LATINO POLITICAL PARTICIPATION
IN RURAL CALIFORNIA

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DISCUSSION
HISPANIC POLITICAL PARTICIPATION
IN RURAL CALIFORNIA

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The Working Group on Farm Labor and Rural Poverty was formed in 1987 by professors at various campuses of the University of California in collaboration with the California Institute for Rural Studies, a non-profit research and educational institute located in Davis, California. The Working Group advisory board is composed of eight members from the University of California and nine members from the California community. The Working Group has four main goals: (1) to encourage and support policy-oriented research on rural labor and poverty in California; (2) to bring together academics, activists and policy-makers, both to define the research agenda and to carry on a continuing dialogue over policies; (3) to encourage, fund and assist organizational development and action-oriented research in rural California community groups; (4) to act as a clearinghouse for information on rural labor and poverty in the West. A library and other resources available to the public are maintained at CIRS in Davis.

The Working Group publishes a newsletter, Rural California Report, which is available free of charge, and it has issued the following papers:

Working Paper 1 - Don Villarejo  
Farm Restructuring & Employment in California Agriculture

Working Paper 2 - Paul G. Barnett  
Survey of Research on the Impacts of Pesticide on Agricultural Workers and the Rural Environment

Working Paper 3 - Michael Kearney & Carol Nagengast  
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J. Edward Taylor  
Illegal Immigrants, California Agriculture and the Mexican Economy

Working Paper 4 - Philip L. Martin  
The California Farm Labor Market

Working Paper 5 - Miriam J. Wells & Martha S. West  
Regulation of the Farm Labor Market: An Assessment of Farm Worker Protections Under California’s Agricultural Labor Relations Act

Working Paper 6 - Susan Peck  
California Farmworker Housing

Working Paper 7 - Douglas B. Gwynn, Yoshio Kawamura, Edward Dolber-Smith & Refugio I. Rochin  
California’s Rural Poor: Trends, Correlates, and Policies

Working Paper 8 - Paula Cruz Takash & Joaquin Avila  
Latino Political Participation in Rural California

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DISCUSSION
LATINO POLITICAL PARTICIPATION
IN RURAL CALIFORNIA

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I. INTRODUCTION

Sociopolitical Implications of the Latinization of California

Continued immigration to the United States and rapid growth of non-white, non-English speaking communities in this country since the 1970's, has engendered much speculation about the sociocultural, economic and political effects of these populations on American society, especially in areas where these groups have become numerical majorities. In California, the process by which the state is becoming dominated numerically by ethnic minority groups has been called the "minoritization" of California (Hammel 1981; Takash 1988). In locales where the majority of the residents are of Latino origin, the phenomenon has been referred to as the "latinization" of these regions (Hayes-Bautista, et al. 1988). As immigration from Mexico comprises the largest proportion of all immigration to the United States, Mexican immigrants and others of Latino origin have received the greatest amount of attention in the debate over the positive and negative consequences of immigration.

That this is not merely a localized phenomenon is attested to by the national attention it has received in various news reports: "Hispanic Population Swelling" (USA Today 9/30/86:3); "Hispanic Population Growing 5 Times as Fast as Rest of US" (NY Times 9/11/87:1); "Flow of Third World Immigrants Alters Weave of U.S. Society" (NY Times 6/30/86:1).

Responses to immigration which reflect a concern with the minoritization of American society include the enactment of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) by Congress in November 1986, and the passage of "English-Only" propositions in several states. De la Garza (1985:228) observes:

Advocates of more restrictive immigration policy also suggest that the presence of large numbers of Mexican immigrants poses a serious political threat to the United States... [and is] one of the major factors impeding the integration of Mexican-Americans into mainstream American sociopolitical life. To support their assertion they cite the reluctance of Mexican-Americans to become monolingual English speakers and the wide-spread support Mexican-Americans give to bi-lingual education.... the maintenance of these cultural traditions is interpreted as potentially leading to the balkanization of the United States, to the irredentism in the Southwest, or to the development of political ties between the Mexican government and the Mexican-origin population that may threaten U.S. interests.

While numerous studies refute the contention that immigrants adversely affect the national economy, few studies satisfactorily address the cultural and political effects of immigration. In this paper, we examine the political participation of Chicanos and Mexicanos in rural California towns in which persons of Mexican origin now comprise the majority of the population; the migration and settlement of immigrant and native-born persons of Mexican descent account in large part for the latinization of these cities. Although most Chicanos and Mexicanos live in urban areas, in California the examination of Latino political participation in rural cities is particularly warranted, as a significant majority of California Latino elected officials at the municipal level have been elected in rural places.1
Rationale for Research on Rural Latino Political Participation

Published work that has focused on Chicano/Mexicano politics in rural California has been devoted almost exclusively to studies of farm labor politics, e.g., farm labor protest, strikes, organizing and unionizing activities, to the degree that Chicano/Mexicano political struggles in rural California outside the realm of farm labor have gone unnoticed. Apart from a few studies regarding the "Chicano takeover" of the city council in Parlier, research on Chicano/Mexicano participation in non-farm labor, community politics and government in rural California is virtually non-existent. Several features of Chicano/Mexicano political participation in rural California thus beg scholarly attention and may also enhance our knowledge of urban politics.

First, we need to understand why most Latino elected officials are elected in rural places deemed in the early 1970's as offering "inadequate opportunities for Mexicans to participate in governmental functions" (CA State Advisory Committee 1971:64). This finding suggests real sociopolitical changes in rural California as well as in the state in general. It also suggests that Latinos are more underrepresented in urban cities where the majority of Chicanos and Mexicanos live (Padilla 1982:4). To date, there is no published analysis which attempts to account for this phenomenon.

