

INTRODUCTION: A BORDER REGION AND PEOPLE

Richard Griswold del Castillo

San Diego is known throughout the world for its beautiful beaches and mild climate, and civic boosters like to say that they live in “America’s finest city.” Not highlighted in the tourist promotions is the fact that the San Diego region is also home to several million Mexicans and Chicanos, people whose descendants founded this city more than 230 years ago. Except for advertising the restaurants and shopping opportunities in “Old Town” and suggesting possible trips to Tijuana, just across the U.S.–Mexican border, such publications give little attention to the historic and contemporary importance of San Diego’s Spanish-speaking population. A person scanning bookstore and library shelves or surfing the Internet will find very little of value written about the ethnic Mexican people in this area. They have been rendered invisible by long-term political and historical forces. This book seeks to give voice to the rich heritage of the Mexican-origin people who live in this important border region. The story that emerges in these pages is that of a long struggle by people of Mexican descent to have their society and culture respected and their views heard.

This work responds to a larger problem that pervades our local, regional, and national consciousness: the tendency to ignore, discredit, and discount the Mexican heritage in the United States. This constructed invisibility and devaluation begins with school textbooks, where aside from mention of the Mexican War in 1846 and César Chávez in the 1960s, virtually no mention is made of the Mexican American presence in U.S. history or of the importance of their culture. It also is a sad truth that few positive representations of the Mexican heritage appear in the electronic and print media. The lack of understanding of the political, economic, and cultural importance of the Mexican people in the United States is based on ignorance, which starts in the schools and pervades public life.

This book and others like it is a small step toward educating ourselves about the realities of our multicultural and globalized world as we enter the twenty-first century.

A famous philosopher once said “all history is local,” meaning that the largest theories and generalizations in history are based on interpretations of local events. So it is that the master narratives of U.S. history have been largely based on the experiences of Euro-Americans in the eastern regions of the United States. To understand the issues of the American Revolution, we study the history of Boston or of Washington, DC; and we study Charleston to understand the origins of the Civil War.

Chicano San Diego, then, seeks to add to a larger understanding of American history by telling a new story, that of the Mexican and Chicano peoples in San Diego, California. It is a story that has local, regional, and even national significance because it revises and challenges predominant interpretations and seeks to incorporate perspectives and experiences that traditionally have been excluded, omitted, and devalued.

San Diego, California, is located in the extreme southwestern part of the United States, bordering on Tijuana, Baja California Norte, one of the largest metropolitan regions of Mexico outside of Mexico City. San Diego County's population in 2000 was more than 2.8 million and has been growing by about 2 percent every year as people have been attracted here by the climate and jobs. Mexicans and those of Mexican descent comprised about 26 percent of the total, or 750,000 people, in 2000 making them the largest nonwhite ethnic group in the county (fig. 1.1). In the 2000 census African Americans comprised about 6 percent of the total and American Indians less than 1 percent. The city also has the largest population of people of Filipino descent in the United States (almost 100,000), and there are sizable groups of Asians, including Vietnamese, Hmong, Korean, and Chinese.¹

San Diego's history has been heavily influenced by the military, especially the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps, which have constructed bases throughout the county. Today, the county of San Diego has seven military installations with more than 148,000 employees. Defense spending in San Diego is more than 11.7 billion dollars a year, and almost 146,000 civilian jobs have been created to support the military.² Besides this, hundreds of thousands of former military families live in San Diego. One of the fastest growing groups in San Diego is seniors more than sixty-five years of age. Almost 500,000 seniors lived in the county in 2000, and

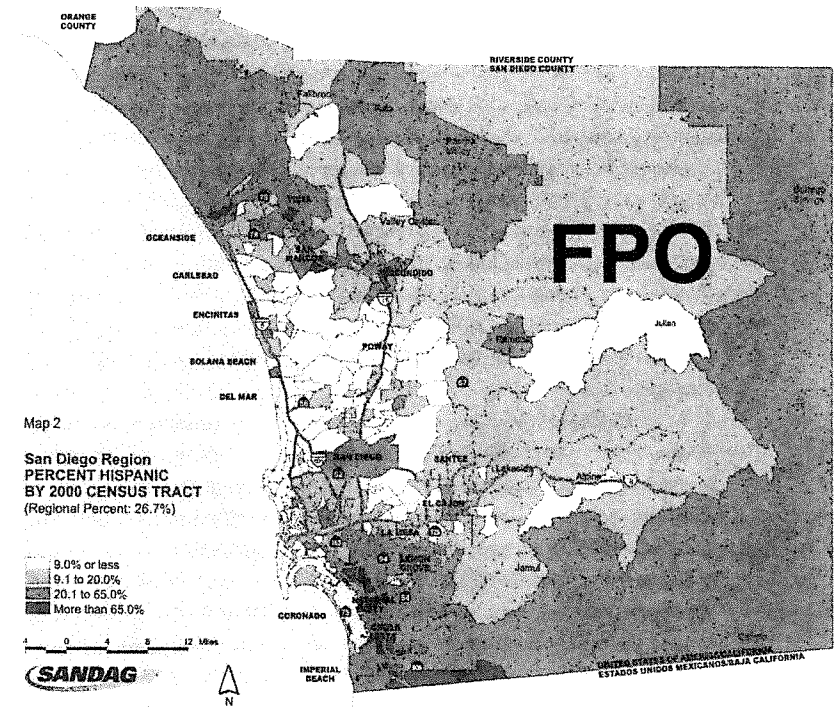


FIGURE 1.1. Map of San Diego, 2000 census tract by percentage of Hispanic population. (Courtesy of SANDAG, “Mapping the Census,” p. 7)

at that time this population had been increasing at a rate of more than 10 percent per year.³ This combination of military personnel and retirees has been the basis of a conservative, Republican-dominated elite that has sought to develop San Diego as a tourist attraction with minimal attention to the needs of marginalized groups.

Yet San Diego has been and remains a special place for the Latino peoples of California,⁴ having been founded as the first Indo-Hispanic settlement in California in 1769. The Spanish-Mexican pioneers developed the first agriculture and stock raising in the area and organized systems of government, law, and land

tenure that influenced the later development of the modern city of San Diego. When the Americans took over the region after the Mexican War, the Mexican population of San Diego was a diverse collection of Hispanicized Indians, mestizos, Spaniards, Afro-Mexicans, and other ethnic groups. This ethnic and racial diversity within the Mexican population, with its attendant mixture of cultures and languages, has been a defining characteristic of *la raza* (the people of Indo-Hispanic heritage). A complex terminology of identification has developed to try to capture this diversity: the terms *Chicana/o* and *Mexican American* are used to refer to those individuals of Mexican heritage, while the terms *Hispanic* and *Latina/o* generally describe membership in a larger Pan-Latin American culture. Regardless of the term we use to identify ourselves, our language, culture, and history are products of the mixture of European with indigenous and African peoples.

Certain forces have made the Chicano/Latino experience in San Diego different from that of Latinos in other regions. One difference emerges from the region's geopolitical setting. The fact that San Diego is on the international border, adjacent to a major Mexican metropolitan area, Tijuana, gives our region a special dynamic. Ties to Mexico are historic and ongoing. Geographic proximity has constantly reinforced the "Mexicanidad" of the barrios and *colonias*, not only through immigration but also through the influence of the media, tourism, and the establishment of binational friendships and family ties. San Diego has a greater proportion of Mexican-origin people than southern California's great metropolitan center, Los Angeles. San Diego's other Hispanic groups, from Central and South America, Puerto Rico, and Cuba, are less influential in molding the local Hispanic society and culture than is true elsewhere. Together with the Mexican inhabitants of Baja California Norte, the Chicano/Mexican population in this binational region numbers almost three million, a sizable linguistic and cultural bloc whose growing presence will play a major role in the future of the region.

