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Activist Legacies: Connecting Current Struggles for K-12 Ethnic Studies to Local Histories, the Example of La Puente High School in the 1960s–1970s

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Abstract

This article draws on school board minutes, newspaper articles, and oral histories from the 1960s and 1970s to (a) highlight an overlooked activist legacy for ethnic studies in the multi-racial working-class Los Angeles County suburb of La Puente, and (b) offer strategies for how students, teachers, and community members might work to co-learn some of their local histories via ethnic studies. As California school districts rush to satisfy Assembly Bill 101 to ensure high school seniors can complete a semester-long course for graduation by 2029–2030, this article and the examples of early activism at La Puente High School are a reminder of the limits of a one-size fits all approach to ethnic studies and the importance of attending to local struggles and how they intersect with larger national and transnational dynamics.

Keywords: Ethnic Studies; Activism; Suburban Struggles; Black and Latina/o Coalition Building; Excavating Community Histories; 1960s-1970s

In March 2022, residents and community activists, including members of ¡Juntos Podemos/Together We Can! celebrated the unanimous passage of a resolution for Intersectional Ethnic Studies in the Hacienda La Puente Unified School District (HLPUSD). Community pressure and California Assembly Bill 101 mandating that ethnic studies be offered in high schools by 2025–2026 facilitated the approval of this resolution institutionalizing ethnic studies "curriculum, classes, and pathways across TK-12 for all its schools within five (5) years" (HLPUSD Resolution No. 2021/22-22, 2022).

This was a multi-generational victory. Yet as the historical document on record, the resolution excluded any mention of the struggle for such classes by earlier generations or that ethnic studies classes are not new to district schools. Regardless of intent, such absences undermine community activism and ethnic studies' focus on local communities' knowledges, histories, and experiences (see Ochoa & Ochoa, 2022; Valenzuela, 1999).

This erasure is not unique. Until recently, ethnic studies classes have tended to center national and urban struggles from the 1950s Civil Rights Movement and the 1960s–1970s Black Power and Chicana/o Movements, along with select individuals and organizations such as Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Cesar Chavez, the United Farm Works, the East Los Angeles 1968 School Blowouts, and the San Francisco State Third World Strike. As important as these histories are and how they have influenced other organizing, local and suburban struggles have often been overlooked. Likewise, administrators and elected officials often take credit for changes made under their terms in ways that obscure the roles of community activists' collective labor in pushing for transformation (see Coreas et al., 2020; Ochoa, 2021). This invisibility misrepresents history and social movements. It perpetuates incomplete images of activism and can also demobilize action if community struggles are ignored or co-opted, and community power usurped.

These understudied histories must be corrected, and they are teachable moments in ethnic studies. They offer opportunities for learning about and documenting local histories to expand understanding of activist legacies and contribute to on-going transgenerational struggles (see de los Ríos et al., 2022; Ochoa, 2022b). Toward this end, this article draws on oral histories and archival materials (a) to recover community activism for ethnic studies in the Los Angeles County suburb of La Puente in the 1960s–1970s that preceded the passage of the recent ethnic studies resolution by over fifty years, and (b) offer suggestions on how students, teachers, and community might work collectively to co-learn some of their local histories.

As California school districts rush to satisfy Assembly Bill 101 to ensure high school students complete a semester-long course for graduation by 2029–2030, this article is a reminder of the limits of a one-size fits all approach to ethnic studies and the importance of attending to local struggles as part of larger national and transnational movements. It is also a call for today's ethnic studies classes and future generations of students to continue excavating activist legacies and pushing for more just schools and societies.

A Multi-Racial Blue-Collar Suburb

La Puente is about twenty miles east of downtown Los Angeles in the Eastern San Gabriel Valley. From the mid-1950s through the 1970s, when the area's walnut and citrus industries were subdivided into relatively affordable tract houses, La Puente transitioned from an agricultural town with a long-established Mexican barrio in the town's center to a uniquely blue-collar, multi-racial suburb (King, 2006; Ochoa, 2004).

While suburbanization was occurring in the San Gabriel Valley, in Los Angeles, Latina/o, Black, Asian American, and other poor communities were being massively displaced with the building of freeways, sports arenas, schools, and businesses (Johnson, 2013). Then, in South Central Los Angeles, the 1965 Watts Uprisings occurred. As one of the nation's most significant urban rebellions, Watts-area residents spent six days rebelling against "the police as an occupying force" (Pulido, 2006, p. 70), resulting in further movement of urban residents to the growing suburbs.