Specifically, in this paper, we discuss the development of Chicano/Mexicano non-farm labor politics in rural California. Few published sources or ongoing research efforts address this topic. This paper is thus an attempt to expand our understanding of rural Latino political mobilization. We begin by reviewing bias in the literature which may explain in part why social scientists have tended to ignore political developments in rural America and California.

A second feature of the rural California political landscape that warrents investigation is the ethnoracial political transition of seventeen California city councils dominated in 1987 by Chicanos: eleven are rural communities located in five counties; 6 are urban cities, all within one county (see Tables 1 and 3, and Map 1). While the transition of political power at the municipal level in the rural town of Crystal City, Texas, has received considerable attention from scholars (Goodwyn 1963; Grebler, Moore and Guzman 1970; Rivera 1973, 1974; Gutierrez 1971; Gutierrez and Hirsch 1974; Schockley 1974), and the "Chicano takeover" of the formerly Anglo-dominated city council in the small farming community of Parlier, California, has also received some attention (Trujillo 1978; Sosa Riddell and Aguillo Jr. 1978), researchers have failed to follow the ethnic transition of local political power in other rural California cities. To our knowledge, no scholarly research has been published regarding the events leading up to the domination of these city councils by Chicanos nor about the consequences of having Latino-dominated municipal political institutions in rural California, aside from the aforementioned works about Parlier. Given the current national hysteria regarding immigration, it appears essential that we understand the conditions under which the ethnoracial political transition of these municipal governments has taken place.

Other questions are raised in regards to the political mobilization of Latinos in rural California. For example, does the United Farm Workers Union's early organizing strategy of "establish[ing] extensive community solidarities, and train[ing] a broad base of indigenous organizers..." (Chacon 1987:157) account in part for the non-farm labor political activity of Chicanos and Mexicanos who reside in rural California communities, especially in those towns in which Chicanos dominate municipal government? Interviews conducted with several Latino politicians in Fresno county by Takash (1987, 1988a, 1988b) suggest their initial politicalization may
be attributed in part to their participation in UFW organizing activities. What role, if any, have other organizations which participated in farm labor struggles, e.g., California Rural Legal Assistance, Migrant Ministry, played in non-farm rural politics?

Several books have been published that analyze California farm labor political activities in this century (McWilliams 1971; Galarza 1970; Galarza 1977; Daniels 1981; Jenkins 1985). Accounts of the politicalization of farm labor leaders have also be written, e.g., Chavez’s autobiographical article about his own political development (1974:57-62). Unquestionably important in their own right, these studies nonetheless provide a limited understanding of how other participants, the “rank and file” so to speak, may have carried their farm labor political experiences over into other political arenas. Studies of the political histories of Latino community leaders and elected officials in these areas may provide us a better understanding of the broader effects of farm labor community organizing efforts and, in general, of the long-term, cumulative effects of grassroots political participation.

The role of Latina women in rural community politics is another feature in need of scholarly attention. While Chacon (1987:157) favorably reviews Jenkins’ book, The Politics of Insurgency (1985), about the farm worker movement in the 1960’s, he notes the real need for research on the contributions of women who participated in the United Farm Workers Union. Latina women have also been active participants in other expressions of rural community politics: e.g., in union politics in the California food processing industry (Ruiz 1987; Zavella 1987; Bardeke 1987); in bilingual education, desegregation mobilization efforts (Donato 1987; Takash 1988); in local chapters of national Latino organizations such as MAPA, LULAC, etc.; and in electoral politics.

Finally, we present a more detailed discussion of political developments in Watsonville, an agriculturally based community located in the California Central Coast region. The authors have spent over two years documenting the past and contemporary political struggles of the Watsonville Chicano/Mexicano community. Some of the political processes observed in Watsonville may not be generalizable to all rural California towns that have significant concentrations of Mexican-origin populations, because of their differences in scale and socioeconomic composition – e.g., farm labor-dominated communities with small tax bases versus more socioeconomically diverse towns in which farm owners, laborers, and others of various occupations reside. Nonetheless, we contend that at least one of the Chicano/Mexicano political struggles in Watsonville promises far-reaching consequences that will affect Latino politics not only in rural and urban communities in California, but in cities in eight other states as well.

II. BIAS IN STUDIES OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

We approached the task of reviewing the status of Chicano/Mexicano politics in rural California with some sense that our search would not result in an extensive list of published materials or research in progress; our assumption was not unfounded. Social scientists have tended to ignore political developments in rural America; fewer yet have studied this topic in California. Frank Bryan, a political scientist and author of Politics in the Rural States: Peoples, Parties and Processes (1981:7), observes:

...despite the fact that hundreds of books have been produced in recent years on urban politics and metropolitan problems, there has not been a single book
published exclusively on rural politics in America for over two decades. It is as if the rural areas have been wiped from the consciousness of American political scientists. Indeed, nearly all the works that have considered rural areas have focused on the conflict between rural and urban, as if some mystic causation has perpetuated forever the tension that allegedly existed between the two in the past [our emphasis].

Bryan further attributes the "metro-bias" in political science research: to its practitioners being urbanites with cosmopolitan worldviews, the most urban being those political scientists who dominate the published research on state and local politics; to their stereotype of rural areas as very conservative, resistant to change, and thus uninteresting; and to their fascination with the city in a decade [the 1960's] of tremendous sociocultural upheaval.