There is a paradox underlying San Diego's history. Unlike the typical border city, San Diego has developed with its back to Mexico, as local economic and political leaders on the U.S. side have consistently ignored the ways in which the region is connected to Mexico through historical, cultural, and increasingly, economic factors. The result has been that most European-origin San Diegans do not think of themselves as living in a border city. They do not recognize the importance of the Mexican presence across the international line or within the

city. The tourist-oriented economy of San Diego and the relative prosperity of the region (compared to other border cities) has acted to insulate white San Diegans from their dependence on Mexicans and Chicanos for continued economic prosperity and for the cultural distinctiveness that makes San Diego an attractive tourist destination. This historical amnesia has had consequences for the development of Chicana/o society and culture here.

Another important factor shaping the special regional character of Chicanos and Latinos has been the nature of the English-speaking, non-Hispanic population that has dominated San Diego's political and economic development for the past 160 years. The "Anglos," themselves a diverse ethnic group, have controlled San Diego since 1848 and until very recently, the Mexican-origin population has been of little consequence in public life. Until just a few years ago, there had never been an elected city or county official of Mexican, Hispanic, or Mexican American heritage. San Diego's economy has been dominated by the U.S. Navy, aerospace, and tourism, sectors that have offered limited opportunities for Latinos living within San Diego. It is not surprising to find, from the most recent census, that Hispanic families have the lowest median family income of any ethnic group in San Diego county (\$26,453) or that, with the exception of American Indians, Hispanics have the lowest percentage of college graduates of any group in San Diego County (10 percent). Part of the puzzle in understanding why this is so resides in our collective ignorance of the lessons of the past.

A recent book, *Under the Perfect Sun: The San Diego Tourists Never See*, takes a critical view of San Diego's history and is a first step in uncovering the reasons why Mexicans and Chicanos in San Diego have remained marginalized.⁵ Mike Davis, in particular, reveals how the city has been controlled by an almost hereditary elite who have dominated the development and exploitation of the human resources of the region. Davis and his coauthors give some attention to the underclass of ethnic minorities and radicals who have unsuccessfully opposed the elite but do not give significant attention to the historic Mexican and Chicano presence in the city. Thus, even among sympathetic writers, the role of Mexicans and Chicanos in shaping San Diego has remained hidden. One consequence of *Chicano San Diego* will be to provide the ethnic Mexicans who live here, especially the youth, with a sense of belonging and of pride in their participation in the rich history of this region.

That's not to say that scholars have totally ignored the Chicano population. As early as 1990 Larry Herzog documented the plight of Chicanos in the 1970s

Where North Meets South. Subsequently, Leo Chávez brought the plight of documented Mexican immigrants out of the shadows and into the public light in his study *Shadowed Lives*. More recently, Carlos Vélez-Ibáñez offered a participant observation–based account of some of the events associated with the rise of Chicano Movement in San Diego in *Border Visions*.

But these efforts have largely been “snapshot” contributions to a mosaic whose tours have remained uncharted. Moreover, the limited images they present have been continually overshadowed by the representations of undocumented migration in the region, which have served to perpetuate the historic image of Chicanos in the U.S. borderlands as nothing more than commodity labor.

This anthology illuminates the emergence, experiences, and struggles of Chicanas/os in San Diego. In so doing we seek to advance knowledge about Chicanos in what historian David Gutiérrez calls “the third space”⁶ by building upon the paradigmatic contribution made by Vélez-Ibáñez in his sweeping review of the Mexican experience in the U.S. borderlands. Our work follows lead thematically, theoretically, and methodologically. Thematically, our methodology embraces and empirically underscores Vélez-Ibáñez’s vision of U.S. Chicanos as being “engaged in the process of cultural creation, accommodation, rejection, and acceptance.” We elaborate on this theme by documenting the struggle of Chicanas/os for social justice in a space where they have encountered and continue to confront oppression. Theoretically, we seek to unmask gender assumptions about Chicanas/os in the city, to use Vélez-Ibáñez’s terms. Methodologically, we follow him by combining traditional narratives with autobiographical treatments that provide insight into Chicanos’ contemporary lived experience from the bottom up. Such an approach enables us to reveal U.S. Chicanos in San Diego as more than just commodity or immigrant labor and instead as a people who have been creating a home, a cultural place and space, struggling for social justice on their own and in conjunction with their counterparts across the border. They have historically always been “Mexicans without borders,” a term Vélez-Ibáñez coined to describe the people who live in the third space. While the geopolitical border has shifted, other racial, political, cultural borders have emerged. Chicanas/os in San Diego have been challenging these less visible borders. The point is that borders as limiting and delimiting national and ethnic boundaries have been fluid through our history.

The chapters in this book are the result of the collaboration of scholars and activists, males and females, San Diego natives and migrants from other parts

of the Southwest and even Europe. Although it is a multidisciplinary anthology, several common themes tie the essays together. Some of the chapters in this book are historical narratives focusing on the mestizo settlers of this region as they attempted to survive in a forgotten and neglected outpost of the Spanish Empire and later the Mexican Republic. Other chapters are personal testimonies and reflections based on the experience of living in this dynamic border region. These personal stories are linked to the history of larger struggles of Chicana/o and Latina/o peoples throughout the Southwest.

The chapters are organized in roughly chronological order, beginning with a brief overview of the indigenous and early Spanish settlers in San Diego and ending with a first-person account of human and civil rights struggles along San Diego’s border with Mexico. Each chapter develops the themes of political and cultural struggle to overcome colonial submergence and how Mexicans and Chicano communities have engaged in creative elaboration of a third space, a place that is uniquely their own. The final chapters tell of Chicana/o efforts to preserve their space by engaging in political actions during the Chicano Movement, by creating a vibrant artistic renaissance, by forming organizations to oppose gentrification of their barrios, and by protesting and speaking out against the brutal treatment of undocumented immigrants.

In compiling this book, we have collectively been aware of how much our effort is a preliminary one. There is much more research and writing to be done on many of the topics raised in these pages. This anthology is a baseline survey of the Chicana/o history of San Diego, not intended to be exhaustive in coverage or groundbreaking in theoretical analysis. We hope our work here provides a beginning for others who will elaborate on this rich history.

As suggested, much of this book is the result of personal experience and draws heavily on oral histories and newspaper accounts. There are relatively few published accounts of the struggles of Mexican-origin people in San Diego. As might be expected, there is much more scholarship treating the founding of San Diego and its Spanish and Mexican periods up to 1848. The first two chapters of this book draw from the most important scholarly resources for this period, the most thorough being the multivolume *History of California* by Herbert Howe Bancroft. But this venerable survey suffers from a historicism that obscures and distorts the major themes that are important to understanding later Chicano history, most notably the importance of *mestizaje* (the mixture of indigenous, Spanish, and African elements) in the daily lives of Spanish-speaking San Diegans

and their struggles to achieve political and cultural autonomy. Additionally, the older sources also occasionally reveal disturbing cultural prejudices and anti-Mexican stereotypes. The first two chapters in this book therefore are a reexamination and reinterpretation of a well-established historical narrative.