In the Eastern San Gabriel Valley, African Americans were largely steered to one neighborhood on three concentrated streets from Greenberry Drive on the margins of La Puente (*Los Angeles Sentinel*, 1990; Ochoa, 2024). White homebuyers lived throughout the city, but as more people of

color moved in, many whites left, and by 1970, white residents were only a slight majority at 51%; 46% of residents were Latinas/os, predominantly Mexican American, and 3% were African Americans (Ochoa, 2004; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1971).

Most La Puente-area youth attended La Puente High School (LPHS) in the Puente Union High School District which became the Hacienda La Puente Unified School District in 1970. The LPHS student demographics reflected the city: 49% were Latina/o, 44% white, 5% Black, and 1% Asian American (*Los Angeles Times*, 1972). Yet, the school's educators, curriculum and larger campus climate were largely white, a fact that fueled much of the activism highlighted in this article.

Today, 81% of La Puente's thirty-seven thousand residents are Latina/o/x. The remaining residents are Asian and Pacific Islander (13%), white (3%), and Black (1%). Forty percent of La Puente residents are immigrants. Sixty-six percent of adults have received a high school graduation or higher, and the median household income in 2022 dollars was $77,000; 10% of residents live below the poverty line (U.S. Census, 2022).

While communities of color and working-class communities are not new to the suburbs, it is only within the past couple of decades that researchers have moved beyond Los Angeles and focused on San Gabriel Valley's suburban areas (see Calderón, 1991, 1995; Cheng, 2013; Fong, 1994; González, 2017; Guzmán et al., 2020; Horton, 1995; Hung, 2013; Ochoa, 2004, 2013; Saito, 1998; Saavedra, 2018; Tseng, 1994, 1995; Valle, 2009; Zarsadiaz, 2022). Together, these studies highlight the significant roles of the San Gabriel Valley in the making of the larger Los Angeles region, complicate facile constructions of Los Angeles by attending to the specificity of contexts and are among the precursors to the on-going call for scholarship on suburban communities of color (see Lewis-McCoy et al., 2023; Wiese, 2004). Yet, largely absent in these studies and the teaching of ethnic studies is an in-depth focus on the 1960s–1970s and the histories of resistance and activism in the Valley. This period marks a time before the area became predominantly Asian American and Latina/o/x and when Mexican Americans, African Americans, and white allies fought for greater access, equity, and justice, helping to lay the groundwork for today's struggles.

My Positionality and Methodology

Writing about La Puente is personal. As a life-long resident and with familial ties to the region—my Sicilian and Nicaraguan immigrant families moved to the city in the 1950s, my work is informed by academic scholarship, personal experiences, and thirty years of research. I have conducted over 200 oral histories and interviews with La Puente-area residents and educators and been involved in struggles for educational justice (for examples, see Ochoa, 2004, 2007, 2013, 2022b; Ochoa et al., 2023). For this current work, I analyzed the La Puente City council minutes from city incorporation in 1956 through 1976, the school board minutes from the Hudson Elementary District and the Puente Union High School District (1960–1970) and the Hacienda La Puente Unified School (1970–1980). I also researched relevant newspaper articles from the 1950s-1970s and reviewed local church and NAACP records from 1964–1970s and school yearbooks from the 1970s.

To flesh out what I found in these archival materials, I completed thirty-one oral histories with people who lived or worked in the La Puente-area at any point during the 1960s and 1970s. I also completed five informational interviews with more recent community leaders. These oral histories

and interviews ranged in length from 30 minutes to three hours and averaged eighty minutes. Writing about activism and creating a space for community members to share their experiences is part of the process of remembering and space-making that is integral to unmasking local activist legacies.

Legacies of Struggle: The Fight for Educational Justice in La Puente, 1960s–1970s

Fifty years before the district adopted the 2022 ethnic studies resolution, in February 1972, over two hundred people packed the Hacienda La Puente School Board chambers. Among their demands, the La Puente-area Organization of Mexican American Communities (OMAC) called for:

> The Board of Education of the Hacienda La Puente School District makes it a graduation requirement for all high school students to take at least 10 units, or one year, of Chicano and Black Studies. (HLPUSD Board Meeting Minutes, February 10, 1972)

This was the latest set of demands focused on improving educational conditions. For over ten years, predominately Black and Mexican American residents and students had been challenging multiple forms of discrimination, establishing organizations and pushing for change. This history is among the overlooked precursors in the 1960s–1970s leading to the district's passage of ethnic studies in 2022.