In addition to the urban bias in the field, Chicano politics in general has received little attention from mainstream political science; minority politics in the United States appears to be equated with Black politics by the scientific community. A computer search of Political Science Review for articles about Chicano/Mexicano (Hispanic) politics yielded no citations. Political Science Quarterly and Western Political Quarterly were also searched and yielded a total of twelve citations, two in the former journal and ten from the latter journal. Of these articles, none addressed rural California politics.2

Despite the lack of attention, there does exist a fairly large literature regarding Chicano politics, much of it produced in the last two decades by Chicano/a scholars. A search of the Chicano Periodical Index 1984-1986, which indexes 44 Chicano periodicals and selectively indexes 386 mainstream periodicals, yielded over 2,000 citations regarding Latino politics. Much of this research is focused on urban Chicano protest.

As mentioned above, published work that has focused on Chicano/Mexicano politics in rural areas has been devoted almost exclusively to studies of farm labor politics to the degree that, until the early 1970's, Chicano/Mexicano political mobilization in the United States was generally equated with farm labor politics. To counter a prevailing stereotype that all Chicanos and Mexicanos in the U.S. were farm laborers, emerging Chicano political scientists called for a redirection of scholarly attention away from Chicano/Mexicano politics in rural areas to a new focus on Chicano urban protests. This redirection was expressed in 1973 by political scientist Carlos Munoz, Jr. (1973:6987):

During the sixties and seventies various dramatic demonstrations of protest on the part of the nation's second largest oppressed minority have taken place throughout the urban centers of the Southwest United States. For the most part, however, the politics of Chicano urban protest remains little understood by both non-Chicanos and Chicanos themselves. The fact that the national prominence of Cesar Chavez and the Farm Worker struggle have captured the imagination of the mass media, politicians, and social scientists, explains in part the perpetuation of the popular stereotype of the Chicanos as an ethnic minority group that remains in the rural sector of American society.... There is a paucity of scholarly literature on Chicano politics, and a serious and systematic study of Chicano urban protest is yet to emerge [our emphasis].

Subsequent analyses of the status of Chicanos and Mexicanos in the United States based on the
structure of political and economic oppression (Acuna 1981; Almaguer 1974, Munoz 1974; Barrera et al. 1972) represent a contribution to our knowledge of Latino politics and to ethnic politics in general. Yet, while students of urban Chicano protest have done much to counter the stereotype of all Chicanos being farm laborers, they have not contributed to dispelling the notion that politics in rural areas only involves farm labor issues.

III. PROFILE OF ELECTED LATINO OFFICIALS IN CALIFORNIA

A Civil Rights Commission staff study conducted in 1971 concluded that Latino representation in municipal government in small towns and rural places was very low when compared to their statewide population. Persons from several rural towns appeared before the Civil Rights Commission to testify about the difficulties Latinos encountered when they sought to become political participants and argued that "...pressures facing rural Mexican Americans who attempt to become politically active are quite different from those confronting urban Mexican Americans" (CA State Advisory Committee 1971:64-65). Frank Valenzuela, a former mayor and councilmember of Hollister, San Benito County, testified that he was forced to leave Hollister after protesting against the displacement of resident farm workers by Mexican braceros (Ibid. 1971:65).

Yet, while the problems facing rural candidates may have differed from those faced by urban candidates, the former appear to have been more often elected than their urban counterparts. This pattern emerged in Padilla’s (1981) analysis of Chicano representation in California city government in 1980 and was affirmed by our own analysis of data for 1973 and 1987. For example, in 1973, there were a total of 120 Spanish-surnamed city council members and mayors in the state; seventy-eight were elected in rural areas, forty-two from urban places (Lemus 1973:6-35). Latinos dominated six city councils in 1973 (compared to 17 in 1987); of these six, four were rural, two urban.

The overwhelming majority of Latino elected officials in California are at the municipal level; this is also true of Latino elected officials in other states (National Roster of Hispanic Elected Officials 1987:11-26). Out of a total of 142 Latino mayors and city councilmembers in California for 1987, 88, or 63.3%, serve in rural communities.

In 1987, seventeen California cities are governed by Chicano-dominated city councils. As the city councils in all seventeen cities are comprised of five members, including the mayors, they are said to be “Chicano-dominated” when Chicanos gain three or more city council seats. Eleven are rural communities located in five counties; six are urban, all located within Los Angeles County (see Table One, and map). Of the 11 rural communities, 10 have Latino mayors; four of the six urban cities have Latino mayors. These findings suggest sociopolitical and economic changes in rural California as well as in the State as a whole during the past decade. They also suggest that Latino representation in Californian urban cities, where the majority of Chicanos and Mexicanos live, is even more severely limited than aggregate numbers of elected Latino officials may lead us to believe. Padilla (1982:14-15) observes:

\[
\text{Urban Chicanos appear to be significantly underrepresented. If the number of Chicano city officials are compared by county, the counties with the highest percentages of Chicanos have an early proportional share of all Chicano city officials whereas the counties with the largest urban, Chicano populations are significantly underrepresented.}
\]
Padilla (1982:15-16) further postulates that of the two variables he used to distinguish towns and cities with Chicano officials -- size and percent of Chicano in a given community -- the former variable is more important in determining the probability of elected or appointed Chicano officials. Chicanos are more likely to be elected or appointed in cities with populations of less than 10,000 or communities which are more than 70% Chicano. Chicano candidates experience the greatest difficulty in attaining office in cities with 25 to 69.9% Chicano inhabitants. Padilla suggests that Chicanos are not perceived as a threat in communities with less than 25% and are, thus, more electable. In cities in which they constitute a sufficient majority, or over 69.9%, Padilla contends it becomes difficult to deny Chicanos some measure of political representation. He concludes:

The local political establishment becomes conscious of a Chicano political presence when Chicanos reach a critical mass between 25 and 69.9 percent of a community's total population. Community political elites in this category of community may feel themselves challenged or threatened by such a high percentage of Chicanos.

