.M.D.T.U., that helped and supported members with insurance, medical and funeral expenses, and raised funds through social events. Throughout this time Denver’s neighborhoods grew to become more recognizable and culturally cohesive than they had been in the nineteenth century.50 The populations of Mexicans in these sections of the city remained relatively constant through the twentieth century (see Figure 12 and Figure 13).

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45 Twitty, Silver Wedge: The Sugar Beet Industry in Fort Collins, S2.
46 Twitty, Silver Wedge: The Sugar Beet Industry in Fort Collins, S2–54.
Figure 12. Locations of Latino families in Denver c.1950.\textsuperscript{51}

Figure 13. Locations of majority Latino neighborhoods in Denver, based on 1980 census tracts. The author of this 1986 report highlighted the tracts with 47 percent or more Hispanic population.52

Westside
Mexicans were largely relegated to the bottom rung of Denver society and their neighborhoods often reflected it. In 1924 Presbyterian ministers Robert McClean and Charles Thompson described one Mexican neighborhood as, “a district which looks as if both God and Denver had forgotten it…the mongrel offspring of a deserted village and a city slum [with] no paving, sidewalks, no sewers.”

La Alma Lincoln Park neighborhood became established near the rail yards and industrial areas where many Mexicans found work. The most destitute area in the city was known as “The Bottoms,” located along the South Platte River between the rail yards that bordered Auraria, Globeville, and Highland. The district, which was prone to frequent flooding, generally consisted of wooden shacks and dirt yards (see Figure 14). The Bottoms was largely ignored by Denver’s leading citizens and was a landing place for the city’s poorest residents into the 1960s when it was razed, destroyed by flooding of the South Platte River in 1965 and various urban renewal projects.

In the 1920s more Mexicans settled in Auraria. The rapid growth of the railroad industry along the South Platte River led to a bustling warehouse district in Lower Downtown, an open market at Denargo on the outskirts of downtown, and a vibrant commercial district along Wazee Street west of the 14th Street Viaduct. Auraria offered Mexican residents an established neighborhood within walking distance to the railroads, warehouses, and small factories where they worked (see Figure 15).

Other early Mexican neighborhoods in Denver included a few blocks of the current La Alma Lincoln Park neighborhood near the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad’s Burnham Yards. Combined with Auraria, this neighborhood was often referred to as the “Westside.” Santa Fe Drive emerged as a commercial center in the early twentieth century. As the Mexican population in Denver grew, it became one of the primary commercial centers for Mexican businesses in the city. Mexicans built a strong foothold in the neighborhood, and by 1940 they represented 15 percent of the population. Following World War II, the Westside emerged as a majority Mexican neighborhood that was central to the Chicano Movement and other community improvement organizations.

Figure 14. View of houses along Fox Street, between the rail yards and Globeville, near the “Bottoms” of the South Platte River.

Figure 15. Latino-owned residences on 9th Street in Auraria between Curtis Street and Champa Street, c.1970. This block is currently preserved as the Ninth Street Park Historic District.

**Northside**

Beginning in the 1910s Mexicans also settled in the “Northside,” which included the Highland and Sunnyside neighborhoods, slowly replacing the Italian immigrant community in those neighborhoods (see Figure 16). Mexicans first settled in the older, eastern areas of the neighborhood near the railroad yards and smelters. As the population grew, W. 32nd Avenue became another important commercial center for Mexicans. Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church (1209 W. 36th Avenue, 1948, extant) was the second Catholic church established for Denver’s Mexicans. As with St. Cajetan, it was the cultural center of the community and established the Northside as an important nucleus for Denver’s Mexicans.57

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Eastside
The nineteenth-century neighborhood on the “Eastside” continued to grow around Annunciation Church on 36th Avenue and Humboldt Street, and Sacred Heart Catholic Church and the commercial district on 21st and Larimer Street. Centrally located with proximity to downtown warehouses, Globeville’s smelters, and Elyria’s meat packing houses drew many Mexican workers. While the neighborhoods on the Westside and Northside became more culturally insular as European immigrants moved out, the Eastside remained a culturally mixed area of immigrants and working-class residents. Well into the twentieth century, this neighborhood included a mix of Mexican, Black, and Japanese families that made it distinct from other neighborhoods in the city.59

Figure 17. The Denver Union Stockyards and meat packing plants on the Eastside provided employment to many Latinos. Located east of the South Platte River, the meat packing plants’ smelters and other industries were near the working-class neighborhoods of Globeville, Elyria, and Swansea. Residential blocks of Elyria can be seen on the right side of the photograph.60

59 Ramona Martinez et al., Video interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales, June 2, 2021.
Southwest
Mexicans increasingly settled in Southwest Denver beginning in the mid-1940s as part of the postwar residential growth in the city, largely between the South Platte River and Sheridan Boulevard south of W. Alameda Avenue. A commercial strip catering to Mexicans developed along Morrison Road that continues to be an important corridor in the city (see Figure 18). Father Michael A. Maher founded the St. Anthony of Padua parish in 1947 to serve 175 families in Westwood. The church built a new structure in 1959 at 3801 W. Ohio Avenue that became an important gathering place. Under the leadership of Father Patrick V. Sullivan in the 1970s and 1980s, the church advocated for many low-income and working-class Latinos as a “social justice parish.”

Figure 18. This mural of United Farm Workers leader César Chávez, donated to the community by the César Chávez Peace and Justice Committee, is located at 3601 Morrison Road, a vibrant corridor with numerous Latino businesses in Southwest Denver.

Great Depression and the 1930s: economic hardship and redlining

The Great Depression of the 1930s was especially hard on Denver’s Mexicans. In the city Mexicans were often the first workers let go by failing industries and the last to be rehired. In the surrounding region persistent drought and the Dustbowl decimated Colorado’s agriculture, including the sugar beet industry, with Mexicans again being the first group to feel its effects. The Dustbowl was especially pronounced in New Mexico, causing greater numbers of Hispanics to migrate north for work, despite the lack of jobs to be found. Even though Hispanics were U.S. citizens, they were treated as inferior and undeserving of equal treatment. Newspapers in Colorado called for the internment of “alien” migrant workers. In 1936 Governor Edwin Johnson declared martial law and ordered the National Guard to the New Mexico border to prevent migrant workers from entering Colorado. Although his orders only lasted a few days and were later declared unconstitutional, they exemplified the intense discrimination against Mexicans at the highest levels of government and society.

In housing, the federal Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) issued Residential Security Maps, commonly known as “Redlining” maps, in 1933 to advise on the suitability of certain neighborhoods for development or investment (see Figure 19). All of Denver’s neighborhoods were redlined and rated as “Hazardous,” with details regarding the “Mexican” population specifically called out on the Westside and Eastside. Five Points on the Eastside was described as “an old area now occupied by a combination of Negroes, Mexicans and a transient class of workers…[and] is Denver’s closest approach to a slum district.” Auraria on the Westside was described as a “deteriorated…residential area bordering heavy commercial and industrial districts…[with] a Mexican concentration…Because of its proximity to railroad yards and shops this area has always been occupied by railroad workers principally.” The Westside neighborhood east of Federal between 12th Avenue and Alameda was “an area of scattered old shacks and brick houses…and the very poorest part of Denver. It is occupied by a poor class of laborers and virtually all occupants of the area are on some type of relief. Mexicans live in the northern part [in]…a very cheap and poor area…known as ‘Frog Hollow.’” Thus began a pattern of disinvestment in the Mexican neighborhoods that lasted for decades and is still being felt today. In the 1940s restrictive housing covenants on new developments aimed at Mexicans, Blacks, Jewish people, and other ethnic groups restricted Mexicans from purchasing homes, and even with the absence of these covenants, “gentlemen’s agreements” prevented Mexican homebuyers from leaving their neighborhoods.

Civic engagement and political activism in Denver’s Latino communities, 1940-1990

The period of 1940-1990 is defined by efforts of Mexicans and Chicanos to become more active and engaged in their communities, coming together to fight against racial discrimination and demand reforms in education, farm worker rights, healthcare, housing, military service, and labor. The period also saw much greater participation in the electoral process with more Mexican and Chicano politicians representing Denverites at state and local levels. While older generations preferred to use more conservative methods and work within established systems, younger generations increasingly turned to more radical and revolutionary methods. Together, these groups worked to create effective change in Denver for Chicanos, though the fight for equality continues today.

World War II and its accompanying industrial mobilization caused the largest influx of Latinos to Denver up to that point. Between 1940 and 1950 the Latino population of Denver doubled from 12,000 to 24,000. By 1960 it was more than 43,000. This period also saw a shift in identity, as Mexicans began to refer to themselves as Mexican American. The Bracero Program, a guest worker program between Mexico and the United States that lasted from the 1940s to the 1960s, brought many Mexican immigrants to work in factories and farms throughout Colorado. Many of

65 “Confidential Report on the Minorities of Denver” (Prepared by the Mayor’s Interim Survey Committee on Human Relations, Dean Paul Roberts, Chairman, 1947), Spanish Americans-26, Denver Public Library Western History Collection.
these workers settled in Denver and other cities and towns in the state (see Figure 20). Across the city, industry surged to meet wartime production demands. New wartime industries such as the Remington Arms plant in Lakewood and the Rocky Mountain Arsenal in Adams County helped fuel the growth. The state's standing industries including agriculture, steel production, rubber, and stockyards all surged and welcomed Mexican American laborers. Sales from the Denver Union Stockyards, a major employer of Mexican Americans, rose by $10 million between 1940 and 1941 alone. The value of produce at the Wazee Market in Auraria rose by more than $750,000 in the same year.68

The result for Mexican Americans was a sudden increase in living standards and community building. New residents flooded into the established neighborhoods and began expanding into new neighborhoods west of the South Platte.

Figure 19. A 1938 Residential Security Map of Denver. The areas marked in red to the north, west, and east of downtown Denver, all locations of Denver’s twentieth century neighborhoods, were rated as “fourth grade” neighborhoods that were not considered safe for investment.66

66 “Guide Map of Denver and Suburbs Colorado [Residential Security Map].”
River. Home ownership among Mexican Americans rose from ten percent in 1940 to 50 percent in 1950.69

Although the surge in wartime production increased the living standards for Mexicans in Denver, they continued to face severe discrimination in the labor market, education, housing, and social life. The 1947 “Confidential Report on the Minorities of Denver,” commissioned by Mayor Quigg Newton, stated:

Discrimination against Spanish-speaking people in Denver is a reality. It exists in almost every phase of their daily lives in this community. The fear of discrimination pervades their thinking; it distorts judgment. It cripples the young and smothers ambition in the able. Whether discrimination exists or not in particular cases, the Spanish-speaking people believe it does. Thirty thousand Denver citizens live and work under that shadow of intolerance.71

According to the report, 80 percent of Mexicans worked as unskilled laborers or in the service industries. Few if any training opportunities were available to advance into skilled labor and accounted for less than five percent of union membership in the city.72 In education, Mexican American students were admitted to Denver’s public schools, but the general feeling towards these students was not confident in their chances of success. This attitude filtered down to many students who believed there was little value in finishing school because they would not be able to rise above the discrimination in the labor market.73

Many families sent their children to Catholic parochial schools instead. These schools offered a solid education and helped shield younger Mexican Americans from racism. Politician Richard Castro credited Annunciation School for his later successes, recognizing the dedication and skill of teachers such as “Sister Ann Margaret, my tenth grade biology teacher, who ran her class with an iron fist. She had to; we were a rough bunch of kids who didn’t begin to appreciate her strict discipline until many years later.”74 Many of the nuns discouraged speaking Spanish and were intolerant of Latino culture. Still, these teachers provided an important foundation for many Mexican American families who did not want their children to attend public schools.75

In the social life of the city Mexican Americans were consistently discriminated against. While there were no official segregation laws in place in Denver, signs stating “No Mexicans” were common in the city, and Mexican Americans were limited to businesses they could frequent.76 The Curtis Park bathhouse, the only bathhouse in the city with this policy, limited access to different races on different days of the week. The 1947 report also indicated that the community centers in Mexican American neighborhoods were lacking in services, and all “minority recreation workers” were only assigned to their respective neighborhoods.77

75 Adrianna Abarca et al., Video interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales, May 25, 2021.
Growth of neighborhoods, commerce, and civic organizations
In response to segregation and discrimination, Hispanos and Mexican migrants developed strong networks in each neighborhood that revolved around their church, family, and close friends and neighbors. They built economic footholds to a better life by operating small businesses, including barbershops, restaurants, pharmacies, clubs, grocery stores, hotels, and theaters, or thriving medical, dental, and law practices. Mexican Americans wanted to spend their money at Mexican American-owned businesses, and several longtime family-run businesses remain Denver institutions today. The main commercial districts throughout the city that catered almost exclusively to Mexican Americans are Santa Fe Drive on the Westside, West 32nd Avenue, 38th Avenue Federal Boulevard, and Tejon Street on the Northside; Larimer Street on the Eastside, and Morrison Road in Southwest Denver (see Figure 11).

Latina efforts in building neighborhoods, businesses, and organizations to help one another cannot be overstated. The history of Mexican Americans has not been well documented, and that of Latinas can be even harder to research. These women played an important role in building their families, upholding their faith and culture, and helping their families and communities thrive. They knew that in order to survive and keep their families together, they needed to be always vigilant, nurturing, and present for their families and communities.78

Despite the intense levels of discrimination in the city, the 1940s also saw the beginnings of Mexican American political action and community building between Hispanos and Mexican immigrants. Historians commonly refer to the postwar Mexican Americans as the Mexican American generation. This generation initiated a common identity that was both deeply Mexican and American, regardless of national origin, and worked to improve the conditions of their communities. In addition to this common identity, new economic opportunities made available to Mexican Americans during World War II and pervasive discrimination of veterans returning from the war spurred this generation to greater civic engagement to advocate for better conditions and opportunities.79

Leaders organized a number of new groups to improve their neighborhoods and gain positive recognition. These efforts primarily reflected the desire of this generation to become part of mainstream society while holding onto their cultural identity. In 1947, a group established the Latin American Council to improve housing, health and education, recreation, and citizenship status, and was one of the first organizations to represent and invite the participation of all Latinos in Denver. Reflecting a mix of religious and political beliefs, this group had members in Denver, Brighton, and Greeley and held annual conferences in Denver.80 The American GI Forum began in Texas in 1949 to recognize the rights of Mexican American veterans, and a Colorado chapter formed in Denver in the 1960s. In addition to veterans, the GI Forum advocated for school desegregation, protection of migrant farmworkers, and ensuring Mexican Americans received fair trials. The Colorado Chapter became a primary force behind the boycott of Coors Brewery in the 1960s in protest of Coors’ refusal to hire Latino workers.81 Another group that formed in Denver, the Good Americans Organization (GAO), became highly influential (see Figure 21). The GAO formed in 1954 in response to protests at Cole Middle School against a series of Rocky Mountain News articles that described the “Spanish American Problem” in Denver. Harnessing the anger of 1,000 people who attended the protest, the GAO developed a number of significant programs, including providing low-income housing, a senior citizen residence, and held popular dances and banquets for Latinos at their meeting hall at 4700 Lipan Street (extant) on the Northside (see Figure 67 in Section 12).82

Increased political involvement
Many successful businessmen became respected leaders and deeply involved in their communities, and some ran for political office. In 1932 Elmer Tenorio from Auraria...
was the first Mexican to run for city council. As described by his daughter, Louise Vigil, “He knew that he couldn’t win the election because he didn’t have sufficient funds to run a campaign, but he had the courage to do it. He wanted to make a break-through in politics for the Hispanic community, which he did.” In 1943 James Fresques, a Republican and pharmacist, became the first Latino elected to the Denver City Council. He also served as president of the Council from 1946 to 1958. While Hispanics from southern Colorado had been elected to the Colorado General Assembly since the 1860s, the first Mexican American elected to represent Denver was Bert Gallegos in 1957, followed by Roger Cisneros and Frank Anaya in 1965. The first Mexican American woman, Betty Benavidez, from La Alma Lincoln Park neighborhood, was elected in 1971.

These successful state legislators benefitted from changes in the districting process that occurred in the 1960s. Prior to this time, all of Denver’s representatives and senators were elected as “at-large” members, meaning that Mexican American or Black candidates had very little chance of succeeding against white candidates supported by the white majority in Denver. This changed with a new redistricting plan, when Westside, Eastside, and Northside residents could choose their own candidates. Interracial coalitions that first formed in the 1940s became increasingly important in the 1950s and 1960s as Mexican Americans and other marginalized groups, particularly Jews and Blacks, banded together in Denver to fight for common causes of inequality and civil rights.

Mexican Americans became more politically active in the late 1950s and 1960s, and many joined the Democratic
Party. Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales, a champion boxer from the Eastside who graduated from Manual High School, became a strong leader for the Democrats, helping enroll Mexican American voters, and becoming state coordinator for ¡Viva Kennedy! to help elect John F. Kennedy in 1960. Along with Bernard “Bernie” Valdez, who held several prominent positions in Denver, including Manager of Denver’s Social Services Department, Gonzales founded Los Voluntarios in 1963 to engage Mexican Americans in voting and to address inequality. He told a Denver Post reporter in 1964 that Latinos were becoming more politically engaged in the Democratic party, although he acknowledged, “Republicans are using them too, but they have to dig in the bushes to find Spanish names for window dressing.”

**El Movimiento and neighborhood activism, 1960s–early 1970s**

By 1964 Gonzales held the position of Neighborhood Youth Corps director, appointed by Mayor Tom Curragan in a nod to his efforts to encourage Mexican Americans to vote for Democratic party candidates. He was becoming an influential voice, eager to help young urban Mexican Americans find meaningful, well-paid jobs, improve housing conditions, and teach Mexican American youth about their history (see Figure 22). Gonzales began to speak out about the city’s discrimination of Mexican Americans, and Curragan abruptly fired Gonzales in 1966, claiming he did not conduct himself as a City official. In response, Gonzales formed the Crusade for Justice, which rejected mainstream politics and became an important player in *El Movimiento*, the Chicano civil rights movement that coalesced during the 1960s.

*El Movimiento* was inspired by and aligned with Black civil rights, Black Power, the American Indian Movement, and anti-Vietnam war demonstrations, as well as influenced by the deadly police altercations and brutality experienced by minorities. Denver became a hotspot for Chicano activism during the civil rights era, particularly for urban youth and to demand improvements in education for Latinos. The Crusade for Justice established a family community center at the former Calvary Baptist Church, 1567 Downing Street (non-extant), which included a performance space for music and theater, classrooms, bookstore, boxing gym, meeting rooms, offices, art studios, bar, curio shop, and art gallery, as well as services to help people find jobs, legal defense, and mental health counseling. The Crusade helped organize a student-led walkout, known as a “Blowout,” at West High School in March 1969 to protest racial remarks made by one of the teachers. In the same month, they held the National Chicano Youth Liberation Conference at their headquarters, which brought 1500 young people to Denver from throughout the U.S. (including a contingent from Puerto Rico) and Central America. These activities galvanized young people to join the Crusade in search of a more radical approach to changing society, instead of following the same tactics of their parents and grandparents. Colleges and universities such as Metropolitan State University, University of Colorado in Denver and Boulder, and Colorado State University-Pueblo had Chicano student chapters. Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan (MEChA), which was founded during the 1969 youth conference, and United Mexican American Students (UMAS) held meetings and events to inform and educate students about inequalities and injustices, and were key in getting more young people involved in *El Movimiento*.

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Chicanas were the “unsung heroes” who fought for political representation as part of El Movimiento. According to former Denver Mayor Federico Peña, “It was the women who were on the frontlines. They are the ones who took on the brunt of the difficulties in civil rights, and they are the ones that do the hard work… the things nobody else will dare do.”93 On the Westside, a group of women formed Madres del Movimiento to improve their families’ and neighbors’ lives by undertaking projects in local action centers and schools, and helping Chicanos and Chicanas get elected to local and state offices.94

In addition to the Crusade, multiple other groups and social justice organizations fought for civil rights. Many Chicanos in Denver wanted to be accepted by the majority while holding on to their cultural traditions and use existing systems to solve their problems and often times older Chicanos felt alienated by the militancy of the Crusade.95 Some middle-class Chicanos who had moved out of the neighborhoods still faced racial discrimination in their new neighborhoods because of their skin color, but they had achieved a new upward mobility, particularly for families who had already been in Denver for generations.

The Vietnam War also deeply divided Chicanos, with some embracing a patriotic, anti-Communist stance, while the Crusade and others protested the war as perpetuating American hypocrisy and inequities.96 The Brown Berets and Black Berets (which included Chicanos) formed to protest the high percentages of deaths of Chicanos, Blacks, and members of other marginalized groups who died in the war. These groups also advocated for developing neighborhood support systems to feed, educate, and care for young people and vulnerable groups. Other neighborhood and religious organizations in Denver that supported Chicanos included the Sisters of Loretto in southwest Denver, Denver Inner City Parish, the West Side Improvement Association, and the West Side Action Council, a Community Action Program funded through the Economic Opportunity Act, known as President Lyndon B. Johnson’s “War on Poverty” initiative. These groups and others responded to the needs of residents, providing support for students who wanted to attend college, employment counseling and training, mental health and legal services, and advice to senior citizens, tenants/landlords, and consumers. These centers also provided help (and many continue to provide help today) to immigrants and people applying for and receiving government benefits, as well as food, clothing, and furniture to people in need.97

In the late 1960s an urban renewal plan surfaced in Denver to expand the Auraria Higher Education Center on the Westside in one of the oldest neighborhoods in Denver, a close-knit community and vibrant center of Chicano life with churches, businesses, and residences. When the Denver Urban Renewal Authority bought and demolished most of the residences and businesses in the community in the early 1970s, parishioners at St. Cajetan saved their church from demolition and it became a community meeting space on the campus. Historic Denver and other preservationists also succeeded in saving several other structures, including the Tivoli Brewery (see Figure 23) and an entire block on 9th Street, preserving a small remnant of the once thriving neighborhood.98

In response to the displacement of residents and destruction of Auraria, the West Side Coalition (WSC), the West Side Action Council, West Side Improvement Association, and numerous other organizations came together to resist the further decline of neighborhood. People associated with the fight to save Auraria included residents, non-profits, schools, and churches, and reinforced work already started by the Auraria Community Center, established in the 1950s as part of the Lincoln Park Homes Community Center. The WSC constructed new affordable housing and renovated older homes to create a buffer zone between the neighborhood and the new Auraria.

93 Colorado Experience | Justicia Y Libertad | Season 2 | Episode 211.
campus. They also developed pocket parks in vacant lots on the Westside.\(^{100}\)

By 1973 the Crusade for Justice and the WSC had lost much of their influence due to several different factors. Despite all of the good it had done to educate Chicanos and provide vital services to the most vulnerable members of the community, the Crusade was seen as too radical in its approach to achieving Chicano rights and self-determination. As with leaders of other civil rights groups, the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Counterintelligence Program (COINTELPRO) targeted Gonzales and other key leaders of the Crusade. Arrests and charges resulted in multiple court battles that weakened their efforts and drained their finances. The WSC also disbanded in 1973. Even though these organizations were relatively short-lived, they demonstrated the importance of having community-led organizations to help direct the future of Chicanos, rather than feeling powerless against larger forces uniting against them. For example, the New Westside Economic Development Corporation (NEWSED) formed in 1974 as a program of the West Side Action Center to bring a different approach to economic development to the Westside. NEWSED invested in new shopping centers with stores and services provided by local, non-white-owned business, partnered with the Denver Urban Renewal Authority and other city agencies, and updated the infrastructure of the Westside with new sidewalks, restored original facades, and paint jobs for many of the neighborhood’s historic homes.\(^{101}\)

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100 La Alma Lincoln Park, 9; Virginia Castro, Video Interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales, June 28, 2021; 1042-1048 Santa Fe Drive Staff Report Certificate of Demolition Eligibility.

Segregated schools continued to be a major issue in Denver, with Keyes v. School District Number One the first non-southern school desegregation case to be decided on by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1973. The courts found Denver’s tri-ethnic racial demographics of white, Chicano and Black students unique when it came to the segregated schools in Denver. The Denver Public Schools had segregated Black and Chicano students into older schools on the Westside, Eastside, and Northside, where the students received outdated textbooks and equipment, and were academically behind their peers in white schools. The court ordered busing Black and Chicano students across the city to attend white schools, and vice versa.102 This order continued in Denver until it was rescinded in 1995 and had little effect on lessening the achievement gap between white and non-white students.

With radical activism waning, political leaders began to make strides within their communities. Ruben Valdez, first elected to the Colorado House of Representatives in 1971, helped shape the careers of incoming Latino legislators for years by mentoring them and sharing his lessons and experiences. Richard Castro, originally a member of the Crusade, became an integral leader of the West Side Coalition and won a seat in the House in 1974, serving five terms and becoming the head of Denver’s Agency for Human Rights and Community Relations. Other notable leaders included Councilman Sal Carpio, Councilman Sam Sandos, and Federico Peña, a lawyer from Brownsville, Texas who first came to Denver in 1973 to work with the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education fund to desegregate the schools and won a seat in the House in 1978 and 1980. A Democrat, Peña was Denver’s only Mexican American mayor, winning two terms (1983-1991, see Figure 24) on a broad platform that focused upon revitalizing the historic neighborhoods of Denver, planning major large-scale public works projects, and advocating for racial and social equality for all of Denver’s ethnic groups.103 He galvanized Mexican Americans in Denver and throughout the country, winning with a broad base of support from voters at a time when Denver’s Mexican American population was only 18 percent, or approximately 92,000. He represented an exciting new direction for Denver citizens who chose a younger progressive Latino instead of the older white establishment candidate, William McNichols, Jr.104

Growth and diversity in the Latino communities

During the 1980s the Latino communities in Denver became much more diverse, due to the arrival of more people from Mexico, Spain, Cuba, Puerto Rico, countries in Central and South America, and the Caribbean, many of whom escaped abysmal conditions such as drug wars, human trafficking, civil war, and other economic crises in their home countries for a chance at a better life in the United States. These groups have differing origins, backgrounds, music, foods, activities, and languages, and these differences created divides between the new immigrant groups and Mexican Americans from families who had been in Colorado for generations. The new arrivals settled throughout the city in the existing Latino neighborhoods, but typically kept to themselves. Mainstream Americans did not differentiate between longtime Denver residents and the recently arrived immigrants.

Figure 24. Mayor Federico Peña unveils the Historic Landmark medallion at the Decker Branch Library (1501 South Logan Street, extant), 1984.105

either, compounding the lack of understanding and racial discrimination experienced by all Latinos. It did not matter to many whites that a Latino was descended from people who had lived in the United States for hundreds of years; instead, most people incorrectly assumed they had recently immigrated from Mexico.\textsuperscript{106}

Beginning in the 1980s during the terms of Republican President Ronald Reagan (1981-1989), Latinos across the United States encountered multiple challenges amidst a rise in conservatism and reactionary politics that continues today. While the number of Latinos in the workforce increased by 40 percent during the 1980s, representing the nation’s fastest-growing group, the jobs they held were typically lower paid, including restaurant, retail, labor, construction and trade jobs. Latino unemployment was 1.5 times higher than the general population. Historians Arnoldo de León and Richard Griswold Del Castillo summarized the dichotomy of this growing work force within the U.S. and the issues they encountered:

In comparison to the relatively affluent U.S. working class, the immigrants entered at the bottom of the American socioeconomic pyramid. Native-born Latinos who were U.S. citizens—such as a majority of the Puerto Ricans in New York, Chicanos in the innercity barrios, Hispanos in New Mexico’s small towns, and Tejanos in South Texas—also endured high rates of poverty and educational underachievement.\textsuperscript{107}

These socioeconomic issues continue today and many Latino communities, including Denver’s, have experienced a rise in gang activity and violence, exacerbated by an increase in the sale and use of illegal drugs, rising teen pregnancies, and higher rates of incarcerations amidst continued racial discrimination.\textsuperscript{108} Added to this, the historic neighborhoods that have been home to Denver’s Latinos have changed rapidly due to gentrification and population growth in the city. The longtime residents of the Northside, Eastside, and Westside have experienced gentrification and development and are frustrated over what has happened to their neighborhoods. Many have left due to rising rents, replaced with younger, more affluent residents moving into new apartments and multi-unit housing that have replaced older single-family residences. The neighborhoods public spaces and businesses have changed as well, with many small family-owned businesses being replaced by new bars and restaurants. This trend of gentrification and displacement started in the 1980s and is a major problem occurring in neighborhoods throughout Denver.

Despite continued challenges, there are celebrations and successes too. Residents of Globeville on the Eastside proved they had a voice and collective power to force major corporations to do the right thing in their neighborhood. A group of neighbors led by Margarette and Robert Escamilla successfully took on the American Smelting and Refining Corporation (ASARCO), suing the company in 1991 for the harmful effects of former smelters in their neighborhood on their homes, health, and environment, which had lowered their property values and caused numerous health problems. ASARCO settled with the neighbors in 1993, awarding them $28 million in damages. A second suit brought by residents on the south side of I-70 was also settled by ASARCO in 1997.\textsuperscript{109}

The city’s Catholic parishes continue to be focal points of community pride and engagement, offering regular masses, some bi-lingual, and serving as more than just a spiritual center. Many churches host an annual bazaar during the summer that have become revered traditions and bring thousands of people together to enjoy music, food, and fellowship. Denver community celebrations and festivals such as \textit{Cinco de Mayo}, \textit{Diez y Seis de Septiembre}, \textit{Diá de los Muertos} (Day of the Dead), and \textit{Ceremonia Xupantla} (summer solstice) have been happening for decades and continue to bring people together to celebrate and learn about Latino cultures.

Denver’s low rider, car show, and cruising culture has been thriving for decades, particularly at Barnum Park and along Federal Boulevard, which connects the Westside and Northside neighborhoods and is an important family-oriented activity. People congregate at vacant lots, parks, or other spaces to unite over a love of cars, heritage and culture, and music. The continued popularity of cruising demonstrates cultural resilience in the face of development and gentrification in historically Latino neighborhoods. Pride in Chicano and Mexican heritage are found in the elaborate iconography painted on the cars with deep cultural and personal significance, including traditional Mayan and Aztec codices, the Virgin of Guadalupe, or portraits and quotes of family members and famous Chicanos and Latinos.\textsuperscript{110}

\textsuperscript{106} Gould, \textit{The Life and Times of Richard Castro: Bridging a Cultural Divide}, 188.
\textsuperscript{107} Gould, \textit{The Life and Times of Richard Castro: Bridging a Cultural Divide}, 188.
\textsuperscript{109} Abarca et al., Video interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales; García, \textit{Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology Identity}, 1930-1960, 301.
\textsuperscript{110} Torres, Video Interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales.
Religious facilities are spiritual spaces where the sense of place and community is strong. Although three of every four Latino people identify as Catholic, a few other religions and beliefs of Latinos include Protestant, Methodist, Jehovah's Witness, Judaism and non-denominational. Latino religious spaces in Denver provide a space to pray, find fellowship, socialize, and work on social justice issues. The focus of this chapter is to provide a history of the important religious spaces in Denver identified by the Latino communities. The resources are organized by neighborhood. It is not an exhaustive list, nor does it include a detailed history of every resource found while conducting research and engaging with the public. For more information and for a spatial understanding of the identified religious buildings, see Figure 38 at the end of this chapter, followed by Table 1 that provides a list of designated and known sites.

Westside

*San Cayetano (St. Cajetan Catholic Parish Church)*

In the 1900s Mexicans from New Mexico and Southern Colorado and newly arrived migrants from Mexico began settling in Auraria, a predominately Irish and German neighborhood of Denver. At this time two Catholic churches served Auraria: St. Elizabeth of Hungary on 11th Street and Curtis Street (extant) and St. Leo the Great on 10th Street and Colfax (nonextant), both built in 1887. St. Elizabeth’s primarily served the German-speaking members of the community and St. Leo’s congregation was largely Irish. During the Mexican Revolution more and more Spanish-speaking people arrived and settled in Auraria. The Mexican Catholics attended mass at either St. Elizabeth’s or St. Leo’s but did not feel welcome at either church. Oral histories captured by Magdalena Gallegos recount individuals overhearing German parishioners at St. Elizabeth’s “whispering to each other that they did not appreciate the Spanish people going there” and baptisms of Hispano children occurred in the basement of St. Leo’s because the main alter was reserved for whites.

As conflicts between the Irish and German immigrants and Mexicans continued to grow, it became clear to the Mexican community they needed their own church. In the early 1920s leading Mexican women petitioned Bishop Tihen asking for their own church and for the Theatine Fathers to administer mass. The Theatine Fathers are a men’s Catholic religious order founded in 1524 by St. Cajetan in Italy and brought to the United States in 1906.