Subsequent chapters, treating the ethnic Mexican experience from after U.S. annexation up to 1940, have had to draw on a limited body of scholarship, mostly published articles appearing in the *Journal of San Diego History*. An early pioneer in attempting to rescue the Chicano history of San Diego was Mario H. García, a well-known historian who in his youth taught at San Diego State University and researched the ways in which the San Diegan Californios experienced the American conquest and colonization after 1848.⁸ Another important contribution to the Chicano history of San Diego has been the research of Frank Norris, who wrote the first history of Logan Heights, a middle-class Anglo-American neighborhood that became a barrio.⁹ We also relied on Robert Alvarez Jr., whose father was a plaintiff in the first successful anti-segregation lawsuit in California in 1930. Robert wrote an account of that event which later was made into an important documentary film.¹⁰ Other published historical interpretations of the Chicanas/os' community struggle to gain a voice in San Diego have been written by Isidro Ortiz, who studied challenges to voting restrictions that denied Chicanos representation; by Gilbert Gonzáles, who studied the farmworkers who courageously confronted economic exploitation in the Imperial Valley; and by Richard Griswold del Castillo, who researched the ways in which Chicanos, Mexicanos, and Anglos interpreted a violent racial episode, the San Ysidro Massacre.¹¹ Of necessity, the contemporary history of Mexicans and Chicanos in San Diego relies on oral histories, personal reminiscences, and altered unpublished sources. Tragically, the archives of some of San Diego's most important Chicano artists, organizations, and leaders are not available to the general public because they have not been valued by libraries as resources. Herman Baca, founder of the Committee for Chicano Rights in the 1960s, has a huge archive that he allowed us to consult. Salvador Torres, a renowned artist who helped develop Chicano Park, also had a massive document collection, but because of lack of local interest, his archive was given to the University of California in Santa Barbara. We hope that this book will provide librarians and others with an impetus for accessing and preserving the many documents that remain scattered in private collections and which will be important in writing the next generation's history.

This book has as its audience, first, the Mexicans and Mexican Americans who live in this region. Most of them have come here from elsewhere, as migrants either from southern Mexico or from other parts of California and the Southwest. For them, the San Diego-Tijuana region is a foreign country, a place that has no history, a region where people are connected only by the happenstance of geography. We hope that this historical overview will serve not only to provide them with a sense of belonging to a larger tradition and heritage but also to motivate them to contribute to its development and manifestation. Another audience for this book is the non-Hispanic peoples of the region, many of whom are also migrants from other countries and places in the United States. We hope that this account will provide them with a new perspective on living in an area with a large Spanish-speaking population, a perspective that will enable them to relate to these people in constructive and positive ways. Finally, we hope to reach with our history people who live elsewhere in the United States and Mexico. They may have only a vague idea of where San Diego is located and who lives there. We sincerely hope that as a result of this book they not only will understand the region and its Hispanic peoples in a fuller way but also will come away with a greater appreciation of the richness of the Mexicano and Chicano heritage.

A brief introduction to the authors of the chapters will help orient the reader to the collective and individual resources that have been part of making this book. Richard Griswold del Castillo is a historian who teaches Chicana and Chicano history at San Diego State University (SDSU). His research interests have been focused on the nineteenth-century Southwest, in books such as *The Los Angeles Barrio, 1850-1890* and the *Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo: A Legacy of Conflict*. Richard helped in the development of the chapters dealing with San Diego's history up to the 1940s and coordinated the overall book project. Isidro Ortiz is a political scientist who also teaches in the Chicana and Chicano Studies Department at SDSU. He has been researching community organizations and development and has co-edited a number of books, including *Chicano Studies: a Multidisciplinary Approach* (with Eugene García and Francisco Lomelt) and *Chicanas and Chicanos at the Crossroads: Social, Economic, and Political Change* (with David Maciel). Isidro's understanding of how community organizations work has been valuable in writing the crucial chapter on the Chicano Movement in San Diego. Roberto Martínez is a community activist, the former director of the American Friends Service Committee in San Diego, responsible for

monitoring and acting on incidents of abuse of the human rights of immigrants along the U.S.–Mexican border. Roberto's rich experience in community organizing and in publishing annual reports summarizing the abuses suffered by Mexican immigrants made his contribution to this book especially valuable. Roberto developed the chapter dealing with the struggles of the Mexicano and Chicano communities in San Diego for human rights. Rita Sánchez is a professor of Chicano Studies and English at Mesa College who received her degree from Stanford University. She has had lots of experience in the arts, having owned and operated the first Chicano art gallery in San Diego and having organized a large number of art shows. Rita's research in family history has resulted in a book, *Cochise Remembers: Our Great-Grandfather, Charles Henry Coleman*, and many articles on family history. She is also author of "The Five Sanchez Brothers in World War II," a history of her uncles, her father, and her family during World War II. Her enthusiasm and experience in the local arts scene gives an important background for the chapter on Chicano arts in San Diego. María de la Luz Ibarra is an anthropologist who teaches Chicana and Chicano Studies at SDSU. She has written numerous scholarly articles about the lives of Mexican immigrant women who are domestic workers, and she is currently working on a book manuscript about this subject entitled, "Creen que no tenemos vidas." María's experiences growing up in a migrant camp in San Diego's north county combined with her academic training have given her special insights in writing about migrant women in San Diego. Emmanuelle Le Texier is a professor of political science at the Institut d'Etude Politiques in Paris, who got involved in researching barrio issues during her Fulbright visit to California in 2002. She has published several articles in France on Latino politics. Emmanuelle has a fresh and unbiased view of the ways in which Mexican Americans have mobilized. She represents a new generation of international scholars who are researching the U.S.–Mexican border and its communities. José Rodolfo Jacobo is a doctoral student at SDSU. His love of U.S.–Mexican border history has resulted in a number of important projects: a coauthored book entitled *Juan N. Cortina and the Struggle for Justice in Texas* (with Carlos Larralde) and a co-edited book of poetry and photographs entitled *The Giving Gaze*. Like María, Rudy grew up in the farm labor camps of north county as the son of a bracero worker. His interest and personal experiences in the Bracero Program give him special expertise in writing the chapter on San Diego during the 1950s.

In preparing this book, we have been helped by many individuals and

institutions. Our thanks go to the librarians at SDSU, who assisted us in tracking down rare and important documents. Also, the photo resources of the San Diego Historical Society and the photo archives of *La Prensa* were valuable, as were the archives of Herman Baca, head of the Committee on Chicano Rights. Additionally, the California Council for the Humanities helped support the construction of a Web site for use by high school students interested in the Chicano/Mexicano history of the region. We encourage teachers to use this Web site to supplement their teaching of California and U.S. history (go to www.rohan.sdsu.edu/dept/mas/chicanohistory/index.html). Finally, we want to give our appreciation to the many students who have encouraged us in our endeavor by helping us shape our vision of the region and its distinctive history and dynamic. Ultimately, this book is a challenge to them to go beyond our work and write more about their communities and families.

8

THE STRUGGLE AGAINST GENTRIFICATION IN BARRIO LOGAN

Emmanuelle Le Texier

As Rita Sánchez's personal reflections trace the Chicana Movement and the arts in San Diego, this chapter contributes another perspective on the role of women in political activism. In Barrio Logan, the issue of gentrification is an important one, especially in the global context of California's urban renewal policies and the rise in housing prices. Indeed, transformations provoked by the gentrification of this Mexican-Chicano community involve questions not only about the sense of history, space, and place but also about cultural recognition and political participation in the global city. Gentrification is yet another boundary that is being constructed within our community, one that barrio residents are struggling to overcome. The resistance to gentrification, led by barrio women, is a fascinating case study of Chicano politics. The gentrification struggle allows us to understand how the contemporary Chicano/Mexicano experience in one San Diego barrio is both unique and similar to experiences in other American barrios struggling for social justice. In the struggle against gentrification is an attempt to preserve a cultural and social space which is important to the values and heritage of Mexicans in San Diego.