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<td>56.0</td>
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<td>5. Commerce</td>
<td>10,509</td>
<td>85.0</td>
<td>4</td>
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</tr>
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<td>6. Firebaugh*</td>
<td>3,740</td>
<td>69.7</td>
<td>3</td>
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</tr>
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<td>4,181</td>
<td>66.5</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>8. Huron*</td>
<td>2,769</td>
<td>91.0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Irwindale</td>
<td>1,030</td>
<td>87.1</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>10. Mendota*</td>
<td>5,038</td>
<td>84.7</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>11. Orange Cove*</td>
<td>4,026</td>
<td>72.2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>12. Parlier*</td>
<td>2,680</td>
<td>91.0</td>
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<td>13. Pico Rivera</td>
<td>53,459</td>
<td>76.1</td>
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<td>14. San Fernando</td>
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<td>68.9</td>
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<td>15. Soledad*</td>
<td>5,928</td>
<td>82.8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>16. South El Monte</td>
<td>16,623</td>
<td>77.8</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>17. Vernon</td>
<td>90</td>
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1 All 17 of these city councils have five members
* Rural cities
Sources: Population and % Sp. Origin figures based on 1980 Census of Population;
1987 figures of Chicano council representatives based on the 1987 NALEO Roster of Hispanic Elected Officials;
1973 figures of Chicano council representatives based on the 1973 Spanish-Surnamed Elected Officials of California, compiled by Frank C. Lemus for the Assembly Chicano Caucus
CALIFORNIA CITIES WITH THREE OR MORE
CHICANO COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES

CITIES

1. Brawley
2. Calexico
3. Coachella
4. Colton
5. Commerce
6. Firebaugh
7. Greenfield
8. Huron
9. Irwindale
10. Mendota
11. Orange Cove
12. Parlier
13. Pico Rivera
14. San Fernando
15. Soledad
16. South El Monte
17. Vernon

(*rural cities)

Based on the 1987 NALEO National Roster of Hispanic Elected Officials
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<th>Names</th>
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<td>1</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Manuela Rios</td>
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<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Mendota</td>
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<tr>
<td>1977</td>
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<td>Mendota</td>
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<td>1979-80</td>
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<td>Colton</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Elaine Gutierrez</td>
<td>Soledad</td>
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<td>1981-82</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yolanda Cobas</td>
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<td>Pauline Garcia</td>
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Figures for years 1985 and 1987 based on the NALEO Roster of Hispanic Elected Officials.
Latina women have always played an active role in politics yet, historically, the degree of their political participation has not been reflected in the acquisition of elected governmental offices. In 1973, only three Latina women served as city councilmembers in California, one of them as mayor (Lermus 1973). In 1980, Latina city councilmembers numbered eight in this state, including one mayor (Padilla 1982:3). Twenty Latinas sit on California city councils in 1987; three serve as mayors, three are mayor pro tems. Ten Latina councilmembers were elected in rural areas, ten in urban communities.

Women of Mexican origin began to appear on the city councils in the seventeen cities by the early 1970’s; as with male councilmembers, the majority of these Chicana councilmembers have been elected in rural areas. The first Chicanas to serve as councilmembers in any of the seventeen cities were elected in 1973 in the city of Coachella; they appear to have served one term. In 1975, there was only one Chicana councilmember serving on any of the seventeen councils. The voters of Mendota elected their first Chicana in 1975-76; it appears she served for two terms, 1975-1978. In 1977, two Chicanas held city council positions. The city of Colton elected their first Latina to its city council in that year, a position she has held continuously to the present. Two Chicanas served as councilmembers in 1979, the City of Soledad electing their first Chicana at that time (See Table 2).

The number of women of Mexican origin elected to the city councils in these seventeen towns has steadily increased in the 1980’s. In 1988, nine Chicanas serve on city councils in seven of these cities. Cindy Cisneros, a councilmember for over a decade in Colton, became that city’s Mayor in 1988; three other women have served as Mayor Pro Tems. We found no research regarding these women’s political experiences, their process of politicalization nor about any other Latina women who have held elected governmental offices in California.

IV. ETHNORACIAL POLITICAL TRANSITION OF RURAL CALIFORNIA MUNICIPAL INSTITUTIONS

Peter Eisinger (1980:5), a political scientist who studies the politics of displacement, defines ethnoracial political transition as:

the acquisition of formal executive office in a political jurisdiction by a member of a previously subordinate ethnic group that is now backed politically by a new, durable working majority composed largely of or dominated by members of that group.

The “Chicano Revolt” in the rural community of Crystal City, Texas, whereby Chicanos took control of local government in 1963 and again in 1969, is perhaps the most often-cited case of Chicano politics of displacement (See Shockley 1974). In California, Parlier is the best-known example of the ethnoracial transformation from an Anglo-dominated city government to a Chicano-dominated government. A small agricultural community in the San Joaquin Valley, persons of Mexican origin comprised approximately 85% of the population just prior to the “take-over”; Anglos and a smaller percentage of Japanese/Japanese-Americans comprised the other 15%.