Establishing the La Puente-West Covina National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)

In 1962, Black youth picketed La Puente High School (LPHS) when school administrators ignored Black students' complaints that a minstrel show was being held where white students dressed in black face and reproduced racist characterizations (Simmons, 1960-62, p. 104). In 1964, frustrated with ongoing discrimination, Black residents established the La Puente-West Covina branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) which later became the San Gabriel Valley NAACP. They fought segregated housing in West Covina and curriculum tracking, IQ tests, racist books, and other exclusionary practices in schools (Lane, 1967; Ochoa, 2024). They also advocated for human relations courses (Robertson, 1967). First established around World War II, human relations programs focused on monitoring racial discrimination and enhancing cross-racial relationships through dialogue, education, and understanding (Calfano & Martinez-Ebers, 2020; Ethington & West, 1998).

The Organization of Mexican American Communities (OMAC)

By 1969, anger over educational injustices grew, and La Puente High and neighboring Bassett High School community members formed a chapter of OMAC, the Organization of Mexican American Communities to advocate for the education of Mexican American students and ensure school administrators no longer "ignored" Mexican American youth (Elwell, 1970; *Los Angeles Times*, 1971; Ward, April 11, 1972).[57] According to the 1970 OMAC President Gloria Herrera, one of the group's main criticisms was that "the whole system is geared for Anglos" (as quoted in Elwell, 1970).

[57] OMAC was a member of the Congress of Mexican American Unity which was comprised of 250 organizations (Santillan, 1978, p. 148).

Although Mexican American students were nearly half of LPHS's student population, the school had no Mexican American administrators, one half-time counselor, and only 5 teachers, resulting in less than half a percent of the teachers (Elwell, 1970). Like the NAACP, OMAC members and President Herrera also criticized the system of curriculum tracking for perpetuating inequalities: "While their [Anglo] kids are being prepared for college and future professions, our kids are put in body shops and laboring courses. They always say of the Mexican-American students he's great with his hands. They never say he's good with his head" (as quoted in Elwell, 1970).

Explaining OMAC's activism, Herrera used the often-cited phrase of the period that "the sleeping giant has awakened now and we're not going to go to sleep again" (as quoted in Elwell, 1970). To push for change, community members opened an OMAC headquarters in Downtown La Puente in May 1970 (Elwell, 1970). Herrera described that members of OMAC were meeting "in a final effort to avert an explosion of smoldering resentments" (Elwell, 1970). She emphasized, "We do not want violence, but our children are sick of being treated like second-class citizens and so are we. Something has to be done fast" (as quoted in Elwell, 1970).

OMAC members urged school officials "to change their philosophy and practices" if they wanted to "avert trouble" (Elwell, 1970). They advocated for: (a) Mexican American ethnic studies programs in high school; (b) more Mexican American administrators, teachers, and counselors; and (c) a change in educators and administrators' philosophies toward Mexican American students so that they are encouraged to pursue college and other professional opportunities (Elwell, 1970).

Several recently hired LPHS teachers supported OMAC's demands, including Spanish teacher Stuart Lubin who blamed school administrators for prohibiting an ethnic studies program because "the administration imagines or fantasizes that the Anglos would be against it. The truth is that many Anglos are sympathetic with our desire to have such a program" (as quoted in Elwell, 1970). Fellow teachers faulted the administration, pinning the blame on the LPHS Principal for "stalling" (as quoted in Elwell, 1970).

Despite pressure, school administrators avoided responsibility and were slow to act. The LPHS Principal minimized OMAC's concerns, saying the school's U.S. history classes had incorporated a unit of ethnic studies for African Americans, Asian American, and Mexican Americans, and expressing hope that an ethnic studies program would be offered as an elective in the future (Elwell, 1970). The principal also denied charges that Mexican American students were being discriminated against and steered away from college, arguing that the school does not "divide students along ethnic lines" (as quoted in Elwell, 1970). He was optimistic about relationships at LPHS, reporting that "he didn't feel there was anything explosive about the present relationship of the school and Mexican-American students" (Elwell, 1970).

While the District Superintendent agreed with OMAC that the number of Mexican American administrators, counselors, and teachers was smaller than he wished, rather than take responsibility for recruitment and hiring processes, he blamed the low number on few applicants and seemingly unqualified Mexican Americans (Elwell, 1970). When the Superintendent invited OMAC members to meet with him, President Herrera criticized how administrators say, "Yes, yes, we want to work with Mexican parents" but then "they pacify us, and we are tired of being

pacified" (as quoted in Elwell, 1970). OMAC members wanted action, not just talk, and they threatened to picket the school if nothing changed (Elwell, 1970).