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The Mexicans asked Bishop Tihen to name the church after St. Cajetan in honor his charitable work and the organization of the Theatine Fathers. In 1922 Bishop Tihen established St. Cajetan Parish and arranged for Theatine priest Father Bartolomew Caldentey to hold mass in the basement of St. Leo’s for Mexicans. Father Caldentey began to raise funds for a new church, and approached John Kernan Mullen, an Irish immigrant who became a multi-millionaire flour miller, for land for the church. When he was nine Mullen immigrated to New York with his family. Eventually he made his way west and settled in Auraria, and still owned property there. In 1923 Mullen donated his land to build a new church, and donated his previous home at the intersection of 9th Street and Lawrence Street to serve as parish rectory. A Spanish Revival church designed by Robert V. Willison and built by F.J. Kirchoff Construction Company was completed and dedicated on March 21, 1926 (see Figure 25). In 1935 six Sisters of Saint Benedict from Atchison, Kansas, opened St. Cajetan School, a two-story brick building hosting students through eighth grade, and a convent at W. 12th Avenue and Umatilla Street.

As Denver’s Mexican population grew from 1,390 in 1920 to 43,147 in 1960, St. Cajetan parish thrived and became a central and intrinsic cultural center for the community. It provided a space for spiritual, cultural, physical, and economic growth. According to Magdalena Gallegos, Father José María Lara, an activist priest at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in the 1970s, said: “The church is where we meet friends. We get validated as a person. We get recognized in a world that is impersonal. Religious and social needs are closely intertwined, and the building at St. Cajetan represented and provided a social and political element for the people.”

Figure 25. The Spanish Revival St. Cajetan Church upon completion in 1926.

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121 St. Cajetan.


The church opened a credit union on January 10, 1939, allowing for Mexican families to borrow money to buy homes and cars. St. Cajetan had a flourishing choir and band made up of parishioners that played every Sunday and provided space in the basement for individuals to practice for operettas and plays during the week. The school provided free lunches for children during the week. Political meetings were held in the basement of the church. Every aspect of life for the Mexican community in Auraria was woven into St. Cajetan's church (see Figure 26).

In the 1970s the Denver Urban Renewal Authority bought and demolished nearly all of the structures in Auraria to make way for the 169-acre Auraria Higher Education Center (also known as the Auraria Campus). St. Cajetan parishioners worked with preservationists to save the church from demolition. In 1970 St. Cajetan Church was declared both a local Denver Landmark and was listed in the National Register of Historic Places for its significance to Chicanos, its connection to John Kernan Mullen, and its Spanish Revival architecture. The school and convent closed in 1970 and both were razed in 1973 to make way for the education center campus (see Figure 27). In 1973 the Auraria Campus forced the parish to relocate and the original church was repurposed as an auditorium and community event center. In 1975 a new church was built at 299 S. Raleigh Street in Southwest Denver (see Figure 28). Mershon-Gimeno Construction Inc. of Denver built the church, and the architect is not known. An article in the Denver Catholic Register described the building as “an architectural rebirth of pyramids built centuries ago in Mexico by Aztecs.” The majority of parishioners followed to the new church and it continues to serve the greater Latino population of Denver.

Figure 26. An advertisement for a community event sponsored by St. Cajetan in 1961.
Figure 27. St. Cajetan Church in 1973 following the razing of the school and convent.133

Figure 28. The 1975 St. Cajetan church at 299 South Raleigh Street.134

134 “Our Parish History.”
Denver Inner City Parish

Denver Inner City Parish (DICP) is a non-denominational human services nonprofit located at 1212 Mariposa Street (extant) in La Alma Lincoln Park neighborhood. After the end of World War II many middle-income families left Denver’s inner city and moved to the suburbs, and many Catholics, church congregations, and schools followed. Bishop Urban John Vehr recognized the potential for expanding Catholic schools and churches in Denver’s suburbs during the postwar baby boom. He launched a campaign to build a church, rectory, school, and convent within walking distance to anyone in the Denver metro area. In preparation for this plan, the archdiocese purchased 50 sites that consisted of at least 5 acres throughout the greater Denver area. Several Catholic church congregations and schools utilized Bishop Vehr’s sites and relocated to the suburbs. These churches provided many services including food banks, after-school programs, and programming for senior citizens that met the needs of low-income families, many who were Latinos. As the churches left Denver, low-income families suffered.135

In 1960 laymen from Montview Boulevard Presbyterian Church in Denver formed the DICP. The non-denominational group provided the previously lost services and worked directly with low-income families in Denver’s Westside. In 1961 the group formally incorporated, and according to the Denver Landmark Preservation Commission Individual Structure Landmark Designation Application for Smith’s Chapel at 910 Galapago Street (extant), the church became the first home to the DICP. Built in 1882, the architect of Smith’s Chapel is unknown. Smith’s Chapel originally served the United Brethren Church until the congregation disbanded in 1960. As the 1960s unfolded, the Chicano Movement took shape in Denver and highlighted many issues, including lack of equal access to education. On March 20, 1969, students at West High School led a walkout, also known as a “blowout,” to protest racial remark made by one of the teachers (see Chapters 3 and 7 for more information). During the blowout, the DCIP, under the leadership of Gerry Garcia, offered refuge to more than 300 students, families, and friends in Smith’s Chapel (see Figure 29).136

The DICP continued to expand its programming over the years. By 2004 the DICP had outgrown its headquarters at Smith’s Chapel. In 2004 the DICP moved most of its programming to 1212 Mariposa Street (see Figure 30) but still offering many of their education programs out of Smith’s Chapel. In 2017, they moved all of their programming to

Figure 29. Smith’s Chapel, 910 Galapago Street.137

1212 Mariposa Street and in 2019, sold Smith’s Chapel to the current owner, Galapago Commercial LLC. Today the DICP continues to provide education and youth development, hunger relief, health and wellness, and community support, as well as provide a space for activism.  

Northside

Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe (Our Lady of Guadalupe)

Similar to St. Cajetan Catholic Parish, Our Lady of Guadalupe provides a cultural center for Latinos in Denver’s Northside. The church started out of Slavin’s corner store at 1201 W. 36th Avenue in 1935 as a mission to St. Cajetan Catholic Parish. The Mexican congregation remodeled the store’s interior and built an altar. They also remodeled the exterior to “make the structure conform to the Spanish type,” according to an article published in the Denver Catholic Register in 1936. It quickly outgrew the remodeled storefront, and in 1948 a Spanish Mission-style church was built at 1209 W. 36th Avenue (see Figure 31). The church was designed by architect John K. Monroe. In 1974 Guadalupe Hall was completed at 3632 Lipan Street to the northwest of the church, and a rectory and parish offices at 1201 W. 36th Avenue were constructed directly to the north of the church in the 1970s.

Our Lady of Guadalupe provided social services such as a credit union and food co-op. In addition to offering aid to its parishioners, it acted as a space to practice folkways, including mariachi masses, Hispano fiestas, and display art. Father Lara commissioned muralist Carlota Espinoza to paint murals in the interior spaces of the church and muralist Carlos Sandoval to paint a mural on the west exterior wall of the parish hall (see Chapter 8 for more information about murals). Under the direction and leadership of Theatine priest Father José María Lara, Our Lady of Guadalupe also provided a makeshift campaign headquarters for future councilman Sal Carpio, setting the stage for the church’s involvement in activism and political activism in the late twentieth century.

140 Abarca et al., Video interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales; Lorenzo Ramirez and Lorenzo Trujillo, Video Interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales, June 15, 2021; Sister Alicia Cuaron, Video interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales, May 26, 2021.
144 Our Lady of Guadalupe Church.
145 Abarca et al., Video interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales.
the Chicano Movement (see Chapter 7). Father Lara welcomed the United Farm Workers (UFW), La Raza Unida political party, Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales’s Crusade for Justice, and other activist Latino groups to hold meetings at the church, and often administered mass with the UFW eagle on his vestments (see Figure 32). Like many other Latino and Italian churches, Our Lady of Guadalupe hosts an annual summer bazaar that attracts thousands of people to enjoy food, music, and community in North Denver. Today the parish continues to offer mass in Spanish and provide more than spiritual guidance to its parishioners.

In response to the growing number of Italian Catholics in North Denver, Bishop Nicholas Matz formed the St. Catherine of Siena parish in 1912. The first masses were held in the basement of 4201 Hooker Street, known as Bungalow Theater, which was the home of actor George Swartz. In 1912 the congregation purchased lots on the corner of W. 42nd Avenue and Hooker Street and construction of a Romanesque brick church and rectory (non-extant) began. In 1913 the first masses were celebrated in the partially completed church until its completion and dedication in 1915. In 1921 the basement of the church was converted into four classrooms and three Sisters of St. Joseph from nearby St. Patrick’s convent taught two grades starting in the fall. In 1923 construction started on St. Catherine Hall, a building used for community and parish gatherings, and a gymnasium for the school located at the southeast corner of W. 43rd Street and Federal Boulevard. By 1929 the parish had purchased lots on W. 43rd and W. 42nd Avenues and built a parish school and a convent. The school held classes through eighth grade and continues to offer classes from pre-school through eighth grade today. Under the leadership of Father Delisle A. Lemieux, the parish launched a building program in 1934 for a new church to replace the overcrowded church located at W. 42nd Avenue and Federal Boulevard. The Great Depression and World War II delayed completion, but the church was eventually completed at 4200 Federal Boulevard and dedicated on November 27,
1952 (see Figure 33). It was built in the Lombardic Italian Renaissance style and was designed by architect John K. Monroe.158

Mexican residents began moving to the Northside in the early twentieth century. After World War II, as new mechanized farming methods replaced the armies of field laborers, the Latino population grew steadily and made up more than two-thirds of the neighborhood population by 1990.160 The neighborhood was attractive to Latino residents due to the central location to large employers in the city and reasonable home prices. These residents led similar blue-collar, middle-class lives as the previous Italian residents, working at nearby industrial jobs and running local businesses.161 Today St. Catherine of Siena offers mass in both in English and Spanish.162

Eastside

Sacred Heart Church and School

Sacred Heart, built 1879-1880 and located at 2760 Larimer Street, is the oldest continually used church in Denver. As railroads arrived in Denver in the 1870s, so too did the Irish and Italian Catholics to work on the railroads. They lived near the rail yards and had vegetable farms along the South Platte River. They attended mass at St. Mary’s and St. Elizabeth of Hungary until Bishop Machebeuf authorized a new parish in 1879, Sacred Heart, to meet the needs of the growing Denver area.163 Bishop Machebeuf purchased five lots for $2,500 near 28th Street and Larimer Street for the new parish. He asked the Jesuits to run the parish as the young diocese was too poor to support the new parish, and the Jesuits agreed. Father John Baptiste Guida gave the first mass on September 12, 1879, in a tiny frame rectory that doubled as a church. Father Guida asked Emmet Anthony, one of Denver’s first architects, to design the brick and pine Gothic building standing today. The new church was dedicated on April 25, 1880 (see Figure 34).164

160 Simmons and Simmons, Denver Neighborhood History Project, 1994: Highland Neighborhood, 2.
162 The neighborhood was attractive to Latino residents due to the central location to large employers in the city and reasonable home prices. These residents led similar blue-collar, middle-class lives as the previous Italian residents, working at nearby industrial jobs and running local businesses.

Figure 33. St. Catherine of Siena Church at 4200 Federal Boulevard, 1952.
Parishioners converted the basement of the church into classrooms for a free school, and by the fall of 1880 the school opened and held classes. In 1890 the parish opened the Sacred Heart School located at 2840 Lawrence Street, a two-story brick building that offered high school curriculum. The school remained open until 1976, when the Sisters of Cincinnati and the Jesuits were forced to close its doors due to economic hardship (for more information on the school see Chapter 3).

Sacred Heart offered several aid societies. In 1892 the parish established the Sacred Heart Aid Society, a pioneer Catholic charity that gave food and clothing to those in need. As the neighborhood shifted from residential in the late 1880s to a landscape filled with businesses, factories, and warehouses by the 1930s, it continued to offer services to its community. In 1925 the society opened the Little Flower Social Center at 2809 Larimer Street, which provided food, shelter, clothing and “sociability to the down and out.” The mission continues to serve its community and that of the greater Denver area. In 1980 the convent was converted into the Sacred Heart House, an organization focused on helping single mothers with children and single women experiencing homelessness.

Over time, the Irish and Italian families moved to other parts of the city and Latinos moved into the neighborhood. The parish has provided spiritual guidance and aid for Latinos and Spanish-speaking parishioners since the 1970s and 1980s. In 1988 financial difficulties and the shortage of Jesuit priests led the Jesuits to return Sacred Heart to the Archdiocese of Denver. Today the church offers mass in both English and Spanish.

**Centro San Juan Diego**
Centro San Juan Diego, a ministry of the Archdiocese of Denver, was established in 2003 in the former Sacred Heart school at 2830 Lawrence Street. Its main focus and goals are to address the needs of the Hispanic and Latino communities of Denver.

**Epworth Spanish Church**
The Epworth United Methodist Church of Denver was organized in 1905 under Pastor Austin N. Chapman. The congregation included immigrants from abroad as well as migrants from the eastern United States who lived near Curtis Park in the early twentieth century. Ten years after organizing the church, the congregation raised enough funds to build the Classical Revival brick building located at 1130 31st Street (see Figure 35). The architect

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170 “Sacred Heart Parish 2760 Larimer Denver, Colorado 1879-1989.”
171 *LaJoie, “Our History/Nuestra Historia.”*
of the building is unknown,\textsuperscript{175} As more and more Mexicans moved into the Curtis Park neighborhood, the needs of the church shifted to reflect its community. In 1949 it was reorganized as the Epworth Spanish Church,\textsuperscript{176} Sometime after the formation of the Epworth Spanish Church, Goodwill Industries expanded its services and purchased the building, although the congregation continued to meet in the building. In 1966, in addition to housing Goodwill Industries activities and the Epworth Spanish Church, it included the Curtis Park Community Center. Beginning in approximately 1980 the building stood vacant until Larry Nelson and Ruth Falkenberg, real estate and development investors with 620 Corp., purchased the building in 2014.\textsuperscript{177} After extensive rehabilitation and historic preservation, the building now includes large mixed-use spaces including Wenk & Associates landscape architects in the old sanctuary space, and the Little White Dress Bridal Shop.\textsuperscript{178} It is not clear what happened to the Epworth Spanish Church congregation.

\textbf{Figure 35. The former Epworth Spanish Church at 1130 31st Street, c.1925.} \textsuperscript{179}

\textbf{Annunciation Catholic Church and School}

Annunciation parish originally started in 1883 as St. Ann’s. The small brick church was built on land donated by Bishop Machebeuf located at 38th Street and Nebraska (now Delgany). It served the Irish, German, and Slavic immigrants who lived in the Cole neighborhood and who worked in the smelters, for the railroads, and for the foundries. In 1885 the little church was destroyed in a fire when a freight train car blocked access of fire equipment to put out the blaze.\textsuperscript{180} A larger church was built on the same location under the leadership of Father Nicholas C. Matz. Father Godfrey Raber took over the parish in 1887 and soon after opened a parochial school in classrooms located at the back of the church under the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondolet.\textsuperscript{181} In 1889 Father Raber switched parishes with Father Henry Robinson, a priest who founded Annunciation in 1880, the first Catholic parish in Leadville.\textsuperscript{182} Soon after his arrival, Father Robinson observed that most of St. Ann’s congregation was moving out of the increasingly industrialized area near the South Platte River to Denver’s Hyde Park Addition east of the railroad tracks. They found crossing the railroad tracks increasingly more difficult and dangerous. In 1890 Father Robinson sold the church, school, and grounds for $7,300 and built a new three-story building to be used as an office, school, and temporary church for $19,000 on the northwest corner of 37th Street and Humboldt Street (see Figure 36). At his request, St. Ann’s changed its name to Annunciation.\textsuperscript{183}


\textsuperscript{176} The Spanish-American Population of Denver: An Exploratory Survey, 57.

\textsuperscript{177} Colorado Cultural Resource Survey, Epworth Building, SDV.2112; “Epworth Building”; Edelen, “Five Point’s Historic Epworth Church to Be Mixed-Use Development.”


\textsuperscript{179} Epworth Institutional Ch. 31st & Lawrence, Photograph, black & white, c.1925, Denver Public Library Special Collections, https://digital.denverlibrary.org/digital/collection/p15330coll22/id/39552/rec/2.


While the congregation used the 1890 three-story brick building as a temporary church space as well as a school, its primary focus in the 1890s was to raise funds to build a new church. Father Robinson slowly raised funds from his congregation despite the Silver Panic of 1893, which directly impacted his parishioners as most of them worked at the Globe smelter and the railroads. In 1904 construction started on the new Annunciation church on the northwest corner of 36th Street and Humboldt Street. The Romanesque and Gothic Revival church was completed in 1907. Around 1915 the spire and bell tower were added.  

The church and school served Swansea, Cole, and Five Points, three of Denver’s low-income neighborhoods. As the congregation grew, so did the school’s enrollment. By the 1940s Annunciation Catholic School was the largest Catholic school in Denver. By 1950 the school included high school curriculum as well as a new high school building built on the 3500 block of Lafayette Street. Following national trends of declining enrollment and closure of Catholic schools, the high school closed in 1968. Annunciation Catholic School remains open today and offers classes preschool through middle school (see Chapter 3 to learn more about Annunciation School).  

In the early 1970s Archbishop James V. Casey gave Annunciation Parish to the Capuchins, the Franciscan Order of Friars Minor. By the 1980s about 90 percent of the congregation were Mexican or Latino. The church started holding mariachi masses and started focusing on restoration and fostering the next generation of students at its school. The church’s National Register nomination form quotes Sister Therese Klepac, a Sister of Charity of Leavenworth, as saying: “Europeans built this parish, but the Hispanic parishioners restored it... People started to look at the history of this area and this parish.”

Figure 36. A c.1915 photograph of the Annunciation Catholic Church.  

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185 Catholic Church; Widmann, Annunciation Church, 1, 5; Widmann, “Denver’s Annunciation Church: Its History; Its Architect, Fred W. Paroth; and Its Neoclassical Architecture,” 4, 10.  
189 Widmann, Annunciation Church, 7.
Southwest

St. Anthony of Padua

Father Michael A. Maher founded the St. Anthony of Padua parish in 1947 to serve 175 families in Westwood on the southwest side of Denver. He held their first masses in the Westwood Skating Rink and a tavern on W. Alameda Avenue and heard confessions in Westwood Cleaners until a church could be built in 1948. In 1959 St. Anthony’s started construction on a new, larger church, and in 1960 opened its new Langhart and McGuire-designed church at 3801 W. Ohio Avenue. Under the leadership of Father Patrick V. Sullivan in the 1970s and 1980s, the church became a “social justice parish” and advocated for the neighborhood, which included many low-income Latinos. Father Sullivan opened a food bank, started a Latino studies and health program, and Christmas basket operations. Like Our Lady of Guadalupe and St. Cajetan, the church also hosted political activists and meetings. St. Anthony’s became an important hub for Latinos, offering seven masses in Spanish each week. After the Archdiocese of Denver appointed a more conservative pastor in the 1990s and 2000s, the church stopped offering many of its programs and was no longer seen as a social justice parish.

Rosemary Rodriguez remembers family members and godparents who attended mass at St. Anthony when it was seen as a social justice church. Years later Rodriguez worked directly with the neighborhood and the parish to provide more programs to the community. When Rodriguez was on the city council in the early 2000s, she collaborated with the police, the Westwood neighborhood, and the church to offer a unique program. The community members did not want to call the police but were willing to contact Rosemary’s city council office and the church about issues observed in the neighborhood. The police would then take the anonymous concerns and work with the community to handle the concerns “without a car showing up at the front door, promoting law enforcement while protecting people.” During her time as city councilwoman, Rodriguez also witnessed the church serving as a center for the Southwest Improvement Council (SWIC), which built low-income housing in the community. Rodriguez remembers St. Anthony’s continuing to be big advocates for west and southwest Denver.

Unincorporated Adams County, Goat Hill (Alto de la Chiva)

The Penitentes, also known as La Fraternidad Piasoda de Nuestro Padres Jesus Nazareno (the Pious Brotherhood of Our Father Jesus of Nazareth), is a lay religious sect of the Catholic Church established around 400 years ago. Although outside of the former structure of the Roman Catholic Church, Penitente moradas became integral in the establishment of Hispano settlements. Chapters of the Penitentes, known as moradas, are primarily found in politically and religiously isolated areas of what is now northern New Mexico and southern Colorado. The government of New Spain (later Mexico) ignored the almost exclusively Catholic areas due to the isolated nature of the region. Lack of religious leadership in these areas led to the creation of the Penitente Brotherhood. The focus of the Penitentes includes charity, good deeds, and devotion both through spiritual and physical practices. Physical devotion includes punishment related to Christ’s suffering performed in public and private, often differing across different moradas, but can include self-flagellation and ritual re-enactments of the Crucifixion.

190 Rodriguez, Video interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales; Noel, Colorado Catholicism and the Archdiocese of Denver, 1857-1989, 343.
192 Noel, Colorado Catholicism and the Archdiocese of Denver, 1857-1989, 344; Abarca et al., Video interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales.
193 Rodriguez, Video interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales.
194 Rodriguez, Video interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales.
195 Rodriguez, Video interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales.
ish Roman Catholic Church established these traditions dating to medieval times but shifted their practices in New Mexico around 1797, when leadership changed from Franciscan dominance to secular priests. Under this shift, these types of physical devotion displays were seen as extreme, and in 1833 Bishop Zubiriá of Durango officially admonished the Penitentes from the Catholic Church.198

Although primarily found in northern New Mexico and southern Colorado, moradas are located across the West, including farther north just outside the city limits of Denver in the Goat Hill neighborhood of unincorporated Adams County. It is unknown when the chapter located in Goat Hill was established but the Brotherhood of the Penitentes was active in the area well before the 1940s and their morada was located at the east end of W. 65th Place (nonextant).199

In 1945 a missionary priest named Father J. P. Trudel saw the need for a Catholic Church in Goat Hill and established the Good Shepherd parish. He made a four-year arrangement with the Penitente Brotherhood to provide mass on Sunday mornings in the morada. In 1949, as their arrangement ended, Father Trudel persuaded the Denver Tramway Company to donate two streetcars to the community with the intention of converting the streetcars into a place of worship. He asked Penitentes for permission to place the two streetcars on their property near the morada, but the brotherhood denied his request. Benito and Elosia Garcia donated part of their land on W. 66th Avenue and Decatur Street to the project and work began on the two cars. The first mass held in the new facility was on Christmas 1949.200

In 1954 the Archbishop authorized the construction of a new church. The concrete-block church was completed within five weeks of when construction began and cost $8,000. At the time of its completion the parish was renamed Our Lady of Visitation.201 The streetcar building was converted into a meeting hall until it was dismantled sometime before 1983.202 On July 1, 1958, Our Lady of Visitation became a mission church to the new Holy Trinity Church built in 1957 about 2 miles north of Our Lady of Visitation.203

It is unclear when the association between Our Lady of Visitation and Penitentes started, but the Goat Hill community and the Archdiocese of Denver views it in the following way. In 2017 the Archdiocese of Denver decided to close the mission church, citing its proximity to Holy Trinity and the lack of priests as the main reasons for closure, hoping the community would become more integrated into the parish and would understand the shortage of priests faced by the Catholic Church.204 Community members feel the Archdiocese of Denver did not like its strong association with the Penitentes and was the reason for closing the mission.205 Approximately 100 of its members living in the Goat Hill community and surrounding areas filed an official complaint with the Vatican in November 2017. In March 2018 they received word from the Congregation of Clergy on behalf of Pope Francis stating they would look into the complaint. Sandi Garcia, one of the church members who filed the complaint, said it could take five to six years to learn the Vatican’s decision.206 Today, the Archdiocese of Denver holds mass twice a year at Our Lady of Visitation (see Figure 37).207

198 “Religion in the Purgatoire River Region.”
203 Castillo, “Our Lady of the Visitation Church,” 9
207 “Goat Hill Catholic Society.”
Figure 37. Our Lady of Visitation Church, date unknown.\textsuperscript{208}

\textsuperscript{208} Our Lady of Visitation.
Figure 38. Map of identified religious facilities associated with Latino history in Denver.

Nuestras Historias: Mexican American/Chicano/Latino Histories in Denver
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource Name</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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<td><strong>Designated Sites: National, State, or Local Landmark</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Annunciation Catholic Church</td>
<td>Eastside</td>
<td>1408 E. 36th Avenue</td>
<td>National Register; State Register; Local Landmark</td>
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<tr>
<td>Café Cultura, Smith's Chapel, United Brethren Church Denver Inner City Parish</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>910-912 Galapago Street</td>
<td>Local Landmark; State Register</td>
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<tr>
<td>Central Presbyterian Church</td>
<td>Eastside</td>
<td>1660 N. Sherman Street</td>
<td>National Register; State Register</td>
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<td>Curtis Park Historic District</td>
<td>Eastside</td>
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<td>Local Landmark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Westside</td>
<td>1212 Mariposa Street</td>
<td>Within La Alma Lincoln Park Historic Cultural District; Current Location</td>
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<tr>
<td>Epworth Spanish Church</td>
<td>Eastside</td>
<td>1130 31st Street</td>
<td>Local Landmark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Baptist Church</td>
<td>Eastside</td>
<td>1345 Grant Street</td>
<td>National Register; State Register; Local Landmark</td>
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<tr>
<td>Holy Rosary Catholic Church</td>
<td>Northside</td>
<td>4664, 4670, and 4690 Pearl Street</td>
<td>State Register</td>
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<tr>
<td>La Alma Lincoln Park Historic Cultural District</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td></td>
<td>Local Landmark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ninth Street Park Historic District</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td></td>
<td>Local Landmark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our Lady of Guadalupe</td>
<td>Northside</td>
<td>1209 W. 36th Avenue</td>
<td>Local Landmark</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sacred Heart Church</td>
<td>Eastside</td>
<td>2760 Larimer Street</td>
<td>Local Landmark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacred Heart School</td>
<td>Eastside</td>
<td>2830 Lawrence Street</td>
<td>State Register; Now home to Centro San Juan Diego</td>
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<tr>
<td>St. Cajetan Catholic Parish</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>101 Lawrence Way</td>
<td>Local Landmark; Original Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Dominic</td>
<td>Northside</td>
<td>2905 Federal Boulevard</td>
<td>National Register; State Register; Local Landmark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Elizabeth of Hungary Church</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>1062 11th Street</td>
<td>National Register; State Register; Local Landmark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Joseph Catholic Church</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>600 Galapago Street</td>
<td>National Register; State Register</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Patrick's Mission Church</td>
<td>Northside</td>
<td>3325 Pecos</td>
<td>National Register; State Register; Local Landmark</td>
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<td>Holy Family Church</td>
<td>Northside</td>
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<td>Holy Ghost Church</td>
<td>Eastside</td>
<td>633 19th Street</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Luz Del Mundo Iglesia Del Dios Vivo Columna Y Apoyo De La Verdad</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>3607 W. 14th Avenue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our Lady of Grace</td>
<td>Eastside</td>
<td>2645 E. 48th Avenue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Anthony of Padua</td>
<td>Southwest</td>
<td>3801 W. Ohio Avenue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Cajetan Catholic Parish</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>299 S. Raleigh Street</td>
<td>Current Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Catherine of Siena</td>
<td></td>
<td>4200 Federal Boulevard</td>
<td>Officially Eligible for the National Register – 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Resources not in Denver (not mapped)</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mt. Olivet Catholic Cemetery</td>
<td></td>
<td>12801 W. 44th Avenue, Wheat Ridge, CO 80033</td>
<td>Cemetery, outside of Denver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our Lady of Visitation Church</td>
<td></td>
<td>2531 W. 65th Place</td>
<td>Unincorporated Adams County</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Education

Similar to the Catholic churches, Catholic schools offered a central space for Mexican Americans to learn and participate in afterschool activities, sports, and meetings, and acted as community centers for their neighborhoods. They relied on the parochial schools to educate their children and in some ways protect them from the harsh realities of the lived experience in a racialized and discriminatory world. The focus of this chapter is to provide a history of Mexican American education in Denver. This includes several important schools in Denver identified by them, the widespread racism and discrimination faced by Mexican American and Chicano students, and a summary of the changes to the Auraria neighborhood when the majority of the residences and businesses were razed in the early 1970s for the Auraria Higher Education Center. While the education center in Auraria provided a path for higher education to many in Denver, it was also a controversial project for Chicano communities because the campus displaced a thriving, vibrant Latino neighborhood.

The resources described in this chapter are organized by neighborhood. It is not an exhaustive list, nor does it include a detailed history of every resource found while conducting research and engaging with the public. For more information and for a spatial understanding of the identified educational buildings, see Figure 48 at the end of this chapter, followed by Table 2 that provides a list of designated and known sites.

Catholic schools offered a central space for Mexican Americans to gather. They counted on the parochial schools to educate their children and in some ways protect them from the harsh realities of the lived experience in a racialized and discriminatory world. Tony Garcia, artistic director at Su Teatro and professor at Metropolitan State University (MSU Denver, previously Metropolitan State College), remembers attending St. Cajetan Catholic School before it closed in 1970 and it feeling like “a safe, isolated bubble, and that if you left the bubble, you would run into racism.” Although in some ways the schools protected and insulated the Mexican American and Chicano students, many also discouraged students from speaking Spanish and cultivating Chicano culture within the schools. In the 1970s Catholic schools in inner cities nationwide began to close as more affluent parishioners moved to the suburbs and lower income families could not afford rising tuition (see Chapter 2, Religion and Spirituality).

Denver was no different, and Chicanos felt the closures of Catholic schools across the city as the achievement gap widened and graduation rates fell. Richard Castro noted when Annunciation High School closed, “many of the young people who would have gone there dropped out of school. They couldn’t make it at Manual [High School]. There wasn’t the small classroom atmosphere. There wasn’t the opportunity to participate in all aspects of school life. The public school was not the center of their life that Annunciation was to me.”

In the 1980s historians researching the educational experience of Mexican Americans and Chicanos in the southwestern United States found children were “viewed intellectually inferior and culturally deprived” and were often segregated into separate classes or schools. Adrianna Abarca, founder of the Latino Culture Center,

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209 Rodriguez, Video interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales; Abarca et al., Video interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales.
211 Abarca et al., Video interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales.
212 De Maeyer, “USA: The ‘Great Decline’ of Catholic Schools.”
213 Abarca et al., Video interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales.
attended Denver Public Schools in the 1960s and 1970s. She remembers fights breaking out in the schools between students who identified as Chicanos and those who identified as Mexican. She also said she had “zero exposure to my culture – no books, no library – I knew I was getting an inferior education.”

The Chicanos Movement in Denver fought against the cultural insensitivity, racism, and segregation through protests and walkouts (called blowouts) at schools and founded its own school (see below for more information, as well as and Chapter 13 on the Chicanos Movement). In addition, the landmark school desegregation case in Denver—Keyses v. School District No. 1, which came before the Supreme Court in 1973—was recognized as one of the first efforts to desegregate schools in a city not located in the southern United States. Josie Perez, a West Side Chicana activist, was one of the named plaintiffs in the case and testified before the U.S. Supreme Court. Another unique factor was the tri-ethnic make-up of the Black, white, and Chicano students that made up the school district in Denver. The court ruling acknowledged that Chicano students and Black students had very different backgrounds and problems and could not be lumped together. Yet both groups lagged behind white students because their segregated schools, textbooks, and equipment were older and in poor condition, and the academic levels were a year or two behind that of white schools. The court ruling resulted in city-wide busing of Chicano and Black students to white schools in Denver, and vice versa, until 1995, when the court order was rescinded. It also started a process of “white flight” for many white families in Denver neighborhoods who moved to suburban school districts, where few non-white students lived at the time.

Dr. Martha Urioste, the former principal of Denison Montessori (1821 S. Yates Street, extant) and known as La Madrina de Montessori (the godmother of Montessori), was tasked with helping to desegregate several schools in the 1980s including Mitchell Elementary School (1350 E. 33rd Avenue, extant, closed 2009). When asked what she would do to encourage white, middle-class children to get on a bus and go to school in the Eastside of Denver, Dr. Urioste worked to turn Mitchell into a Montessori school. Eventually, 44 percent of the students at Mitchell were white children who were bused to the school to receive Montessori education. Dr. Urioste also helped other schools within primarily Chicano neighborhoods transition to Montessori education, including Lincoln Elementary School (710 S. Pennsylvania Street, extant), Gilpin Elementary School (now one of Denver Language School’s campuses, 2949 California Street, extant), Academia Ana Marie Sandoval (3655 Wyandot Street, extant), and Escuela Tlatelolco (2949 North Federal Boulevard, extant, closed 2017). Dr. Urioste also founded Family Star Montessori, an early childhood program for children ages 0-3.