Anglos had long dominated local political affairs; by 1964, the Japanese/Japanese-American community achieved political representation on the city council. At least two Japanese-Americans served on the council; one would serve as mayor from 1966-1970. Parlier would also elect its first Chicano councilmember, Baltazar Tovar, in 1966. The Chicano representative lost his seat in 1968: after a brief interlude, the Chicano community was once again unrepresented in city government.
Prior to the 1940's, Parlier was a small, predominantly Anglo residential area for landowners of surrounding farms. The ethnic composition of the town was changed in the 1940's by an "influx" of Mexican farmworkers that transformed Parlier into "a bustling, if still small, predominantly Chicano town" over the next twenty years (Sosa-Riddell and Aguillo, Jr. 1979). In April 1972, three Chicanos swept into office displacing the Anglo mayor and two Anglo incumbent councilmembers; by June of that same year, the city council was completely dominated by Chicanos, the two remaining Anglo and Japanese-American incumbents having been ousted in a recall election called by the Chicanos. Inspired by decades of neglect on the part of dominant Anglos and Japanese-Americans towards the town's Chicanos and Mexicanos, these events were ignited by the City Council's appointment of a less experienced Anglo to the position of Police Chief over an experienced, local Chicoano police officer.

Unlike the Crystal City case, where the first Chicano-dominated council of 1963 was swiftly defeated by Anglos and Anglo-supported Mexican-Americans two years later (Chicanos would not regain control until 1969), the Parlier Chicanos have retained their control over city government to the present. Chicanos in twelve of the seventeen California cities (including Parlier) have also maintained their council majorities to the present; seven of these cities are rural, five are urban.

Chicanos in five of the seventeen cities achieved a majority before the 1970's. Chicanos achieved majorities during the 1970's in six cities; the city councils in the remaining six cities became Chicano-dominated in the 1980's. Of the five cities with Chicano majorities before the 1970's, four are rural (Calexico, Coachella, Colton, Huron), and one is urban (Irwindale).

Four of the six Chicano-dominated city councils of the 1970's are rural (Mendota, Orange Cove, Parlier, Soledad), and two are urban (Commerce, South El Monte). Although Commerce's council was not Chicano-dominated at the time of its incorporation, as in the case of Irwindale, it did have two Chicano representatives on its first city council.

Urban cities fared somewhat better in the 1980's. Of the six cities with Chicano-dominated councils in the 1980's, three are rural (Brawley, Firebaugh, Greenfield) and three are urban (Pico Rivera, San Fernando, Vernon).

Without further research, it is impossible to determine how similar or different the processes of ethnoracial political transition for these seventeen cities are to one another or the sociopolitical and economic consequences of these "take-overs." However, a few patterns do emerge from the data (see Tables 3 and 4). One pattern suggests in some cases a more gradual incorporation of Chicanos into municipal government than was the case in Parlier (e.g. Calexico, Commerce, Firebaugh, Greenfield, Huron, etc.) -- gradual in the sense that there is first one Chicano representative, then two, prior to Chicanos becoming a majority.

More striking are those cities for which the data suggest there were dramatic changes in local community political control as in the case of Parlier (Brawley, Coachella, Colton, Mendota, Orange Cove, South El Monte). In these latter cases, the data depict city councils which had at most one Chicano representative just prior to becoming Chicano dominated.

The case of Soledad, located in Monterey county, also suggests a major struggle for electoral power between several resident ethnic groups. Chicanos in Soledad occupied one or two city council seats for ten years before becoming a majority in 1975. It appears, however, that their majority status was quickly lost. By the next election, only one Chicano remained on the council;
three persons with Italian surnames supplanted the Chicano majority in 1977. Chicanos gained an additional representative in the 1979-80 election, then suddenly comprised a majority in 1981-82 with four Chicanos on the council. This majority again disappeared by 1983, during which time there was only one Chicano councilmember; the Chicano majority was replaced by three Anglos. Chicanos again became a majority by 1987; in 1988, two Chicanos dominate the council as there are only one Anglo and two vacancies.

**TABLE 3**

**ETHNORACIAL POLITICAL TRANSITION OF SEVENTEEN CALIFORNIA MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Year Incorporated</th>
<th>Year Chicanos Dominate City Council</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Brawley</td>
<td>1908</td>
<td>1984: 3 Chicanos; has maintained majority to present. From 1965-83 had only 1 Chicano representative</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Calexico</td>
<td>1908</td>
<td>1964: 3 Chicanos; has maintained majority to present. 1945-47 there are no Chicano representatives; 1948-1958 is one Chicano representative; 1959-1963 are 2 representatives, one who becomes mayor 1960-1964 while council is still Anglo-dominated.</td>
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<td>3. Coachella</td>
<td>1946</td>
<td>1966: 3 Chicanos; has maintained majority to present.</td>
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<td>5. Commerce</td>
<td>1960</td>
<td>1977: 3 Chicanos; has maintained majority to present; when first incorporated had two Chicanos on council</td>
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<td>6. Firebaugh</td>
<td>1914</td>
<td>1985: 3 Chicanos; has maintained majority to present.</td>
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<tr>
<td>City</td>
<td>Year Incorporated</td>
<td>Year Chicanos Dominate City Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Irwindale</td>
<td>1957</td>
<td>1958: 5 Chicanos; has maintained majority to present; first council comprised of all Chicanos including the mayor.</td>
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<td>10. Mendota</td>
<td>1942</td>
<td>1979: 4 Chicanos; has maintained majority to present; went from 1 Chicano representative in 1978 to 4 the next year.</td>
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<td>11. Orange Cove</td>
<td>1948</td>
<td>1979: 4 Chicanos; has maintained majority to present; went from 1 Chicano representative in 1979 to 4 the next year.</td>
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<td>12. Parlier</td>
<td>1921</td>
<td>1971: 4 Chicanos; has maintained majority to present; went from zero Chicano representatives 1970 to 4 the next year.</td>
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<td>13. Pico Rivera</td>
<td>1958</td>
<td>1984: 3 Chicanos; has maintained majority to present.</td>
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<td>14. San Fernando</td>
<td>1911</td>
<td>1987: 3 Chicanos; has maintained majority to present.</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. Soledad</td>
<td>1921</td>
<td>1975: 3 Chicanos; loses majority shortly afterwards in 1977-1980 during which years 3 persons with Italian surnames dominate the council. Regain majority with 4 Chicanos in 1981-82 only to lose it again in 1984 to three persons with Anglo surnames until 1987 at which time 3 Chicanos dominate the council. In 1988 are only 2 Chicano council members, 1 Anglo, 2 vacancies.</td>
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<td>16. South El Monte</td>
<td>1958</td>
<td>1971: 4 Chicanos; has maintained majority to present; went from 1 Chicano representative to 4.</td>
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<td>17. Vernon</td>
<td>1905</td>
<td>1984</td>
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### TABLE 4
Pattern of Chicano Representation on 17 California City Councils, 1965-1988