Student Activism at La Puente High School (LPHS)

As community members pushed for change, students and teachers were also organizing. On October 14, 1969, when LPHS students were invited by the school board to present on conditions at their school, over fifty students joined them to protest the district's policy on facial hair. Students raised the following concerns that night:

1) Students should be allowed to have facial hair and long hair.
2) If teachers are allowed to have facial hair and long hair, why not students?
3) Food at the cafeteria is not satisfactory.
4) Music building is falling apart, needs to be reconstructed or torn down and a new building put up.
5) Some teachers are late to class all the time.
6) Swimming pool needs complete renovation.
7) Students should be allowed to write articles for school newspapers without the articles being censored.
8) Students should have a say in how student body funds are spent.
9) Teachers should be neatly groomed, as an example to the students.
10) The Agriculture Department is in dire need of supplies and equipment. (La Puente Union High School District Minutes, October 14, 1969)

At the same meeting when students presented their appeals, board members approved the formation of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) at the district's high school campuses (La Puente Union High School District Minutes, October 14, 1969). Known as "the largest and most influential organization in the 1960s American New Left," SDS emerged from students' activism in the south for integration and voting rights for African Americans. SDS critiqued the conservative practices and emphasis on conformity from the 1950s, joined farm workers' struggles, and opposed the Vietnam War (Miller, 1999; Navarro, 1995). Due to student activism within the HLPUSD, in Summer 1971, the school board voted 3-2 to relax the student dress code and leave it to individual school principals to decide. Boys would no longer be expelled from school for having beards and hair longer than collar length (Frank, 1971).

United Mexican American Students (UMAS)

By the early 1970s, with help from local college students and a few teachers, LPHS students established campus organizations reflecting the growth of the Black and Chicana/o Power Movements. LPHS students tried to form a United Mexican American Students (UMAS) club modeled after the 1967 organization founded by college and high school students (see Navarro, 1995). UMAS organizations focused on educational reform—increasing Chicana/o access to higher education, hiring Chicana/o educators and administrators, and implementing cultural programs (Navarro, 1995). However, LPHS administrators delayed approving the organization and misrepresented students. High school junior Danny Morales described how "from the very beginning, [LPHS administrators] treated us like a bunch of rabble rousers. We met every requirement of the school constitution for club recognition and still they humiliated us by taking a student officer poll and turning us down" (as quoted in Elwell, 1970). Teacher Stuart Lubin

concurred: "I can vouch for the kids who signed the petition to have the club. They are some of our finest on campus. This was no way to show love or get people to behave themselves. The administrators should know if you treat young people like hoodlums then eventually they'll turn out to be hoodlums" (as quoted in Elwell, 1970). After months of trying, UMAS was finally accepted at LPHS in May 1970, but the prolonged process left people indignant (Elwell, 1970).

Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA)

As part of the larger Chicana/o Youth Movement (CYM), student activists urged all related organizations to drop their existing names and become the Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA), and in 1972, MEChA replaced UMAS as the largest CYM organization in California (Navarro, 1995). At LPHS, 14-year-old Hector De Paz was learning about the Chicano Movement from his older brother José De Paz and his friends who were active at the nearby community college – Mt. San Antonio College (H. De Paz, September 8, 2024). Likewise, LPHS student Manuel Maldonado became very "pro-Chicano" after "going through a lot at school because of the discrimination" (Maldonado, March 21, 2023). Manuel remembers how he, Hector, and a group of students met with teachers Gilbert Rubio and María del Rosario Martinez who were "very strong advocates for the Chicano Movement." During one of those conversations, teachers encouraged them to request Chicano Studies and to start MEChA "because a lot of the students did not know or did not have full understanding of their background" (Maldonado, March 21, 2023).

Students took their teachers' advice, and as Manuel recalls, college students helped with the group's formation:

> In 1971 a group of MEChistas from Cal Poly [Pomona] or Mt SAC [San Antonio College] came to La Puente High School. We met with them because we were celebrating the International Club or something like that. They talked to us about MEChA, and they said, "We'll tell you how to do it." (Maldonado, March 21, 2023)

With guidance by college students, LPHS students "Hector [De Paz] and Felipe Quinteros took the lead," according to Manuel, "then we went through with the MEChA." José De Paz remembers his younger brother Hector's involvement establishing a MEChA chapter as "a lot of hassle" (J. De Paz, 1996). Fortunately, according to Manuel, several teachers supported students as the group formed:

> Rosario Martinez, Carlos Magallanes, [Stuart] Lubin and [Gilbert] Rubio as well as Mr. Martinez were some of the strong supporters of our group as well as white teachers like Mr. [Michael] Gothie and teachers that taught social studies. (Maldonado, December 19, 2023)

During this period when he was organizing MEChA, making flyers and planning for school walkouts, Hector found encouragement in Teacher Gilbert Rubio. Mr. Rubio was someone Hector called for advice and for strategies, sometimes meeting him at a local restaurant. Crediting Mr. Rubio as "a mastermind," Hector retells, he was "Lo Chicano when being a Chicano was bad for your resume, when being an activist Chicano was even worse, and he was gay. This guy had valor; he had guts" (H. De Paz, September 8, 2024).