The busing mandate in Denver is widely seen today as failing in its goal of desegregating schools and providing educational achievement for all students regardless of color. Many of the bused students still remained segregated in their schools, where they were separated into high-achieving classes of whites and other classes of non-whites. As a result, non-white students continued to fall behind their white peers. Today more than half (52.4 percent) of the students who attend Denver Public Schools (DPS) are Latino. DPS acknowledges its diverse student population and, while it is making efforts to improve its relationship with Latinos, it still has a long way to go.

Westside

Auraria Higher Education Center (AHEC)

In 1858 a small group of prospectors established the Aurora Town Company on the west bank of Cherry Creek. The town company included two square miles from where the South Platte River and Cherry Creek meet, from

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216 Abarca et al., Video interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales.
218 Romero, “How I Rode the Bus to Become a Professor at the University of Denver Sturm College of Law: Reflections on Keyes’s Legacy for the Metropolitan, Post-Racial, and Multiracial Twenty-First Century,” 1028.
8th Avenue to Clarkson Street. The organizers named their little settlement Auraria, deriving the word from the Latin word for gold: aura. In 1859 a different group of prospectors established the Denver City Company on the east bank of Cherry Creek. Barely a year later the two towns consolidated to form the City of Denver.\(^{222}\)

Originally home to European immigrants primarily from Ireland and Germany, by the 1900s Hispanics from northern New Mexico and southern Colorado, as well as migrants from Mexico, started settling in Auraria. During the Mexican Revolution more Spanish-speaking people arrived and settled in Auraria.\(^{223}\) In 1922 Bishop Tihen saw the need for a Catholic church devoted to the Mexican Americans in Auraria and established St. Cajetan Catholic Parish, and St. Cajetan Catholic Church located at 101 Lawrence Way was completed in 1926 (extant). The church became a community center for the Hispanics living in Denver (to learn more about St. Cajetan Catholic Parish, see Chapter 2).\(^{224}\) The neighborhood began to change, and as Europeans moved away, more Latinos settled in Auraria. Discrimination outside of Auraria brought Latinos closer together, with St. Cajetan Catholic Parish (see Chapter 2, Religion and Spirituality) and Casa Mayan Restaurant (see Chapter 5, Commerce) as important sites.\(^{225}\) In 1970, 89 percent of people living in Auraria were Chicano.\(^{226}\)

In the 1960s the Denver Urban Renewal Authority (DURA) and the Downtown Denver Master Plan Committee chose four centrally located potential sites for a new higher education campus: Auraria, Civic Center, Skyline, and Union Station.\(^{227}\) In the 1940s reports written for the Denver Housing Authority labeled Auraria as “blighted” warning it was a danger to public welfare and one that could spread to other areas of the city if left unattended. A report written in 1949 stated 64 percent of Denver’s Spanish American population lived in blighted areas compared to 21 percent of the white population.\(^{228}\) A 1954 city planning report “issued dire warnings about how the spread of extreme blight represented a ‘cancerous’ threat to the health of the city and recommended that it be addressed through ‘surgery’ rather than rehabilitation.”\(^{229}\)

By the time DURA began to search for a higher education campus location, Denver officials saw Auraria as an irredeemable area of the city.\(^{230}\) However, the residents of Auraria saw their neighborhood as a thriving community, with more than 250 families living there. Multiple businesses, three taverns, and three churches and schools were all within the 38-block radius neighborhood.\(^{231}\) Ultimately, however, DURA and the Downtown Denver Master Plan Committee chose Auraria for its new higher education campus.

Residents of Auraria did not learn of the City’s plans to demolish the neighborhood until DURA distributed pamphlets to residents three years after the plan was first announced and two months before the bond issue was put to a vote.\(^{232}\) Auraria residents and other Westsiders joined together to form various protest groups, including the Preserve the Westside Committee, Chicano student organizations at Metropolitan State College (now MSU Denver), as well as the Crusade for Justice (see Chapter 6 for more information on the Crusade for Justice and the Chicano Movement). St. Cajetan priest Father Pete Garcia,

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an active leader in the efforts to save Auraria, formed the Auraria Residents Organization (ARO). Collectively, ARO focused on bringing attention to the rest of Denver that the neighborhood was never consulted, the residents deeply valued their community regardless of the perception of “blight,” and that they felt it was an attempt to destabilize the Chicano residents. DURA responded with more discussions of blight; said that of the four sites, Auraria would displace the fewest number of people; and made the argument that Chicanos would benefit most from the new campus, offering a new education facility for “you, your children, and your children’s children.” Ultimately the educational advancement argument won, with some Chicanos supporting the educational campus. Paco Sanchez, who represented Auraria in Colorado House District 7, said: “This is a tremendous opportunity for my people. I don’t want the college to go anywhere else. My young people will be within walking distance of the college, in the heart of the city, only blocks from their homes. I am for it. You cannot replace education.”

By 1974 most of the structures within Auraria were condemned and the residents, mostly low income and elderly Chicanos, were displaced, invoking “one of the largest incidents of forced migration in [Denver’s] history.” DURA gave homeowners a maximum of $15,000 and a minimum of $500 for moving expenses and renters $4,000 over the course of four years to pay for new leases or towards buying a home. Historic preservationists saved major buildings in the neighborhood including St. Cajetan Catholic Parish, Tivoli Brewery, and the Ninth Street Historic Park (see Figure 39).

236 Sanchez, “The Effects of the Auraria High Educational Complex in the Westside Community.”
239 Aerial View of Auraria/Lincoln Park before 1977.
The Auraria Campus opened in 1976 (see Figure 41). Today the 169-acre campus incorporates three distinct institutions: Community College of Denver (CCD), MSU Denver, and University of Colorado Denver (CU Denver), comprising 38,000 students and 5,000 faculty and staff across the three schools. According to the Auraria Higher Education Center 2020-2021 annual report, CCD and MSU Denver are both designated Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI) and CU Denver will most likely be eligible for this designation sometime in 2022. In order to be eligible to receive an HSI designation, a college or university must have an enrollment of “undergraduate full-time equivalent students that is at least 25 percent Hispanic at the end of the award year preceding the date of application.” As of fall 2020, 36.4 percent of CCD students identified as Hispanic/Latinx, 32 percent of MSU Denver students identified as Hispanic/Latina/o/x, and 22 percent of CU Denver students identified as Hispanic/Latina/o/x. Many Latinos from Denver and Colorado have received degrees and instruction there and it is an important center for education in the city.

Figure 41. Aerial view of Auraria Higher Education Center with St. Cajetan Catholic Parish in the foreground, 1977. View facing northeast.

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244 “AHEC Annual Report,” 8–9.
245 About the Auraria Campus.”
246 Aerial View of Auraria Higher Education Center.
West High School
West High School, located at 951 Elati Street, was constructed in 1924-1925 and was designed in the Neo-Gothic style by Denver architect W. Harry Edwards (see Figure 42). It expanded the previous high school, known as West Denver High School, West Side High School, and Franklin School, which had been operating out of the Central School on W. 5th Avenue and Fox Street since 1892.247 The building located at W. 5th Avenue and Fox Street became Baker Junior High School until it was demolished in 1959.248 An addition was added to the rear of the Neo-Gothic style building in 1977-1979.249 West High School is the site of the 1969 West High Blowout. Students faced racist teachers and received no support from the principal when they asked the school to hire Chicano teachers, teach classes in Spanish, and teach Chicano courses. They turned to the Crusade for Justice, Black Berets, the West Side Action Council, and the Black Panthers to help them plan a student-led walkout at the school on March 20, 1969. Police attacked the protestors with billy clubs and tear gas, and many protestors and students were also arrested. Many protestors tried to find shelter across the street from the school at Sunken Gardens Park (between Speer Boulevard, W. 8th Avenue, Delaware & Elati Streets, extant) and the Denver Inner City Parish in Smith’s Chapel (910 Galapago Street, extant). The next day 1,200 students gathered for a walkout at West, which spread to other schools throughout Denver.

Figure 42. An undated photograph of West High School. Notice the streetcar tracks and lines in the foreground of the photograph. Students would take the Route 72 to school until bus Route 60 replaced the streetcar line in the 1960s.250

249  Magnuson, West High School.
(see Figure 43).\textsuperscript{251} After the Blowout, West High students and their parents attended a Denver School Board meeting to request changes at West.\textsuperscript{252} While many of these demands took years to be met and some are still in progress, the blowout helped students effectively protest policies and teachers that were racist and discriminatory at West. See Chapter 7 for more information on the West High Blowout.

\textsuperscript{251} La Alma Lincoln Park, 9, and other pages; Vigil, The Crusade for Justice: Chicano Militancy and the Government’s War on Dissent, 81–86.

\textsuperscript{252} Chicano Students’ Demands at West High,” West Side Recorder, March 1969, Volume 5, Number 9 edition, https://www.coloradohistoricnewspapers.org/?a=d&d=WSR19690301-01.2.32&srpos=86&e=------en-20--81--img-txtN%7ctxC0%7ctxTA--chicano------0--Denver------.


Figure 43. Latino students from West High School during the Blowout on March 20, 1969.\textsuperscript{253}
Northside

North High School
North High School was constructed in 1911-1913 and was designed in the Beaux Arts style by Denver architect David Dryden (see Figure 44). It expanded the North Side High School, which had been operating out of the Ashland School on W. 29th Street since 1883. The high school also included the Denver School of Trades until the 1930s. It was expanded in the 1950s to include an east wing for gym classes and a pool, and again in the 1980s with a new auditorium, cafeteria, atrium, offices, and additional classrooms. In 2010 the school received $35 million to renovate and restore the campus buildings, including building a new library.254

Mexican American residents began moving into the Northside of Denver in the early twentieth century. Most initially migrated to northern Colorado to work on sugar beet farms and lived in Denver during the offseason, which eventually led to taking up year-round residence in the city. By the second half of the twentieth century more and more Mexican American students attended North High School, along with Italian, Jewish, and white students who lived in the neighborhood. According to Phil Goodstein, author of Northside Story: Denver’s Most Intriguing Neighborhood, “divisions were notable between those who had been born in Denver and for those who had moved to the city from Latin America.”256 Today the student population is predominately Latino.257

Figure 44. Aerial photograph of North High School campus, 1961, view facing north.255

Eastside

Annunciation Catholic School

Annunciation Catholic Church, originally St. Ann’s, formed in 1883 near 38th Street and Delgany Street in a heavily industrial area. In 1885 a fire destroyed the small brick church and the parish rebuilt the church. By 1890 the congregation, tired of crossing dangerous railroad tracks to attend mass, sold the church and land, changed its name to Annunciation, and built a three-story brick building on the northwest corner of E. 37th Avenue and Humboldt Street (nonexistent). The building served as an office, school, and temporary church until the brick Romanesque Revival church located at 1408 East 36th Avenue (extant) was completed in 1907 (to learn more about the Annunciation Catholic Church and parish, see Chapter 2, Religion and Spirituality).258

The new school in the three-story brick building held its first classes in October 1890. Father Robinson recruited the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth to teach at the school, holding them in high regard as they had taught the congregation, as well as for classrooms.260 The school building held elementary grades in the first story, junior high in the second story, and by 1913 held high school classes in the third story.261 The Sisters operated the largest Catholic school in Denver, which by 1945 had an enrollment of 641 students and 18 Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth.262 The demographics of the school reflected the demographics of the neighborhood at approximately 60 percent Mexican American, 15 percent Black, and 25 percent white.263 In 1949 a new high school located at 3536 Lafayette Street (extant) was built from the money left to the church by Annunciation priest Father Michael Callanan (see Chapter 2). In 1934, a small black box was found among his possessions left to the church. The box contained Cripple Creek gold mining stock he had purchased years before, worth approximately $80,000. Archbishop Vehr dedicated the school in the fall of 1951.264

Following national trends of declining enrollment in Catholic schools due to disparity of wealth and increase in tuition fees, in 1968 the last high school class graduated from Annunciation.265 The elementary school and junior high school moved into the high school building and the original 1890 three-story brick building located on the northwest corner of E. 37th Avenue and Humboldt Street was demolished.266 Humboldt Apartments, a collaboration between the Archdiocesan Housing Committee, Inc. and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, were built at the site of the old school building.267 Archdiocese Family Housing, Inc. owns the buildings today.268 Annunciation Catholic School continues to offer classes for children preschool through eighth grade.269

262 Widmann, Annunciation Church, 6; Widmann, “Denver’s Annunciation Church: Its History; Its Architect, Fred W. Paroth; and Its Neoclassical Architecture;” 7.
266 Widmann, Annunciation Church, 6; Widmann, “Denver’s Annunciation Church: Its History; Its Architect, Fred W. Paroth; and Its Neoclassical Architecture;” 7; Noel, Colorado Catholicism and the Archdiocese of Denver, 1857-1989, 308.
269 “Our Story, Our History, & Our Mission (Nuestra Historia y Misión);” “Who We Are (Quienes Somos).”
Manual High School

Manual Training High School, located near the intersection of E. 27th Avenue and Franklin Street, was built between 1893 and 1894. The school opened in March 1894 and focused on arts and crafts, technical subjects, and mass exercises (see Figure 45).270 Because of its location on the Eastside, the students came from a mix of ethnicities, but the majority were Black, Mexican, and Japanese. The school was built to provide vocational training, implying the Eastside students who attended the school were only cut out for those types of jobs. The mascots, the Bricklayers, were celebrated in the school song, “We are bricklayers, one and all.”271

Figure 45. Boys and girls carve wood blocks during carving class at Manual High School, c.1900.272

In 1948 Denver voters approved a $21 million building program, one of the largest the City of Denver had ever seen. The program included $3.5 million for the construction of a new Manual High School (see Figure 46). In 1949 Denver School District No. 1 purchased a three-block site (10.3 acres) for the new school, which would include the existing training school building and encompass E. 28th Avenue to the north, E. 26th Street to the south, Humboldt Street to the west, and N. Williams Street to the east. Construction started on the new building near the original high school in May 1951. At this time the school decided to remove “training” from its name and officially became Manual High School. It also changed its mascot from the Bricklayers to the Thunderbolts.273

Figure 46. Construction of the new Manual High School, 1952.274

On July 24, 1953, the original Manual Training High School building burned. The new school building remained unharmed and welcomed its first students in September 1953. It was formally dedicated on November 12, 1953. The three-story, red brick building was designed by architect Raymond Harry Ervin with input from students and teachers. The school maintained the vocational aspect of instruction, making sure to include classrooms and spaces that fit the needs of learning both academic and technical skills. The new facilities included administrative offices, classrooms, an auditorium, study hall, art rooms, publication rooms, a library, music classrooms, and an armory and rifle ranges. The building was double in size compared to the original Manual Training High School.275

273 Simmons and Simmons, Manual High School, 3; Forrest, McAllister, and McKeever, History of the Public Schools of Denver: A Brief History (1859-1989) and Complete Building Survey of the Denver Public Schools, 44.
275 Simmons and Simmons, Manual High School, 3; Forrest, McAllister, and McKeever, History of the Public Schools of Denver: A Brief History (1859-1989) and Complete Building Survey of the Denver Public Schools, 44, 55.
In the late 1960s Manual became part of the Keyes school desegregation case in which a group of Black and Chicano parents sued Denver Public Schools for creating district boundaries between Manual and East High Schools (a school with a predominantly white student population) that perpetuated segregation within the district. The 1973 U.S. Supreme Court desegregation order for the case required all schools within the district to bus Black, Chicano, and white students out of their neighborhoods to different parts of the city to meet the court-ordered ratio for integration and create a more diverse student population throughout the school district. Accordingly, Denver Public Schools began busing white students to Manual High School, along with all other schools in the district, while students from the Eastside were bussed to majority white schools in south and southeast Denver.

Escuela Tlatelolco Centro de Estudios

In the 1960s and 1970s the Chicano Movement, or “El Movimiento,” was a prominent social movement in Colorado and especially in Denver. El Movimiento celebrated Latinos’ Mexican and Indigenous roots and rejected the concept of white superiority in society. It consisted of a broad coalition of labor, political, and academic organizations, as well as journalists and artists, organized around a central idea of promoting the lives of Chicano and Latino people in the United States. In Denver the movement included school walkouts (also known as blowouts), boycotts, marches, and hunger fasts. These events, particularly the West High School Blowout (see below and Chapter 13 for more information), led to the founding of a school focused on the Chicano Movement and social justice: La Escuela Tlatelolco Centro de Estudios (Tlatelolco School Center of Studies, referred to as Escuela Tlatelolco hereafter).

Escuela Tlatelolco opened on October 8, 1970, in the Crusade for Justice headquarters located at 1567 Downing Street (nonexistent and focused on the academic success of Chicano youth. The founders named the school after the site located in La Plaza de las Tres Culturas in Mexico City. On October 2, 1968, more than 300 people were killed during a protest against the Mexican government at Tlatelolco. It is also where Spanish priests first opened a school for Indigenous and Mestizos peoples. Founded by Crusade for Justice leader Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales, the dual-language school provided a space for Chicano children ages preschool through high school that focused on developing leadership skills and building confidence.

The school was also connected to Denver’s Chicanos through “la familia concept,” focusing on building a strong connection through its teachers and administrators. Arlette Lucero, a long-time educator from Denver, remembers her involvement in the school in the 1970s. She said, “no matter what people think of it politically, it gave me a chance to connect with my cultural identity in a way involvement in my predominately white church could not.” Councilwoman Jamie Torres recalls it was a “mobilizing place” where community members could meet with businesses or the mayor, or just generally get the support that they needed.

Over the years Escuela Tlatelolco had several homes, including sharing space with another Crusade for Justice organization Servicios de La Raza (4051 Tejon Street, extant). In 1995 the school purchased the St. Dominick’s Elementary School building at 2949 N. Federal Boulevard (extant). DPS did not renew the school’s contract for the 2015-2016 school year. The school could not recover the loss of income, closing at the end of the 2017 school year. Over its 46-year history, the school taught more than 7,000 students (see Figure 47). For more on the Crusade for Justice, Gonzales, and Escuela Tlatelolco, see Chapter 7.

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277 Simmons and Simmons, Manual High School, 3.
278 Goodstein, North Side Story: Denver’s Most Intriguing Neighborhood, 39.
280 Romero and Gonzales, “Escuela Tlatelolco A Reality.”
281 Romero and Gonzales, “Escuela Tlatelolco A Reality.”
282 Abarca et al., Video interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales.
283 Torres, Video Interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales.
La Escuela Tlatelolco Centro de Estudios focused on educating Chicano youth, including learning about the Crusade for Justice and the Chicano Movement. This image of students appeared in the 1973 school yearbook. The large painting in the background was painted by Emanuel Martinez in 1969.  

Figure 48. Map of identified educational institutions associated with Latino history in Denver.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site Name</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boulevard Elementary</td>
<td>Northside</td>
<td>2351 Federal Boulevard</td>
<td>Within Witter-Cofield Historic District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bryant-Webster Elementary</td>
<td>Northside</td>
<td>3635 Quivas Street</td>
<td>National Register, should be revised to include Chicano history; State Register; Local Landmark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Café Cultura, Smith’s Chapel, United Brethren Church, Denver Inner City Parish</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>910-912 Galapago Street</td>
<td>Local Landmark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curtis Park Historic District</td>
<td>Eastside</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East High School</td>
<td>Eastside</td>
<td>1600 City Park Esplanade</td>
<td>National Register, should be revised to include Chicano history; State Register; Local Landmark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elyria School/El Centro SuTeatro</td>
<td>Eastside</td>
<td>4725 High Street</td>
<td>Local Landmark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily Griffith Opportunity School</td>
<td>Eastside</td>
<td>1250 Welton Street</td>
<td>Local Landmark (1250 Welton Street) Current Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1860 Lincoln Street</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gilpin Elementary School/ Denver Language School</td>
<td>Eastside</td>
<td>2949 California Street</td>
<td>Within Curtis Park Historic District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Alma Lincoln Park Historic Cultural District</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td></td>
<td>Local Landmark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lake Middle School</td>
<td>Northside</td>
<td>1820 Lowell Boulevard</td>
<td>Local Landmark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North High School</td>
<td>Northside</td>
<td>2960 Speer Boulevard</td>
<td>Local Landmark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ninth Street Park Historic District</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td></td>
<td>Local Landmark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacred Heart School/ Centro San Juan Diego</td>
<td>Eastside</td>
<td>2830 Lawrence Street</td>
<td>State Register</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skinner Middle School</td>
<td>Northside</td>
<td>3435 W. 40th Avenue</td>
<td>Local Landmark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunken Gardens Park</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>Bounded by Speer Boulevard, W. 8th Avenue, Delaware Street, and Elati Street</td>
<td>National Register; should be revised to include Chicano history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West High School</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>951 Elati Street</td>
<td>Local Landmark; should be revised to include Chicano history</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

continued
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site Name</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Undesignated Sites</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annunciation Catholic School</td>
<td>Eastside</td>
<td>3536 Lafayette Street</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auraria Higher Education Center</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>890 Auraria Parkway</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheltenham Elementary</td>
<td>Northside</td>
<td>1580 Julian Street</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbian Elementary School</td>
<td>Northside</td>
<td>2925 W. 40th Street</td>
<td>Field Eligible – 1983</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Del Pueblo/Girls Athletic Leadership Schools</td>
<td>West Side</td>
<td>750 Galapago Street</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denison Montessori</td>
<td>Southwest</td>
<td>1821 S. Yates Street</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escuela Tlatelolco Centro de Estudios</td>
<td>Eastside</td>
<td>1567 Downing Street (non-extant)</td>
<td>Original Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Northside</td>
<td>Souden Building, 4059 Tejon Street (extant)</td>
<td>Second Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Northside</td>
<td>2949 North Federal Boulevard (extant)</td>
<td>Officially Eligible for the National Register – 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(St. Dominic's Elementary building); Final Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greenlee Elementary School</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>1150 Lipan Street</td>
<td>Officially Eligible for the National Register – 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kepner Middle School</td>
<td>Southwest</td>
<td>911 S Hazel Court</td>
<td>Field Not Eligible for the National Register – 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knapp Elementary School</td>
<td>Southwest</td>
<td>500 S Utica Street</td>
<td>Field Not Eligible for the National Register – 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>La Academia Sandoval (Sandoval Elementary)</strong></td>
<td>Northside</td>
<td>3655 Wyandot Street</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lincoln Elementary and Montessori School</td>
<td>South Denver</td>
<td>710 S. Pennsylvania Street</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manual High School</td>
<td>Eastside</td>
<td>1700 E. 28th Avenue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitchell Elementary School</td>
<td>Eastside</td>
<td>1350 E. 33rd Avenue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saint Patrick’s School/Escuela Guadalupe/Call for Action Center/Chicano Humanities &amp; Arts Council (CHAC)</td>
<td>Northside</td>
<td>3401 Pecos Street</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Since the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and the incorporation of Mexican nationals in the Southwest as United States citizens, the industries of the United States have depended on the labor of Latino workers—a dependence steeped with racialized exploitation. As described by historian Zaragosa Vargas, following the Mexican-American War, “a form of labor relations was ushered in founded on racial inequality and oppression as the worst jobs became synonymous with Latino jobs. A dual wage system developed based on race that became part of the West’s distinct labor relations.” Latinos have immigrated to the United States, or migrated within the country, in waves during periods of significant economic growth. This is no accident, as that economic growth depended on cheap and accessible labor. The international policies between the United States and Spanish-speaking countries have further enforced and entrenched this pattern. Throughout America’s history Latinos have consistently faced intense discrimination evidenced by low pay, dangerous working conditions, and lack of advancement. In the face of this discrimination Latino workers in turn have consistently fought to improve their conditions, wages, and representation within unions and other organizations through strikes, boycotts, and self-organizing efforts.

These workers’ experiences across the country were reflected in Denver’s communities. Mexicans migrated into the city following the explosion of the sugar beet industry in the early twentieth century, the need for industrial workers in World War II, and during the city’s rapid growth during the postwar era of prosperity. These economic pulls proved to be the genesis of Denver’s Latino neighborhoods and the flowering of culture that followed. However, Latino workers in Denver continued to face discrimination and mistreatment from employers. Largely excluded from unions and other organizing efforts due to racial discrimination, these workers relied on their own mutualistas (mutual aid societies) to support each other. As the community grew the mutualistas gave way to self-organization into unions to improve the working conditions of Latinos throughout the state. The following chapter provides an overview of the general trends faced by Latino workers and identifies significant historical responses to those trends. While it does not include every significant person, organization, or event, it represents the general efforts of Mexican Americans in Denver to improve their working conditions. This chapter also focuses on large-scale employment in the industrial and agricultural sectors. (See Chapter 5 for discussion of commerce and entrepreneurial activities in Latino communities.)

For more information and for a spatial understanding of the identified labor-related buildings, see Figure 58 at the end of this chapter, followed by Table 3 that provides a list of designated and known sites.

Prominent industries and employers

Railroads
Denver was a primary transportation hub in the Rocky Mountain region in the early twentieth century. The city’s numerous railroads provided the key transportation network for its numerous industries. They were also one of the largest employers of Mexicans and Mexican Americans at the time and one of the few industries open to minorities. Among others, the major railroad companies in Denver included the Denver Pacific, Denver & Rio Grande, Colorado Southern, and Chicago Burlington & Quincy. The earliest Latino residents in Denver gravitated toward the railyards, where they began building their urban neighborhoods on the Westside, Northside, and Eastside surrounding downtown Denver. As with other industries, Mexicans replaced European immigrant groups, and eventually made up more than 70 percent of railroad workers across the nation. Despite the large numbers of workers, Latinos and other historically marginalized ethnic groups were generally restricted to low-paying

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289 Vargas, “Latino Workers.”
positions regardless of their experience or tenure. They filled positions as trackmen and maintenance workers and worked in yard gangs and loading crews. A few found slightly more prestigious jobs as boilermakers, machinists, and section bosses. Employment opportunities, meager as they were, continued throughout the twentieth century. The Bracero Program, a guest worker program between Mexico and the United States that lasted from the 1940s to the 1960s, employed as many as 62,000 Mexican immigrants on the railroads in 1945 (see Section 10.B below for more on agricultural labor).290

**Defense industry**

World War II opened up industrial jobs in Denver as production soared and other workers went off to war. The wartime production especially provided new employment opportunities for women, including Mexican American women, in the workforce. However, even though more opportunities were available, jobs offered to Latinos remained limited to low-pay positions such as janitors. Major arms production plants such as the Denver Ordinance Plant in Lakewood and the Rocky Mountain Arsenal in Adams County strongly discriminated against minorities by rarely hiring them or only hiring them for the lowest jobs. According to Paul Shriver, the director of Colorado’s Works Progress Administration, in 1941, “Negroes and Mexicans have one chance out of a thousand” of finding work in these industries.291 This situation began to change when President Franklin Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8802 in 1941, establishing the Fair Employment Practices Commission, which outlawed discrimination in any federal agencies, private companies, and unions engaged in war-related work. This Order would open the doors particularly for African American and Mexican Americans women to enter higher-paid war industry jobs. E.O. 8802, combined with war-related labor shortages, would provide more opportunity and more leverage for Latinas during this time. Gates Rubber Company (factory, nonextant) was one war-related factory that hired Latinas during this time (see Figure 49). This also attracted hundreds of Mexican American families to the Baker neighborhood and Southwest Denver, some coming from more rural areas in the state.292

**Meat packing houses**

The “Big Four” meat packing companies—Swift & Company, Armour, Wilson, and Cudahy (all nonextant)—along Packinghouse Road between Elyria and Globeville comprised Denver’s largest industry in the middle of the twentieth century (see Figure 50). Previously dominated by Eastern Europeans, Mexican Americans slowly began to get these jobs during World War II. Again, they were limited to the lowest-paid, most dangerous, and least desirable positions, working in the boning rooms and hide cellars. Alfonzo Gonzales, later a leader in the labor movement, recalled being confronted and physically chased out of his job at the Capitol Packing Company by white employees in 1942.294 After the war young white residents of Globeville and Elyria began moving to the suburbs, utilizing federal home loans not available to Mexican Americans. As their labor force left the neighborhood the packing houses opened new positions to Latinos resulting in a steady but significant migration of Mexican Americans into those neighborhoods in the 1950s and 1960s. By the 1980s Mexican Americans made up 60 percent of the Elyria-Swansea population.295

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The packing houses continued to treat their new employees unfairly, with practices such as refusing to heat the bathrooms in the winter to prevent workers from spending too much time off the floor. Most of the established meatpacking unions were based in Midwestern cities and were not friendly to Latino workers. In response, Denver’s Mexican American workers started their own unions at the packing houses in the 1950s and 1960s (see Union Representation below). Geronimo Sandoval, the father and grandfather of State Senator Paul Sandoval and City Councilwoman Amanda Sandoval, organized the Colorado Meat Packers Union during this time to push for better working conditions.297

Beyond the major industries of railroads, defense, and packing houses, Latinos in Denver found employment

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297 Amanda Sandoval, Video Interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales, June 22, 2021; Mary Lou Egan et al., Video Interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales, June 6, 2021.
at small industries and the service sector. These included metal and machine shops, canneries, auto repair shops, restaurants, hotels, and janitorial service, to name a few. Again, these jobs were mostly located in the city core downtown and among the industrial areas where Mexican Americans settled.299

**Mutualistas**

Mutual aid societies, or mutualistas, originated in Hispano and Mexican communities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and helped provide financial, social, and cultural support for the newly arrived laborers in the city. Mexicans and Hispanics had separate societies, and these organizations helped support these groups in Denver before labor unions and other social organizations existed. Mutualistas provided insurance, medical or funeral expenses, and small loans, and hosted social events such as community dances, often as fundraisers for the organization.

One of the most significant Hispano mutualistas was La Sociedad Proteccion Mutua de Trabajadores Unidos (the Society for the Mutual Protection of the United Workers, SPMDTU). Founded in Antonito, Colorado, in 1900, the SPMDTU fought against discrimination and employment inequities and sought to improve the social, economic, and political condition of Hispanics across Colorado (see Figure 52). The SPMDTU reached its peak membership in the 1940s with 65 councils across the state. In Denver it had multiple meeting locations, including a former residence at 1172-1178 Mariposa Street (extant) and a meeting hall on 38th Avenue in the Northside, across from La Raza (formerly Columbus) Park (3758 Osage Street, extant).300 La Sociedad Protectora Hispana Americana (the Spanish American Protection Society) was another early mutualista organized by Mexican Americans that was active on the Westside. Mutualistas founded by and for Mexican immigrants included La Sociedad Mutualista México (the Mutual Society of Mexico) in Auraria, founded by Nicolas Navarro, Santiago Mijares, Salvador and Ignacio Mackintosh, and Angel Carranco. In addition to financial support, they kept Mexican culture alive in Denver by hosting celebrations of Mexican holidays such as Diez y Seis de Septiembre and Cinco de Mayo.301

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Union representation

Across the country Mexican Americans had difficulty joining and gaining recognition through the dominant union organizations in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The American Federation of Labor (AFL), established in 1886, represented skilled craft unions with a staunch “whites only” stance to their membership. In the early twentieth century a new branch developed, the Federal Labor Union (FLU), to organize a limited number of skilled non-white workers.303 The Great Depression and New Deal programs marked the beginning of support for workers with the passage of the 1935 Labor Relations Act that enforced employee rights to form and join unions.304 Formed in 1938, the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) had a slightly more inclusive approach to including non-white workers as union members. While some accounts describe the CIO as a collection of leftist unions supportive of racial equality and civil rights that were open to Latinos, others provide a different account.305 Labor historian Juan Gómez-Quiñones describes the attitude of the CIO unions as little different from the AFL: “Neither the CIO nor the AFL made a priority of minority or women’s participation or representation, either before the New Deal or after; they emphasized wages, working conditions, and union recognition for white male workers in selected occupations.”306 In 1955 the two dominant associations formed as the AFL-CIO. The AFL-CIO focused its efforts on improving working conditions, but also worked with international unions in an effort to manage immigration into the American workforce.307 During the 1950s and 1960s Latinos made inroads within the AFL-CIO as their political and organizational clout grew in the major industries.