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*Rural cities
Sources: Data are based on Spanish surname, compiled from California Roster(s) of Elected Officials for all years except 1983-87; the California Roster was not published for the years 1983 & 1986; data for years 1984, 1985 & 1987 compiled from the NALEO Roster of Hispanic Elected Officials; 1973 California Roster data were cross-checked with data from Lemus' 1973 Spanish-surnamed elected officials of California.
V. THE LATINIZATION OF A TOWN DEPENDENT ON IMMIGRANT LABOR

Above we have examined data regarding California rural communities in which Chicanos dominate city council seats. The number of council seats won by Chicanos in any given city, however, may not adequately reflect the degree of struggle by Latinos to achieve equality and representation in their communities. Watsonville, an agriculturally-based community, is a case in point.

Located at the southern end of Santa Cruz County in the fertile Pajaro Valley, Watsonville is one of 47 California cities in 1988 that has a single Latino city councilmember; until May 1987 there had never been a person of Mexican origin on the city council in the history of the city. Watsonville Latinos were also effectively excluded from decision-making roles in union locals and in institutions in which future political leaders are cultivated, e.g., city commissions, the Chamber of Commerce, Woman’s Club, Rotary and other fraternal organizations. Anglos predominate in the available city jobs and no Latino holds a high-ranking paid position within the city government. What the lack of numbers of Latinos on the Watsonville city council and in other key leadership positions does reflect is the history of discrimination the city’s Chicanos and Mexicanos have endured. It also reflects a response by dominant Anglos to the latinization of a town they have long considered “theirs.”

Although Mexican-origin people inhabited the Pajaro Valley before and after Watsonville was founded, Latinos have only become a significant part of the Watsonville population since the 1960’s. Founded by Yankees from the East and Europeans in the mid-1800’s, both Anglo-Americans and Latinos agree that the Chicano/Mexicano population comprises over 60% of Watsonville’s total population in the 1980’s.

Anglos appear to have become aware of the latinization of Watsonville by the 1960’s, as evidenced in articles carried by the local newspaper, the Register-Pajaronian (RP). In 1967, the RP carried a series on the local Latino community published in both English and Spanish. One article (RP 9/14/67:14) entitled “Fiesta brings recognition to local Mexican community,” announced the first community-wide celebration of Mexican Independence Day planned jointly by the Economic Opportunity Commission, the Chamber of Commerce and six community groups. The event was billed as recognition of “one of its (Watsonville’s) most important segments -- the Mexicans.” One Latino planner (RP 9/14/67:14) accorded the celebration a second, very important purpose, that of “mak[ing] the Mexican proud of his heritage here, and we want, in turn, to show the Anglo community that in the Mexicans, they have something to be proud of.”

A second article in the series (RP 9/14/67:19) recognized the Pajaro Valley’s 20-year dependence on Mexican labor and their contribution to the increase in retail sales. In 1970, a local journalist observed that the placement of Spanish signs over the postal slots at the Watsonville post office was symbolic of “official recognition ...that there is more than one face to our society -- that another culture is inextricably linked with the one we usually think of as ‘ours’” (Akers 1970). While he gave Watsonville credit for this gesture in bi-cultural relations, he nevertheless warned the reading public not to assume that it implied that racism and bigotry was rare in Watsonville. He concluded (Ibid. 1970), “Hardly a day goes by that you don’t run up against evidence of both.”

Other indicators of the latinization of Watsonville through the 1970’s include a letter to the editor...
Other indicators of the latinization of Watsonville through the 1970's include a letter to the editor from a resident observing that the local movie theater had "gone Spanish" (RP 3/30/73) and another letter complaining of the writer's inability to find employment in Watsonville because she could not speak Spanish (RP 10/22/74):

I want to know the reason when I try to get a job the first thing they ask is "can you speak Spanish?" ... The old saying is when in Rome do as the Romans do, not Romans do as the immigrants. Well, if you haven't noticed this is America not Mexico!... I thought the American colors were red, white and blue. But stop and look around and the colors seem to be red, white and green.

Her letter elicited a number of supporting and opposing responses from other members of the community. In the former category, another woman complained she was denied a job interview because she couldn't speak Spanish (RP 11/5/74): "I think everyone should have a chance for a job if they really want it, but I don't think they should be kicked out of the running just because they stayed American in America."