The city of San Diego, billed as "America's finest city," has recently become one of the wealthiest areas in the United States. It is home to approximately 1.2 million people.¹ However, its economic success has not been distributed evenly, and the local Latino population has not benefited from it as much as the population at large has. First, the residential segregation in San Diego has deepened in the last decade, in both the city and the suburbs. In 1990, suburban Latinos lived in census tracts that were 58 percent non-Hispanic white, whereas in 2000, they lived in census tracts that were 45 percent white. Segregation rates are even higher for Latino children than for the adult population. The San Diego inner-

city barrio, located southeast of downtown, is composed of three neighborhoods: Barrio Logan, Logan Heights, and Sherman Heights. Together they comprise an enclave that has been ignored politically. A barrio has been defined as an ethnic neighborhood where at least 40 percent of the population is of Latino origin and at least 40 percent of the residents live in poverty.² The San Diego barrio fits this definition perfectly. The three neighborhoods of the barrio host approximately 5,000 inhabitants, 68 percent of whom are Latinos (primarily of Mexican origin); 40 percent live below poverty level. Second, the census data for 2000 reveal a set of factors that reinforces political disenfranchisement in the area. Specifically, the heterogeneity of migratory experiences within the barrio population contributes to a kind of political invisibility. Two-thirds of the residents are native-born, whereas one-third are foreign-born. Among the foreign-born population, only 22 percent are naturalized citizens. Political enfranchisement is thus limited to a fraction of the residents. In both local and state elections, voter registration and turnout are indeed extremely low. For instance, turnout for city council District 8 elections (which includes the barrio) ranged from 7 percent to 35 percent of the registered voters between 1983 and 2005. In addition, another large segment of the barrio population does not have legal immigration status. Thus, not only is access to voting limited, but for many residents the cost of visible participation in the community is possible deportation.

Moreover, socioeconomic criteria also negatively influence the political participation of barrio residents. Unemployment rates in this community were more than triple those for the entire city (21.7 percent versus 6.1 percent), and the median household income was 57 percent less than the median income for the city of San Diego (\$19,968 versus \$45,733), according to the 2000 census. Education levels are also extremely low, which disfavor involvement in politics. Finally, the barrio is not a place that many formal organizations and institutions have invested in. The community organizations inherited from the Chicano Movement that are still operating in the barrio have been incorporated into social service agencies (namely, San Diego County Chicano Federation; Barrio Station; Logan Heights Family Health Center, formerly known as the Chicano Clinic; and outside of the barrio, the Centro Cultural de la Raza). The Chicano Park Steering Committee, which is not yet incorporated, and other organizations born at the end of the 1980s are either mainly state-funded (Environmental Health Coalition and Metropolitan Area Advisory Committee) or voluntary grassroots organizations (Unión del Barrio, Raza Rights Coalition, Steering Committee).³

Community organizations encounter obstacles to activism in the barrio. This situation contrasts with the mobilization of residents during the Chicano Movement era described by Isidro Ortiz in chapter 6. In San Diego, numerous organizations were created by Chicano activists, and among the most symbolic of many political acts was the takeover of land to create a community park. Chicano Park and the murals that covered the Coronado Bridge pillars in the 1970s (and later in the 1980s) are a significant artistic and political heritage of the *movimiento* in Barrio Logan.⁴

References to the barrio in San Diego city official documents and in the main daily newspaper (*San Diego Union-Tribune*) demonstrate that a highly stereotyped vision of the area pervades. They describe the barrio as a dangerous and apathetic space. For instance, the 2002–2004 *Community and Economic Development Strategy Plan* for revitalization of the city of San Diego states that “low-income households are concentrated in the oldest and least expensive parts of the City. A concentration of poverty leads to what sociologists refer to as a ‘culture of poverty,’ in which social interactions are governed by short term survival, including success in high risk, high-reward, illegal activities, while the values of the broader culture, such as workforce responsibility and success at school are avoided.”⁵

The use of “culture of poverty,” Oscar Lewis’ highly debated concept,⁶ does not seem to be a matter of controversy for policymakers dealing with the barrio community in San Diego. Nevertheless, when Lewis elaborated the concept of a culture of poverty, he was describing the pathological expressions of a particular subculture among the poorest of Mexico City. He then applied the definition to Mexican immigrants in U.S. barrios to explain the passivity of the population and the self-reproduction of poverty. As a consequence, this perspective does not account for structural causes of poverty and social and political marginalization. At the same time, the widespread perception of a “culture of dependence” was then a major argument against the welfare and assistance programs in marginalized urban areas. Criticizing this theory, academics shifted their perspective in the 1970s and elaborated the concept of barrios as “internal colonies.”⁷ They suggested that barrios were the result of a history of class, ethnic, and cultural oppression. They also pointed out barrio residents’ structural incapacity to participate in the political process. To sum up, scholars generally outlined the political disenfranchisement of barrio communities and provided a justification for policymakers in search of reasons to limit public investment in these areas.

Reinforcing San Diego policymakers’ negative perceptions of the barrio, the *San Diego Union-Tribune* draws a portrait of the barrio as a dangerous place. A review of news articles from 2000 to 2003 reveals that of 230 references to the barrio, 65 percent are short reports relating to violence, crimes, and gang- and drug-related activities. The remaining 35 percent are long articles that describe the multiple risks present in that space, in predominantly negative terms. Different topics addressed include environmental hazards, homelessness, declining educational achievement, and health problems. The barrio is “a crime-ridden area,” the city’s “poorest neighborhood,” “plagued by gang-related activities and drive-by-shootings,” in brief a “ghetto.” For instance, “Of 42 homicides in the city during the period, 14 were in southeastern San Diego. Violence is just a part of life down here, always has been,” stated a newspaper article that seemed to present only one side of the story.⁸ The only positive images of the barrio are cultural references, especially to Mexican celebrations and culture (Cinco de Mayo, Virgen de Guadalupe), food traditions, and the Chicano Park murals. But even positive images recall internal problems of the barrio. As an example, one article stressed the role of local artists in the revitalization of the neighborhood but emphasized at the same time that they were fighting a losing battle: “Mario Torero restores a mural that he hopes will symbolize the rebirth of three San Diego inner-city neighborhoods. I thought the mural’s poor condition reflected the mood of the community—neglected, old and tarnished.”⁹ All representations of the barrio and discourses about it are important because the struggle over the meaning and the boundaries of the barrio is also a struggle for power. Barrio Logan is thus similar to other barrios in terms of socio-demographic characteristics: it is a disenfranchised community defined by low income and poor social, economic, and political achievement. It suffers from the consequences of the city of San Diego’s public policy choices.

Barrios and Political Participation

The phenomenon of residential segregation raises concerns not only of social justice but also of political incorporation. Residential segregation refers to the degree to which certain types of people live separately from one another. To the extent that segregation constrains social, educational, political, and economic advancement for ethnic groups such as Latinos in the United States, it is a salient public policy issue. Ghettos and barrios are radical figures of the multifaceted urban marginalization of minorities in American metropolises.¹⁰ Barrio

residents have been defined as apolitical or politically deficient. Many believe that neighborhood poverty leads to political passivity, and the few existing empirical studies certainly support the lack of participation in these areas.¹¹ The number of Latinos living in impoverished barrios continues to grow at a rate that is disproportionate to their representation in the overall population. From 1970 to 1990, the number of Latinos in barrios rose from 730,000 to more than 2,000,000. In 1990, when the Mexican-origin population represented 5.4 percent of the total U.S. population, 14.3 percent of them lived in barrios.¹² Barrios are characterized by physical deterioration (vacant lots, housing in disrepair, abandoned housing, and low rates of homeownership); economic depression (low employment and labor force participation, long working hours and low wages, sectorized occupation, low household income); and social marginalization (prevalence of single-parent families—especially female-headed families—poor educational attainment, high teenage pregnancy rates). These characteristics are present in the San Diego barrio.