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305 Vargas, “Latino Workers.”
made up less than five percent of the total unionized workforce in the city, amounting to 1,244 workers. Latinos had no representation in the service industries where the majority worked. Only two unions, Ironmakers #507 and Teamster #3, had more than 20 percent membership among Mexican Americans. One thousand of the total unionized Mexican American workers were represented by the Ironmakers local union and two Teamster local unions.308 While these numbers may seem inclusive for the time, these well-organized unions represented all levels of employment. Among the Teamsters in particular, Mexican Americans generally worked in packing and storing. The union overall excluded Mexican Americans from driver positions and opposed immigration from Mexico.309

Mexican American advancements in the labor movement can be exemplified by Tim Flores, one of Denver’s most significant Latino labor leaders. Flores was born in Saltillo, Mexico, in 1919 and moved to Colorado in 1926, where his father found work with the Colorado Fuel & Iron Company in Pueblo and the sugar beet farms around Greeley. Flores’s first job was with the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad in Pueblo. In 1947 he became the first Mexican-American bricklayer apprentice at the Colorado Fuel & Iron Company, where he joined the United Steel Workers of America union, which was later represented by the AFL-CIO. He advanced through the union and was elected as vice president of the local steelworker’s union in Pueblo in 1958. Between 1963 and 1969 he served as the vice president of the Colorado Labor Council of the AFL-CIO and became the legislative director in 1973. Flores also served with several local organizations including the American GI Forum, the Latin American Research and Service Agency (LARASA), and the Democratic Party.310

In the early 1970s Flores was instrumental in establishing Colorado chapters of two union organizations within the AFL-CIO focused on the Chicano struggle (see Figure 53). In 1970 he helped organize, and was voted vice president of, the Colorado Chapter of El Obrero Chicano (The Chicano Worker), a national union focused specifically on the needs of Chicano laborers. El Obrero Chicano met at the Denver Labor Center on the corner of Acoma Street and W. 4th Avenue (nonexistent).311 In 1973 Flores represented Colorado during the formation of the Labor Council for Latin American Advancement (LCLAA). The LCLAA was an umbrella organization for Chicano unions that operated within the AFL-CIO. In the 1970s the LCLAA persuaded the AFL-CIO leadership to support César Chávez’s grape boycotts and other initiatives of the United Farm Workers.312

Agricultural labor

Latinos have consistently represented a significant number of agricultural workers in Colorado and have faced difficult challenges throughout their history in Colorado. As with other industries, they faced low wages and poor working and living conditions. Historically it has been
very difficult for agricultural workers to organize in the United States. Colorado’s 1943 Labor Peace Act exempted farm, orchard, and ranch workers from protections allowing the right to unionize, which has only recently been amended. Regardless of these setbacks, Mexican and Mexican American farm workers have also fought through organized labor to improve their conditions and treatment. Even though agricultural work took place outside of Denver, strong connections formed between Denver and agricultural areas throughout Colorado. Seasonal workers and their families lived in Denver during the off-season, where they found jobs to supplement the field work. Kids who attended school in Denver often went to work in the fields during their summer vacations, staying with family members in Greeley or Fort Collins, for example. Organizations with strong Denver chapters that helped agricultural workers advocate for their rights and find better-paying jobs in Denver include the United Farm Workers and Colorado Migrant Council.

**Bracero Program**

The Mexican Farm Labor Supply Program, better known as the “Bracero Program,” was a series of agreements that established an official immigrant worker program between the United States and Mexico between 1942 and 1964. In those 22 years, 4.2 million braceros (laborers) entered the United States from Mexico, the majority working in agriculture. The Mexican government intended the Bracero Program to educate and “modernize” Mexican farmers by learning from American growers and bringing their new knowledge and techniques back to Mexico. In exchange, growers in the United States would receive a reliable, but not permanent, labor force during World War II and beyond. Many braceros came to Colorado to work in the sugar beet fields in the South Platte River Valley (see Figure 54). The Great Western Sugar Company hailed them as “Soldiers of the Field” in their publications.

Part of the agreement required growers to educate the braceros and provide suitable housing and care while in the United States. In practice, braceros were essentially treated as previous immigrants had been: with backbreaking work and deplorable housing and care that often did not even provide bathrooms or cooking facilities. Braceros were often underpaid and sometimes not paid at all. One unintentional effect of the Bracero Program was a significant rise in undocumented immigration from Mexico. Many braceros experienced in traveling and finding work in the United States returned to work for growers who were eager to hire them as cheap labor without the regulations of participating in the official program.

Through both official and undocumented immigration,
the Bracero Program brought thousands of Mexican immigrants to northern Colorado, many of whom settled in Denver’s neighborhoods.\textsuperscript{320} Braceros also helped change and shape Mexican and Mexican American culture in towns across Colorado, including Denver. Popular pastimes included the development of Mexican and Mexican American baseball teams and leagues and other sports that barred them from playing on established fields.

United Farm Workers

In the 1950s and 1960s several agricultural unions were formed by Mexican Americans, including the Filipino Farm Labor Union, Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee, Agricultural Workers Association, and National Farm Workers Association, among many others. The Bracero Program significantly reduced the wages of farm workers to an unsustainable level by the 1960s. In its wake after 1964, growers’ practices during the Bracero Program led to a massive effort to unionize farm workers across the western United States in the 1960s and 1970s. In 1966 the United Farm Workers (UFW) consolidated these independent unions into a united front under the leadership of César Chávez and Dolores Huerta.\textsuperscript{321} The UFW was highly active in Colorado and Denver, with strikes and boycotts to improve the conditions of agricultural workers.

The first major action taken by the UFW was a national boycott of grape growers in Delano, California, that had been started by the Filipino Farm Labor Union. Chicano activists in the Denver area eagerly supported the boycott. Juanita and Alfred Herrera established the Denver Boycott Grape Committee under the UFW and led local support for the boycott (see Figure 55). Activists picketed liquor stores and Safeway grocery stores that sold grapes and wine made from the grapes.\textsuperscript{322} Father Jose Lara also took in UFW activists at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church and supported the UFW cause. He often wore the eagle symbol of the UFW on his vestments (see Figure 56).\textsuperscript{323}

Other strikes and boycotts occurred throughout Colorado. The Herreras also organized a new group, the “Denver Witnesses for Human Dignity,” and staged a ten-day fast outside Denver’s Cathedral Basilica of the Immaculate Conception (301 E. Colfax/1530 Logan Street, extant) in 1969 to bring attention to three legislative bills that
would give Colorado farm workers the right to unionize and receive workman's compensation and disability protections. All of the bills failed. It was not until 2021 that farm workers in Colorado achieved the ability to unionize.

Mexican Americans and Chicanos played enormous roles in the farm workers movement in Colorado. Magdaleno Avila and Orlinda de Vargas organized the boycott of the Finerman Lettuce Company in Center, Colorado, located in the San Luis Valley. Their organization, *Dicho y Hecho* (Said and Done), protested the poor living conditions, low pay, and safety issues faced by lettuce growers in southern Colorado. De Vargas personally led a march from Pueblo to the State Capitol in Denver to raise awareness of their plight. In Brighton, Colorado, just north of Denver, Guadalupe Briseño, Mary Padilla, Martha de Real, and Rachel Sandoval founded the National Floral Workers Union to protest working conditions at the Kitayama Floral Corporation, a carnation farm. Women working at Kitayama endured low wages and long hours working in the mud and mist that often resulted in colds and pneumonia. Their picket lasted from 1968 to 1969. In February 1969, five women chained themselves to the company gates in an effort to finally end the strike. Weld County sheriff’s deputies teargassed the women, one of whom was pregnant, while they were still chained and arrested them. The strike officially ended after this incident and conditions did eventually improve at the carnation plant as a result. This strike encouraged more Latinos to speak up for better working conditions in other businesses and industries.

**Colorado Migrant Council**

The University of Colorado Office of Economic Opportunity and Department of Sociology established the Colorado Migrant Council in 1966. The council had several goals at its outset. It worked to improve the living conditions of migrant workers through improvements in housing, sanitation, health, and nutrition. It also provided education.
to stop the poverty cycle by educating workers and their children on the causes of poverty. Lastly, the council provided vocational training for workers to enter other fields beyond migrant farm work. The Colorado Migrant Council actively engaged migrant workers in decision making within the council, as well as their work environment, and sought to improve cooperation between growers and workers. In the 1970s the council shifted operation from the University of Colorado to Chicano activists in Denver. Among these young activists were Abelardo “Lalo” Delgado (see Chapter 3) and Ricardo LaForé, a member of the Crusade for Justice who worked as a career counselor for the council beginning in 1972 and later became the director of the council.330

**Latino veterans and the GI Forum**

Upon returning from their armed services deployments in World War II, Korea and Vietnam, Chicano veterans expected to find good-paying jobs in local industries or in Denver’s police and fire departments. They soon realized, however, that they were still treated as second-class citizens, even after having served their country honorably. Following his return, in 1969, from serving as a Marine in Vietnam, Joseph Gonzales felt culture shock at an American society that had drastically changed: “different values, different clothing, different music, and different attitudes.” When seeking employment, Gonzales recalled the “indifference and possibly resentment” of those young people who had opposed the war and were now “in human resource positions and did not consider ‘search and destroy’ operations and filling body bags as experience that could be applied to available positions.”

The American GI Forum, started in 1949 in Texas as an organization dedicated to improving the rights of Mexican American veterans, expanded its focus to fight for school desegregation, protection of migrant farmworkers, and ensuring that Latinos received fair trials. The Colorado chapter of the GI Forum (see Figure 57) initiated one of the last major boycotts of the era: the Chicano boycott of the Coors brewery in Golden, Colorado, which started in 1966 to protest Coors’ refusal to hire Latino workers. The brewery was also known to discriminate against Blacks, women, and homosexuals. Additionally, Joseph Coors opposed a Chicano studies program at CU Boulder, and the Coors family supported the California grape growers being boycotted by César Chávez. Other organizations associated with the Coors boycott included the University of Colorado chapter of United Mexican American Students (UMAS), led by Juan Federico, Coors Boycott and Strike Support Coalition of Colorado and the Aztlán Boycott Coors Committee. While leaders attempted to build a national boycott, the confrontation dragged on for years. It was not until 1987, more than 20 years later, that an agreement was reached between the brewery and activists.332

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Figure 58. Map of identified labor-related sites associated with Latino history in Denver.

Nuestras Historias: Mexican American/Chicano/Latino Histories in Denver
Table 3. List of identified labor-related sites associated with Latino history in Denver

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Resource Name</th>
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<td>Local Landmark</td>
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<td>Westside</td>
<td>1717 Federal Boulevard</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>St. Jacob’s Lodge Hall</td>
<td>Northside</td>
<td>4483 Logan Street</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPMDTU Meeting Hall</td>
<td>Northside</td>
<td>3758 Osage Street</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Resources not in Denver (not on map)</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Coors Brewery</td>
<td>Golden</td>
<td>13th Street and Ford Street, Golden</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While many of Denver’s Mexican Americans were farm laborers, meat packers, or factory workers, others started their own businesses, many of which became highly profitable and provided stable employment to others. Nationally, there is a rich history of Latino entrepreneurs who opened restaurants, pharmacies, clubs, grocery stores, hotels, theaters, and many other businesses. If they had a choice, many Latino families preferred to frequent Latino businesses and use Latino doctors, dentists, and lawyers because of their innate understanding of the cultural needs and desires of community members. Despite facing discrimination in their education and difficulties attaining the qualifications needed for these fields, Mexican American professionals throughout Denver built prosperous and essential businesses for their communities and others of the community.

The owners of these businesses often became the leading citizens in their communities. Although they were not always highly profitable endeavors, small family businesses gave their owners and the community a feeling of pride and ownership of their own lives. These businesses offered an escape from the dangers and hardships and discrimination of the labor force and inspired others. Mexican American women participated equally in these endeavors and professions and were the backbone of many family businesses in Denver. Many of these women also became prominent leaders in their communities. As one Denver resident stated, “Latino business owners made a difference by showing others that it was possible to achieve such success.” While there are too many Latino businesses in Denver to list them all, this chapter focuses on the primary historic commercial districts in Denver’s neighborhoods and a few individual entrepreneurs identified by community members as significant to their neighborhoods’ commerce. For more information and for a spatial understanding of the identified commerce-related buildings, see Figure 66 at the end of this chapter, followed by Table 4 that provides a list of designated and known sites.

5. Commerce

Commercial districts

The Mexican American entrepreneurial spirit has a long history prior to the urban neighborhoods. Ranching, commerce, and wagon freighting abounded among Latino entrepreneurs in the Southwest prior to the American colonization, but these entrepreneurs were steadily denied opportunities and edged out of these industries by the twentieth century. As they moved to the city and built their neighborhoods, business owners emerged to serve the segregated communities. In the first half of the twentieth century Mexican American businesses catered almost exclusively to their own and became community institutions. After the 1960s Latino businesses spread throughout the city. Because Latinos lived in neighborhoods previously built and occupied by other ethnic groups, they generally utilized the existing buildings in their neighborhoods for their commercial centers, and their use of these buildings added to the historic and cultural significance of these structures. The most concentrated Mexican Americans and Chicano commercial districts in Denver include Santa Fe Drive on the Westside, Federal Boulevard, which connects the Northside and Westside, W. 32nd Avenue and W. 38th Avenue on the Northside, Larimer Street on the Eastside, and Morrison Road in Southwest Denver.

Santa Fe Drive

“Santa Fe Drive had everything on it. You didn’t have to go downtown…It was a fun neighborhood because everything you had was there.” Veronica Barela’s words capture the feeling of many Westside residents about the strip of Santa Fe Drive between W. 6th Avenue and W. 13th Avenue. The main street of the Westside was originally part of the old Santa Fe Trail that kept Denver alive in its earliest years. Built up in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by European immigrants, the strip was a Mexican American enclave by the 1950s. After national chains such

337 Ramirez and Trujillo, Video Interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales.

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as Woolworths pulled out of the neighborhood in the post-war years, Veronica Barela and the New Westside Economic Development Corporation (NEWSED), which was started by the West Side Action Center, helped Mexican Americans and Chicanos reclaim the vacant commercial spaces. In the 1990s and early 2000s NEWSED transformed Santa Fe Drive into the Santa Fe Arts District, the cultural and artistic heart of Latino Denver (see Chapter 8).

The Santa Fe Drive includes two theaters significant to Latinos: the Su Teatro/Denver Civic Theatre (721 Santa Fe Drive, extant) and the Aztlan Theatre/Santa Fe Theatre (976 Santa Fe Drive, extant). Henry Lowenstein opened the Denver Civic Theater as a community playhouse, which later became the center for the Su Teatro theater troupe (see Chapter 8, Arts for more information on both theaters).

Of the many restaurants on Santa Fe Drive, the one mentioned most by locals was Joe’s Buffet. The small restaurant at 753 Santa Fe Drive (extant) was a favorite of Westsiders and is hailed as the birthplace of the “Mexican hamburger.” A cheeseburger prepared in a tortilla with refried beans and often smothered with New Mexican-inspired green chili is a classic dish among Mexican restaurants in Denver.339 As described by journalist Gustavo Arellano, the Mexican hamburger, “personifies the Mexican-American experience. The tortilla is wholly indigenous; its flour rendition, the legacy of Spain. The focus on green chili places it firmly in the Southwest; its gravy presentation, the legacy of Tex-Mex. The hamburger patty, of course, is wholly American—but even that has a German past.”339

Another significant business on Santa Fe Drive was Jiggs Barbershop (836 Santa Fe Drive, extant). Eddie Lopez opened Jiggs Barbershop in the 1960s and operated in the same location for more than 55 years before closing in 2017. In the 1950s and 1960s barbershops were a popular option for young Latino entrepreneurs. When access to higher education was limited, they could go to “Barber’s College” to receive training with the ability to open their own business. Denny Vigil opened the 8th Avenue Barbershop (715 W. 8th Avenue, extant) in 1971 around the corner from Jiggs (see Figure 59). On the far Northside, James Maestas opened the Mr. James Beauty Salon (5038 Federal Boulevard, extant, see Figure 60) in 1957 and used his success to start a political career.340

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Zick’s Market was also an important location on Santa Fe Drive. John “Jack” and Ray Zick were Jewish brothers who ran the grocery store at 1301 Santa Fe Drive (extant) through the postwar decades. Although not Mexican Americans, they provided an important service to the community and hired young Mexican American Westsiders to work in their shop. In the words of one Denver resident, “[Jack] treated all people of color equally. He and his brother Ray always gave us neighborhood kids opportunities and summer jobs.”\(^{343}\) Another resident described how his father, Pedro (Pete) Gonzales, a retired sheriff from Walsenburg, would sometimes sit outside Zick’s Market and translate legal documents for Spanish-speakers in the neighborhood.\(^{344}\) Although not an official service, this illustrates how grocery stores offered the neighborhood far more than food. Neighbors gathered there for legal advice, to catch the news, or send letters and money to their relatives thousands of miles away. The market was the center of the community, and on Santa Fe Drive, that was Zick’s.

Larimer Street

The blocks of Larimer Street between 20th Street and Park Avenue West, just east of downtown Denver, were the Latino business district for the Eastside. In the mid-to-late twentieth century the strip featured clothing shops, bakeries, grocery stores, bars, and restaurants whose bi-lingual owners catered to the entire community.\(^{345}\) Characteristic of the Eastside, the Larimer Street commercial district was not exclusively Mexican but served an ethnic mix of Polish, Mexican, Italian, Japanese, and Jewish residents in its heyday.\(^{346}\) Although it declined through the 1980s, historic preservation efforts saved this district, which is now part of the Denver Landmark Ballpark Neighborhood Historic District established in 2002.\(^{347}\)

For Mexican Americans, the center of Larimer Street was Johnnie’s Market at 2030 Larimer Street (extant). Ed Maestas purchased Johnnie’s Market from the Ricotta brothers in 1975 and ran the grocery store until it closed in 1997. Similar to Zick’s, Johnnie’s Market was an institution on

\(^{342}\) Project, “Mr. James Beauty Salon, 1957.”
\(^{343}\) Maptionnaire survey response provided on June 23, 2021 (respondent 3bzn37o4ekv6).
\(^{344}\) Maptionnaire survey response provided on June 23, 2021 (respondent 3bzn37o4ekv6).
\(^{345}\) Nita Gonzales, Video Interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales, May 25, 2021.
the Eastside and a popular destination for Mexican Americans to purchase fresh meats and produce. The Larimer Street district was a thriving commercial center and home to families who lived above the shops until the 1980s, when the urban renewal Skyline Project shifted Denver’s “skid row” eastward on Larimer Street. Maestas organized the North Larimer Merchants Association to prevent further demolition for fast food restaurants and parking lots in anticipation of Coors Field in the early 1990s. Maestas’s efforts ultimately saved the buildings and a handful of the businesses still remain.348

Larimer Street was also home to several restaurants and bars owned by Latinos such as Los Compadres (2034 Larimer Street, extant, Figure 61) and Mexico City Lounge (2115 Larimer Street, extant, Figure 62), as well as La Popular Food Company nearby on Lawrence Street (2033 Lawrence Street, extant). La Casa de Manuel was identified as one of the oldest Mexican restaurants in Denver, originally located at 2010 Larimer Street (nonextant), but moved to 3158 Larimer Street (extant). Bars and nightclubs are important to Latino communities because they represent informal gathering sites for cultural events, dances, music, and neighborhood and family celebrations. Historically they have also been a pressure valve for groups facing consistent discrimination. As a place to unwind and relax from their daily struggles, these locations are essential community gathering places.


W. 32nd Avenue

Many people call out the commercial district along W. 32nd Avenue between Fife Court and Clay Street as one of the few places in Denver where Mexican Americans could purchase Mexican and Latin-American products and visit stores owned by members of their own community. Two significant locations in this commercial district include the Holiday Theater and Panaderia Rosales (Rosales Bakery). Paco Sanchez purchased the Holiday Theater (2644 W. 32nd Avenue, extant) in the 1960s. Originally named the Egyptian Theater when it opened in 1926, it had a stage and movie screen like many small theaters of the 1920s. The Holiday Theater is potentially the first theater in Denver to screen Spanish-language films. Sanchez also opened the theater to Mexican American musicians and original plays performed by Teatro groups such as Su Teatro. It played a central role in the artistic development of Denver’s Latinos.351

Panaderia Rosales (2636 W. 32nd Avenue, extant) was one of the first Mexican Bakeries in Denver when it opened in 1976. According to Laura Rosales, the current owner, her family moved from Cuidad Juarez in Mexico to Denver in the 1970s. They originally settled on the Eastside in Five Points, but soon moved to the Northside, where they found a strong Mexican culture where they opened their bakery. Panaderia Rosales is known for authentic Mexican baked goods and maintaining the family-owned business through the Northside’s many changes over the years. The business was also an important part of the community and co-hosted events such as the “¡32nd Avenue Fiesta!” in the 1980s.352

Another significant restaurant on the Northside is the Original Chubby’s at 1238 W. 38th Avenue (extant, built in 2017). Stella Cordova, the “matriarch” of Chubby’s, took over a fairly standard burger stand in 1967 and started serving tacos, burritos, and the traditional green chili her family brought from New Mexico. In the 1960s Chubby’s was the first Mexican restaurant on the Northside. It soon became a mainstay for the neighborhood’s growing Latino population and was a mecca for cruisers and low riders.353 Restaurants were often sites of important meetings in the neighborhood. La Casita (3561 Tejon Street, extant, built in 2005) and Papa Rock’s (3609 N. Tejon Street, extant), owned by Northside politicians Paul Sandoval and Sal Carpio at W. 36th Avenue and Tejon Street, represented the political center of the neighborhood. Meetings were held, deals were made, and campaigns were started inside these restaurants.354

Morrison Road

The stretch of Morrison Road between Sheridan Boulevard and W. Alameda Avenue has become the cultural and commercial center of Mexicans and Mexican Americans in Southwest Denver in recent years. The surrounding Westwood neighborhood grew as a suburban enclave for returning veterans and blue collar workers from the 1940s through the 1960s. In more recent decades waves of Latinos and Denver residents displaced by urban renewal and gentrification built their community in the same neighborhood. By the 2010s Westwood was 80 percent Latino, representing the largest Latino enclave for a single neighborhood in the city. Although they have not received much attention from scholars or the city, the murals, restaurants, bakeries, boutiques, auto shops, and other Latino-owned businesses lining Morrison Road deeply embody this culture and its continuing influence in Denver.355

One of the many family-owned businesses on Morrison Road was MGM’s Nightclub (4801 Morrison Road, extant). Marco Martinez purchased the club in 1984 and established an institution in Westwood. In addition to its reputation as a nightclub, Denver’s mayors often visited to gain support from the neighborhood residents. It was also a destination for Chicano music. Martinez made a point to support the neighborhood through the club, offering the space for local fundraisers.356

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354 Amanda Sandoval, Video Interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales, June 22, 2021; Maptionnaire survey response provided on March 23, 2021 (respondent 729mp74uw7).
355 Joseph Rios, “Westwood’s Morrison Road Will Become a Mexican Cultural District,” Denverite, Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales; Egan et al., Video Interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales; Barela Rivera et al., Video interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales; Sandoval, Video Interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales.
9th Street Historic Park
The 9th Street Historic Park on the Auraria campus is currently showcased as a nineteenth-century residential block. As one of the few remaining areas of the old Auraria neighborhood, it has the potential to tell the complex stories of daily life in the Mexicans and Mexican Americans neighborhood that grew there in the mid-twentieth century. While the park is comprised of residential houses, one business in particular—the Casa Mayan (Mayan House) Restaurant (1020 9th Street, extant)—is highly significant to the history of Latino commerce in Denver.

Mexican immigrants Ramon and Carolina Gonzalez purchased the home in 1933 and developed it into the Casa Mayan Restaurant and Cultural Center by 1946 (see Figure 63). Casa Mayan is often credited as the first Mexican restaurant in Denver. However, as Eugene Vigil recalled, “Most of the clientele came from outside of the neighborhood and most were Anglos…Hardly anyone in the neighborhood ate at restaurants in the thirties and forties.” Considered a gathering place for all types of people, Casa Mayan was one of the first businesses to start the cultural osmosis of Mexican American and white culture that continues in Denver to the present. Casa Mayan became popular with famous Latino musicians and dance groups passing through Denver in the 1940s through the early 1970s, when they had few places to perform in the city. It was also a prominent meeting place in the neighborhood. Many early community groups such as the Latin American Cultural Society, Corrida Club of Denver, and the Pan-American club got their start holding meetings at Casa Mayan. In the era of the Chicano Movement, Casa Mayan was a hub of activism where students from UMAS gathered to fight the Auraria Campus plan and the West Side Coalition held their earliest meetings. Casa Mayan embodies the full extent of services, direct and indirect, that Latino businesses provided to the community: a place of nourishment, cultural ambassadors, relief from daily life, artistic expression, and community organization.

Figure 63. The Gonzalez family in front of Casa Mayan in 1958. Top from left to right: Ramon, Carolina, and Marta Alcaro; bottom from left to right: Olivia and Trinidad.

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Newspapers and print shops are some of the oldest Latino-run businesses with a tradition in the Southwest dating back to the eighteenth century. In the urban neighborhoods, Spanish-language newspapers provided local news for new immigrants and migrants to learn the complexities of their new home cities. They also provided news from their home countries, keeping newcomers in touch with the lives they left behind. Newspapers were also often prominent voices in political movements and debates. Some of Denver’s earliest Mexican American newspapers included *Heraldo* (1900-1906), *Defensor Popular* (1924-1925), *Nueva Era* (1934) and *Verdad* (1937-1941). Later newspapers published in the postwar era include the West Side Recorder, which was the voice of political activism on the Westside from 1964-1974. The Crusade for Justice published *El Gallo* between 1967 and 1980. Multiple versions of *La Voz*, including *La Voz Hispana de Colorado*, *La Voz*, and *La Voz Nueva*, were published by Jose and Wanda Padilla from 1976 to 2008, when the paper was sold to Pauline Rivera, who had been at *La Voz* since 2004. *La Voz Bilingüe* continues today as an online publication. Recently, The Denver North Star began publication in 2019, focusing on Latino issues and neighborhood news on the Northside.

El Semanario – The Weekly Issue

In 1989 Chris Frésquez, a native of the Eastside, started the family owned, bilingual, weekly newspaper El Semanario to cover issues of interest to Denver’s diverse Latino communities. He recognized that Denver included multiple diverse groups of people who came from all over, including Spain, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Mexico, and countries in South and Central America, in addition to those who had been in Colorado for generations. He focused on matters that were important to families, including shelter, education, safety, and wanted to be a voice for underrepresented groups in Denver. With the tag line, “We Speak Your Language,” El Semanario began an online publication in 2004; expanded to cover New Mexico, Arizona, California, Nevada, and Florida; and recently started a podcast dedicated to Latino issues. Frésquez started the newspaper in the basement of his residence at 206 W. Irvington Place (extant). Later offices were on 46th Avenue and Federal Boulevard, 23rd Street and Welton Street, and in the World Trade Center building at 1600 Broadway Street.

Radio and television

Paco Sanchez started Denver’s first Spanish-language radio station, KFSC, with Levi Beall in 1954 (see Figure 64). Sanchez first arrived in Denver from Guadalajara, Mexico, in 1948 as a band leader and music promoter. Sanchez brought the mid-century sounds of Ranchera, mariachi, and Música Tropical to Denver’s clubs. While living in Denver he noticed there was an untapped market for a Spanish-language radio station. Sanchez broadcasted KFSC from his living room at 3340 Lafayette Street (extant, see Figure 65). The station later moved to a larger studio at 2185 Broadway (extant). Several people spoke to the importance of Paco Sanchez and KFSC to Denver and the significance of having a radio station devoted to their culture and daily lives in their own language.
Figure 64. Undated photograph Paco Sanchez broadcasting at KSFC.367

Figure 65. Sanchez’s home at 3340 Lafayette Street, home of the first KSFC broadcasts.368

367 “Paco Sanchez: Denver’s Hispanic Media Pioneer Social Reform Activist.”
368 “Paco Sanchez.”
As radio gave way to television in the 1960s, Denver's Chicanos found a new means of broadcast expression. George Sandoval, a native of Raton, New Mexico, gained a position at KFSC after he caught the eye of Sanchez performing as a stand-in during a play at Sacred Heart Church. He gathered a following as a radio host in the 1950s. In the 1960s he was invited by KWGN, Channel 2, to host Denver's first Spanish-language television show, “Festival Español.” In the 1970s he developed plans to start the city's first Spanish television station, and became the owner of KDVR-TV, Channel 31, in 1981. The bilingual station catered directly to Denver's Latino residents. 

Marcia Oueste, a white woman who learned Spanish as a child growing up in Lima, Peru, also presented bi-lingual news programs on KWGN in the early 1970s. Oueste claimed that her bilingual programing, which included interviews and summaries of the topics in English and Spanish, was often helpful to American-born Latinos who wanted to learn Spanish but had not been taught as children because their parents wanted them to assimilate as much as possible into white society.

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369 Julie Asher, “George Sandoval: From Humble Beginnings to A Successful Broadcaster,” *The Denver Catholic Register*, 23 May, 1, 3, Archdiocese of Denver Digital Repository; Barela Rivera and Romero, Video Interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales.

Figure 66. Map of identified commercial resources associated with Latino history in Denver.
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<th>Site Name</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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<td>Westside</td>
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<td>Local Landmark, National Register</td>
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<tr>
<td>Curtis Park Historic District</td>
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<td>Within Baker Historic District</td>
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<td>Casa Mayan Restaurant</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>1020 9th Street</td>
<td>Contributing to Ninth Street Park Historic District; Local Landmark; National Register</td>
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<td>Westside</td>
<td>924 W. Colfax Avenue</td>
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<td>La Alma Lincoln Park Historic Cultural District</td>
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<td>Local Landmark</td>
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<td>Larimer Street Commercial District</td>
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<td>Within boundaries of Ballpark Neighborhood Historic District; Local Landmark</td>
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<td><em>El Chapultepec</em></td>
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<td>1962 Market Street</td>
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<td><em>El Noa Noa</em></td>
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<td>Holiday Theater</td>
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<td>Jiggs Barbershop</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>836 Santa Fe Drive</td>
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<td>Joe's Buffet</td>
<td>Westside</td>
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<td>Johnnie's Market</td>
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<td>KFSC Radio</td>
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<td>2185 Broadway</td>
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<td><em>La Casa de Manuel</em></td>
<td>Eastside</td>
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<td>3158 Larimer Street</td>
<td>Current Location</td>
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<td><em>La Popular Food Company</em></td>
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<td>2033 Lawrence Street</td>
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Table 4. List of identified commercial resources associated with Latino history in Denver (continued)

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<td>Eastside</td>
<td>2034 Larimer Street</td>
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<td>MGM's Nightclub</td>
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<td>Mexico City</td>
<td>Eastside</td>
<td>2115 Larimer Street</td>
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<td>Mr. James Beauty Salon</td>
<td>Northside</td>
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<td>Panaderia Rosales</td>
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<td>Tejon Drugs</td>
<td>Northside</td>
<td>3158 Tejon Street</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tamales by La Casita</td>
<td>Northside</td>
<td>3561 Tejon Street</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Original Chubby's</td>
<td>Northside</td>
<td>1231 W. 38th Avenue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zocalo Shopping Center</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>1050 W. Colfax Avenue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Undesignated Historic Cultural Districts</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Fe Drive Commercial District</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>Santa Fe Drive between W. 6th Street and W. 13th Street</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morrison Road Commercial District</td>
<td>Southwest</td>
<td>Morrison Road between W. Alameda Avenue and S. Sheridan Boulevard</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West 32nd Avenue Commercial District</td>
<td>Northside</td>
<td>W. 32nd Avenue between Fife Court and Clay Street</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West 38th Avenue Commercial District</td>
<td>Northside</td>
<td>W. 38th Avenue between Kalamath Street and Shoshone Street</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Federal Boulevard Commercial District</td>
<td>Northside and Westside</td>
<td>Federal Boulevard between W. 32nd Avenue and Bayaud Avenue</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. Politics

The fight for political representation and civic inclusion began when Hispanics and Mexican Americans first arrived in Denver and took on greater momentum as the numbers of Latinos grew in the city and still continues today. Early on, Mexican Americans were courted by Democrats and Republicans for their votes, but without Latino and Latina candidates representing their needs, progress was slow. Mexican Americans in Denver formed and relied on their own organizations to improve their communities in the 1940s and 1950s. In the 1960s and 1970s statewide election rules changed, allowing leaders from Denver’s Chicano communities to achieve influence at the state and national level. Within Denver, local organizations and activists organized grassroots efforts to help their neighborhoods. This chapter follows the local leaders and organizations that shaped Latino politics and neighborhood activism in Denver, both from within and outside of the official channels of power. While a few Latino and Latina politicians and leaders are highlighted in this chapter, there are many more who contributed to Denver and Colorado history. For more information and for a spatial understanding of the identified political resources, see Figure 76 at the end of this chapter, followed by Table 5 that provides a list of designated and known sites.