1977 was designated the "year of bi-lingual education" in the Pajaro School District by the Register-Pajaronian staff in their "wrap-up" of the year's important events (RP 12/31/77). The article noted that a new state law requiring that bi-lingual education be provided for those who requested it had taken effect that year; it also reported that the law was being actively opposed by a local group calling itself "Concerned Citizens for Education." A member of this citizens' group, a graduate of the local high school, was quoted as asking the school board Trustees "why Mexican-Americans were being 'catered to' all of a sudden," when they had not been when he was a Watsonville High student. When a staff reporter asked why the implementation of bi-lingual education was being resisted, a teacher replied (Ibid):

They're resisting it because they feel it's being shoved down their throats. It comes down to a political and economical threat. They see it as the shadow descending over the land -- they see Watsonville becoming a Spanish-speaking town.

In 1950, the Latino community comprised 8.8% (1,001 persons) of the total population of 11,374 persons; ten years later, the Latino community had doubled, accounting for 17.0% of the total population (13,293). By 1970, it comprised 34.85% (5,069) of the total population (14,561) and in the 1980 census count, made up 48.9% (11,509) of a total of 23,543 inhabitants.

Mexican-origin persons, immigrants and native-born, are now the largest ethnic group in Watsonville. According to a Latina businesswoman, born and raised and living for sixty years in Watsonville, the latinization of the city in the late 1970's and 1980's is perhaps most apparent by the numbers of Chicanos and Mexicanos shopping downtown and the ease in which they stroll down Main Street. "When I was growing up here," she confided (Interview #60 July 1987), "you never saw Mexicans downtown unless their employers brought them... no way, they knew better... they [the employers] would bring them [Mexican workers] in back of their big trucks every couple of weeks to do their shopping, then haul them back to the farms or wherever the workers lived...."

An Anglo attorney (Interview #32 April 1987) verified the woman's statement. A former Watsonville police officer in the 1950's, he added that there existed an "informal understanding" that they [the police officers] were to keep Mexicans from coming above lower Main Street.
Most businesses, banks and city offices have had to hire some bi-lingual speakers in order to serve their Spanish-speaking clientele. Although still concentrated in the 200 and 300 blocks of Main Street, Latino businesses have slowly appeared on "upper" Main street blocks; in the windows of some non-Latino shops, Se Habla Espaol signs are prominently displayed. Quincenera gowns and paraphernalia in bridal shop windows attest to the presence of Mexican families in Watsonville, as does the Mexican zapateria franchise, Canada. Mexican meals, jugos de frutas (fruit juices) and postres (pastries) are available at any number of small Mexican-owned and operated restaurants and stores; the foodstuffs are typical of the Michoacan and Jalisco regions of Mexico, where the majority of Mexican immigrants in Watsonville are from. Weeknights and weekends, Latino soccer teams may be seen practicing their art in any of the city parks. Climate permitting, young Mexican parents or grandparents keep watchful eyes on their progeny from park benches in the downtown plaza; Mexican men in work clothes congregate in small all-male groups in the plaza, eating, smoking, exchanging information or otherwise communing with one another. Sunday evenings, Chicano/Mexicano car club members promenade about the plaza in their specially designed automobiles.

The phenomenal growth of the Watsonville Chicano/Mexicano community may be attributed in part to agriculture's increased dependence on a large and settled labor force. In recent decades, changes in California agriculture and related industries have resulted in the evolution of the labor market's dependence on circular migrants to a dependence on a large, year-round labor force. In the Watsonville area, this is seen in the increasingly lengthened harvest and frozen food processing seasons, and in the replacement of capital-intensive field crops requiring little labor with fruit and vegetable row crops requiring more, and more specialized, labor (Wells 1982; Mines and Martin 1983; Palerm 1988). This development is also reflected in the manufacturing and service sector labor markets. The sustained demand for new immigrant labor by U.S. business interests, the maturation of Mexican network immigration to the U.S. since 1970, the intensification of the economic crisis in Mexico since 1982, and domestic and foreign policies of the U.S. government have all contributed to the dramatic rate of large-scale settlement of Mexican families in California and other regions.

Watsonville's Latinos are concentrated in agriculture, agriculturally related industries, and low-level service sector jobs. Their numbers are also reflected in public school student enrollments, adult English courses, religious membership rolls and in their purchasing power, upon which local businesses have become dependent. Where their numbers are not adequately reflected are in higher-income and upper-management employment, in institutions of higher education and in other social and political institutions whose members make decisions about community resource distribution. Large-scale settlement of Mexican immigrant workers in the Pajaro Valley, a consequence of changing agricultural practices and domestic and foreign policies, thus challenges the status quo regarding the Latino community's entitlement to Watsonville's resources and full participation in community affairs, including in the local body politic.

VI. DISCRIMINATION AGAINST THE WATSONVILLE LATINO COMMUNITY

A Latino resident remarked (RP 9/14/67:14) that the point of the first city-wide Mexican Independence Day celebrated in Watsonville was "to relate the struggle of the Mexicans against the Spanish in 1810 to the struggle of the Mexicans today to gain their rightful place in American society." That Watsonville Chicanos and Mexicanos were struggling against discrimination and racism was well recognized by Anglos and Latinos alike. A local Anglo reporter wrote (RP 9/14/67:13):
For the average Mexican family, life in Watsonville is not overly promising. Ask most Anglos, and they'll look aghast at the suggestion that discrimination is practiced against Mexicans in town. But ask most Mexicans, they will be able to cite case after case, many of them documented, of subtle but definite discrimination [our emphasis].

In some instances, racist attitudes were not so subtle, as in the case of a public statement made by an Anglo woman before the Santa Cruz County Low Income Housing Commission...Yeherently opposed to the county establishing a housing authority to deal with its critical housing shortage, the woman first expressed her disapproval of the Spanish translation provided for the seventy-five Chicanos/Mexicanos attending the meeting. She then added (Levy1969:16):

When I came here, I worked. I advise Mexican-Americans and alleged Mexican-Americans to do the same thing. Any (housing) projects we would have here after five years would be slums. You don't have any right [she told the supervisors] to decide on low-income housing for any people who don't want to work. [To the Chicanos/ Mexicanos, she said], Work, earn your money, build your houses and don't become beggars.