Nevertheless, a shift in perspective may lead us to question the thesis that barrio residents are not politically involved. I argue that previous models are not totally accurate, because literature on political participation has focused on conventional forms of participation (such as electoral behavior; membership in unions, political parties or formal institutions; and campaigning activities) and ignores gender. Instead of asking why barrio residents do not participate and what conditions lead to political incapacity, I propose to widen the definition of political participation to any “activity that has the intent or effect of influencing government action—either directly, by affecting the making or implementation of public policy, or indirectly, by influencing the selection of people who make those policies.”¹³ This broader definition enables me not only to focus on a diversity of unorthodox forms of participation but also to measure outcomes differently. I ask the following questions: Which unorthodox forms of participation may take place in the barrio? Which resources make the emergence of collective action possible in the barrio? Scholars have rarely addressed poor people’s political activities, except in the negative context of urban riots or upheaval. When confronted by the Chicano Movement involving barrio residents in the late 1960s or by the Civil Rights Movement, they opted to analyze collective action as a psychological disruption that served to alleviate grievances.

Some authors have argued that violent protest is the only effective form of political participation available to marginalized populations.¹⁴ I shall develop

another approach to the study of poor people’s political participation by stressing the role of representations, symbols, and collective identities as determinants for collective action.¹⁵ In addition, I rely on the standard definition of “social capital,” that is, networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefits to formulate new hypotheses regarding participation in the barrio.¹⁶ I use the case of the struggle against gentrification in Barrio Logan in which respondents have expressed resistance to the ongoing urban renewal process there. Interestingly enough, the voices heard are mainly women’s. First, I will demonstrate the extent to which gentrification has become a mobilizing agenda for barrio residents, and especially for women. Second, I will emphasize that certain forms of resources, such as social networks based on collective identity, extend the definition and role of social capital in determining participation.

Methodology

Barrio Logan, located in the southeast section of San Diego, California, has not been studied by political scientists except in the late 1960s and early 1970s. From a theoretical perspective, the literature specific to San Diego and to the barrio is extremely scarce and dates back to the War on Poverty program. San Diego has always been portrayed and considered as a place where nothing much happens or where everything is “under the perfect sun.”¹⁷ Various hypotheses can explain this lack of interest. First, scholars have studied mainly Chicago, Los Angeles, and larger southwestern cities. Scholars of Mexican American or Latina/o political participation have focused more on electoral participation or pan-ethnic forms of activity. Local research traditionally has favored nonlocal issues such as border policies or binational and transnational politics. Second, the decline in political mobilization after the 1960s Chicano Movement has given the impression that there is no longer any political activity. The community organizations surviving from that time have become part of regular urban politics. They are much less threatening to established power and work mainly within the political system. As a consequence, the context seems less favorable for the study of political mobilization. Third, minorities in San Diego have long been denied access to the electoral sphere. The 1990 redistricting and lawsuits led by the Chicano Federation of San Diego County helped terminate the at-large election system and initiate the rise of Hispanic/Latino electoral representation at both city and state levels. Nevertheless, San Diego’s political system is still perceived as “static and boring.”

I conducted an ethnographic study in the barrio from August 2002 to December 2003, observing community meetings, cultural events, political demonstrations, and marches. I participated in the daily life of the community at different stages and levels (voluntary work). I designed a photographic database in order to present the diversity and complexity of the barrio. In addition to participant observation, I held ninety-eight semi-structured interviews with community leaders, members of organizations, elected officials, and representatives of government agencies involved in the barrio; and eighteen life-story interviews with non-mobilized residents. More than a hundred informal discussions took place during the fieldwork. In addition, I observed citizenship classes in barrio schools during a period of four months. During the classes, I distributed a questionnaire to a sample of residents who were first-generation Mexican immigrants applying for citizenship. The questions concerned political participation issues, dual nationality, socialization, citizenship practices, and electoral representation. Finally, I examined local newspapers and archives from the San Diego City Redevelopment Agency for a twelve-year period, from 1991 to 2003. I used this triangulation of sources and methods to provide as complex and comprehensive a picture of the barrio as possible.

It is often stated that poverty leads to mistrust and is strongly associated with fatalism. In particular, civic culture theorists have linked this distrust to the development of a passive political culture among Mexican-origin people.¹⁸ Indeed, people in barrios have little confidence in the system or in other people. The *desconfianza* (mistrust) is expressed both horizontally, along class lines, between legal and illegal immigrants, residents and citizens, first and second generations, or renters and owners; and vertically between residents and public authorities, political leaders and local representatives, developers and landlords, and so on. The *desconfianza* factor hindered my entry into the community. As a local artist warned me, "the Chicano Movement was like a big table, some of the people sat there and were sharing their meal, some others just wanted to be close to the table, to grasp some part of the meal and leave: So, where will you be seated? What do you want from us, and what will you do and give to us?" Multiple outsider factors (nationality, racial background, and gender) delayed the process of my acceptance by residents. Simultaneously, these factors helped differentiate me from both community members and institutional representatives. They provided a source for curiosity and trust, openness and comfort. This fieldwork leads me to argue that the main outcome of barrio residents' resistance

to gentrification is indeed the framing of the barrio image and of its territorial and symbolic boundaries.

Gentrification in San Diego

Gentrification is the process "by which poor and working-class neighborhoods in the inner city [neighborhoods that have previously experienced disinvestment and a middle-class exodus] are refurbished via an influx of private capital and middle-class homebuyers and renters."¹⁹ It usually happens in three phases: (1) the deterioration of life and housing conditions; (2) a transitory period characterized by renovation of housing and "beautification" usually by Anglo outsiders; and (3) a final phase where only former homeowners among the original residents remain in a mainly Anglo neighborhood. Indeed, it is not a phenomenon specific to San Diego. Paradoxically, after a period of official neglect of deprived areas, a new form of interventionism is taking place in American cities. These newly adopted policies aim at encouraging private enterprise to make up for government disinvestment through a policy of preferential taxation to favor free enterprise in certain urban areas (enterprise zones) and the promotion of inner-city revitalization with community involvement (empowerment zones).

San Diego local government initiated a process of urban renewal in the late 1980s. The "redevelopment," "revitalization," and "beautification" programs started with large investments in the downtown area, which was transformed into an entertainment and commercial area (with cafés, restaurants, movie theaters, etc.). The construction of the Padres baseball stadium accelerated the gentrification. Meanwhile, the City of Villages plan promoted a "smart growth" approach and focused on redeveloping "historically or culturally distinct communities."²⁰ Notably, since part of the barrio was turned into a Redevelopment Project Area in 1998, residents have suffered from a sharp increase in rents, eviction, and displacement (fig. 8.1). As a resident stated, "They [elected officials] have to be aware that here, two or three families live in one house in order to afford the rent, that there is no privacy for anyone, that some of them live in garage rooms, and that we need apartments for low-income people."²¹ In fact, data show that 80 percent of San Diego inner-city barrio residents are renters. More than one-quarter of the barrio population spends more half of its household income in gross rent; and more than half pays one-third or more.