Early political associations

As Denver’s Mexican American population grew in the 1940s and 1950s, leaders began to organize to improve their neighborhoods and gain recognition in the city. Unlike the Chicano Movement of the 1960s (see Chapter 7), most of these organizations preferred more traditional approaches to community organizing. Led by business owners, religious leaders, and others, they fought for the incorporation of Mexican American citizens into full participation in Denver’s economy through improvements in housing, education, and electoral representation. These organizations reflected a desire for assimilation into mainstream society, believing the best way forward for Mexican Americans was to participate equally within white society, while also holding on to their cultural identity. As described by Denver historian Richard Gould, “They were assimilationist; they all yearned for acceptance by white society, yet often simultaneously expressed feeling of ethnic pride. In tune with the times, they made few waves and drew little media attention. They did, however, plant seeds.”

A 1950 report on the “Leadership Among the Spanish-American Population of Denver” identified 11 organizations within the Mexican American communities, most of which had less than 50 members. These included the Alianza Service Club, Latin American Education Foundation, and the Denver Service Club. One of the most active groups was the Denver Chapter of the Latin American Council. The Latin American Council (LAC) was based on the Eastside and was established between 1947 and 1949 by Francisco and Isabel Benavidez, Tim Duran, Bernie Valdez, and Bennie Martinez. They held regular meetings at the Curtis Park Community Center (potentially 292 29th Street, Extant). The LAC was typical of these early organizations, with the goals of “improvement of the housing, health, education, recreation, and citizenship status of the Spanish-Americans.” The group openly supported slum clearance for new housing, rejected communism and called for Mexican American participation in the free market, and stood against the “importation of foreign workers” through the Bracero Program (see Chapter 4). The LAC membership represented a mix of religious and political beliefs, and expanded its reach from Denver to Brighton and Greeley.

374 “Third Annual Colorado Latin-American Conference Resolutions,” 1952, Bernard Valdez Collection, Box 1, Denver Public Library Western History Collection.
Another highly influential organization during the 1950s was the Good Americans Organization (GAO). The GAO was born in 1954 when more than 1,000 Denver Mexican Americans gathered at Cole Middle School to protest a series of Rocky Mountain News articles describing the “Spanish American Problem” in Denver. The new organization adopted its name to emphasize that Latinos were equal citizens in the United States. Led by Paco Sanchez, the GAO quietly sought to expand civil rights and improve neighborhood conditions for Mexican Americans in Denver. The organization established its meeting hall on the Northside at 4700 Lipan Street in Sunnyside (extant, Figure 67). Housing emerged as one of the GAO’s primary initiatives and it was the first private organization in Denver to sponsor low-income housing. Beginning in 1968, the GAO helped build the GAO Homes (1445 Knox Court and 1409 Julian Street, extant) and the Juanita Nolasco Residences for senior citizens (4550 W 9th Avenue, extant).

While these organizations were operating, strong political leadership also emerged within Mexican American communities. James Fresques was the first Latino elected to the Denver City Council in 1943. Fresques graduated from Manual High School and later owned and operated the Rocky Mountain Pharmacy at Champa Street and Park Avenue West (nonextant). He served on city council for 12 years, where he was President and also a member of the city’s Commission on Human Rights in the early 1950s. Fresques continued to serve the city as assistant to Mayor Richard Batterton, city budget director, and public housing director. He was also a member of the Urban League of Denver.

Bernard “Bernie” Valdez was an instrumental member of several organizations (see Figure 68). His family moved to Colorado in 1926 to work on the Moffat Tunnel construction and also worked in sugar beet fields. Valdez joined the Civilian Conservation Corps during the Great Depression.

Figure 67. An undated photograph of the GAO meeting hall at 4700 Lipan Street (extant) in Sunnyside.

377 “Paco Sanchez: Denver’s Hispanic Media Pioneer Social Reform Activist.”
378 “Paco Sanchez.”
Depression and earned his high school diploma in Fort Collins. He worked his way into government positions and served on the Larimer County Farm Labor Relations Board, the Denver Parks and Recreation Department, and the Denver Housing Authority, and also managed Denver’s Social Services Department. Valdez was committed to developing educational opportunities for Latino youth and was the president of the Denver School Board in the 1970s. Throughout his career he built coalitions within the city government to improve education and housing opportunities. He cofounded the GAO, Latin American Research and Service Agency (LARASA), and Latin American Education Foundation, and started Los Voluntarios with Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales, a precursor to the Crusade for Justice. Two buildings in Denver are named after him: the Bernard Valdez Hispanic Heritage Center (924 W. Colfax Avenue, extant) and the Valdez-Perry Branch Library in Globeville (4690 Vine Street, extant).380

Sam Sandos has been credited with bridging the gap between the 1950s and 1970s political generations for Denver’s Latinos. Born and raised on the Westside, he lied about his age to serve as a paratrooper in the 82nd Airborne division as a teenager in World War II. After returning to Denver, he worked for a time as a bricklayer before dedicating his life to political activism and helping Latino youth. Sandos helped establish multiple youth centers on the Westside and the Sam Sandos Westside Family Health Center in Sun Valley (1100 Federal Boulevard, extant). He was elected to city council in 1975 and served three terms until his retirement and passing in 1987 (see Figure 69). He worked with a multitude of organizations during his lifetime including the American G.I. Forum, League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), Boys and Girls Clubs of America, and Big Brothers, to name just a few. He was included as a significant, if overlooked, Coloradoan in Barbara Jo Revelle’s 1989 mural A Colorado Panorama: A People’s History at the Colorado Convention Center.382

Mexican American leaders needed support from the major political parties and associated with both the Democratic and Republican Parties. The majority of Mexican American politicians in Denver joined the Democratic Party. From the 1930s on the Democratic platform generally aligned with Latino goals of improving housing, education, and social services for their communities. In the 1960s Denver leaders Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales and Polly Baca, among many others, supported both Kennedy presidential campaigns by forming local ¡Viva Kennedy! clubs, which nationally delivered 85 percent of the Latino vote for John F. Kennedy in 1960. The success of John F. Kennedy’s election has at times been attributed to the support of Mexican American voters. But many Latinos were frustrated with the Democratic Party at mid-century. Although promises were made, many felt that the Democrats relied on non-white voters without producing tangible results for those communities. In the 1960s and 1970s a new generation of Chicano politicians forced the Democrats to make good on their promises and “face up to their treatment of Hispanics.”

Frustrations with the Democratic Party led some Chicanos toward other parties. The Republicans had a measure of representation amongst Denver’s Chicanos, including James Fresques and James Maestas in the 1950s. A focus on promoting the free market economy appealed to some more conservative leaders who argued for Mexican American assimilation into the mainstream economy. The Republican gubernatorial candidate John Love courted Latino voters in 1962, and formed the organization “Hispanics for Love.” Although Love promised to give an ear to Mexican American concerns once in office, most of them in Denver “wanted more than a friendly handshake and an open door.” La Raza Unida Party, established during the height of the Chicano Movement, offered an option at the opposite end of the political spectrum (see Chapter 7). While La Raza Unida successfully organized Chicano activists and brought their causes to light, those who became viable candidates generally drifted back to the Democratic Party. As described by Ruben Valdez, “The mission of La Raza Unida was not really to elect candidates but was to bring issues to the forefront. Obviously, if we wanted to get elected, we had to participate in one of the two major parties.”
The 1970s saw a significant rise in Chicano political power at both the state and city level through the Colorado Chicano caucus (see Figure 70). This rise was a response to the growth and successes of the Chicano Movement, but also a major change to the districting process during the 1960s. While Hispanics from southern Colorado had consistently served in the General Assembly since the 1860s, their representation in the state legislature declined between 1920 and 1970 after the rise of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s. This gap significantly limited the representation of Latinos across the state and particularly in Denver. In Denver all representatives were elected at large by the entire city, enabling whites to win in districts that still had a Chicano majority. Lawyer Bert A. Gallegos became the first Latino elected to represent Denver from 1957 to 1963. In the 1960s Republicans successfully pushed for district-wide voting over at-large voting to try to squeeze out the Democrats in certain districts. The result for Denver’s Chicanos was the ability, for the first time, to elect their own representatives in their districts.


Prominent Latino/Chicano politicians

Numerous Latinos and Latinas were politically active and became important leaders in Denver. While only a few politicians have been included here, additional research and interviews should be done to fully understand the contributions of the many who have participated in politics in Denver.

Figure 70. Latino Colorado legislators posing with the UFW leader César Chávez in 1979, wearing pins in support of the Chiquita boycott. From left to right: Federico Peña, George Chávez, Ruben Valdez, César Chávez, Polly Baca, and Richard Castro. Peña, Valdez, Baca, and Castro represented the Denver area and were leaders in the Chicano Caucus in the 1970s.389

389 Colorado Legislators with UFW Leader César Chávez.
Ruben Valdez
According to Richard Gould, Ruben Valdez was the “undisputed leader and mentor of a whole generation of Chicano lawmakers.”390 Born in Trinidad, Valdez moved to Denver’s Westside in 1960. He developed his leadership and organizing skills working with the United Steel Workers and the Crusade for Justice. In 1971 he won an upset victory against the incumbent Jerry Bohn on the Westside to the State House of Representatives, signaling the coming change in Denver’s Chicano political power. In his first term he quickly educated himself on all of the issues facing Colorado to gain the respect of other representatives and effectively fight for his civil rights goals within the legislature. In 1974 he was elected as Colorado’s first Chicano Speaker of the House and shared his lessons and experiences with the incoming Latino representatives. Between 1971 and 1979 he introduced bills in support of bilingual education, mental health programs, disability rights, employment law, and higher education among other causes.391

Betty Benavidez
Betty Benavidez became the first Chicana elected to the Colorado State Legislature from 1971 to 1974 after the rules changed to allow each district to elect their own representatives. Born and raised on the Westside, she attended St. Cajetan Catholic School, dropped out of Cathedral High School, but later obtained her GED and attended what was then called Metropolitan State College (now MSU Denver). She was a respected leader known for many successful community projects in the La Alma Lincoln Park neighborhood, and considered a trail blazer for future Latina politicians. Several of her friends and neighbors were part of Madres del Movimiento, a group of politically active women who helped canvass for her successful run as state legislator. She lived with her husband, community organizer Waldo Benavidez, in La Alma Lincoln Park (1175 Lipan Street, extant). While in the state legislature, she sponsored a bill for bilingual education, worked to promote basic health for all children, and the developed ethnic studies courses in state colleges.392

Polly Baca
Polly Baca was the first Chicana to serve in both houses of the state legislature and was a major figure in Colorado politics. Born near Greeley in 1941, she committed herself at an early age to fighting the discrimination that she experienced firsthand growing up in northern Colorado. She became involved in the Democratic Party while attending Colorado State University and worked her way up through the party to become a staffer on Robert Kennedy’s 1968 presidential campaign. During that election she worked directly with César Chávez and Dolores Huerta to register Latino voters in California. In 1970 she organized the Hispanic Caucus within the Democratic National Committee, which was the first for either major political party, and the Democratic Chicano Caucus in Colorado in 1972. She also co-founded the National Council of La Raza, one of the largest Chicano political organizations in the country. Having spent her early life as a political organizer and manager, she was elected to the Colorado House of Representatives in 1974 and became a state senator in 1978. During her time in the legislature she fought for farm workers’ rights, introducing bills requiring farmers to provide bathrooms and other protections, and pay equity for women in the state.393 She was the first Chicana to co-chair two National Democratic Conventions and served as Vice Chair of the National Democratic Party from 1981-1989.394

Ramona Martinez
Ramona Martinez’ introduction to politics began when she worked for Sam Sandos’ city council campaign while a stay-at-home mom. Sandos nominated her for a voter registration position, where she learned how important it was to get involved in politics to make changes that would make a difference. She became elected to city council in 1987 as representative of District 1, and was the first Chicana to serve as city council president for three consecutive terms. Witnessing the civil rights protests of the 1960s and 1970s, Martinez understood the importance of using her voice to improve the lives of Latinos and others in Denver.395

Rosemary Rodriguez

Rosemary Rodriguez grew up on the Westside and attended Catholic schools and Metropolitan State College (now MSU Denver). She remembered her upbringing and family life as revolving around the St. Joseph parish, where they prayed, socialized, and attended school. She was elected Denver Clerk and Recorder from 1997 to 2002 and city councilwoman from 2003 to 2007, serving southwest Denver. She later served on Denver Public Schools Board of Education and was the State Director for U.S. Senator Michael Bennet. While on city council, Rodriguez created a program in her district where residents wrote down their concerns anonymously, which were then passed on to the local police station so that people did not feel like they would be targeted by police for reporting issues in the community. Her passions are improving voting access for Latinos and educational opportunities for Denver children.397

Richard Castro

Richard Castro was one of the leading and influential Chicano activists and politicians to come from Denver beginning in the 1960s through the 1980s (see Figure 72). Castro grew up on the Eastside, where he learned to negotiate a multi-ethnic neighborhood. He attended Metropolitan State College (now MSU Denver) in the late 1960s, where he became involved with UMAS and began his long career as an activist. In the early 1970s Castro was one of the leaders of the West Side Coalition. In 1974 he was elected to the Colorado House of Representatives, one of the youngest representatives in the state's history. Serving in the legislature from 1974 to 1983, he brought attention to several social justice issues facing Denver. From 1983 to his untimely death from a brain aneurism in 1991, he was the director of the Denver Agency for Human Rights and Community Relations, where he acted as a liaison of sorts between the local non-white communities and Mayor Peña's administration. Throughout his career, Castro focused on improving the lives of minorities in Denver, particularly for Latinos.398

Paul Sandoval

Paul Sandoval was inspired by his father Geronimo Sandoval’s union activism, along with the poverty and discrimination he experienced growing up on the Eastside, to pursue a career in local politics. After graduating from Metropolitan State College (now MSU Denver), Sandoval unsuccessfully ran for city council representing the Northside. In 1974 he was elected to the Colorado House of Representatives, serving in the legislature from 1974 to 1983. He brought attention to several social justice issues facing Denver. From 1983 to his untimely death from a brain aneurism in 1991, he was the director of the Denver Agency for Human Rights and Community Relations, where he acted as a liaison of sorts between the local non-white communities and Mayor Peña's administration. Throughout his career, Sandoval focused on improving the lives of minorities in Denver, particularly for Latinos.398

398 Rodriguez, Video interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales.
solving over political divisions. In this spirit he had a tradition in local races to bet a dollar against his opponent. When the race was over, the winner would collect the dollar and then both parties could sit down to discuss the election and how to move forward in the interests of the community. His daughter, Amanda Sandoval, was elected to city council in 2019.400

Federico Peña
Federico Peña was Denver’s mayor from 1983-1990. Raised in Brownsville, Texas, in a middle-class family, Peña was somewhat of an outsider in the Chicano Caucus when he moved to Denver in the early 1970s. However, he was quick to make his mark on the city. He worked with the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund on police brutality cases and represented defendants from the Crusade for Justice after the St. Patrick’s Day shootings in 1973 (see Chapter 7). He also worked with the Chica-no Education Project, which laid the groundwork for the 1972 Keyes decision (see Chapter 3). He was elected to the Colorado House of Representatives in 1978. In 1982 he ran for mayor of Denver and built a multi-ethnic coalition to win the election (see Figure 73). In some eyes Peña’s victory was the culmination of decades of political work by Denver’s Mexican Americans and Chicanos, but as mayor he endeavored to serve the interests of the entire city, not only Latinos. In his own words, “This city has gone beyond the question of one’s ethnic background. Dynamic growing cities like Denver…. are willing to elect an individual who is competent whatever his background.”401 Peña’s work focused on rebuilding and developing Denver. He focused on the value of historic preservation and spearheaded the redevelopment of Lower Downtown. He also directed funds towards neighborhood improvements and infrastructure, inviting 130 neighborhood organizations to participate in neighborhood planning and giving lower-income neighborhoods a voice in the city’s growth. One of his most lasting legacies is the Denver International Airport. Peña’s administration began Denver’s shift from an industrial hub to a modern service-oriented city that has had lasting effects, both good and bad, for Latinos.402

Sal Carpio
Chicanos also gained new representation on the Denver City Council in the 1970s and 1980s. Sal Carpio represented the Northside and Westside and won a surprise victory over the Italian candidate Eugene di Manna in 1972. He had previously run for U.S. Congress under La Raza Unida Party in 1970, which gained him the attention of the Democratic Party. He brought the ideals and perspective of the Chicano Movement into city politics, considered radical by some at the time. Carpio fought to restore and rebuild the residential character of his district, which had been slipping towards industrial zoning in the 1960s, by supporting new housing and commercial enterprises within the neighborhoods and endorsing urban renewal development.

Figure 73. Peña at his swearing in ceremony in 1983.403

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400 Sandoval, Video Interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales.
401 Gould, The Life and Times of Richard Castro: Bridging a Cultural Divide, 193
efforts on the Westside.\textsuperscript{404} One of Sal Carpio’s legacies is the empowerment of Latinas on the city council.\textsuperscript{405} His aide, Deborah “Debbie” Ortega, served on the city council from 1987 to 2003 and 2011 to the present. In turn, Ortega hired Judy Montero as her aide, who served on city council from 2003 to 2015.\textsuperscript{406}

John Zapien

Although never elected to a political office, John Zapien has been a pillar of leadership in the Globeville-Elyria-Swansea neighborhoods. Zapien came to Globeville from Kansas in 1958 and worked in construction and the meat packing plants. He received legal training in “poverty law” through the Legal Aid Society when working with the Model Cities Program. He successfully partnered with other organizations to clean up the industrial neighborhoods north of downtown by blocking new zoning efforts to increase industry in Globeville and helped retain the neighborhood’s residential character in the 1970s. He has also been involved in the effort to improve the South Platte River by convincing industries to cease dumping pollution into the river.\textsuperscript{407}

Neighborhood activism, 1960s–1990s

Despite the efforts of community leaders and organizations after World War II, neighborhood decline and commercial disinvestment followed the growth of the Mexican American neighborhoods in Denver. Because of labor discrimination, prejudiced lending practices by banks, and the relegation of most Latinos to low-wage jobs, the buying power in these neighborhoods declined. In response, many large businesses abandoned the local commercial districts such as Santa Fe Drive. The effects of redlining also led to a continued decline in property values. Zoning laws further prevented the construction of single-family homes, and many landlords neglected their properties in the hope of selling to commercial, industrial, or high-density residential developers at some point in the future.\textsuperscript{408} While Chicano political power slowly grew in the 1960s and 1970s, local neighborhood organizations filled in to preserve and uplift the neighborhoods. This section explores a few of the most historically significant of these organizations.

War on Poverty

President Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty program in the 1960s, codified in the 1964 Economic Opportunity Act, offered a flood of federal funding into local communities. The unconventional approach of the War on Poverty was to give money directly to low-income communities and allow them to develop and fund programs they believed most beneficial. The local War on Poverty program, Denver Opportunity, was directed by Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales before he established the Crusade for Justice and rejected a governmental approach to solve the challenges facing Chicanos (see Chapter 7). Denver Opportunity created five neighborhood action centers as part of its program. Local groups mobilized to take advantage of the funding and it had lasting impacts on Latino neighborhoods, particularly in La Alma Lincoln Park with the West Side Improvement Association and West Side Action Council. As an example of the types of services offered by the action centers, the West Side Action Center offered reading and literacy programs, the job training program “Operation SER” (1039 Inca Street, extant), health services, and housing assistance, among other initiatives.\textsuperscript{409}

Auraria Community Center

On the Westside, the Auraria Community Center (ACC, 1178 Mariposa Street, extant and within La Alma Lincoln Park Historic Cultural District) became a focal point for organizing activities related to the War on Poverty. The Auraria Community Center was established in the 1950s to compliment the Lincoln Park Homes Community Center. The Bungalow-style house was connected

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{408} Gould, \textit{The Life and Times of Richard Castro: Bridging a Cultural Divide}, 36.
\item \textsuperscript{409} Gould, \textit{The Life and Times of Richard Castro: Bridging a Cultural Divide}, 33; McEnroe, \textit{Denver Renewed: A History of the Denver Urban Renewal Authority}, 691; Denver, La Alma Lincoln Park Historic Cultural District Application, 22.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
with the duplex behind it and was one of the rare public gathering spaces available to Latinos on the Westside and offered a variety of services and programs. In the early 1960s the ACC started the Community Renewal Program and West Side Improvement Association to address the “urban blight” in the neighborhood. In the late 1960s Waldo Benavidez became the director of ACC. Benavidez had previously engaged with political work with the 1960 ¡Viva Kennedy! campaign and several positions in city government. He lived with his wife Betty Benavidez, who became the first Latina in the Colorado House of Representatives in 1971, in the house behind the ACC at 1175 Lipan Street (extant and within La Alma Lincoln Park Historic Cultural District). He partnered with Dean Punké and developed an approach to neighborhood rebuilding using the Saul Alinski method based on organizing local residents to act on specific goals and outcomes. Their focus was on the preservation of the buildings and community of the West Side. Benavidez and Punké soon brought two young college students, Richard Castro and Virginia (Lucero) Castro, into their fold and established the West Side Coalition.

**West Side Coalition**

The West Side Coalition (WSC) was formed during the aftermath of the Auraria Campus struggle (see Chapter 3). The WSC’s mission was to improve the Westside through autonomous self-control and organization of the community with limited external influence. The organization established a coalition of residents, nonprofit and civil rights organizations, schools, and churches to advance their common goals. The coalition met at the ACC and the Casa Mayan restaurant in Auraria in its early years, and later established an office on Santa Fe Drive (877 Santa Fe Drive, extant, see Figure 74). Waldo Benavidez and the Castros were the core leadership of the organization. The Castros even relocated from the Eastside to the Westside to focus on their efforts and purchased a house at 159 W. Ellsworth Street (extant) in the Baker neighborhood, where they lived for 15 years. Among the WSC’s many efforts was the construction of new affordable housing and renovating older homes, intentionally creating a “buffer zone” between the Auraria Campus and the remaining Westside neighborhoods. The coalition developed pocket parks on vacant lots, including Hector Flores Park at the intersection of Galapago Street and W. 4th Avenue (extant) and helped establish La Familia Recreation Center at 55 S. Elati Street (extant).

One of the WSC’s most expansive initiatives was an attempt to “down-zone” the Westside from high-density to low-density single-family housing. If successful, this would have relieved the neighborhood from the constant threat of redevelopment and allow it to grow without relocating the current residents. However, the measure did not pass city council vote. In Richard Castro’s estimation they lost because the council gave precedence to the landowners’ interests over neighborhood residents. The district councilman, Eugene DiManna, an Italian American from North Denver abstained from voting, which further angered Castro and other Latinos on the Westside, who successfully forced him out of office after two separate recall efforts.

By 1973 tensions and disagreements within the Latino community between religious leaders, the WSC, and the Crusade for Justice led to major upheavals in grassroots Chicano activism. The WSC dissolved and the Crusade, beset by a number of problems, also lost its momentum.

410 Denver, La Alma Lincoln Park Historic Cultural District Application, 9.
412 Castro, Video Interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales; Denver, La Alma Lincoln Park Historic Cultural District Application, 9.
413 Castro, *West Side Coalition Office*.
The Crusade for Justice felt the WSC was not radical enough in its approach working within the established power structure of the city. Religious leaders, particularly the Inner City Parish and First Mennonite Church, felt the WSC had become too controlling in the neighborhood and wanted to forge their path without the WSC or the Crusade. These conflicts eventually escalated into violence in the neighborhood, with bombings and shootings directed at the headquarters and leaders of the different factions. After the shooting of Richard Castro outside the Escuela de Aztlan on Santa Fe Drive in 1973, Waldo Benavidez disbanded the WSC, noting that it was not worth anyone dying over. Although the WSC was relatively short-lived, it had a lasting impact on the Westside and Denver's Chicanos. As Richard Gould described the WSC, “As an experiment in grassroots democracy, the Coalition represented a significant step in combating the powerlessness endemic to poor Chicano communities.”

In 1967 the West Side Action Council began providing services to neighborhood residents at the West Side Action Center located at 1042-1048 Santa Fe Drive (extant) and later at 1312 Santa Fe Drive (nonexistent) and 1100 Santa Fe Drive (extant). The center closed during the late 1970s, but its lasting legacy is the establishment of the New Westside Economic Development Corporation (NEWSED).

In the wake of the WSC, the West Side Action Council started a new organization with a very different approach to community development on the Westside: the New Westside Economic Development Corporation. NEWSED was part of the 1960s Great Society programs, in 1974.
focused on increasing economic opportunities by acting as a for-profit organization administered through Denver Opportunity. NEWSED formed various other economic development corporations and partnered with city agencies such as the Denver Urban Renewal Authority (DURA) to achieve its goals. Veronica Barela Rivera was the NEWSED president for 40 years from 1977 to 2017. NEWSED’s approach was not always popular within the community, but the organization successfully redeveloped parts of the Westside and brought new economic opportunities to the neighborhood.

NEWSED established two new shopping centers in La Alma Lincoln Park neighborhood. The Zocalo Shopping Center (1050 W. Colfax Avenue, extant) opened in 1979 and was the first new commercial development in the neighborhood since the 1950s. The Plaza de Santa Fe (1355 Santa Fe Drive, extant) opened in 1984, and was constructed by the Chicano-owned, Westside-based, Alvarado Construction company. Both of these shopping centers offered space to local, non-white-owned businesses. NEWSED additionally worked to improve the appearance of the Westside by securing funds for new sidewalks, restoring original facades, and repainting the neighborhood’s historic homes.

NEWSED also made a concerted effort to revitalize the historic buildings along the Santa Fe Drive commercial corridor, which had steadily declined from the 1950s through the 1970s. The organization began its efforts by purchasing one building on each block to prevent developers from taking over entire blocks at a time. They encouraged non-white-owned businesses to take over vacant storefronts, and restore and preserve the properties to retain the corridor’s unique character. NEWSED also saw potential for Santa Fe Drive to become a cultural center for Latinos in Denver. In the 1980s it began hosting Cinco de Mayo and Diez y Seis celebrations on the street. Through the 1990s and 2000s it developed the Santa Fe Arts District to preserve Latino artistic culture and provide a designated space for Latino and Chicano art in Denver.

**Globeville and ASARCO**

A more recent, but highly significant, story of community activism is the fight waged by Globeville residents against the American Smelting and Refining Corporation (ASARCO), an amalgamation of smelting companies formed in 1899. The smelters north of Denver, which included the Boston and Colorado, Omaha and Grant, and Globe Smelting and Refining Company, were collectively one of the largest industries in Denver and the state at the turn of the twentieth century. Although smelting essentially ceased around Globeville by 1920, the Globe plant near Washington Street and E. 55th Avenue continued to operate at a reduced scale through the twentieth century, steadily leaking toxic materials into the surrounding neighborhood.

Although studies were conducted proving the harmful effects of the plant to its employees and the neighborhood, little action was taken to mitigate these effects. In 1991 nine Globeville residents led by Margarette and Robert Escamilia brought suit against ASARCO claiming the company had “contaminated soil, lowered property values, and endangered health.” Eventually, more than 500 Globeville residents joined the suit. These residents used their own funds, mortgaging their homes, to hold ASARCO accountable. In 1993 they won their suit and were awarded $28 million in damages. A similar suit was brought by residents living south of I-70, led by Lalo and Eumelia de Baca, in 1997. In that case ASARCO ultimately settled out of court at the last minute. ASARCO’s Globe plant was shut down in 2006 and the site was redeveloped as a “brown field” site into a corporate park. Today there is no evidence of the Globe plant, or the other smelters, which itself is a testament to the efforts of individual citizens to stand up for their right to a clean and healthy neighborhood. As Robert Escamilla stated, “The little guy came out on top…we’re just sending a message out to other corporations that pollute neighborhoods that the people don’t have to tolerate it.”

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Figure 76. Map of identified political resources associated with Latino history in Denver.

Nuestras Historias: Mexican American/Chicano/Latino Histories in Denver
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource Name</th>
<th>Area</th>
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<th>Comments</th>
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<td><strong>Designated Sites: National, State, or Local Landmark</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auraria Community Center</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>1178 Mariposa Street</td>
<td>In La Alma Lincoln Park Historic Cultural Landmark District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baker Neighborhood Historic District</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>Local Landmark</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic Center Historic District</td>
<td>Eastside</td>
<td>Local Landmark District</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado State Capitol</td>
<td>Eastside</td>
<td>200 E Colfax Avenue</td>
<td>Within Civic Center Historic District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curtis Park Community Center</td>
<td>Eastside</td>
<td>929 29th Street</td>
<td>Within Curtis Park Historic District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curtis Park Historic District</td>
<td>Eastside</td>
<td>Local Landmark</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic Chamber of Commerce/Bernard Valdez Hispanic Heritage Center/</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>924 W. Colfax Avenue</td>
<td>Local Landmark; National Register</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westside Courthouse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Alma Lincoln Park Historic Cultural Landmark District</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>Local Landmark</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Familia Recreation Center</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>55 South Elati Street</td>
<td>Within Baker Neighborhood Historic District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our Lady of Guadalupe</td>
<td>Northside</td>
<td>1209 West 36th Avenue</td>
<td>Local Landmark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard and Virginia Castro Residence</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>159 W. Ellsworth Street</td>
<td>In Baker Neighborhood Historic District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waldo and Betty Benavidez Residence</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>1175 Lipan Street</td>
<td>In La Alma Lincoln Park Historic Cultural Landmark District</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Undesignated Sites</strong></td>
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<td>GI Forum</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>1717 Federal Boulevard</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Americans Organization (GAO) Hall</td>
<td>Northside</td>
<td>4700 Lipan Street</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>GAO Homes</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>1445 Knox Court, 1409 Julian Street</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hector Flores Park</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>Galapago St. and W. 4th Ave.</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Juanita Nolasco Residences</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>4550 W. 9th Avenue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>La Familia Recreation Center</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>55 S. Elati Street</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>MGM’s Nightclub</td>
<td>Southwest</td>
<td>4801 Morrison Road</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operation SER/ Jobs for Progress</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>1039 Inca Street</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papa Rocks/Lechuga’s</td>
<td>Northside</td>
<td>3609 Tejon Street</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plaza de Santa Fe</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>1355 Santa Fe Drive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam Sandos Westside Family Health Center</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>1100 Federal Boulevard</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamales by La Casita</td>
<td>Northside</td>
<td>3561 Tejon Street</td>
<td>2005 building extant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valdez-Perry Branch Library</td>
<td>Eastside</td>
<td>4690 Vine Street</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*continued*
Table 5. List of identified political resources associated with Latino history in Denver (continued)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Resource Name</th>
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<th>Location</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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</thead>
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<td>Westside</td>
<td>1042-1048 Santa Fe Drive</td>
<td>Both former locations of center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1100 Santa Fe Drive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Side Coalition Office</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>877 Santa Fe Drive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zocalo Shopping Center</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>1050 W. Colfax Avenue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Frustrated over the lack of political representation, pervasive poverty, and systemic racism, many Mexican Americans and Chicanos stepped up to join the nationwide fight for civil rights in the 1960s and 1970s. They demanded reforms in education, farm worker rights, policing, healthcare, and housing. The high numbers of Chicanos, Blacks, Native Americans and other ethnic groups who went into the military and were killed during the Vietnam War became a rallying point for many. Other issues that needed to be addressed included fair labor practices and union representation, and greater participation in the electoral process. Although there has been some progress, the struggle for civil rights continues today. This chapter focuses on the Chicano Movement in Denver that began in the 1960s and included many individuals and organizations working for social changes. These groups were not only located in Denver, there were many other places in Colorado where Chicanos fought for social change, including Boulder, Greeley, Fort Collins, Brighton, Pueblo, the San Luis Valley, and other cities and towns. The Crusade for Justice is the best-known of many groups that fought for Chicano rights both before and after the Civil Rights era. For additional information on Latino labor and political activism in Denver before, during, and after the civil rights era, see Chapter 4 on labor history and Chapter 12 on politics and government involvement. For more information and for a spatial understanding of the identified buildings related to the Chicano Movement, see Figure 88 at the end of this chapter, followed by Table 6 that provides a list of designated and known sites.