As Mr. Rubio helped with organizing, Civics Teacher Carlos Magallanes became the MEChA faculty advisor in 1972 (La Puente High School Annual, 1972). Demonstrating his support for the 1960s and 1970s protest movement, he had a large classroom bulletin board proclaiming: “Black and Brown Are Beautiful.” As shown below, included on the bulletin board was a “Viva La Raza” poster, an image of the August 29, 1970, Chicano Moratorium protesting the Vietnam War, and a picture of R&B artist-activist Isaac Hayes Hayes, known for his involvement in the Civil Rights Movement lunch counter sit-ins and the Black Freedom Struggles (American Roots, 2009; Butler, 2021).

***Figure 2.1*. Photo from La Puente High School Annual, 1971, p. 7.**

Appearing for the first time in the 1972 LPHS Annual, as seen in the picture below, MEChA was described as “an organization that provides an opportunity for all students particularly those of Mexican American descent to work together for individual and group improvement. This organization is open to all students, whatever ethnic background they may have. The students must be willing to obtain the objectives of MECHA and help the high school and community” (La Puente High School Annual, 1972, p. 155).

OFFICERS: L to R BOTTOM: Hector Lopez de Paz-President, Felipe Quinteros-Vice President TOP: Raquel Quinteros-Treasurer, Miss Rosario Martinez-Advisor, Carlos Magallanes-Advisor, Noeilde Lopez de Paz-Secretary

MECHA is an organization that provides an opportunity for all students particularly those of Mexican-American descent, to work together for individual and group improvement. This organization is open to all students, whatever ethnic background they may have. These students must be willing to obtain the objectives of MECHA and help the high school and community.

***Figure 2.2*. Photo from La Puente High School Annual, 1972, p. 155.**

Reflecting on the group's mission, Manuel Maldonado described:

> As a club, we tried to get acknowledgement for the Latinos in our school to acknowledge that we had roots in California, in the southwest, how our people were being discriminated against, how a lot of our students were not being allowed to go to colleges or universities, how many high schools were not properly preparing students with the classes needed for them to continue into higher education. Those were some of the things that we promoted, as well as civil rights because a lot of us were not being considered. We were not given the rights that other students would have. (Maldonado, December 19, 2023)

Like Manuel, Noemi Lopez De Paz joined MEChA when she witnessed some teachers' low expectations of Latinas/os and sensed "a lot of friction" between Latinas/os and white students (Lopez De Paz, July 14, 2023). She became the group's first secretary, and for her, MEChA was a space of critical dialogue that enhanced awareness:

> We would meet and talk about certain things that were going on. I remember the non-English speaking students were somewhat pushed to the side [at school], and I wasn't aware, really, until my brother Hector got to know them . . . it was obvious these were trying times for Latinos. (Lopez De Paz, July 14, 2023)

In response to "all that unfairness in classes, that unfairness in the treatment," Noemi said ten MEChA members regularly wore brown berets to school (Lopez De Paz, July 14, 2023). Manuel recalled how even one of their teachers did:

> In some instances, Mr. [Gilbert] Rubio very proudly wore the brown beret that identified us MEChistas, and in some cases, he wore a brown arm band that said MEChA, even though it was a big no-no back in those days, and they saw you as a radical person, as a foe, as an enemy to society. (Maldonado, March 21, 2023)

Manuel noticed how students who wore their berets were also perceived as "rebel rousers, like we were problem makers." Noemi concurred:

> The teachers were not happy about that. They were like, "Oh Mexicans, they maybe criminals" . . . I would go into my English class. I had good grades, and the Anglo teacher seemed not very pleased with us, somewhat scared, not scared but somewhat hesitant especially after we started wearing our brown berets. They didn't like that. (Lopez De Paz, July 14, 2023)

Hector was harassed by some white students who would try to corner him when we wore his beret and army jacket, but such targeting did not deter the MEChistas. Noemi "felt good wearing that brown beret. It felt good showing this is where I stand" (Lopez De Paz, July 14, 2023). Likewise, Manuel Maldonado and Hector De Paz wore their "brown berets with a lot of pride" (Maldonado, December 19, 2023).