The complexity of gentrification is reflected in the changing discourses in the media and by public officials about San Diego's "poor inner-city area." The

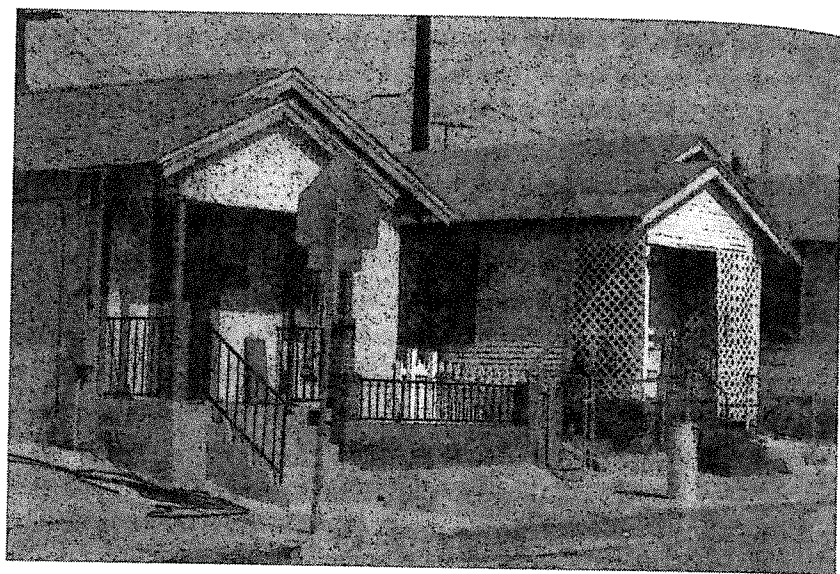


FIGURE 8.1. Casitas built in the 1920s to house Mexican immigrant families in Logan Heights barrio. Still in use today, they are prime targets of urban redevelopment. (Courtesy of Richard Griswold del Castillo)

metaphors have shifted from the barrio as a “gang-plagued neighborhood” to a “vibrant residential community.”²² An optimistic vision stresses the revitalization of neighborhoods through ethnic mixing and private investments. But a pessimistic approach would instead link beautification projects with a form of urban “cleanup” (also labeled a “strategy of containment”) that pushes away certain categories of the population from a historically Mexican-origin space. Because recent urban changes threaten barrio residents both individually by displacement and collectively by the disappearance of their community, gentrification constitutes a mobilizing agenda. It activates social networks to resist displacement.

Gender, Gentrification, and Participation

To demonstrate my argument, I take the example of DURO—Developing Unity through Resident Organizing (in Spanish, *Desarrollando Unidad a Través de Residentes Organizados*). Barrio residents created DURO, an almost exclusively female grassroots group, in the fall of 2000. A loose voluntary association of first- and second-generation Mexican-origin women and students comprises

DURO. It is dedicated, among other things, to the defense of barrio renters and residents against forced and unlawful evictions. The association also lobbies for low-income and affordable housing units, and promotes community input regarding the development of vacant lots in the barrio. As a flyer states, members “who work or were born and raised in the communities of Logan Heights and Sherman Heights [gathered] to dialogue about signs of gentrification that seemed to have gained momentum with the Ballpark development and the downtown redevelopment efforts.” The community meetings were held either in private homes or in the local Sherman Community Center. The organization’s first victory happened when a DURO member won an eviction court hearing in May 2001. This resident had lived for twenty-three years in the same property, a two-bedroom apartment she was renting for from \$300 up to \$400 and \$550 a month. Now the same unit, after being rehabilitated, commands double that rent. Nevertheless, the resident finally got displaced. She recalled the forced eviction as follows: “I felt it was unfair, it was unfair the way the owner evicted us, because he said he was going to call la migra [the Border Patrol]. I got sick because of the dust and the stress, yes, because of the dust falling when he started to demolish and renovate the house while we were still living there. We were still in there, because the owner only gave us eight days’ notice, and we had nowhere to go. . . . I lived twenty-three years in this house.” As another resident noted, “In San Diego, everything is more expensive, homes, rents. Before, we paid \$500 for a two-bedroom apartment, now it is almost double that. They renovate houses, they send la migra to people, and then rents skyrocket. I am lucky because I bought my house almost ten years ago. But people cannot afford to live here anymore.”²³

The urban transformations sparked a variety of responses, such as door-to-door contacts, distribution of bilingual flyers on tenants’ rights and responsibilities, petitions for rent stabilization, community meetings, and marches. For instance, on June 30, 2001, more than one hundred residents participated in a march to protest displacement.²⁴ Another march called the Trail of Tears March (*Caminata de Lágrimas*) took place and banners read: “We are organizing to claim our human right to housing. Our inherent dignity is being violated”; “Make your voices heard”; “Aquí estamos y no nos vamos!”; “En unión hay fuerza”; “Únase a nuestro esfuerzo comunitario!”²⁵ The association attempted to raise consciousness about the housing problem during city council meetings but it got only limited media coverage, mostly in local Spanish-language television channels and newspapers (*La Prensa San Diego*). In 2002 the organization

tried to build coalitions and networks with other groups, but the mobilization began to decrease. From 2003 onwards, DURO started to meet on a more regular basis, addressing the specific issues of the use of vacant lots in the barrio and low-income/affordable housing projects.

But DURO's most important aspect is that it is constituted mainly by women. Gender difference in participation has been overlooked in the literature, especially because theoretical analyses have focused on certain forms of conventional participation (turnout in elections, election to government positions, financial contributions). Certainly, three main determinants affect the degree of women's participation in such traditional avenues: differential access to resources, in particular to education; lower integration in the workforce and other social networks, which decreases their chances of being recruited into political activities; and finally, difference in political orientations: less access to information, interest in politics, and feeling of political efficacy than men have. Classic literature would focus on women's political deficiencies, in particular among low-income Mexican or Mexican-origin women.²⁶ Margarita Melville labeled them "twice a minority."²⁷ But barrio women are more likely to be four times a minority: as women, as Latinas in a Latino-dominated environment, as Mexican-origin individuals in a racialized society, and as low-income barrio residents. It is thus even more striking that barrio women led the resistance to gentrification. Why do women mobilize against gentrification? How is gentrification a gendered agenda that channels participation?

Public and Private Spheres

I suggest that barrio women's participation is essentially linked to the gentrification issue for two main reasons: the barrio space is highly invested with social meanings for the community; and domestic and community space are intertwined in women's representations and actions. By questioning the traditional dichotomy between private and public spheres, we can understand how women's civic involvement in grassroots associations might provide more benefits to them than would entry into conventional politics.

First, DURO members and residents' narratives constantly illustrate two conflicting visions of space. Elected officials, promoters, institutional representatives, and media discourses present the barrio as a materialized space, a product of costs and benefits. The terms *revitalization*, *beautification*, *revival*, *cleanup*, and *redevelopment* are metaphors of the reification of the barrio territory. A

district official expressed her perception of gentrification in these terms: "In terms of issues, I think housing is what my constituents are worried about, the first issue they are concerned about, to beautify the areas, such as Barrio Logan and Sherman Heights." Redevelopment projects are conceived as a privatization of the space, carried out through a rhetoric of progress and security, the stigmatization of the homeless population, and an agenda of ethnic and economic diversity. In contrast, members of DURO and barrio residents recall that the neighborhood space is a product of common history shared among generations. They have a collective desire to preserve the cultural specificity of their community. One activist stated: "The rent is increasing a lot. Then there are no homes anymore for low-income people. . . . It is not fair. This is a very old community, a Latino community, for the Latinos, and it is not good that the Americans come here. Because every community has its own thing, right?"²⁸ DURO members feel attachment to this territory, because—simply stated—living in a Mexican barrio is something important to them.²⁹ Thus, in these opposite representations, some individuals seek to maximize the exchange value of the space whereas others privilege its intrinsic value. That's why the struggle against gentrification is a struggle not only for the defense of a physical space but also for the definition of symbolic boundaries and collective identities.