El Movimiento, the Chicano civil rights movement, was a powerful social and political movement inspired by and aligned with Black civil rights, Black Power, the American Indian Movement, and anti-Vietnam War demonstrations. These groups objected to the higher percentages of minorities who served in the armed forces and the devastating loss of life experienced during the war. Additionally, they protested police brutality and harassment of Chicano, Black, Native American, and other marginalized people, targeted because of the color of their skin, which continues to be a pervasive issue today.425

Chicanas in particular were the “unsung heroes” who fought for political representation as part of El Movimiento. In the Westside, a group of women formed Madres del Movimiento to improve the lives of their families and neighbors by undertaking projects in local action centers and schools, and helping Chicanos and Chicanas get elected to local and state offices.426 More work should be done to research other Chicanas who worked hard to improve conditions in Denver communities and who have not received any credit for this hard work.

426 Denver, La Alma Lincoln Park Historic Cultural District Application, 22–23.
Today, the term “Chicano Movement” has become associated with both the revolutionary and more traditional efforts of a diverse number of groups and organizations who collectively demanded improvements in the lives of Latinos throughout the United States. When the movement began in the 1960s, however, it represented a revitalized Chicano identity and the need for radical, revolutionary changes in American society (see Figure 77). Chicano leaders believed they represented a groundbreaking departure from the efforts of previous generations, who worked within the established system rather than agitating for changes outside of the system. Still, the Chicano Movement owes a great deal to the decades of activism that preceded it, particularly after World War II when Chicano veterans organized to fight racial discrimination, gain economic stability, and vote more Chicanos into political office. Scholars such as Mario T. Garcia have noted that the Chicano Movement was “built on both the successes and failures of the Mexican-American Generation,” particularly in improvements in education, jobs and, political representation that had resulted in some Chicano families achieving middle-class status. The Mexican-American generation came of age after World War II, and is characterized by a desire to assimilate in language, education, and lifestyle. Some children of these middle-class families went on to become active participants and leaders in the Chicano Movement, rejecting their parents’ slant toward assimilation, and instead embracing their culture, language, and history.

**Chicano identity**

The Chicano identity emphasized a distinctive ethnicity, descended from native Mexicans and Spanish speaking Europeans who colonized Mexico as well as Native Americans in the United States. This mixture of different cultures and peoples became the mestizo (mixed race) Chicano people, indigenous to the southwestern United States.

Several national Chicano leaders of *El Movimiento* emerged during the 1960s. César Chávez, Dolores Huerta, and Filipino activist Larry Itiliong advocated for migrant farm workers and rural laborers through the United Farm Workers, beginning in California and spreading throughout the country. Reies Lopez Tijerina from New Mexico established the Alianza Federal de Mercedes (Federal Land Grant Alliance) to demand the return of land stolen from Hispanos in New Mexico and southern Colorado by the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. In Texas, José Angel

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Gutierrez created a third political party, La Raza Unida, to challenge the status quo of Democrat and Republican politicians. In Denver, Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales led the Crusade for Justice and was known for his ability to galvanize young urban Chicanos. El Movimiento sparked activism throughout the country where there were concentrated populations of Chicanos, but especially in the larger cities in Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico, and Texas. This was not a nationally shared movement, but rather distinct to areas in the Southwest.

Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales

Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales (1928-2005) was born on the Eastside of Denver at the location now occupied by the St. Charles Recreation Center (3777 Lafayette Street). The youngest of eight children, Gonzales’s father was a migrant farm worker who also worked for the Union Pacific Railroad. The family attended the Annunciation Church (1408 East 36th Avenue, extant) and primary school. Gonzales graduated from Manual High School and attended the University of Denver briefly, but dropped out to work in a meat packing plant because he could not afford tuition. At the university he took a course in literature and writing that introduced him to other cultures struggling for equality.

Gonzales trained at the Epworth Boxing Club (in the Epworth Spanish Church, 1130 31st Street, extant) and became a hometown hero as a champion boxer in the early 1950s, earning national and international featherweight titles as an amateur. Boxing was a gateway for young men like Gonzales to get out of the neighborhood and earn money. It also taught discipline. He retired from boxing in 1955 to start a family with his wife, Geraldine Romero, living at 3350 Vine Street until 1964 (extant) and then moving to 2385 Leyden Street (extant) in Park Hill. The couple had eight children, including several who became leaders in the Chicano Movement in Denver. He owned and operated several businesses in Denver, including Corky’s Corner, a bar and restaurant at 3707 Walnut Street, and a bail bonds business on 1961 Larimer Street (both nonextant). He also owned a small apartment building at 1265 Cherokee Street (nonextant), which became the first headquarters for the Crusade for Justice. When César Chávez visited Denver in December 1967, he stayed at the Crusade headquarters on Cherokee Street and attended a dinner in his honor at Annunciation Church (see Figure 78).

Gonzales became state coordinator for ¡Viva Kennedy! and was praised by the party for assisting with the successful election of Kennedy in 1960. In 1963 he and Bernie Valdez founded Los Voluntarios, a political organization that became a precursor to the Crusade for Justice, to engage

Figure 78. Gonzales (at right) with César Chávez (at left).
Latino communities in voting and address inequities and injustice on behalf of the “Spanish speaking people of Colorado.” In 1965 Gonzales published Yo Soy Joaquín, an epic poem in both Spanish and English that is widely recognized as one of the most important poems of the Chicano Movement (see Figure 79). It remains an important piece of literature today that vividly describes and illustrates the history of Chicanos and their struggles to survive and thrive in white society. For more information on Yo Soy Joaquín and Gonzales’s other writings, see Chapter 8, Arts.

Democratic Mayor Thomas Currigan appointed Gonzales as the head of the Neighborhood Youth Corps in 1964, and the head of Denver’s War on Poverty in 1965, a key social reform program of the late President Kennedy, in a nod to Gonzales’s political organizing efforts. In 1966 Mayor Currigan abruptly fired Gonzales over a protest Gonzales organized in response to a newspaper article that alleged his mismanagement of the program. Gonzales then formed the Crusade for Justice with more far-reaching goals than Los Voluntarios. The Crusade rejected mainstream politics and organizations and became dedicated to “militant grassroots organizing and independent political action in which Chicanos were to decide their destiny independent of institutions controlled by others.” Other founders of the Crusade included, D.C. De Herrera, Emilio Dominguez, Juanita Domínguez, Eloy Espinosa, Ralph Luna, Ricardo Romero, Lionel Roybal, Jesse Saucedo, Charlie Vigil, and many others. Many young people joined the Crusade, including several individuals who went on to become influential leaders in Denver, Colorado, and the U.S., such as Ken Salazar, Federico Peña, Joe Garcia, Dr. Luis Torres, Dr. Ramón Del Castillo, and Dr. Priscilla Falcón. Others include Ernesto Vigil, Ruben Valdez, Sal Carpio, Emanuel Martinez, Ricardo Romero, Waldo Benavidez, Carlos Santistevan, and Richard Castro.

By 1968 the Crusade bought the Calvary Baptist Church at 1567 Downing (nonexistent) as its headquarters, and in 1972 an apartment house next door at 1539/1541 Downing (nonexistent). According to Gonzales’s daughter, Nita, the purchase of these buildings, acquired through donations of Crusade members, never included any state, federal, or foundation support, which was a major principle of the movement to remain independent of outside control. The Crusade buildings became a family community center where Chicanos could find services for employment, legal defense, education, civil rights, political action, immigration, and recreation. It was the center of all Crusade activity and the location for multiple meetings, gatherings, and events. The main building included a bookstore, gift shop, large lunchroom, boxing gym, 500-seat auditorium, classrooms, offices, lounge, art studios and gallery, and a print shop. Dance and theater groups also formed and rehearsed there, including the Mexican folklorico group, Ballet Chicano de Aztlan, and El Teatro Pachuco (see Figure 80). The Crusade also established a dual-language school, Escuela Tlatelolco Centro de Estudios, in the building, which grew over the years to provide classes for pre-school to undergraduate college students, and Servicios de la Raza, to advocate for and support Latinos in Denver with mental health services.

A youth movement

One of the most successful aspects of El Movimiento and the Crusade for Justice was tapping into the energy of young urban Chicanos who sought a more revolutionary approach to changing society, instead of following the same tactics of their parents and grandparents. Young people who joined the Crusade and other youth organizations began to learn about their history, noting that it was the first time they had been exposed to it, having not heard it at home or in school. Many Chicano youth did not speak or learn Spanish at home, because schools punished children who spoke Spanish and parents felt pressure to make sure their children learned to speak English without an accent. They saw assimilation as a ticket to economic and social mobility. El Movimiento particularly focused on educating young people about their history, encouraging them to embrace their Chicano identity, and become leaders in their communities. In addition, two crucial events occurred in Denver in March 1969—a student walkout, or Blowout, at West High School, and the first National Chicano Youth Liberation Conference—that spread the messages of the movement and fueled its growth.

West High Blowout

The West High School (951 Elati Street, extant) student walkout, known as the West High Blowout, was a galvanizing event that helped broadcast the Crusade’s activism across generations of Chicanos in Denver and beyond. The Blowout emulated similar protests in March 1968 that had erupted in East Los Angeles, when Chicano students walked out of their classes, demanding changes to their schools in protest of racist school policies.443

Some students at West had attended classes on Chicano history, culture, and politics at the Crusade community center. During the 1968-1969 school year, the students complained of racist teachers and asked the principal at West to hire Latino teachers, include classes in Spanish, and teach Chicano courses. Social studies teacher, Harry Shafer, reportedly made derogatory remarks about the educational abilities of Mexican students and refused to correctly pronounce the students’ Spanish surnames. Several students demanded the principal dismiss Shafer. When they did not get a response from the principal, they turned to the Crusade to help support a student-led protest. Gonzales and other Crusade leaders helped organize

443 DeSipio, “American Latino Theme Study -- Struggles for Inclusion (U.S. National Park Service).”
what was intended to be a peaceful walkout at the school on March 20, 1969 (see Figure 81). Unfortunately, the protest quickly became violent when police threw tear gas on the protesters and students. The protest spread across the street from the school as many students tried to flee to the Sunken Gardens Park (between Speer Boulevard, W. 8th Avenue, Delaware & Elati Streets extant) and nearly 300 people sought refuge in the nearby Denver Inner City Parish (Smith’s Chapel, 910 Galapago Street, extant). The next day 1,200 students gathered for another walkout at West, which spread to other schools throughout Denver.444

The West High Blowout was a wake-up call for many residents in Denver and resulted in more young people joining El Movimiento. Ernesto Vigil, who was present at the blowout, explained: “If anyone believed the discontent and criticism voiced by Gonzales and the Crusade were the rantings of a few misfits and malcontents, the events at West High School indicated that the number of malcontents and misfits was much larger than some people realized.”446

After the Blowout, West High students and their parents attended a Denver Public Schools Board of Education meeting to request changes at West. They wanted bilingual education, Chicano teachers, and courses related to the history, culture, and contributions of Chicanos. They also requested the board include members who represented their school district instead of at-large members, adding Chicano books to the school library, that teachers at West refrain from counseling students to join the armed forces, and that class sizes be reduced so the

Figure 81. Students participate in the Blowout at West High School in 1969.445

teachers could be more effective in the classroom. Shafer was reassigned to a different school, and the students who participated in the Blowout were not disciplined. While many of these demands took years to be met and some are still an issue, the Blowout helped students effectively protest racist and discriminatory policies and teachers at West.

**National Chicano Youth Liberation Conferences and organizations**

Just a week after the Blowout at West, the Crusade held an event of significant national importance: the first National Chicano Youth Liberation Conference at their Downing Street building (see Figure 82), the first gathering of its kind, which was attended by 1,500 young people from throughout the U.S., Central America, and Puerto Rico. The conference introduced *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán for the Mestizo Nation* (*El Plan*) that emphasized the ties of Chicanos to Mexico, and their shared origin in *Aztlán*. *Aztlán* originated from the Aztec belief in a vast homeland that was located north of Mexico City, including New Mexico and part of Colorado. The *Plan* was written by numerous individuals, including the Chicano poet Albert Urista (known as Alurista) from San Diego, California, who wrote the preamble. *El Plan* declared: “We the Chicano inhabitants and civilizers of the northern land of *Aztlán*… are free and sovereign to determine those tasks which are justly called for by our house, our land, the sweat of our brows, and by our hearts.” *El Plan* was an integral part of the Chicano Movement, which focused on self-determination and nationalism for Chicanos. Similar conferences followed in 1970 and 1971. At these conferences, all held in Denver, attendees committed to working towards political and economic independence, including joining *La Raza Unida* political party.

On college and university campuses, new student organizations formed to support and encourage young Chicanos. *Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán* (MEChA) was formed during the 1969 youth conference. Chapters formed at University of Colorado (CU), Colorado State University (CSU), University of Northern Colorado, Metropolitan State College (now MSU Denver) on the Auraria cam-

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447 “Chicano Students’ Demands at West High.”
450 Romero and Gonzales, “Colorado,” 118.
451 “Crusade for Justice - Marchers Leave Crusade Headquaters - Photographs - Western History - Denver Public Library Western History/Genealogy Digital Collections.”

*Figure 82. Young members at the Crusade for Justice building, 1567 Downing Street, in 1969.*
El Movimiento gatherings and protests in Denver

Social justice organizations held many protests and meetings throughout Denver, typically at the public parks where many young people gathered for events (see Figure 83) or in the streets downtown near Civic Center Park and the Colorado State Capitol (200 East Colfax Avenue, extant). On the Westside, gatherings and protests took place at La Alma Lincoln Park (1501 W. 38th Avenue, extant). On the Northside, gatherings took place at La Raza (formerly Columbus) Park (1501 W. 38th Avenue, extant) and at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church (209 W. 36th Avenue, extant), where Father José Lara provided meeting space for many different events and activities, as well organizing boycotts and working with agricultural laborers to improve farm worker rights.

In the summer of 1969 Gonzales organized a splash-in at a southeast Denver pool to protest a plan by the city to close two pools on the Westside (Lincoln Park) and Eastside (Curtis Park) because it did not have the funds to maintain the facilities. The Crusade took youths from these neighborhoods to Mamie Eisenhower Park in southeast Denver, a white neighborhood, to invade the pool in street clothes without paying the entrance fees. As neighborhood residents gathered to see what was going on, they asked the Crusade leaders why the kids had taken over “their” pool. The leaders explained that the pools in these kids’ neighborhoods were going to be closed. Ernesto Vigil noted: “Gonzales, who understood that middle-class Denver had political clout, told them they should call city officials to urge allocation of resources to the low-income parks.” The City kept the neglected pools open and committed to fixing problems at the pools (see Figure 84). For more on the history of Chicano “takeovers” at pools, see Chapter 9, Neighborhood Life.

Role of women

El Movimiento had a strong patriarchal flavor, with men getting the credit as the leaders and founders, even though women were involved in all aspects of the movement. More research is needed to better understand the roles of Chicanas in Denver in El Movimiento. The traditional Mexican cultural stereotype was that women...
should be subservient and subordinate to men, discouraged from seeking attention or working outside the home to support the family. However, the reality was that many women were supporting their families and needed higher education to get better paying jobs. This became a rallying cry for Chicanas to create their own organizations advocating for women to be recognized as equal participants in the struggle for equality. Chicana rights groups focused on twin goals: eradicating racism in larger society, and combatting sexism within their own culture and the Chicano Movement.456

Chicanas on the Westside including Josie Acosta, Josie Perez, Vi Medrano, Alberta Crespin, and many others created Madres del Movimiento and worked to help advance the movement while also taking care of their families. Josie Acosta attended school until the fourth grade, when she left to support her family. She later received her GED and always stressed the importance of education to her family. Josie Perez was a local spokesperson for the United Farm Workers and one of the named plaintiffs of the lawsuit Keyes vs. Denver Public Schools; she testified in front of the Supreme Court, joining Black and white families who helped to integrate Denver Public Schools (see Chapter 3, Education).457

Dr. Alicia Valladolid Cuaron came to Denver in 1972, married, and had a daughter before becoming a sister of St. Francis at the age of 51. She noted that Chicanas were practically nonexistent in education and leadership roles in Denver in those times. In response, she co-founded Adelante Mujer in 1979 with Patricia Barela Rivera, Dr. Arlene Vigil-Kramer, Linda Alvarado, Dr. Cecilia Cervantes, and Irene Ibarra.458 The group focused on encouraging Latinas to pursue higher education, job training, and careers to help them succeed and support themselves and their families. The first year, the women hosted a conference at the new meeting rooms in the renovated St. Cajetan’s Church on the Auraria campus, the first conference of its kind in the country. The organizers were overjoyed when a thousand women attended. The conference celebrated pride in all that women did for the community, addressed racism and sexism, and featured Mexican food, dancing, and music. Adelante Mujer and other Chicana organiza-

![La Raza Park](image)

Figure 84. The words “La Raza Park” spray-painted on the pool building at La Raza (formerly Columbus) Park, c.1970. The building was razed in 1984.455


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tions did not join in the larger women’s movement in the United States, which did not speak to Chicana realities of dual oppression as women of color as well as from Chicanos who often held traditional gender roles. Based on interviews with Curarón and Rivera, this was also because they felt it was important for Latinas to organize independently of other women’s groups.

Mi Casa Resource Center (571 Galapago Street – former location, extant; 345 S. Grove Street – current location, extant) opened in 1976 and was founded by Juana Bordas. When it first opened the center provided education and employment resources for women. Over the years the center has expanded to include bilingual business development resources and educational programs for youth, and now offers programming for the entire family. Mi Casa has provided a safe and supportive space for Latinos to grow and thrive since the mid-1970s.

Decline of Crusade for Justice

Divisions between Chicanos over the war in Vietnam, as well as increasing violence, police suppression, arrests, and lawsuits against Crusade members led to a decline in Crusade activities in the early 1970s. FBI agents from the Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) targeted Gonzales and other members of the Crusade as radical and violent revolutionaries taking part in anti-American activities. By this time, the Crusade had solidified its role as the agitator of El Movimiento and forged relationships with other marginalized groups throughout the country. This included the Denver chapter of the American Indian Movement (AIM) representing a diverse group of Native Americans. The shared indigenous ancestry of Chicanos and Native Americans created a strong bond between the Crusade and AIM, and the two groups often held joint political gatherings and cultural events.

In late February 1973 approximately 200 Native American activists, including members of AIM, occupied Wounded Knee on the Pine Ridge Reservation of South Dakota. Crusade members quickly mobilized to take supplies and blankets to the activists, and contacted other groups in New York City, Los Angeles, and New Mexico to hold coordinated protests on March 6 to show their support. In Denver, hundreds of Chicanos started their protest march at the Crusade building, joining approximately 200 AIM protestors. Other groups who joined in the protest included the Black Berets (part of the Black Panther party), and the Brown Berets, a Chicano militant group with a similar mission of the Black Berets to fix problems in the neighborhoods and fight against police harassment and brutality. The marchers proceeded down Colfax Avenue to the Byron G. Rogers Federal Building, 1961 Stout Street (extant), where a peaceful rally took place with 400-500 people. Based on FBI reports, as many as 45 demonstrations occurred in support of the activists at Wounded Knee throughout the country, but the protest in Denver was the largest.

Police and FBI agents used multiple tactics to infiltrate and disrupt the Crusade, including undercover agents, harassment, and multiple trials that exhausted the group’s financial resources. The biggest blow occurred in the early hours of March 17, 1973 — St. Patrick’s Day — when two police officers monitoring a party at the apartments next to the Crusade building on Downing Street initiated a shootout with the residents of the apartments and killed 20-year-old Crusade member Luis Junior Martinez. More police were called to the scene and the apartments were raided, with police arresting 60 people, beating many there, and destroying the upstairs apartment with gunfire and an explosion (see Figure 85). The police said the explosion was caused by a cache of explosives in the apartment, but the Crusade said it resulted from a police grenade. The City ordered the structure to be demolished the same day, making it impossible to determine the cause of the explosion.

460 Cuarón, Video interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales; Barela Rivera et al., Video interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales.
Figure 85. Crusade for Justice apartment building at 1541 Downing Street damaged during March 17, 1973, shootout with Denver Police.\footnote{Damage from Blast at Apartment Building Owned by Crusade for Justice - Photographs - Western History - Denver Public Library Western History/Genealogy Digital Collections; 1973, https://digital.denverlibrary.org/digital/collection/p15330coll22/id/93439/rec/7.}

Figure 86. On March 17, 1974, marchers walked down 16th Street in Denver to commemorate the one-year anniversary of the police killing of Luis Junior Martinez and their subsequent attack on the headquarters of the Crusade for Justice. This photograph was taken by Juan Espinosa, a journalism student at the University of Colorado Boulder and member of UMAS at the time of this march. Espinosa and his wife Deborah moved to Pueblo, Colorado, in 1975 and started \textit{La Cucaracha} newspaper in 1976.\footnote{Juan Espinosa, \textit{Crusade for Justice March in Denver}, Photograph, black & white, March 17, 1974, History Colorado Online Collection; Juan Espinosa, “Photographing the front lines of El Movimiento,” Colorado Heritage (March/April 2015), 22-25.}

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Other major setbacks to *El Movimiento* during this time included two car bombs that killed six UMAS leaders and activists in Boulder in May 1974, and the murder of Ricardo Falcón, a prominent leader at CU Boulder who was involved in La Raza Unida and UMAS chapter.\(^{467}\) While the Crusade continued to provide support to Chicano causes in the late 1970s and 1980s, the power of the movement had diminished. In 1987 Gonzales sold the Crusade building to the U.S. Post Office and it was demolished for a new postal headquarters. That same year he was injured in a car accident and retreated from public life thereafter.\(^{468}\)

### Opposition to the Crusade for Justice

Many civil rights activists of the 1960s and 1970s were unfairly portrayed by the media and police as militant revolutionaries, and Gonzales was no exception. Because Gonzales traveled extensively and spoke throughout the country, many think he was better known and respected outside of Denver and Colorado. As Dr. Antonio Esquibel, a good friend of Gonzales who edited a book of Gonzales’s writings, noted, “Few in Colorado outside of the Crusade for Justice and the Chicano Movement really knew him” and were unfamiliar with his philosophies.\(^{469}\) Some in Denver declined to join in the mission of the Crusade, while others joined the Crusade initially, then left after deciding to pursue alternative ways of enacting change in their communities, particularly through politics. As one interviewee noted, people generally were either active in the Crusade or active in politics, but the two spheres rarely mixed.

For some Vietnam veterans, the hardships they endured during the war, compounded by not being welcomed back into society after the war, dissuaded them from joining the Crusade. Veterans and older Latinos thought the Crusade members and Brown Berets were “playing soldier,” whereas the armed service represented the true military. Some families also forbade their children from joining the Crusade or disowned them if they became members. They rejected the Chicano identity, preferring to refer to themselves as Mexican Americans.

Numerous young people in Denver joined the Crusade but then left to assume other leadership roles in Denver, including artist Emanuel Martinez, Waldo Benavidez, and Richard Castro, who ran the West Side Coalition and became involved in politics (see Chapter 6).

### Lasting influence of *El Movimiento* and the Crusade for Justice

Today *El Movimiento* and the Crusade are credited with a wide-ranging and lasting influence that helped create new leaders and inspire multiple Chicano and Latino causes in Denver and beyond. Many El Movimiento activists continue to work on a variety of causes to uphold the legacy and spirit of the movement. This includes numerous protests and marches through the years that have taken place at Denver parks and government buildings. These protests came to a crescendo in Denver in the summer of 2020, as in other parts of the country, when thousands of community members, including Chicanos, Blacks, Native Americans, Asian Americans, and whites, came together to protest police brutality after a police officer murdered George Floyd in Minneapolis in June 2020.

Another group that continues the goals of *El Movimiento* is the César Chávez Peace and Justice Committee of Denver, a volunteer organization formed in 2001 that educates people about the efforts of Chávez and the United Farm Workers and continues to work to improve the lives of farmworkers. Dr. Ramon Del Castillo, one of the co-founders, explained that the group formed because “We imagined the creation of an organization that would serve as a reminder that Mexican history was fraught with revolution, struggle, pain, and sorrow — and that we needed to continue that struggle, honoring our heroes/heroines.” The group helped pass César Chávez Day as a holiday in Denver and Colorado, lobbied for the renaming of César Chávez Park at 4131 Tennyson Street, and commissioned a bust of Chávez by Emanuel Martinez for the park, in addition to supporting the successful passage of a farmworker rights and wages law in Colorado in 2021.\(^{470}\)

Chicano music, literature, art, poetry, dance, and theater, integral elements of *El Movimiento*, continue to thrive in Denver today (see Chapter 8). Colorado’s colleges and universities now teach Chicano history and other courses,


\(^{468}\) Vigil, The Crusade for Justice: Chicano Militancy and the Government’s War on Disent, 381.


\(^{470}\) Ramon Del Castillo, e-mail correspondence to Mead & Hunt, Inc., July 16, 2021.
and Chicano/Latino student organizations are active on campuses to encourage and support Latino students. Chicano history is taught in some Colorado primary and secondary schools, even though the numbers of Latino teachers is still far fewer than white teachers. Unfortunately, achievement for Latino students remains behind that of whites and other groups in Denver, with a lot of work left to close the gap.

_Escuela Tlatelolco Centro de Estudios_, the bilingual school founded by the Crusade, taught more than 7,000 students over a period of 46 years and had a lasting impact on generations of Chicano youth. The school was dedicated to social justice and developing cultural pride, confidence, and leadership skills. Nita Gonzales, Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales’ eldest daughter, served as principal of the school for several years. Located at 2949 Federal Boulevard (extant), the school had a long-time contract with the Denver Public Schools. When the district did not renew the contract for the 2015-2016 school year, the school could not recover the lost revenue and closed in 2017.472

Another vital community resource developed by the Crusade that continues today is _Servicios de la Raza_. The agency is currently at 3131 W. 14th Avenue but moved from 4055 Tejon Street (extant) in 2014 and was at W. 38th Avenue and Navajo Street until 1978. Servicios provides a range of critical services to help those in need, including a food and clothing bank, healthcare enrollment, counseling, post-prison re-entry, behavioral and mental health, HIV/STI counseling, COVID vaccinations, and domestic violence and crime victim assistance. Initially formed to assist Latinos, Servicios is now open to all communities, ages, genders, and sexual orientation. Another of Gonzales’s children, Rudy Gonzales, became executive director in 2008.

471 Joseph Chavez, _Cesar Chavez Peace and Justice Committee_.
472 Mejia, “Escuela Tlatelolco Closes Its Doors.”

![Figure 87. The co-founders of the César Chávez Peace and Justice Committee, (left to right) Toby LeRoux, Charlene Barrientos Ortiz, and Dr. Ramon Del Castillo, in César Chávez Park in front of a bust of Chávez by artist Emanuel Martinez.](image)
Figure 88. Map of identified resources associated with the Chicano Movement in Denver.
Table 6. List of identified resources associated with the Chicano Movement or Crusade for Justice in Denver

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site Name</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Designated Sites: National, State, or Local Landmark</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annunciation Catholic Church</td>
<td>Eastside</td>
<td>1408 E. 36th Avenue</td>
<td>National Register; State Register; Local Landmark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Byron G. Rogers Federal Building</td>
<td>Central Business District</td>
<td>1961 Stout Street</td>
<td>National Register</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Café Cultura, Smith's Chapel, United Brethren Church, Denver Inner City Parish</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>910-912 Galapago Street</td>
<td>Local Landmark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curtis Park Historic District</td>
<td>Eastside</td>
<td></td>
<td>Local Landmark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denver Public Schools Administration Building (former)</td>
<td>Central Business District</td>
<td>414 14th Street</td>
<td>Local Landmark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epworth Spanish Church (Epworth boxing club)</td>
<td>Eastside</td>
<td>1130 31st Street</td>
<td>Local Landmark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Alma Lincoln Park Historic Cultural District</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td></td>
<td>Local Landmark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Alma Recreation Center</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>1325 W. 11th Avenue</td>
<td>Local Landmark; Within La Alma Lincoln Park Historic Cultural District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ninth Street Park Historic District</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td></td>
<td>Local Landmark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our Lady of Guadalupe</td>
<td>Northside</td>
<td>209 W. 36th Avenue</td>
<td>Local Landmark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Cajetan Catholic Parish</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>101 Lawrence Way</td>
<td>Local Landmark; 1st Adelante Mujer Conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunken Gardens Park</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>Speer Boulevard, W. 8th Avenue, Delaware &amp; Elati Streets</td>
<td>National Register; should be revised to include Chicano history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West High School</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>951 Elati Street</td>
<td>Local Landmark, should be revised to include Chicano history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Undesignated Sites</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chavez (Cesar E.) Park</td>
<td>Northside</td>
<td>4134 N. Tennyson Street</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escuela Tlatelolco Centro de Estudios</td>
<td>Eastside</td>
<td>1567 Downing Street (nonextant)</td>
<td>Officially Eligible for the National Register— 2005 (Dominic’s Elementary building)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Northside</td>
<td>Souden Building, 4059 Tejon Street (extant)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Northside</td>
<td>St. Dominic’s Elementary building, 2949 North Federal Boulevard (extant)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Raza (formerly Columbus) Park</td>
<td>Northside</td>
<td>1501 W. 38th Avenue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mi Casa Resource Center</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>571 Galapago Street</td>
<td>Original Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>345 S. Grove Street</td>
<td>Current Location; Includes Salazar Center for Family Prosperity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rodolfo and Geraldine Gonzales Residence</td>
<td>Eastside</td>
<td>3050 Vine Street</td>
<td>Not shown within map boundaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2385 Leyden Street</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Charles Recreation Center</td>
<td>Eastside</td>
<td>3777 Lafayette Street</td>
<td>On land of former boyhood home of Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Servicios de la Raza</td>
<td>Northside</td>
<td>4051 Tejon Street</td>
<td>Former location</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The renaissance of Chicano music, literature, art, poetry, dance, and theater, which started during the 1960s as an integral part of El Movimiento, remains a crucial component of Latino culture broadly and especially in the Denver community. The arts provide a sense of belonging to the local community through a connection with a shared historical and contemporary experience. Artistic expression helps to instill a sense of identity into individuals that can bring the very diverse Latino communities together. It affirms the shared experience and instills a sense of pride and belonging. It is also an important means to translate ideas to the community to gain support or build momentum behind a movement.473

In his historical overview of the arts in Latino communities, Tomas Ybarra-Fausto identifies the “points of departure” that are essential to any discussion of this topic. First, it is important to keep in mind that all Latino artists have and continue to exist in a historical continuum. Although there have been distinct artistic movements within Latino communities, none of these are the result of a “new consciousness.” Each of these movement and artforms are inspired by previous artists. Indigenous imagery, religious iconography, and contemporary styles blend together to create distinctive styles. It is also important to keep in mind the wide cultural diversity of Latinos. Latinos do not represent a single ethnicity or culture and each are reflected in their artistic expressions. Finally, as will be shown in this chapter, Latino cultural expressions are “mutable and dynamic.” Various different artistic expressions and styles influence and blend with each other. Similar themes can be traced through a multitude of forms including the visual arts, dance, theater, literature, and others. The historical continuum of experience, the broad spectrum of cultural expression, and the intersection of all styles combine to create a recognizable Latino artistic style.474

Architecture

Mexicans and Mexican Americans did not introduce new architectural styles or forms when they first arrived in Denver, as they generally moved into older neighborhoods that had been built by and for previous immigrant groups. These homes and businesses reflect common American architectural styles from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While there are examples of the Spanish Revival style throughout central Denver, typically these were not built or designed by Mexican Americans architects. Mexican Americans and Chicano families adapted and altered the original architecture of their homes and businesses. Several homes in Westwood neighborhood and La Alma Lincoln Park neighborhoods now feature stucco walls and fences around their property that are common across Latin America.475 Mexican American families often build shrines to honor the Lady of Guadalupe and other patron saints on the front porches or

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473 Ramirez and Trujillo, Video Interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales.
yards. A few businesses, such as the Curtis Park Creamery (908 30th Street, extant), have renovated their buildings in the Pueblo style with stucco exteriors and false vigas.

One significant Chicano architect in Denver is Phil Gallegos, who was a professor and chair of the Architecture and Planning Department at the University of Colorado at Denver. In the 1970s Gallegos constructed multiple buildings on the Westside in a modern Maya-inspired style that references the indigenous temples of southern Mexico and celebrates the aesthetic of the Chicano Movement in the 1970s. The former Mariposa Health Clinic (1020 W. 11th Avenue, extant, Figure 89), built in 1976, embodies this design with slanted exterior walls and Maya glyphs surrounding the building. Gallegos also designed Del Pueblo Elementary School (750 Galapago Street, extant) in 1972 in a similar, although less dramatic, style. The Sam Sandos Westside Family Health Center (1100 Federal Boulevard, extant), built in 1984, also reflects this style.