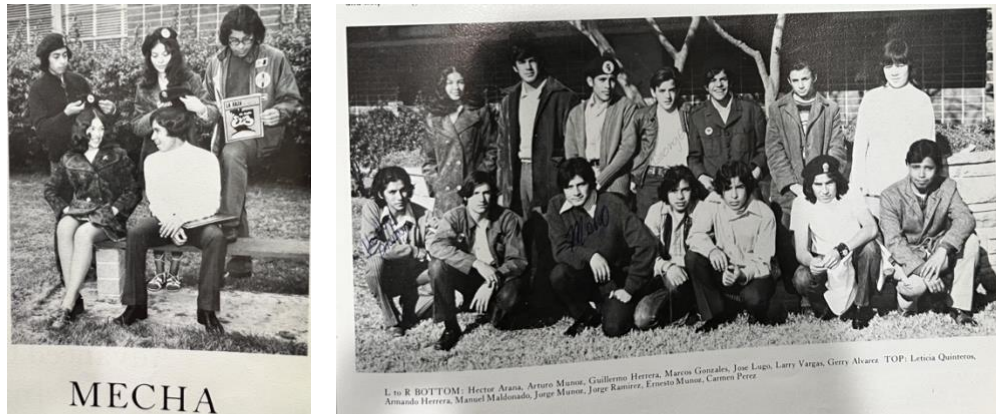

***Figure 2.3 and 2.4*. Photos from La Puente High School Annual, 1972, p. 155.**

In 1972–1973 a year after MEChA, LPHS students began a Black Student Union (BSU). It lasted for fewer years than MEChA, and at the time of this writing, I have found less information.

Student Unrest at La Puente High School and Growing Demands, 1972

On January 25–26, 1972, simmering student frustration at La Puente High School resulted in two days of fighting. A high school senior at the time, Manuel Maldonado recounts:

> There was turmoil between African Americans, Mexicans, and Whites. There were more Whites [at LPHS] than any other ethnicity—very few Asians. African Americans and Mexicans were the two largest minorities, and the cause of the riots was racial because everybody wanted to have a certain recognition at the school. The Pachucos started to riot because they didn't get certain things that they wanted. They started fighting with the Whites because the Whites were undermining them—they were disrespecting the Pachucos. (Maldonado, March 21, 2023)

Hector De Paz remembers there being many lunchtime fights between white and Chicano students, and when it got especially bad, Black students "sided with the Chicanos because the racism was so much" (H. De Paz, September 8, 2024).

OMAC member Fred Aguilar attributed the unrest to the on-going inequalities at LPHS that OMAC had been raising since the group's inception in 1969:

> Forty-seven percent of the school's 2,582 students are of Mexican-American descent. They are frustrated they do not have anyone to identify with and they get the run-around from the administration. There is only one part-time Chicano counselor and only six of the 115 teachers are Chicanos. Something must be done. (as quoted in Jones, 1972a)

Noemi Lopez De Paz recalled how students' displays of dissatisfaction were attempts to raise awareness of inequities at the school:

> I would call it dissatisfaction of the Latino students, dissatisfaction because we weren't meant to be violent but rather to expose, to say what we were feeling, what was going on, to make people aware, to make students aware and that they could do something about it. At least that was the intent I felt. That's how I experienced it. (Lopez De Paz, July 14, 2023)

These fights occurred the same year students formed MEChA, and to Noemi the causes leading to the formation of MEChA and to the disturbances were similar:

> . . . All of that [inequality] led to organizing into MEChA, then organizing the riots, not riots, but the discomfort in 1972. I saw when the trash cans from the second floor were dropped and the fighting. (Lopez De Paz, July 14, 2023)

The school responded to student unrest by calling the police to "break up fights between Anglo and Chicano students" (*Los Angeles Times*, December 1972). Administrators punished 25 students: they transferred ten students to other schools and suspended 15 for three days (Jones, 1972a).

During what he described as "turmoil," Manuel felt "everybody was against everyone." He went to the LPHS Principal's office to advise him on what he should do, but the principal was crying "because he didn't know how to end the riot:"

> I told [the principal], "Why don't you call all the [student] leaders—the leaders of the African Americans, the leaders of the Pachucos, and the leaders of the surfers. They used to call them the surfers—the whites—because they had long hair, always wore sandals, and then one of the top hits was the Beach Boys song. So, they were always saying that they were surfers, they were going to the beach to surf.
> [The Principal] said, "That's impossible. I cannot do it."
>
> I said "Look, I'll get you the leaders in this office and then you'll lead this and find out what's going on, why they're rioting." I spoke to the leaders. With the surfers and then I spoke to the leader of the Pachucos, and then I went to speak to the leader of the African Americans. They agreed to meet in the office. We spoke, and then things calmed down from that time on. (Maldonado, March 21, 2023)