Second, resistance to gentrification is indeed a defense of private homes against eviction and rent increase, but it is also a defense of the overall community. Barrio women see gentrification as a threat because it implies a dramatic disappearance of domestic and community space. Not only are homes being destroyed and renters evicted, but also vacant lots, public parks, community centers, and the character of streets are being redefined by gentrification (fig. 8.2). Studies show that women's common preoccupations with basic common rights, such as education, health, and housing, are essential for collective participation and politicization. In this respect, how increasing housing costs affect housing and living conditions is a key issue. As a DURO member stated, "One of the main problems is to have affordable housing, because there is very little affordable housing here. I think that for a kid to do well at school, his family has to be in a good situation, because when a kid goes to school without food or without a home to sleep in, how do you think he is going to do at school?"³⁰ As a consequence, barrio women link the private and the public spheres, reinventing forms of participation, dialogue, and political activism that extend beyond the family space. As Pardo noticed in her study of Mexican American women activists in Los

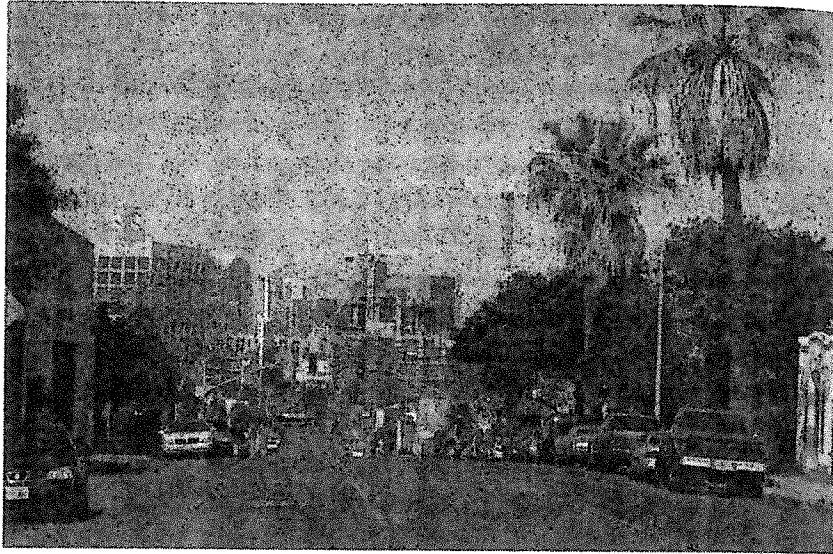


FIGURE 8.2. National Avenue near the heart of Barrio Logan, showing the ongoing redevelopment of the downtown area. (Courtesy of Richard Griswold del Castillo)

Angeles, “The quality of life in a community reflects unrecorded social and political processes, often originating in grassroots activism. Different from electoral politics, grassroots activism happens at the juncture between larger institutional politics and people’s daily experiences. Women play a central role in the often unrecorded politics at this level.”³¹

If gentrification threatens the public space, it also overlaps into the domestic sphere, and vice versa. One DURO participant remembers the struggle to get a public meeting room: “We struggled for a long time because we did not have any fixed place to meet, the majority of people missed the meetings, because we were always changing from one house to another.”³² An example of this overlap is manifested in the lack of public resources that transforms private homes into meeting places for the association.

The mobilization against gentrification shows that collective action happens in the barrio and is gendered, in particular because of the issue at stake. It is then important to ask what kind of nonmaterial resources barrio women use to enact

this participation. I suggest that ethnic and territorial identity forms one of the essential symbolic resources present in the barrio.

Collective Identity and Participation

Collective identities are socially constructed processes difficult to label because they are both reasons for and results of collective action that is intimately imposed, voluntarily chosen, and internalized. They have a complex situational, contextual, and political genesis, but they might favor the emergence of collective action. In the San Diego barrio case, chosen or imposed Latino-origin, Mexican-origin, or barrio-origin identities are all situational. Ethnic identities are used as both reactive and proactive means to define and preserve barrio community boundaries. Scholars have largely focused on ethnic identity as a resource for the elaboration of specific claims and as a means for collective action.³³ Group identity constitutes a resource in the struggle against identified outsiders or gentrifiers. I argue that DURO members use both ethnic and territorial identities. The fact that barrio residents share a set of symbols and representations of their community space helps them build a sense of self-affirmation. Residential segregation is experienced as social and political exclusion and becomes, paradoxically, a source for claiming a right to “live together in difference.” Communities are constructed symbolically over time.³⁴ Barrio residents have built a community, that is to say, a unit of belonging whose members perceive that they share moral, aesthetic/expressive, or cognitive meanings, thereby gaining a sense of personal as well as group identity.

First, narratives show that DURO members and women activists are limited in their choice of resources to build common frames of action and have to use ethnic identity as one resource. In fact, the construction of cultural similarities is not necessarily rational, instrumental, or conscious. It is not always a matter of choice but more often of imposition. At the same time, politically involved individuals have a tendency to use the frames elaborated by the Other. In-group/out-group thinking is constantly present in narratives that identify “the enemy” as “white,” or more frequently, as foreign—“they” or “them”—or as a pejorative other: “they” are “not Mexican,” or “not Latino.” Any whites, be they public authorities, property owners, developers, or journalists, are identified as gentrifiers or developers. The struggle against gentrification is often phrased as a denial of the “whitening” of the area, which contrasts sharply with the metaphors of “cleaning up” used by

the gentrifiers. A comment by a community activist expresses this dichotomy: "We are saving this neighborhood, with anger, determination, but we will save it from that; it has already been under attack, in particular with the urban City Planning Department, who is our greatest enemy. This is the issue of the last Mexican American community on the southeast of California."

The barrio's community identity is preserved through the protection of its Mexican history or Mexican American roots. But the reality is more complex than ethnicity, since identified outsiders may share the same ethnic background or, in some cases, may live in the barrio. In these cases, the narratives appear to be more territorial and stigmatize the outsiders as people who "are not from here," "were not born here," "do not live here," "do not belong here," or "do not even come here." During one meeting, a woman declared her anger against outsiders in the following way, "We formed ourselves because there was no organization in the barrio, and those organizations that exist are created by outsiders. The other day we had a community meeting. People came from all over the place, they said: we need this here! They don't even live here!" Such discourses do not fix the limits of who is part of the barrio and who is not based on racial or ethnic categorization, but rather show the complexity and debates on the determination of community boundaries.

The second marker of collective ethnic identity for mobilization is the use of the Spanish language. The inability to speak English and the linguistic isolation of barrio residents are indeed strong obstacles to their participation. Speaking only Spanish or having limited English, as much of the first-generation immigrant population in the barrio does, can be analyzed as a basis for discrimination and political powerlessness.³⁵ Fluency in the dominant language also conditions access to the workforce, educational success, and integration into the broader society. In the barrio, data from the 2000 census show that almost 38 percent of the population is linguistically isolated and an additional one-third reports difficulties in speaking English.³⁶ At the same time, a more instrumental perspective on language is interesting to consider: that the capacity to speak Spanish might be used as an instrument for internal solidarity and community empowerment. Language can be seen as an oppositional resource that links Spanish-speaking people together. A Mexican-origin DURO member expresses her desire to link non-English speakers with bilingual ones: "My mom is Mexican, no habla inglés; they don't want to challenge because they've been oppressed for so long. . . . People were scared because they don't know, pero sí pueden hablar." Language use

is a vehicle for intragroup protection and reciprocal support. Second, bilingual activists might choose to use Spanish to mark politically and symbolically their relationship to the outsiders. The contextual shifts from one language to another are striking. Speaking Spanish during a meeting may force the outsiders to respect the use of the group language. It forms an attempt both to show systemic oppression by the dominant group and to claim recognition of cultural rights. In part, the use of Spanish might compensate for the lack of traditional resources (money, members, material capital) for political participation. For instance, complaints about translations during public meetings are frequent. One resident had to summarize a meeting with city and district representatives. The first thing he recalled was "The translation was terrible, he was distorting all of what people said. . . . We have to track the entire process, because this is supposed to be an open process." The presence or absence of translation, its quality and accurateness, and its objectivity or distortion, is a matter of conflict. As a matter of fact, symbolically and politically, the debate over language use represents a discussion of cultural and ethnic-specific rights that gives existence, voice, and visibility to the group.