Visual arts

Murals

Within the genre of the visual arts, public art and murals stand out as significant placemaking elements within Denver’s historically Chicano neighborhoods. They are particularly important within the long context of displacement within Latino history. From immigrants who journeyed to Denver from Mexico and countries in Central and South America, to in-migration within the United States, to those displaced within the city, public murals help to build a sense of place and community through shared experience. This public medium also makes a strong statement of resistance against the historic erasure of Mexican American and Chicano history and art by the dominant white-European society. These murals proudly proclaim and celebrate the presence of Chicano citizens for the entire city to see.

Many of Denver’s Chicano murals embody the ideals of the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Chicano

![Figure 89. The former Mariposa Health Clinic (within La Alma Lincoln Park Historic Cultural District boundary), designed by Phil Gallegos in 1976, shown here in 2019. Businesses including Graham Golden Technologies and Layer Cake Creative now reside in the building (1020 W. 11th Avenue).](image)

477 “City and County of Denver - Historic District Nomination Individual Property Inventory Form - 1020 W. 11th Avenue”; Denver, La Alma Lincoln Park Historic Cultural District Application.
478 “Elmwood to Become Del Pueblo Elementary,” West Side Recorder, October 1, 1972, 1, Colorado Historic Newspapers Collection.
479 Barela Rivera et al., Video interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales.
murals in Denver are often overtly political with specific references to historical traditions, events, and people. The Chicano muralists were heavily influenced by Mexico’s “Tres Grandes”—Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros—who were active in the 1920s and 1930s. These three artists sought to establish a new Mexican identity by incorporating indigenous art with European styles, while also making direct commentary on contemporary issues. Similarly, the Chicano muralists in Denver and across the country sought to establish a new identity for Latinos that incorporated their blended Indigenous, Mexican, and European past. They illustrated contemporary issues with Mesoamerican patterns and imagery to invoke a narrative of place that connected their current neighborhoods to a seemingly forgotten past. As described by archaeologist and curator Lucha Martinez de Luna, who established the Chicano/a Murals of Colorado Project in 2018, “Chicano artists told stories of the past, empowering their audience by legitimizing their self-identity and self-worth.” Chicano muralists also usually involved the local community by inviting residents to help paint the mural and to instill a shared sense of ownership in their public art. While they have largely gone unrecognized, Denver’s Chicano muralists in the 1970s were at the forefront of a national street art movement.482

Emanuel Martínez, the father of Lucha Martínez de Luna, is one of the earliest and most influential Chicano muralists in Denver. Martínez has painted dozens of murals in Denver and several of his works are part of the permanent collection at the Smithsonian National Museum of American Art in Washington, D.C. A Denver native, Martínez learned to paint while incarcerated at a juvenile detention facility as a teenager, where he painted his first mural. In the 1960s he became involved with the Chicano Movement and worked with Chicano activists. His mural Mayan Numerals (1968, destroyed), which he painted in the Crusade for Justice building, is credited as the “first contemporary Chicano mural” in Denver. It featured Maya glyphs and the “Mestizo Head.” He first painted the Mestizo Head on an altar in California in 1967 to commemorate the end of Cesar Chavez’s hunger strike, and it became a symbol throughout the Chicano Movement. The Mestizo Head is a three-part head with an indigenous mother and a Spanish father to the sides, with a full face in the center, representing the union of the two as a modern Chicano.483

While living at the Lincoln Park housing projects, Martínez painted a large mural across one of the buildings. When he was told by the City of Denver that only City employees could paint the buildings, he trained as a lifeguard at La Alma Lincoln Park pool and later became the muralist of the Parks and Recreation Department. While working with the department he painted additional murals that have since been covered at Argo Park, Mestizo-Curtis Park, and the Robert F. Kennedy Recreation Center. When La Alma Lincoln Park pool was closed he applied for a small grant from Denver Opportunity and started an arts and crafts training program out of the abandoned pool building (nonexistent). After the program became an instant success, Martínez asked Denver Parks and Recreation if he could convert the building into a recreation center. Denver Parks and Recreation agreed, and he became the first director of La Alma Recreation Center. The City later tore down the building to build the new La Alma Recreation Center (1325 W. 11th Avenue, extant). He stopped working for the City in 1972, when he refused to paint over Robert Lucero’s murals at La Raza (formerly Columbus) Park. He has continued to work consistently in Denver over the decades, including bronze sculptures and artwork in parks and buildings throughout Denver and Colorado. Two extant major murals from the Chicano era of the 1970s are La Alma and Staff of Life. La Alma (1978) at La Alma Recreation Center (1325 W. 11th Avenue, extant, see Figure 90) presents a Chicano youth and an indigenous ancestor together, both standing in a warrior’s pose. This mural has become an icon of La Alma Lincoln Park neighborhood. Staff of Life (1976) is located in the South Classroom building on the Auraria Campus and depicts the creation of mestizo culture through a juxtaposition of Spanish and indigenous imagery culminating the modern Chicano identity.484


Carlota EspinoZa is a prominent Chicana artist who was also active during the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Her mural *Pasado, Presente, Futuro* (Past, Present, Future, painted in 1975) at the John “Thunderbird Man” Emhoolah, Jr. (formerly Byers) Branch Library at 675 Santa Fe Drive (extant, see Figure 91) describes the history of the Chicano struggle. In her own words it tells the “story of a people: Chicano! It is a story of a people’s romance with history, from Aztec empires, through Spanish imperialism, from alienation to the struggle to re-win a people’s identity, pride and future.” In contrast to other murals at the time, *Pasado, Presente, Futuro* places an emphasis on the essential role of women in Chicano culture, with images of La Malinche (the interpreter to the conquistador Hernán Cortés), a mestizo mother teaching her children, and a carving of the Lady of Guadalupe at the center of the piece. At Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, she painted a 20-foot by 20-foot mural of the Virgin of Guadalupe in *The Apparition of the Virgin Mary to Juan Diego in Mexico* (1977, covered) with the blessing of Father José Lara. Sidestepping tradition, EspinoZa depicted the Lady of Guadalupe as a modern Chicana. This mural was covered in 2010 by Father Benito Hernandez because he felt it shifted focus away from the church altar. The community united to protest this change.

Leo Tanguma continued Denver’s mural tradition through the 1980s and 1990s. Tanguma was also involved in the Chicano Movement in Texas in the 1960s and moved from Houston to Denver in 1983. Tanguma painted intensely political works focused on social justice in the United States and Central America, incorporating history with the personal struggles of the present. Describing his work, he has stated, “I have an obligation to the community to depict the struggle for dignity and life despite the oppressiveness of their lives.” Tanguma’s murals also depict the intersection of various freedom struggles. Works including *Después de Esta Cruz* (Beyond this Cross - 1986, destroyed) and *La Antorcha de Quetzalcóatl* (The Torch of Quetzalcóatl, 1988-1989, status unknown), depict martyrs from the African American and Native American communities alongside those of the international Latino commu-
nities. Among his most well-known pieces are those commissioned for the Denver International Airport in the early 1990s, including *The Children of the World Dream of Peace and In Peace and Harmony with Nature* (see Figure 92).

Not all Chicano artists produced overtly political artwork for the public. One example is a mural by Andrew Mendoza with the help of neighborhood children, (Learning From the Past, Focused on the Future - 1995) located at 1151 Osage Street across the street from Martinez’s La Alma mural. Mendoza’s mural celebrates the history of the Auraria neighborhood and is an important counterpoint to Martinez’s work. Similarly, *Neighborhood Epic*, located along Kalamath Street between W. 36th Avenue and Navajo Street in Highland, is a series of ten mosaic murals created by Bob Luna and Martha Keating that depict the history of the neighborhood from pre-Columbian contact through the growth of city, including both the Italian and Chicano communities in Highland. Each of these mosaics are surrounded by smaller tiles painted by 1,250 neighborhood residents.

An incomplete list of significant visual artists in Denver includes Jerry Jaramillo (see Figure 93), Tony Ortega, Sylvia Montero, Stevon Lucero, Carlos Frésquez, Frank Zamora, Jerry De La Cruz, Patty Ortiz, Daniel Salazar, Judy Miranda, and Jessica Luna.

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489 Espinoza, *Pasado, Presente, Futuro*.


Art collectives and galleries

Chicano Humanities and Arts Council
The Chicano Humanities and Arts Council (CHAC) was established in 1979 by Chicano performing and visual artists and continues to operate in Denver (see Figure 94). The collective was originally named after Chac, the Maya god of rain, because the artists involved wanted to “rain artwork down on the people.” The acronym CHAC was created later. By the mid-1980s CHAC had grown to include more than 150 artists, businesses, and community organizations. As an organization, CHAC offered support and artistic space for Chicano artists who were not supported or recognized by the city’s mainstream art society at the time. The collective currently provides support for the visual arts, literature, theater, music, dance, and the humanities. It also supports local cultural events including the annual Cinco de Mayo festival. CHAC has operated out of multiple locations over the years. The group originally gathered in a church basement and its first official home was in the old St. Patrick’s school building at 3401 Pecos Street (extant) in Highland. This building was home to other Chicano organizations including the Call for Action Center. In 1984 they moved into a converted turn-of-the-century house at 941 E. 17th Avenue (extant). CHAC moved again into a former supermarket at 725 Santa Fe Drive (nonextant) in 1986, where it remained for several years. The collective moved again to a location on Platte Street in Highland in the 1990s before returning to the Santa Fe Arts District.494

Museo de las Americas

The Museo de las Americas was incorporated in 1991 by Jose Aguayo, Magdalena Aguayo, Ramon Kelley, Ramona Kelley, Emanuel Martinez, Maria Lupita Martinez, and Rebecca Arellano. This organization purchased the former commercial building at 861 Santa Fe Drive in 1994, where it remains today. The Museo de las Americas is dedicated to “collecting, preserving, interpreting, and exhibiting the diverse arts and cultures of Latin America.” With a collection of more than 3,500 objects, the Museo has established itself as a central feature in Denver’s Latino arts communities and provides support to local artists as well as showcasing international artists.

Pirate: Contemporary Art

This art collective and gallery space established in the early 1980s at 3655 Navajo Street was part of the burgeoning art community in the Northside and focused on supporting and exhibiting contemporary artists. Pirate soon established a reputation within the community for supporting local Latino and Chicano artists. The gallery hosted one of the city’s first Dia de los Muertos celebrations. Pirate recently moved out of the city of Denver and is currently located in Lakewood at 7130 W. 16th Avenue.

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**Figure 94.** Four founding members of CHAC, shown here c.2009. From left to right, Jerry Jaramillo, Al Sanchez, Stevon Lucero, and Carlos Sandoval.

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**IMAGENES (Arvada Center Gallery)**

As evidenced by the creation of CHAC, Chicano and Latino artists in Denver had few avenues to exhibit their work in the 1980s. The first large art exhibition to exclusively feature Chicano artists at a “major art institution” in Colorado was “IMAGENES: A Survey of Contemporary Chicano Artists from Colorado,” hosted at the Arvada Center for the Arts and Humanities in 1985. It was coordinated by the lawyer Delores Atencio. The show was in part a benefit for the city’s bilingual radio station, KUVO. As an organizing partner for the show, Florence Hernandez Ramos at KUVO sought to “generate public visibility for the art and culture of the Chicano community.” IMAGENES included 100 pieces by 34 Colorado-based Latino artists including Juan Menchaca, Moses Sanchez, Jessica Luna, Arlette Lucero, and Bob Luna. The “centerpiece” of the exhibit was Caminemos Juntos (Let Us Walk Together, nonextant), a large portable mural in two parts by Leo Tanguma that focused on mending the conflicts of gang violence.499

**Music and dance groups**

Music and dance are important components of artistic expression within Mexican culture. Music specific to Mexican culture includes conjunto music (an accordion-led ensemble), jazz, classical, folk, rock and roll, rap, hip hop, flamenco guitarists, and mariachi. Local and traveling bands and artists perform at local venues and bars, such as El Chapultepec (1962 Market Street, extant, closed in 2021); parks; auditoriums; and theaters. In addition to hosting live performances, Denver’s non-profit jazz radio station KUVO continues the tradition of Latino radio in Denver with an iconic program, Canción Mexicana, on Sundays hosted by Yolanda Ortega, Mona Lisa, and Debra Gallegos that features music from Mexico, New Mexico, Texas, and Colorado. Dr. Lorenzo Trujillo, musician, educator, and lawyer in Denver, leads an element of the program called Nuestras Tradiciones Culturales (Our Cultural Traditions) where he highlights and offers insight into celebrated artists (see Chapter 5 for more information about radio stations). Along with attending live concerts and hearing traditional music on the radio, Chicanos and Mexican Americans perform traditional dance styles, including folklorico and flamenco.500 While Mexican music and dance is multi-faceted, this section focuses on mariachi music and folklórico, two important traditions in Denver.

**Mariachi music**

Mariachi music originated as a form of folk music specific to the Jalisco region of Mexico and dates to the mid-nineteenth century. Catholic priests were the first to use the term “mariachi” to describe musicians who performed at social gatherings and celebrations. Over the next 70

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501 Mariachi Sol De Mi Tierra at Cinco de Mayo.
years mariachi developed to encompass a specific musical style, dress, and instrumentation. Mariachi originally included violin, guitar, vihuela (sixteenth-century Spanish guitar), and guitarrón (larger vihuela used as the bass). Jazz and big bands influenced mariachi in the 1940s and 1950s, leading to the incorporation of trumpet into the style. Musicians from Jalisco brought the rural style of folk music to larger cities, and it grew in popularity. By the 1920s the Mexican government adopted mariachi in an effort to establish a unified Mexican cultural identity across the various regions of the country. Recordings made by Mariachi Coculense “Rodríguez” were used in the first sound film in Mexico in the 1920s, helping spread the style. Between the efforts of the government and more readily available recordings of the style, mariachi became a symbol of Mexico (see Figure 96).  

Around the same time mariachi became a symbol of Mexico, radio and television recordings, as well as increased immigration during the Mexican Revolution, helped bring mariachi music to the United States. Mexicans who moved to New Mexico, Texas, California, and Colorado brought the music style with them and felt a strong connection to Mexico and their cultural identity and heritage through mariachi. When asked why mariachi is so popular in the United States, Dr. Lorenzo Trujillo, musician, educator, and lawyer in Denver said, “Because it affirms we’re hearing the pulse of life. The music resonates [and] creates the rhythm, and people respond.”

Its popularity among Mexicans and the Mexican American population led to the incorporation of mariachi into Catholic mass. In 1966 Bishop Sergio Méndez of Cuernavaca, Mexico, commissioned Canadian priest Juan Marco Leclerc to compose La Misa Panamericana (Panamerican Mass). Though other works have since been written, La Misa Panamericana remains the most popular work and is standard repertoire for mariachi performed during Catholic mass.

Mariachi is important to the Mexican, Mexican American, and Hispano communities of Denver and provides connection to cultural heritage. Several churches, including St. Cajetan Catholic Parish and Our Lady of Guadalupe, hold mariachi masses and perform La Misa Panamericana. The group Mariachi Alegre de San Cayetano, which performs at the current St. Cajetan (299 South Raleigh Street, extant), has made several recordings and performs mariachi mass (see Figure 97).

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506 Ramirez and Trujillo, Video Interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales.

In the fall of 2015 MSU Denver (890 Auraria Parkway, ex-
tant) started offering a mariachi music class that is open
to all students regardless of major or background. Dr. Tru-
jillo leads this class and said in an interview in 2016 that
“mariachi music is imperative to teaching kids about their
heritage.”509 The for-credit ensemble class is the basis for
the band Mariachi Los Correcaminos (the Roadrunners),
founded in 2013 by a group of Adams City High School
graduates who came together at MSU. The group per-
forms all over Denver for funerals, weddings, baptisms,
quinceañeras, and more.510 Bryant Webster Dual Lan-
guage School (3635 Quivas Street) offers a mariachi music
program for its students. Formed in the early 2000s by Pa-
mela Liñan and currently under the direction of Jacque-
line Liñan, El Mariachi Juvenil de Bryant Webster offers
instruction to third through eighth graders. Similar to the
Mariachi Los Correcaminos, El Mariachi Juvenil de Bryant
Webster performs all over the city and has performed
with the Colorado Symphony Orchestra and Broomfield
Civic Orchestra (see Figure 98).511 Liñan said about the
program: “sometimes these kids don’t speak Spanish,
and they communicate with their grandparents through
music. They build that culture and relationship.”512 Many
other mariachi bands exist and perform around the city.

**Folklórico dance**

Traditional folklórico is a style of dance, or danza, that
refers to many traditional dances from different regions
and states of Mexico. It can be traced back to ceremonial
and social dances of Indigenous people living in pres-
ent-day Mexico. Today folklórico incorporates influences
from Spanish culture, as well as Germany, France, Asia,
and Africa. Folklórico uses footwork, color, movement,
song, costumes, and dance to communicate and perform
historical folklore of Mexico’s different regions and states
(see Figure 99). The danza can depict different kinds of
stories including stories about animals, what life is like in
a specific area, or a historical event. Rhythms of footwork,
the music, and the clothing all offer clues about where a
particular danza originates.514

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510  “Mucho Mariachi: MSCU Denver’s Mariachi Los Correcaminos Tunes up for a Busy Weekend of Music,” *Metropolitan State University of Den-
512  Hernandez, “Denver Students to Fill Mariachi Teacher Void.”
513  Mark Piscotty, *Members of El Mariachi Juvenil de Bryant Webster Play in the Senate Chambers*, Photograph, 2004, Denver Public Library Di-
lórico-world-dance-2634432812.html.
Similar to mariachi, folklórico is important to Mexican, Mexican American, and Chicano communities and provides a key connection to cultural heritage. Dr. Trujillo co-founded Guadalupe Mestizo Folklórico Dance School at Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church (1209 W. 36th Avenue) in 1969 under the leadership of Father José Lara. This group offers free dance classes to the community and also organizes mariachi mass at the church. Dr. Trujillo sees folklórico as a way for people to connect with their heritage and Indigenous roots. Children respond to the movement and can learn more about their history through the performed folklore and history. According to Dr. Trujillo: “Identity is a powerful role of self. People experience an affirmation through the arts that transcends time and spaces and reaches our spirit. Danza is where our spirit lives.”

In addition to the Guadalupe Mestizo Folklórico Dance School at Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church, Denver has several well-established folklórico dance groups that perform regularly. Jeanette Trujillo-Lucero founded Fiesta Colorado Dance Company (now located at 1390 Brentwood Street in Lakewood) in 1972. The dance company performs folklórico and celebrates Mexican and Spanish dance styles. It also focuses on providing positive opportunities for children as well as performing and learning the arts.

Figure 99. A young man and woman dressed in Aztec costumes for a production presented by Fiesta Alegre de Denver and sponsored by El Centro Cultural, 1971.

Figure 100. Dancers perform at the celebration of Children’s Day at the Denver Art Museum, 2008.

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516 Ramirez and Trujillo, Video Interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales.
517 Kochaniec, Jr., Traditional Mexican Dancers Perform at the Celebration of Children’s Day at the Denver Art Museum Sunday, April 27, 2008.
opportunities for folkloristas in Denver and the surrounding area. Grupo Folklórico Sabor Latino (1815 W. 34th Avenue), a nonprofit that teaches dance and performs professionally, was established in 1987 under the direction of Lorenzo Ramirez. Ramirez designed the group around Raphael Zamarripa, one of the first folkloristas who came from Mexico to work with Chicanos in Denver.

Local and touring folk theaters have long been a mainstay of artistic expression for Mexican Americans. Traditionally, local theater groups have been organized by ordinary citizens and perform stories that connect directly to the experiences of their audience. As described by Nicolas Kanellos, these small theater groups “unselfconsciously

Theater

Local and touring folk theaters have long been a mainstay of artistic expression for Mexican Americans. Traditionally, local theater groups have been organized by ordinary citizens and perform stories that connect directly to the experiences of their audience. As described by Nicolas Kanellos, these small theater groups “unselfconsciously

Figure 101. Dancers from the Fiesta Colorado Dance Company perform at Lincoln Park in front of the Colorado State Capitol during the Cinco de Mayo celebration in Denver, 2012.
reflect the life, mores and customs of the grass-roots communities from which they have sprung and perform mainly for these communities.” As an artform, teatro plays are often brief and humorous, but with a specific message for the audience. Born out of the experiences of the actors, they are often written as improvisation and shared through an oral tradition. As these plays are performed by multiple companies, they evolve and change with each performance. The more modern Teatro Movement began as part of the Chicano Movement with Teatro Campesino (The Farmworkers Theater), founded by Luis Valdez in 1965 near Delano, California. Teatro Campesino’s early actors were farm workers improvising their own experiences, but the company steadily evolved into an award-winning troupe with international performances that inspired numerous companies around the nation.522

**Su Teatro**

One of those companies inspired by Teatro Campesino is Denver’s Su Teatro (Your Theater). Tony Garcia founded Su Teatro in 1971 as a student troupe in response to the destruction of his home neighborhood of Auraria (see Figure 102). This story was told in their original production El Corrido de Auraria (The Ballad of Auraria). Early on the company performed dramas written by Teatro Campesino and original works that reworked Aztec and Maya mythology into contemporary issues. Later works dealt directly with the Latino experience in Denver, exploring the issues directly affecting their audience.523 Garcia saw the strength of his two strongest performers, Yolanda Ortega and Debra Gallegos, who both joined the company in 1974, and wrote plays featuring them in leading roles. According to Garcia, “it made the best sense to create, explore and present them and the role of women at the forefront of the teatro,” while other companies wrote plays with men at the center of the story.524 Through the 1970s and 1980s Su Teatro performed around the Denver area, often at protests and marches as well as local theaters such as the Holiday Theater on W. 32nd Avenue. In 1992 Garcia purchased the old Elyria School building at 4725 High Street, where he established El Centro Su Teatro, which provided a home for the theater company but also served as a local community center built around the performing arts. Here Su Teatro created programs that still continue, including the annual Chicoano Music Festival, and XicanIndie Film Fest. Su Teatro also established the Cultural Arts Education Institute, which provides training in all aspects of the performing arts as well as reading and writing education through theater. In 2010 Su Teatro moved to its current location in the Denver Civic Theater at 721 Santa Fe Drive.525

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**Aztlan Theatre**

In 1966 Abel Gallegos purchased the old Santa Fe Theatre, originally built in 1927 and designed to accommodate stage productions and cinema. A former actor, Gallegos played Spanish-language films and planned to provide acting and dance classes in the building. In 1972 Tim Correa purchased the theater and renamed it the Aztlan Theatre (see Figure 103). A Chicano activist involved with the Crusade for Justice, Correa saw the theater as an opportunity to uplift himself and the neighborhood. Correa also opened Timeo’s Theater Bar next door (966 Santa Fe Drive, extant) and connected the two buildings. The Aztlan was one of only a few Spanish-language movie theaters in Denver. By the 1980s the Aztlan took on a new role as a concert venue for up-and-coming alternative rock bands. Groups such as the Red Hot Chili Peppers, Slayer, AFI, and others played at the Aztlan in their early years. It also became a center for electronic dance music in the city in later years.\(^{527}\)

\[\text{Figure 103. A 1973 photograph of the Aztlan Theatre.}\]^^528^^

**Teatro la Causa de los Pobres**

Another teatro company that performed in Denver in the 1970s and 1980s was Teatro la Causa de los Pobres. This company was composed entirely of women and their children and their performances dramatized the struggles faced by poor Chicanas, often dealing with the welfare system. As with other teatro companies, their plays were written from personal experience and stabbed sharp criticisms at the welfare system, the public schools, and the local police.\(^{529}\)

**Henry Lowenstein**

Although Henry Lowenstein was not Mexican, he fostered an interracial and inclusive theater tradition in Denver that was important to Mexican Americans throughout the city. Born to a Jewish family in Berlin, Germany, in 1925, Lowenstein escaped the Holocaust to London as a teenager and moved to the United States with his family after World War II. In the 1950s he moved to Denver and found work as a set designer at the Bonfils Theater. After his experiences of the Holocaust, Lowenstein made the Bonfils the first integrated theater in Denver. In 1972 he established the Festival Caravan Theater, also known as the Show Wagon, to take his productions to city parks and other locations around Colorado to provide theater for those who could not afford or otherwise access the traditional theater. Lowenstein embraced a range of cultural heritage in his productions, and the Show Wagon became a popular attraction for Latino families who gathered to watch performances at parks around the city.\(^{530}\)

**Literature**

Literature, including fiction, non-fiction, poetry, memoirs, and autobiographies, are integral to Latino culture and arts and provide creative expression on themes of family, religion, love, identity, and historical events. Until the late nineteenth century, oral traditions, including corridos (ballads), verses, riddles, folk tales, and jokes, were the primary method of sharing stories and continue to be important today. After Spanish-language newspapers and printers spread throughout Mexican American communities, written forms of literature (along with news, politics, and other items) became more widely distributed. See Chapter 5, Commerce for more on Denver’s Mexican American and Chicano newspapers. More research should be done on the history of Mexican American writers in Denver. This section focuses on Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales and Abelardo “Lalo” Delgado, both influential Chicano writers who emerged during the late 1960s as Denver became an important center of El Movimiento, the Chicano rights movement.\(^{531}\)

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\(^{527}\) Hernandez, “After Decades of Entertainment on Santa Fe Drive, the Aztlan Theatre Faces Its Future.”


\(^{529}\) Kanellos, “Folklore in Chicano Theater and Chicano Theater as Folklore,” 172.


Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales

Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales was the influential Chicano activist who founded the Crusade for Justice in Denver. In 1967 Gonzales wrote the epic poem, Yo Soy Joaquín, which helped ignite the Chicano Movement throughout the country and is considered the founding work of Chicano literature. Yo Soy Joaquín was one of the first pieces of art to convey the conflict, struggle, and beauty of Chicano identity and define Chicanismo as a mixture of pre-Columbian, Spanish, Mexican, and Indigenous cultures, unique to the American Southwest. The poem celebrates the endurance of Chicano culture despite the centuries of oppression, bigotry, and racism in the U.S., and is an important piece of Chicano literature.532

Here I stand,
Poor in money,
Arrogant with pride,
Bold with machismo,
Rich in courage
And
Wealthy in spirit and faith. . . .
La raza!
Méjicano!
Español!
Latino!
Chicano!
Or whatever I call myself,
I look the same
I feel the same
I cry
And
Sing the same. . . .
I am Joaquin.
The odds are great
But my spirit is strong,
My faith unbreakable,
My blood is pure,
I am Aztec prince and Christian Christ.
I SHALL ENDURE!
I WILL ENDURE! 533

Gonzales also spoke at numerous rallies and events in Denver, Colorado, and throughout the country, and his ideas and philosophy were published in the Crusade for Justice’s newspaper, El Gallo: La Voz de la Justicia. He is widely seen as a leader who encouraged and inspired many people to become involved in Chicano activism, much of which came from his writings and speeches.534 See Chapter 7, El Movimiento, for more on Gonzales and the Crusade for Justice.

Abelardo "Lalo" Delgado

Abelardo "Lalo" Delgado, who made his home in Denver, was one of the seminal poets of the early Chicano literary movement. Born in Chihuahua, Mexico, he immigrated with his mother in 1942 and went to school and worked in El Paso, Texas. He worked with Cesar Chavez in the 1960s and published his first collection of poetry, Chicano: 25 Pieces of a Chicano Mind, in 1969. His most famous poem, "Stupid America," was included in that volume and quickly became a classic influencing Chicano activists and authors across the country. The poem railed against resistance faced by many Chicanos/as from white-European society that assumed they were not intelligent or intellectual and should only be trained for physical work. “Stupid America” proudly proclaimed the artistic and intellectual spirit of the Chicano Movement. Other well-known poems by Delgado include “La Causa,” “The Organizer,” “El Vendido (The Sold),” and “The New Cross.” His poetry transcended the movement into the academic realm and was taught in the earliest Chicano studies courses. With Ricardo Sanchez, Delgado also established his own publishing imprint, Barrio Publications, to publish works by aspiring Chicano authors. As an academic he taught Chicano studies and helped to start Chicano studies programs at colleges across the West. In addition to his literary career, Delgado worked tirelessly as community organizer and labor activist engaged with youth and farm workers (see Figure 104). In Denver he was most active with the Colorado Migrant Council. Following his death in 2004, Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper appointed Lalo Delgado as the city’s posthumous poet laureate.535


534 Gonzales, Message to Aztlán: Selected Writings of Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales, xx–xxi

Figure 104. Abelardo “Lalo” Delgado working with the Colorado Migrant Council.  

Figure 105. Map of identified resources related to the arts and associated with Latino history in Denver.
Table 7. List of identified resources related to the arts and associated with Latino history in Denver

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site Name</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Designated Sites: National, State, or Local Landmark</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bryant-Webster Dual Language School</td>
<td>Northside</td>
<td>3635 Quivas Street</td>
<td>National Register, should be revised to include Latino history; State Register; Local Landmark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Café Cultura, Smith's Chapel, United Brethren Church, Denver Inner City Parish</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>910-912 Galapago Street</td>
<td>Local Landmark; State Register</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casa Mayan Restaurant</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>1020 9th Street</td>
<td>Within Ninth Street Park Historic District</td>
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<tr>
<td>Curtis Park Historic District</td>
<td>Eastside</td>
<td></td>
<td>Local Landmark</td>
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<tr>
<td>Curtis Park Creamery</td>
<td>Eastside</td>
<td>908 30th Street</td>
<td>Within Curtis Park Historic District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elyria School/El Centro Su Teatro</td>
<td>Eastside</td>
<td>4725 High Street</td>
<td>Local Landmark</td>
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<tr>
<td>La Alma Lincoln Park Historic Cultural District</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>La Alma-Lincoln Park, about W. 14th Avenue to W. 10th Avenue/Mariposa Street to Kalamath Street</td>
<td>Local Landmark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Alma Mural</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>La Alma Recreation Center, 1325 W. 11th Avenue</td>
<td>Emanuel Martinez mural, within La Alma Lincoln Park Historic Cultural Landmark District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mariposa Health Clinic</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>1020 W. 11th Avenue</td>
<td>Within La Alma Lincoln Park Historic Cultural District; Former Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ninth Street Park Historic District</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td></td>
<td>Local Landmark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our Lady of Guadalupe (Mural: The Apparition of the Virgin Mary to Juan Diego in Mexico)</td>
<td>Northside</td>
<td>1209 West 36th Avenue</td>
<td>Local Landmark, Carlota Espinoza mural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Cajetan Catholic Parish</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>101 Lawrence Way</td>
<td>Local Landmark; Original Location</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Undesignated Sites</strong></td>
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<td>Call for Action Center/Chicano Humanities &amp; Arts Council (CHAC)/Saint Patrick’s School</td>
<td>Northside</td>
<td>3401 Pecos Street</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chicano Humanities &amp; Arts Council (CHAC)</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>3401 Pecos Street</td>
<td>Original Location</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>941 E. 17th Avenue</td>
<td>Second Location</td>
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<td></td>
<td>725 Santa Fe Drive</td>
<td>Former Location (nonextant)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>772-774 Santa Fe Drive</td>
<td>Former Location</td>
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<th>Comments</th>
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<td>El Chapultepec</td>
<td>Eastside</td>
<td>1962 Market Street</td>
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<td><em>Grupo Folklórico Sabor Latino</em></td>
<td>Northside</td>
<td>1815 W. 34th Avenue</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Holiday Theater</td>
<td>Northside</td>
<td>2644 W. 32nd Avenue</td>
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<td><em>Museo de las Americas</em></td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>861 Santa Fe Drive</td>
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<td>Metropolitan State University of Denver</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>890 Auraria Parkway</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pirate: A Contemporary Art Oasis</td>
<td>Northside</td>
<td>3655 Navajo Street</td>
<td>Former Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam Sandos Westside Family Health Center</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>1100 Federal Boulevard</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Cajetan Catholic Parish</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>299 South Raleigh Street</td>
<td>Current Location</td>
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<td><em>Su Teatro Cultural and Performing Arts Center/ Denver Civic Theatre</em></td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>721 Santa Fe Drive</td>
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<td>Troy Chavez Memorial Peace Garden</td>
<td>Northside</td>
<td>3825 Shoshone Street</td>
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<td><strong>Undesignated Districts</strong></td>
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<td>Arts District on Santa Fe</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>Alameda Avenue to 13th Street/Kalamath Street to Inca Street</td>
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<td><strong>Murals (not shown on map)</strong></td>
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<td>A Colorado Panorama: A People’s History</td>
<td>Central Business District</td>
<td>700 14th Street, Colorado Convention Center</td>
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<td>History of the Westside Community</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>Santa Fe Drive and W. 8th Avenue</td>
<td>Leo Tanguma</td>
</tr>
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<td>In Peace and Harmony with Nature</td>
<td>Denver International Airport</td>
<td>Denver International Airport</td>
<td>Leo Tanguma</td>
</tr>
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<td>Latino Workers Door Painting</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>1031 Santa Fe Drive</td>
<td>Andrew Mendoza</td>
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<td>Learning From the Past, Focused on the Future</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>1151 Osage Street</td>
<td>Bob Luna and Martha Keating</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neighborhood Epic</td>
<td>Northside</td>
<td>I-25 Frontage Road (Kalamath Street) at 33rd Avenue</td>
<td>Bob Luna and Martha Keating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Pasada, Presente, Futuro</em></td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>John “Thunderbird Man” Emhoolah, Jr. (formerly Byers) Branch Library, 675 Santa Fe Drive</td>
<td>Carlota EspinoZa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff of Life</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>Auraria Campus, South Classroom</td>
<td>Emanuel Martinez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Children of the World Dream of Peace</td>
<td>Denver International Airport</td>
<td>Denver International Airport</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Resources not in Denver (not on map)</strong></td>
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<td>Arvada Center for the Arts and Humanities</td>
<td>Arvada</td>
<td>6901 Wadsworth Boulevard</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pirate: A Contemporary Art Oasis</td>
<td>Lakewood</td>
<td>7130 W. 16th Avenue</td>
<td>Current Location</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Strong neighborhood networks connect Latinos throughout the city, and Denver’s historic neighborhoods are the backdrop for day-to-day activities, gatherings, and significant milestones. As with other chapters, this chapter was informed by interviews and the public survey responses (see Chapter 1) in which people shared sites that are important to them, including homes, streets, community centers, churches, schools, parks, athletic fields, businesses, offices, and health clinics. This chapter provides an overview of the major topics important to neighborhood life and should not be considered a complete list of sites. For more information and for a spatial understanding of the identified sites important to neighborhood life, see Figure 119 at the end of this chapter, followed by Table 8 that provides a list of designated and known sites.