Students' displays of frustration highlighted their on-going concerns, and with advice from their teacher Gilbert Rubio, students organized a parent meeting on campus to inform them about their dissatisfaction. Over 150 parents attended (H. De Paz, September 8, 2024). Agreeing with students, OMAC members considered boycotting LPHS or picketing an upcoming school board meeting (Jones, 1972a). OMAC members attended the February 1972 board meeting where they called for a year-long Chicano and Black Studies graduation requirement, demanded amnesty for all 25 of the punished students, and added to their earlier demands, bringing their list of demands to the following five (Jones, 1972a):

- All administrators and teachers in the Hacienda La Puente School District be required to take an intensive, extensive thorough, in-depth course in Chicano Culture.
- The district trains ten individuals in an administrator-internship program, working with a local college, so that in one year we will have 10 Chicano administrators.

- The Board of Education of the Hacienda La Puente School District makes it a graduation requirement for all high school students to take at least 10 units, or one year, of Chicano and Black Studies.
- Our Chicano counselor be assigned to counsel only Chicano students.
- Chicano teachers be assigned to counsel Chicano students who may have problems, and to work with their parents. The teachers should get "release time" from their classes to do this. (HLPUSD Board Meeting, February 10, 1972)

At the packed board meeting, attendees characterized the school "disturbances" as "blown out of proportion" (Jones, 1972b). Thanks to community pressure, the 15 suspended students were back at school, and two of the ten students who had been transferred to other campuses were allowed to return to LPHS (Jones, 1972b). Students and OMAC members successfully forced a board committee to consider their demands (Jones, 1972b). The school board unanimously voted for the Board Ethnic Studies Committee to meet with OMAC and other interested people in four public meetings before the start of the 1972–73 school year (HLPUSD Board Meeting, February 10, 1972). The District Superintendent also said he was reviewing the following suggestions made by a school board member:

1) A joint meeting between the board and the [La Puente] City Council to discuss areas of mutual concern in relation to the current problem.
2) Having the City Council appoint a school district representative on the Police Community Relations Committee.
3) Having a Spanish-speaking person available at La Puente High School at all times to answer the phone as was recently instituted at City Hall. (Jones, February 1972b)

Based on these district responses, members of OMAC reversed their call to boycott LPHS, and according to OMAC member Ray Escarcega they decided to "wait until the outcome of the meetings to determine whether the board is dealing in good faith" (Jones, 1972b).

At the following month's board meeting, OMAC members and district officials reported progress in understanding "each other's problems." But the school board decided to not act on any of OMAC's demands until *after* the public meetings where the board said they would acquire "broader community reactions" (HLPUSD Board Meeting, March 9, 1972). Despite the district's delays in action, OMAC secured unanimous agreement that the board would forward to all district teachers a letter OMAC had submitted criticizing the overblown media coverage of the disturbances at LPHS. Likewise, because of on-going concerns of prejudice in the classroom, the school board instructed the superintendent to prepare a Discrimination Policy (HLPUSD Board Meeting, March 9, 1972).

Black and Latina/o Solidarity: The NAACP and OMAC Unite

During the 1972–73 school year, OMAC complained to the Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) about school district hiring practices that overlooked Black and Chicana/o applicants (Ward, September 13, 1972). However, school board members only "instruct[ed] the administration to pursue a vigorous program to hire Spanish surname teachers." In response to the district's disregard of the hiring of Black employees, the NAACP and OMAC coalesced to advocate for more Black educators, and they successfully ensured the district hired a Black school counselor

(HLPUSD Board Minutes, December 14, 1972; NAACP Annual Report of Branch Activities, 1973). Along with urging school districts to hire Black teachers, coaches, and principals, the NAACP branch also sent letters to the school district advocating for the formation of Black Councils and Black History and Brotherhood Week (NAACP Annual Report of Branch Activities, 1973).

During the same period, OMAC joined the NACCP's 7-year struggle for human relations courses. Getting little response from district officials, NAACP and OMAC united with other La Puente-area Black and Latina/o organizations to form the United People's Coalition for Justice (UPCJ) "to secure justice and equal rights for all oppressed people" (as quoted in Ward, April 8, 1972). The UPCJ included members from the NAACP, the League of United Latin American Citizens, La Raza Unida Party chapters in Rosemead and La Puente, OMAC, and the Black Awareness Committee of the San Gabriel Valley (Ward, April 8, 1972). The HLPUSD Superintendent met with members of the coalition and finally instituted a Human Relations Council in 1972 (*Los Angeles Times*, August 8, 1972). The Human Relations Council recommended becoming permanent and hiring a coordinator to help recruit employees of color in the schools (Ward, December 14, 1972). However, the school board vetoed this recommendation. Delaying action yet again, the school board instead asked the superintendent to recommend a human relations program later the following school year (Ward, December 14, 1972).