The notion of belonging to a specific territory forms the third component of collective identity. Deeply intertwined with ethnic identities, the representations of the barrio as a common cultural place constitute a powerful tool for the construction of a common identity. El barrio is presented as a social space defined by its territorial boundaries, which have to be preserved (streets, parks, shops, etc.). These physical boundaries delimit who is part of the community and who is not. Direct, personal contacts among residents are extremely important because they allow organizers and potential participants to align frames and transmit cultural messages about the particularities of the space. Collective action against gentrification is rooted in a reaction to interventions by challengers: "I want to live here because this is my barrio. If I buy a home, I will buy it here."³⁷ In addition, the barrio is defined positively as our community (*nuestra comunidad*), a place of identification, which can become a place for self-determination. Affective ties to the space play an important role in strengthening horizontal networks. An evicted barrio resident, an active member of DURO, talks of her desire to come back to the barrio: "my wishes now . . . are to go back there. . . . I feel a strong identification because everyone is Hispano there. . . . Over there, there is the bazaar, the farmers market, I feel more identified over there."³⁸ Social ties are thus grounded in the emotional bonds among barrio members. They favor trust and civic and moral commitment thanks to identification with a common shared space.

The feeling of belonging to a group and a specific territory turns into group consciousness, group identity, and eventually into a feeling of political efficacy and capacity. As a consequence, even though they may not be political in origin or intent, affective ties may help recruit people and develop a commitment to the group or the community. In that sense, the feelings of injustice in the face of evictions, rent increases, and worsening of living conditions and the feeling of efficacy to make a change are rather a product of than a reason for the emergence of collective action. In the barrio, the “cognitive liberation” process is fomented through the activity of DURO members and residents, who frame their action as a defense of a cultural and ethnic space. In the following section, I argue that women use barrio social networks and gendered social capital to develop collective action.

Gendered Social Capital and Participation

Gender solidarity in the San Diego barrio establishes bonding forms of social capital that overcome the distrust present within the barrio population. People who are intimately associated tend to build the same views of the world and of the situation they are embedded in. These social ties increase the likelihood of having common ideas, values, interests, and identities, which are the basis for collective action. As a consequence, informal social networks build relations of trust and reciprocity. Putnam’s previously cited definition of social capital as “networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefits” is useful for understanding how political participation emerges in the barrio. It suggests that mobilization can be based on qualitative resources specific to the barrio. In fact, social capital encompasses strengths arising from relationships of mutual trust and collaboration.³⁹ In an impoverished area, however, social networks are often truncated, not only because distrust runs deep, but also because contacts with external social networks are almost nonexistent. Starting with the question, What kind of benefits do women get from membership in DURO? I have come to distinguish three groups of women who have interests in linking together. Their promotion of reciprocal help generates trust, lowers the costs of participation in the barrio, and transforms social networks into political ones.

First, single mothers participate in collective action against gentrification because it provides them with resources they otherwise would not have access to. Census data from 2000 for family type by presence and age of related children

show that in the barrio, female-headed families represent more than 27 percent of all families, and 70 percent of those families have children under eighteen, with an average of 4.5 children per family. Single mothers share meals or information about jobs, prices, and schooling; and exchange clothes, advice, or tips during meetings, potlucks, or fundraising events. A single mother affirms, “The other women always tell me, ‘Go and study English at an evening class. You can do it!’ they tell me. After work, sometimes some of them take me to school. It is difficult, by myself with my kid. But they say, ‘you can do it!’ And I go.”⁴⁰ As a consequence of such networks, single mothers gain material and nonmaterial advantages that help them cope with deprived living conditions.

The second group of women who establish horizontal solidarity networks in the barrio are undocumented women. The fear of deportation and the risks of being arrested by la migra in a border city such as San Diego are high, as post-9/11 Border Patrol cruises in the barrio, on the trolley, and even in front of the Mexican consulate have previously shown. For instance, a barrio activist recalled the dramatic consequences of this policy: “There are still a lot of people without documents here. One day, la migra came at the school entrance, outside of the school, and they arrested a father who was there waiting for his kids. The mother was supplicating to la migra. They took him away; they arrested him, in front of his children.” But despite the risk of gaining visibility in the community, undocumented women evaluate the costs of collective action in comparison to the symbolic benefits of action. Undocumented women give value to action as the only way of surviving available to them. Being part of a semi-formal group gives them social status, recognition, and embodiment. They perceive involvement as part of a re-humanization of an invisible minority. As another resident said: “For lots of people without documents, they think they have no rights, but as human beings they have rights!” Access to collective action provides acknowledgment of the contribution undocumented families make to the community.

Finally, ties across generations—both between first- and second-generation Mexican-origin women (immigrants and U.S.-born), and between younger and older women—are essential for two reasons. On one side, the transmission of knowledge, experiences, and stories constitutes a fundamental aspect of the political socialization of young activists: “What I like here is the presence of professional and community women. . . . I can spend three hours in a meeting and not get bored, because I can listen to them and their different points of view, and that’s the way I learn about the situation.”⁴¹ Meetings in private homes are

particular moments to share experiences, cultural practices, and memories of past history and collective identities. On the other hand, collective events are key moments to transmit the action repertoires inherited from past struggles or mobilization.¹² For instance, repeated references to the birth of Chicano Park by a community takeover of public land during the Chicano Movement connect women with a successful instance of community activism. As a participant stated during a discussion, grassroots mobilization has yielded victories in the past: "The reality is that we have to get people active in the process, like when they took over Chicano Park land, right? The community took it over!" Even if idealized, romanticized, or reconstructed, the collective memory is passed from generation to generation, thanks to the social networks established among the different segments of women. In summary, women build up community-based activities and solidarity networks that develop their sense of belonging and civic duty. This form of gendered social capital enhances individuals' capacity to join together in collective action to resolve common problems. It leads to political engagement.¹³

Conclusion

DURO members and barrio residents' resistance to gentrification causes us to reflect, first, on the meaning and value of active citizenship and political participation; and second, on the different avenues available for exercising a political voice in a disenfranchised community. Barrio residents are not politically passive or deficient. Barrios are political spaces where mobilization happens without intervention from outside. Women's community involvement against gentrification demonstrates the importance of preexisting relationships of trust and mutuality among friends and neighbors. Shared concerns about housing and displacement, about community boundaries and collective identity, serve to mobilize residents. They reinforce the politicization of barrio residents and reduce the costs of participation. In turn, they can catalyze more formal political activities as skills and feelings of political efficacy grow. The barrio benefits from this gendered social capital because social ties are transformed into bonding social capital and political networks.

In other words, qualitative research and study of narratives not only make barrio residents visible in politics, but they transform the concept of political participation. In this particular context, social capital is mobilized as a political resource to strengthen civic involvement. Nevertheless, barrio women

encounter obstacles in their fight against gentrification. In fact, however much barrio women struggle, obstacles limit their capacity to effect change. First, they need to establish bridging social capital—that is, forms of vertical networks with other organizations—to accomplish their goals. Second, they need to explore different ways to frame the public agenda. As a participant in a DURO meeting pointed out, "Imagine how powerful we can be if we unite with residents and unions and connect with workers, *en unirse todos* [unite everyone]." But this second step still seems difficult to achieve in the San Diego barrio case. The local environment, quite hostile to immigrants and immigrants' claims for cultural or political recognition, does not offer many opportunities for such a movement. In fact, barrio residents' struggles have rarely been publicized in the local media and barely heard by the local authorities, and have obtained few concrete results. The gentrification process is underway, and public policies have not dramatically changed since the beginning of barrio residents' organization. Nevertheless, pressure exercised during city council meetings and by more formal organizations has succeeded in putting the low-income housing issue on the agenda. It might indicate an opening of the political structure that might allow barrio residents to be heard.