This chapter is closely intertwined with the themes, events, and individuals mentioned in previous chapters. As noted in Chapter 8, Religion and Spirituality; Chapter 9, Education; and Chapter 14, Arts, Denver’s neighborhoods feature countless essential places for Chicanos and Latinos, where people have fostered a strong sense of belonging, developed deep relationships, and feel connected and accepted. For example, the vibrant and profound Chicano murals found throughout the city have become beloved neighborhood gathering spaces, and many were created by artists from the community members and included children to help paint under their direction.

Families are the cornerstones or foundations of each neighborhood, brought together by school, church, recreation, and cultural activities. Most families have several generations living together or nearby, with grandparents and great grandparents helping raise and support families with younger children. Inter-generational activities held at parishes, schools, community centers, and other spaces keep people engaged and integrated into the community at all stages of life. This is particularly true of youth programs that provide structure and outlets for young people to stay active and learn about themselves and the world around them. Former city council member and Clerk and Recorder Rosemary Rodriguez, who grew up on the Westside, recalled: “The desire to provide for your family is admirable and what bound families together. Our family had multiple children; there was one Rodriguez in every grade. All families were like that and knew one another so that you knew you were safe with them. It was such a secure way to live.”

Mexican Americans in Denver neighborhoods lived among many cultures and ethnic groups, but the largest groups included concentrations of Italians, Jews, and Blacks, as well as white residents. Informal and formal inter-cultural relationships are an important part of these neighborhoods. These include the Centro Cultural (see Figure 106), a small group of Jews and Chicanos led by Judith and Jesse Sauceda that formed during the 1960s and opened a cultural center on the Westside at a Spanish Methodist church owned by the Inner City Ministry (935 West 11th Avenue, extant). Richard Castro and others started the Chicano/Jewish Dialogue group in the 1980s, and several Jewish attorneys worked with Latinos and Chicanos on civil rights cases as well as land rights cases to reclaim land in the San Luis Valley.

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performing and dancing to various cumbias, bandas and merengues; and the bouncing and tilting of lowrider cars." In addition to socializing and recreation, these parks and facilities also provide a place for youth to find employment and in some cases seek safety and refuge from gang activity. They are also spaces where people can gather for protests (for more information about protests and activism in parks, see Chapter 6, El Movimiento). James Mejia, who grew up on the Eastside, said that parks and recreation centers are critical to Mexican American culture. It was a “godsend to have a place to go in the summers.”

City parks, recreation centers, community centers, and sports

City parks are integral to Mexican American culture in Denver. Just about every neighborhood has a park, pocket park, or greenspace. Many of the parks in Denver have a recreation or community center in addition to playgrounds, picnic pavilions, and sports facilities like tennis courts and baseball diamonds. Dr. Sig Langegger, an urban design and planning professor, has written about the importance of public space to Mexican Americans and Chicanos in North Denver. Mexican Americans gravitate to parks with a plaza-like zócalo (public square) atmosphere, where people are gathered and engaging in a number of diverse activities. This includes “people fishing for dinner; children swinging at piñatas; people

The city parks provided a space for youth, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s. Like most city parks, Barnum Park (370 Hooker Street, extant) had a recreation center with a weightlifting room, multipurpose room, outdoor pool, playground, basketball court, and a picnic shelter with tables (see Figure 107). It offered several sports leagues for children and adults, including youth soccer and adult

539 Sig Langegger, “Viva La Raza! A Park, a Riot and Neighborhood Change in North Denver,” Urban Studies 50, no. 16 (2013): 3364.
540 Martinez et al., Video interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales.
softball, and programming for older adults including line dancing, crafting, and wood carving (and still offers many today). Councilwoman Jamie Torres remembers her grandfather had a group of five to six friends who would meet at Barnum Park to play sports when they were 14 and continued to meet there regularly to socialize into their 60s.

Tennis became a popular sport in the 1970s and 1980s for Latinos living near City Park (1700 N. York Street) and East High School (1600 City Park Esplanade). Dan Luna, educator, public servant, and tennis champion, was originally from Pueblo. His family started Luna Tennis, Inc., the first non-profit tennis agency in Denver to serve under-researched communities. They utilized City Park, which became an integrated hub for playing tennis among adults and youth where whites, Asians, Mexican Americans, and Blacks all played tennis together (see Figure 108).

Boxing was also a popular sport in Mexican American communities. According to Nita Gonzales (daughter of Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales), even though Mexican Americans experienced racism in the sport in the 1940s and 1950s, boxing provided a way out of the neighborhood. Gonzales was one of the most successful and famous boxers in Denver, traveling for fights in Nebraska, Kansas, and Minnesota, but drawing the biggest crowds in Denver at the Denver Coliseum. He trained at the Epworth

Figure 107. Barnum Park with Barnum Lake and Downtown Denver in the background, 2010.

541 Barnum Dog Park with Barnum Lake and Downtown Denver in Background.
543 Barela Rivera and Romero, Video Interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales; Torres, Video Interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales.
544 Robinson, “The Big Life of Larger-than-Life Dan Luna”; Martinez et al., Video interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales; Map questionnaire survey response provided on April 12, 2021 (respondent 62mzn7na2dob).
Boxing Club (1130 31st Street, extant) on the Eastside and won both the Golden Glove and the Diamond Gloves tournaments (see Chapter 7, El Movimiento, for more on Gonzales and the Crusade for Justice). Amateur boxing matches were held all around Denver, including a popular spot at Sloan’s Lake Park (1700 N. Sheridan Boulevard) in the building located on the northeast corner of W. 17th Avenue and Sheridan Boulevard (extant).

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547 Abarca et al., Video interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales.
Libraries

Like city parks and recreation centers, libraries provide a space for community development and growth. They also provide an important resource for a community that has experienced cycles of poverty and fewer educational opportunities than white communities in Denver. Having a library in the neighborhood and within walking distance provides enrichment for the entire community through access to resources like books, computers, and afterschool programming. Rosemary Rodriguez remembers when the Ross-Barnum Branch Library (3570 W. 1st Avenue, extant) was built on the Westside of Denver in 1953-1954. She remembers as a child picking the thickest book off of the shelf, The Pickwick Papers by Charles Dickens, because she did not want the book to end. The branch libraries also have books in Spanish and include selections about Mexico, Spain, and New Mexico.

Figure 110. Ross-Barnum Branch Library, 3570 W. 1st Avenue (extant), c.1955.

549 Friedrich, “Ross-Barnum Branch Library”; Rodriguez, Video interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales; Barela Rivera et al., Video interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales; Barela Rivera and Romero, Video Interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales; Maptionnaire survey response provided on March 23, 2021 (respondent 729mpi74uw7).

Celebrations

Fiestas, festivals, family picnics, and church bazaars are also important aspects of Mexican American and Chicano culture. These celebrations are held in neighborhood parks, along streets, and at Catholic churches within Denver neighborhoods. *Día de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead) celebrations started in the 1970s hosted by Pirate: A Contemporary Art Oasis (former location: 3655 Navajo Street, extant), the Chicano Humanities and Arts Council (CHAC, various locations), along Santa Fe Arts District (Alameda Avenue to 13th Street/Kalamath Street to Inca Street), and at La Raza (formerly Columbus) Park (1501 W. 38th Avenue, extant). Cinco de Mayo and Diez y Seis celebrations happened along the Santa Fe Arts District, and some of the first Cinco de Mayo celebrations were hosted by CHAC and held at Larimer Square (Larimer Street between 15th Street and 14th Street). Today Denverites attend Cinco de Mayo celebrations around the city including Civic Center Park (101 W. 14th Avenue Parkway, extant).551

Our Lady of Guadalupe (1209 W. 36th Avenue, extant) and St. Cajetan Catholic Parish (original location 101 Lawrence Way, extant; current location 299 S. Raleigh Street, extant), along with many Catholic churches in Denver host bazaars and religious festivals throughout the year (see Figure 112 and Figure 113). The bazaars and festivals attract many members of the community and include music, food, and dancing.552

![Figure 111. Cinco de Mayo on Santa Fe Drive in La Alma Lincoln Park neighborhood, 1973.](image)

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552 Martinez, Email interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Nicki Gonzales; Maptionnaire survey response provided on March 24, 2021 (respondent 72zkl4cht4ib); Maptionnaire survey response provided on April 10, 2021 (respondent 4sxe9d9ana7t).

553 *Cinco de Mayo.*
Figure 112. Announcement in the Denver Catholic Register advertising an annual bazaar at St. Cajetan’s Catholic Parish (original location 101 Lawrence Way, extant), July 16, 1953.  

Figure 113. Advertisement in the Denver Catholic Register announcing the Fall Festival at St. Joseph Catholic Church (600 Galapago Street, extant), October 8, 1975.
Cruising and lowrider culture

Cruising and lowriding bring people together to celebrate a wide range of creative expression in bikes, cars, art, music, and clothing, and are an important lifestyle for many Latinos in Denver. Cruising on Federal Boulevard has been a tradition for decades and a popular weekend activity, particularly on Sundays. Lowrider clubs organize family-friendly cruise events and competitions. Clubs also promote high standards for maintaining lowriders and create a sense of belonging for people with the same interests.\(^{556}\) As Councilwoman Jamie Torres explained, most people know that cruising involves lowriders on Federal, but she sees cruising as a community experience. She attends cruises on weekends to experience the “intensity and energy not just in the beautiful cars, but also the imagery that includes detailed iconography of Mayan, Aztec, Mexican, and religious images.”\(^{557}\) She noted that new residents who have recently moved to the Westside have called her office to complain about the crowds, cars, and noise that occurs on Sunday nights at locations throughout her district. These newcomers are not aware of the long-standing traditions represented by cruising.\(^{558}\) The continued popularity signifies the importance of cruising to Mexican American and Chicano culture, pride, and identity. In recent years, the City has started supporting cruising and lowriders, a major shift from the years when police and City officials targeted the activity as criminal and violent.

Cruising takes place at large vacant sites, usually parking lots, where people can gather to admire custom vehicles and meet friends. Drivers travel at slow speeds on city streets, displaying hydraulic lifts on their cars and elaborate paint jobs, designs, and artwork, with their stereos and loudspeakers playing rhythm & blues, rap, hip hop, and Mexican and Latino music. Well-known cruising sites on Federal Boulevard include Barnum Park (370 Hooker Street, extant), Grandpa’s Burger Haven (23 South Federal Boulevard, extant), and Columbine Steak House (300 Federal Boulevard, extant). 38th Avenue is also a popular cruising corridor. Businesses such as Sam’s Kustom Hydraulics (2165 W. Evans Avenue, extant) help people work on their cars. Sam Henry started his business in 1990 and is active in preserving and explaining the significance of lowrider culture.\(^{559}\) He and other business owners who customize lowrider cars work with people from all over Denver, the state, and country.

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\(^{556}\) “St. Joseph’s Church Fall Festival,” Denver Catholic Register, October 8, 1975, 32, Archdiocese of Denver Digital Repository.

\(^{557}\) Torres, Video Interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales.

\(^{558}\) Torres, Video Interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales.

\(^{559}\) Torres, Video Interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales.

A photographer in Denver, Armando Geneyro, began documenting lowriders in Denver to bring a greater appreciation for cruising culture. He takes photographs of lowriders in places where change is occurring in Denver, such as under the I-70 viaduct, which was recently torn down for the expansion of the interstate in East Denver.561

### Health and medicine

Health and medicine are deeply entrenched in Chicano and Mexican American communities through the traditions of family and faith. Curanderismo, a holistic healing practice involving both the mind and body simultaneously, is an ancient folkloric medicine that addresses the psychological, spiritual, and social needs of a person. It combines Indigenous and Spanish medical theories, Judeo-Christian religious beliefs, and modern western medical practices to treat a wide variety of maladies. Curanderos/as are people possessed with a “gift from God” to practice curanderismo. For centuries, curanderas were important leaders of the Mexican and Hispano communities, keeping villages together and providing health and medicine practices for community members. Today, many Chicano and Mexican American in Denver seek out curanderas, as well as western medical practices.562

Before the 1960s, many Denver neighborhoods lacked health care facilities. Combined with a distrust of western medicine and lack of health insurance, many Chicanos and Mexican Americans found it difficult to receive medical treatment.563 Rosemary Rodríguez remembers curanderas in the neighborhoods would treat many people. One of Rodríguez’s aunts was a registered nurse who could help treat symptoms of neighbors with teas and herbs and could also recommend when people should go to a western medical doctor for treatment. Rodríguez also knew a sobador, a traditional folk healer utilizing curanderismo who specializes in massage for sprains and strained muscles, who helped her with arthritis. “He knew how to help people where they hurt.” Without easy access to medical facilities nearby, Rodríguez also remembers a man from her neighborhood church who would drive people to a doctor on Downing Street.564

In 1968 the Sam Sandos West Side Neighborhood Health Center (current location 1100 Federal Boulevard, extant) opened. Once the center opened, people could walk to the center for medical treatment. Originally known as the Westside Health Center, the center was renamed in the 1980s after Councilman Sam Sandos, who was influential in getting the center open (see Chapter 6 to learn more about Sandos).565 A couple of other important healthcare

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564 Rodriguez, Video interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales.


Facilities to Chicano and Mexican American are El Centro de las Familias and Mi Casa Resource Center. El Centro de las Familias (original location 75 Meade Street, slated for demolition at the time of this publication; current location 1405 Federal Boulevard, extant) is a bicultural, bilingual mental health clinic located on the Westside. In the mid-1970s Diana Velazquez, a curandera, joined the staff as a secretary at El Centro de las Familias. While taking notes during a psychiatric consultation, she “felt compelled to intervene” and demonstrated her gift. Soon after, team leader Ernesto Alvarado applied for funds to hire Diana on as a team member. Diana practiced curanderismo at El Centro de las Familias and her work was “recognized, appreciated, and validated by both the institution and the community.”

Along with physical spaces, several organizations and facilities have created health campaigns over the years, including the “Aztec Warrior of Health” coloring book (see Figure 116). The West Side Coalition and the Colorado Heart Association distributed the coloring book on the Westside of Denver in the 1970s to help educate families about strep throat. To learn more about the Westside Coalition, see Chapter 6, Politics.

Members of Mexican American communities of Denver seek out both the healing practices of curanderismo and western medicine. This section only covered a few important health and medicine spaces. See Figure 119 and Table 8 at the end of this chapter for more resources not detailed here.

Protests and renaming parks

During the 1960s and early 1970s, as part of El Movimiento (see Chapter 7), Chicanos reclaimed public spaces in Denver, particularly the parks and recreational facilities that were being neglected by the City and in disrepair. The facilities had scattered glass and litter on the pavement next to the pools, broken restroom and playground facilities, and predominantly white staff who ignored the conditions and the Latino kids who used the facilities. Parks that became important protest sites during the Chicano Movement are La Alma Lincoln on the Westside, La Raza (formerly Columbus) on the Northside, and Mestizo/Curtis on the Eastside, where Chicano “takeovers” of the swimming pools within the parks occurred between 1969 and 1971.

The takeovers and eventual renaming of these parks with Chicano names are important victories for El Movimiento and reflect a long-held desire to honor and recognize the Mexican American and Chicano families who live in these neighborhoods, many of them for generations. Lincoln Park was renamed in 1971 to include La Alma (Spanish for “the soul”), although during the renaming ceremony, police disrupted the proceedings and threw teargas in the park and at many nearby houses when neighbors protested their presence. The oldest park in Denver,

567 Del Castillo, The Life History of Diana Velazquez: La Curandera Total, 229–31; Del Castillo, “Effective Management Strategies When Incorporating Curanderismo Into a Mainstream Mental Health System,” 80; Del Castillo, Video Interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales.
570 Denver, La Alma Lincoln Park Historic Cultural District Application, 26.
Curtis Park, was renamed Mestizo (“mixed race”)/Curtis Park in 1986, with the assistance of activist and politician Richard Castro, who grew up on the Eastside (see Chapter 6, Politics).571

After 40 years of demanding the name be changed to La Raza (“the people”), the City officially renamed Columbus Park in 2021. The original name honored the Italian Americans who had lived on the Northside since the early days of the neighborhood. By the 1960s most of the Italians had left the neighborhood and Latinos had moved in. Bitterness between the two communities sparked as Italian Americans felt their ancestors were not being honored, while Latinos felt the Italian Americans were unwelcoming and barring them from public spaces. During the Chicano takeover of the pool at La Raza, Chicano teenagers assumed the jobs once filled by white staff members, and the park became a vital center of Chicano activity, particularly for youth. An annual event in 1981 commemorating the takeover at La Raza ended in violence when police, claiming the event needed a permit, forcibly removed people from the park using dogs, tear gas, and arrests. In 1984, when Federico Peña was mayor, the pool at La Raza was demolished and a new pool built nearby at Aztlan Recreation Center (4435 Navajo Street, extant). The new pool was smaller and attracted younger kids, not teenagers. The removal of the pool continues to be a sore subject in the community, and some think its closure led to an increase in boredom and frustration among youth who instead turned to gangs in North Denver. In 1990 the City built a, pyramid-like shade structure with Aztec influences at La Raza calling it Plaza de la Raza (see Figure 117), and in 2016 artist David Ocelotl Garcia designed murals for the inside of the pyramid.572

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Neighborhood change in Denver since the 1980s

Many Chicano and Mexican American communities, including Denver’s, experienced continued racial discrimination and police brutality amidst a rise in gang activity and violence in the 1980s, exacerbated by increases in drug trafficking, teen pregnancies, and incarcerations.573 While there were already Mexican American and Chicano gangs in Denver, the arrival of new gangs from Los Angeles resulted in more drive-by shootings, retaliations between rival gangs, and gang initiation activities. Latino kids who felt disconnected from their own families found a sense of belonging, comradery, and a support system in gangs.574 Much of the violence took place in public spaces, such as parks, where residents who wanted to use the recreational facilities and seek refuge from the violence feared for their safety. During the summer of 1993, dozens of youths in Denver were injured or died in gang-related violence, in what became known as the Summer of Violence. Some of the kids had no connection to gangs but were innocent victims, killed for their Broncos jacket or a bag of Halloween candy.575

As part of the federal government’s anti-drug campaign known as the War on Drugs, police cracked down on these neighborhoods, arresting and incarcerating more Chicanos and Mexican Americans (and Blacks) and enforcing neighborhood curfews. Cruising became targeted by police, with Federal Boulevard and other streets barricaded to discourage the activity. If they could afford to, some families decided to move away, concerned about their safety. The neighborhoods of the Northside, Eastside, and Westside declined further due to disinvestment and lack of improvements in recreation centers, parks, and streets.576 In defiance of the gangs, several initiatives emerged for Latinos who wanted to take back their neighborhoods. Escuela Tlatelolco, a bilingual school started by the Crusade for Justice, welcomed kids who were expelled from other schools to attend their school (see Chapter 3, Education). Francisco Gallardo, a former gang member who grew up on the Northside and graduated from Escuela’s high school in 1991, founded Gang Rescue and Support Project (GRASP, 1625 E. 35th Avenue) and several other programs to help at-risk youth and counteract gang violence.577

Ana and Jim Chavez, the parents of Troy Chavez, who was killed while hanging out with his friends outside of Our Lady of Guadalupe Church during the summer of 1993, created the Troy Chavez Memorial Peace Garden (3825 Shoshone Street) in a vacant plot of land that had become an eyesore (see Figure 118. The garden includes Aztec and Christian artwork and symbols, hand-painted ceramic tiles that represent the kids killed during that summer, and a garden of plants and herbs important to Latinos that are provided to local residents and chefs. Latino children from the Northside are among the helpers at the garden, who learn how to grow and prepare the squash, chiles, and beans from their families and elders. The garden is a special place that honors the heritage of Chicanos and Latinos in a positive and transformative way.578

The historic neighborhoods that have been home to Denver’s Mexican Americans and Chicanos have changed rapidly in recent years due to gentrification, population growth, and demolition of older buildings in the city. Re-development has increased property values and made the neighborhoods attractive to new residents and investments. Many original buildings in the Northside and Eastside neighborhoods, mostly modest single-family houses, have been razed and replaced by large multi-unit housing units that take up the entire lot, changing the setting and character of the historic neighborhood. These changes are starting to happen more and more in the Westside neighborhoods, too. The neighborhood businesses have changed as well, with many small family-owned businesses replaced by new bars and restaurants.

573 Abarca et al., Video interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales; García, Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology Identity, 1930-1960, 301.
574 Torres, Video Interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales; Sandoval, Video Interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales.
576 Sandoval, Video Interview with Mead & Hunt, Inc. and Dr. Nicki Gonzales.
Figure 118. Troy Chavez Memorial Peace Garden (mural by Emanuel Martinez) in 2020.
Figure 119. Map of identified resources related to neighborhood life with Latino history in Denver.

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### Table 8. List of identified resources related to neighborhood life and associated with Latino history in Denver

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site Name</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td><strong>Designated Sites: National, State, or Local Landmark</strong></td>
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<td>Auraria Community Center</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>1178 Mariposa Street</td>
<td>Within La Alma Lincoln Park Historic Cultural District</td>
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<td>Baker Neighborhood Historic District</td>
<td>Westside</td>
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<td>Local Landmark</td>
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<tr>
<td>Byers Branch Library</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>675 Santa Fe Drive</td>
<td>Local Landmark</td>
</tr>
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<td>City Park</td>
<td>Eastside</td>
<td>1700 N. York Street</td>
<td>National Register</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic Center Historic District</td>
<td>Westside</td>
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<td>Local Landmark</td>
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<tr>
<td>Civic Center Park</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>101 W. 14th Avenue Parkway</td>
<td>Within Civic Center Historic District; Festivals, Activism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curtis Park Historic District</td>
<td>Eastside</td>
<td></td>
<td>Local Landmark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denver Inner City Parish</td>
<td>Westside</td>
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<td>Epworth Spanish Church/ Curtis Park Community Center</td>
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<td>Local Landmark</td>
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<td>La Alma Lincoln Park</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>1325 W. 11th Avenue</td>
<td>Within La Alma Lincoln Park Historic Cultural District</td>
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<td>La Alma Lincoln Park Historic Cultural District</td>
<td>Westside</td>
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<td>Local Landmark</td>
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<td>La Familia Recreation Center</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>55 S. Elati Street</td>
<td>Within Baker Neighborhood Historic District</td>
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<td>Eastside</td>
<td>Larimer Street between 15th Street and 14th Street</td>
<td>Local Landmark; National Register</td>
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<td>Eastside</td>
<td>1021 30th Street</td>
<td>Within Curtis Park Historic District</td>
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<td>Neighborhood House</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>1265 Mariposa Street</td>
<td>Within La Alma Lincoln Park Historic Cultural District</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ninth Street Park Historic District</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>Auraria Campus</td>
<td>Local Landmark; National Register</td>
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<td>Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church</td>
<td>Northside</td>
<td>1209 W. 36th Avenue</td>
<td>Local Landmark</td>
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<td>St. Cajetan Catholic Parish</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>101 Lawrence Way</td>
<td>Original location</td>
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<td>Tivoli Brewery and West Denver Turnhalle Opera House</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>900 Auraria Parkway</td>
<td>Local Landmark; National Register</td>
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<td>Berkeley Lake Park</td>
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<td>Casita Esperanza Health Station</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>801 W. 5th Avenue</td>
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<td>Centro Cultural</td>
<td>Westside</td>
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<td>Chávez (César E.) Park</td>
<td>Northside</td>
<td>4134 N. Tennyson Street</td>
<td>Chicano Movement, activism</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>3401 Pecos Street</td>
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Table 8. List of identified resources related to neighborhood life and associated with Latino history in Denver (cont.d)

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<td>725 Santa Fe Drive</td>
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<td>772-774 Santa Fe Drive</td>
<td>Former Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>222 Santa Fe Drive</td>
<td>Former Location</td>
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<td>Columbine Steak House</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>300 Federal Boulevard</td>
<td>Lowrider events</td>
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<td>Congress Park</td>
<td>In Denver, outside of map boundaries</td>
<td>850 N. Josephine Street</td>
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<td>Denver Coliseum</td>
<td>Eastside</td>
<td>4600 Humboldt Street</td>
<td>Boxing</td>
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<td>El Centro de las Familias Mental Health Center</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>75 Meade Street</td>
<td>Original location – slated to be demolished</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1405 Federal Boulevard</td>
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<td>Westside</td>
<td>621 W. 4th Avenue</td>
<td>Mini (pocket) park</td>
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<td>Gang Rescue and Support Project (GRASP)</td>
<td>Eastside</td>
<td>1625 W. 35th Avenue</td>
<td>Tramway Nonprofit Center (former tramway building)</td>
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<td>Southwest</td>
<td>3600 W. Mississippi Avenue</td>
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<td>Grandpa’s Burger Haven</td>
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<td>Lowrider events</td>
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<td>1501 W. 38th Avenue</td>
<td>Chicano Movement, activism</td>
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<td>Lakeside Amusement Park</td>
<td>Northside</td>
<td>4601 Sheridan Boulevard</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Pirate: A Contemporary Art Oasis</td>
<td>Northside</td>
<td>3655 Navajo Street</td>
<td>Former Location</td>
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<td>Ross-Barnum Branch Library</td>
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<td>Current location</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>990 Federal Boulevard</td>
<td>Former location (nonextant)</td>
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<td>Sam’s Kustom Hydraulics</td>
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<td>Sloan’s Lake Park</td>
<td>Northside</td>
<td>1700 N. Sheridan Boulevard</td>
<td>Boxing fights held in building located at W.17th Avenue and Sheridan Boulevard</td>
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<td>St. Anthony of Padua</td>
<td>Southwest</td>
<td>3801 W. Ohio Avenue</td>
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<td>Troy Chavez Memorial Peace Garden</td>
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<td>3825 Shoshone Street</td>
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<tr>
<td>Twentieth Street Recreation Center</td>
<td>Eastside</td>
<td>1021 20th Street</td>
<td>Close to Northside neighborhoods; Leagues and teams formed here</td>
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<td>Arts District on Santa Fe Drive</td>
<td>Westside</td>
<td>Alameda Avenue to 13th Street/Kalamath Street to Inca Street</td>
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<td>Northside</td>
<td>N. Tejon Street between W.40th Avenue and W.42nd Avenue</td>
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<td><strong>Outside of Denver</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Mariposa Center</td>
<td>Outside of Denver city limits</td>
<td>4704 Harlan Street, Suite 200, Denver, CO 80212</td>
<td>Health and medicine</td>
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<td>Pirate: A Contemporary Art Oasis</td>
<td>Lakewood</td>
<td>7130 W. 16th Avenue</td>
<td>Current Location</td>
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</table>
The context study provides an overview and framework to better understand the deep and rich history of Mexican Americans, Chicanos, and Latinos in Denver. All of this resulted from simply asking people: “What places in Denver matter to you, and why?” Based on community engagement, oral interviews, and archival research, the context does not cover every individual, site, or topic, given the sheer volume of the history. It is the start of a process for Denver citizens to understand, celebrate, and preserve the unique and vibrant history that these communities have brought to the city, and begin to identify sites and districts that could be landmarked for their contribution to Denver’s history.

Despite decades of change in Chicano and Mexican American neighborhoods and spaces in Denver, from gentrification, population growth, and demolition of older buildings that contribute to the historic fabric, there are still many places that tell the story of the city’s Mexican Americans and Chicanos and celebrate their cultures. As demonstrated in the successful local designation of La Alma Lincoln Park Historic Cultural District on the Westside in August 2021, Latino involvement is critical to preserving the places that matter, and in the process, educating the rest of the city. La Alma Lincoln Park neighborhood started to experience major changes in the twenty-first century with demolitions and displacement of the original residents. Concerned members of the local neighborhood association worked with Historic Denver, Inc. and Denver Landmark Preservation staff to preserve the neighborhood’s Mexican American and Chicano history and identity. La Alma Lincoln Park, which was originally listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1973, did not include any mention of the Latinos who had lived there for generations, but this has now been rectified with the local historic district designation. As a result, the oral histories, research, documentation, and community involvement that took place in the neighborhood created a historic cultural district designation that embraces the unique identity of La Alma Lincoln Park.

This Denver Mexican American/Chicano/Latino Historic Context is the first in a series of historic contexts developed by the Denver Landmark Preservation program to understand and recognize the diversity of histories represented by historically marginalized communities, and currently underrepresented in the City’s portfolio of locally designated historic structures and districts. In partnership with the Denver Landmark Preservation office, Professor Nicki Gonzales (Colorado State Historian), and the I Am Denver storytelling project, the preparers of this historic context gathered and synthesized an overwhelming amount of materials collected through archival research, oral histories, and survey responses.

This context study will be used by the City in the following ways (and other ways yet to be identified):^579

- Identify significant locations and buildings within Denver affiliated with Mexican American/Chicano/Latino history
- Preserve and protect Mexican American, Chicano, and Latino cultures and places
- Actively engage members of Mexican American/Chicano/Latino communities to nominate historic landmarks
- Ensure that all aspects of Denver’s history are recognized and preserved
- Diversify the Denver Landmark portfolio with more sites and districts for underrepresented groups
- Inform the citywide building survey, Discover Denver, a joint project of the City and Historic Denver, Inc.
- Inform the production of the I Am Denver mini-documentary on Denver’s Latino/Chicano history
- Guide the development of neighborhood plans, planning practices, and projects

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• Guide future historic contexts on underrepresented groups that explore the diverse ethnic and cultural history of Denver

• Support the city’s equity and inclusivity vision

Recommendations for future work

Additional research is needed to document sites and districts with the potential for national, state, and local significance. Future researchers will be able to use this context study as a guide to select sites and districts that interest them for future landmark potential. Recommendations for future research include:

• Present this context study to the public to disseminate the information, celebrate the significance of Latino/Chicano/Mexican American history in Denver, and gather public response

• Continue to interview people knowledgeable of Latino/Chicano/Mexican American history in Denver

• Continue to research the significance of Latino/Chicano/Mexican American history in Denver

• Consult national and international resources related to best practices for preserving sites of cultural significance

• Provide guidance to evaluate property types as local landmarks, or designation on the State Register, or National Register, including period of significance, thematic statements of significance, and other considerations for landmarking guidelines

• Define and describe property types such as churches, schools, community buildings, parks, medical clinics, businesses, houses, neighborhoods, and streetscapes

• Identify character-defining features of property types to be considered for potential landmarks

• Provide additional guidance for integrity considerations and elements that properties should retain to be considered eligible as local landmarks

• Develop a list of prioritized sites and districts for future preservation of Latino/Chicano/Mexican American sites in Denver

• Work with local property owners and other partners to identify opportunities to nominate properties for consideration
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