Overall, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, La Puente community, students, and teachers formed crucial organizations which pushed for change in schools. They put on notice that they were watching the overwhelmingly white district officials and educators. Despite the intransigence of some administrators and the school district, such activism led to important yet incomplete transformations. In 1972, five of ten counseling positions at LPHS were scheduled to be filled by Black or Latina/o counselors, two of the new six teachers hired were Asian American, and two new administrators were hired in 1972 (Ward, September 13, 1972). African American Jerry Oglesby began as the new coordinator of pupil personnel services and Chicano David Berteaux was hired as the dean of students (Ward, September 13, 1972). Ethnic studies courses were added to the curriculum. For example, through the HLPUSD's Adult School, Jerome Oglesby taught "Black Studies" in 1972 and Gilbert Rubio, David Berteaux, and Raul Rodriquez each taught classes such as: "Mexican American History," "Brown & Chicano Studies" and "Chicano Studies" in 1971 and 1973, and at LPHS Rosario Martinez taught "Chicano & American Indian Studies" in 1974 (HLPUSD Board Minutes 1971-1974).

The multiple forms of activism and resulting victories set the path for today's ethnic studies classes and California's upcoming high school graduation requirement. They illustrate the times people have organized across race/ethnicity and generation for the good of community.

A Place-Based Approach to Tracing Activist Legacies

This brief story of organizing is part of the larger history of activism in the 1960s and 1970s in less well-known places, including multi-racial suburban areas. Reviewing school board and city council minutes, along with church records, and yearbooks helped to excavate some of this unwritten past. However, there are imperfections with these sources and a need for continuing research. The archival sources I had access to tend to privilege the voices of elected officials and district and school employees who set policies and agendas—limiting the perspectives of students and grassroots groups who have less power. In some cases, newspapers were helpful for amplifying

the opinions of activists, but these also tend to center people who are in leadership positions or the most vocal community members. This is where oral histories were key as they provided an unstructured, open-ended and free-flowing space for people to remember and share aspects of their past in ways that were meaningful for them.

Combining the more conventional archival materials with oral histories enabled me to better understand the past and people's experiences and motivations. Yet, gaps and new questions remain that I hope ethnic studies classes, community members, and future generations of researchers help to unpack. Drawing on these lessons and my Latina feminist approach to learning and being in community (see Enriquez & Ochoa, 2023; Ochoa, 2022a), I offer the following suggestions for educators committed to a place-based approach to tracing activist legacies:

1) **Think Creatively about Archival Materials:** Search not only for newspaper articles, school board minutes, school annuals, and student papers. Look for student letters and ethnic studies syllabi, and invite people to share their pictures, letters, and diaries.
2) **Respect People's Stories:**
    a. Create comfortable spaces of deep listening and learning rooted in authentic caring (see Valenzuela, 1999). Build trust and rapport, and ask broad, open-ended questions. Know there are many ways people share their experiences and ensure space for this.
    b. Ask and write about the larger socio-political, economic context influencing peoples' lives and activist approaches. No matter how powerful someone's story is, they do not stand alone. They are part of larger histories.
    c. Be intentional with how you publicly share what you have learned. This includes only using peoples' names with their permission.
    d. Critically reflect on your own positionality and how it influences what you know/don't know, the questions you ask and what people share with you.
3) **Conceive of Activism and Resistance Broadly**: Keep in mind every day and individual forms of activism often undertaken by women of color in homes and communities that may be removed from public view (see Collins, 1990; Ochoa, 1999).
4) **Remember the Specificity of Place**: Place shapes experiences, activist approaches, and how people move through the world. It is foundational to understanding the past, people, and forms of activism and should not be ignored.
5) **Weave in Opportunities for Reflection**: Reflect and check-in with self and community members throughout the process. Sharing and learning about the past may elicit a range of emotions. Take time to sit with these emotions to enhance understanding. Researching and learning from and with community members is an on-going process.

I hope the story, along with the archival materials and oral histories shared in this article encourage critical reflection on past community demands, avenues for future research, and participation in on-going struggle. This overlooked activism for institutional transformation set the foundations to improve school environments for multiple generations of students and must be part of the teaching of ethnic studies, lest these struggles be forgotten and the work of earlier generations of activists be erased. Nonetheless, while changing educators, offering ethnic studies courses, and learning these histories are important steps in altering our schools—as numerous activists and scholars remind us—these efforts alone will not alter the underlying systems of inequality.

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