A group of Anglo citizens echoed the above sentiments before the Santa Cruz county board of supervisors. Attending the meeting to present the board with a list of thirty complaints against the county government, their presentation included what they identified as the source of the county's and society's problems. Comparing the industries in neighboring Monterey county with those in Santa Cruz county, one member of this group complained (RP 5/21/69:1):

What do we have here? A gum factory, a stinking mushroom plant, and culture, culture, and more culture. I've never seen culture pay very much taxes.

A second member of the group suggested the county could save a lot of money by buying the "undesirables" (hippies, Afro-Americans and Mexican-Americans) a one-way ticket "back where they came from."

The Watsonville anti-poverty center, funded by the Economic Opportunity Commission, documented cases of housing and employment discrimination in the city. The agency's Latino director spoke of the Anglo community's contradiction: they exhibit a deprecatng attitude toward Mexicans but also asked why Latinos fail to become part of the community. His retort was (RP 9/14/67:13):

...before a person becomes a part of that group, you have to be wanted by the group... with this prevailing attitude among the 'establishment' of the community, how can this same 'establishment' expect the Mexicans to become part of it?

Perhaps the most resolute public statement by members of the Watsonville Latino community about the discrimination and racism they labored under came in response to the death of a local Chicano activist. Carlos Rivera, active in bi-lingual education issues, died in a barroom altercation with an Anglo; witnesses testified that the fight was prompted by Rivera's claim that Mexicans were taking over the California government. Outraged at what they deemed was an insensitive and inadequate investigation into Rivera's death, Latino community members strenuously maintained that the tragedy was the result of racism. In an open letter to the editor of the
Register-Pajaronian, copies of which were also sent to the Departments of Justice in Sacramento and Washington, D.C., they declared Rivera's death to be another example of "the despicable double standard" which prevailed in Watsonville. They contended (RP 11/20/70:16):

...we most emphatically believe that the underlying CAUSE OF THIS DEATH is white racism nurtured by bigoted newsmen who insist on portraying the Mexican-Americans in an evil light whenever they muster the courage to challenge the white dominated system which relegates them to second-class citizens, economically, socially and culturally. Racism is also nurtured by law enforcement officers who look only for the criminal trait in every Mexican-American, brushing against the law in his quest for justice and equality, but who simultaneously make excuses for flagrant law breakers who happen to be white [our emphasis].

Watsonville business and paternal organizations were slow to recruit Latinos as members. And at least one Watsonville club, the Elks Lodge No. 1300, had a well-known "Whites only" membership policy which prohibited membership to non-whites, including persons of Mexican origin (RP 12/9/70:26; 12/20/70:16).

In 1971, a Mexican woman spoke out against the injustice of the club's color-bar before an Anglo group attending the Watsonville Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture's annual award ceremony; the dinner and ceremony was held in the Elk's Club banquet room. The woman, a naturalized U.S. citizen and founder of a grassroots, pro-bilingual education parents' group, COPE (Comunidad Organizada Para Educacion), was the recipient of the Chamber's Woman of the Year award for her community work that year. When presented with the award, the woman told those assembled that she had at first decided not to attend the ceremony because of the Elks Club's prevailing color-bar; she pointed out that her family and friends, who should share in the award, were prevented from patronizing the club. She also remarked on the irony of presenting the Japanese/Japanese-American strawberry farmers with an award for their contributions to Watsonville that same evening, when they were also restricted from joining the Elks Club.

The woman's condemnation prompted a person who had attended the ceremony to send her an anonymous letter in which she was accused of rudeness and bad manners. The writer went on to extend her sentiments from the Mexicana activist to the entire Chicano/Mexicano race (RP 2/13/71):

Senora "Ill Manners" -
.... You and many of your Compadres come here -- Take all you can get and insult us; and we're supposed to take it. Because you're one of the minority groups (as you call them). We pay taxes so you can live in fine homes -- eat high off the hog -- and help support you in the style you have Never been accustomed to. The Elks reserve the right to pick and choose their members; it is a "private club." I'm the proud WIFE of an Elk.

VII. MOBILIZATION OF THE CHICANO/MEXICANO COMMUNITY

Despite these obstacles, Chicanos and Mexicanos mobilized around a number of issues which had direct bearing on the Latino community in the 1960's, e.g., housing, hiring of Spanish-
speaking teachers and staff, bi-lingual education, and farm labor unionizing. By the late 1960's, Watsonville Latino mobilization began to reflect the protest-demand politics of civil rights groups around the country. By the end of that decade, Register-Pajaronian staff observed (12/31/69:4):

The upheaval of the rest of the state and nation hit Watsonville, as a result of the previous week's sit-in at city hall [by Chicanos], and 200 persons gathered at a special session of the city council in which demands of Mexican-Americans in the community were made. Six written demands were presented to the council.

That same year, Watsonville witnessed a high school walkout and march to downtown by Latino students and supporters; they demanded that Chicano studies be added to the school curriculum (RP 12/18/69:1). Chavez's grape boycott pickets demonstrated outside of local stores, foreshadowing the next decade in which, after years of bitter fighting, many Pajaro Valley farmers would be forced to negotiate with the United Farm Workers Union. In Watsonville, the 1970's would be hailed as that decade in which the UFW "changed the face of California agriculture" (Shender 1979:8).

Latino protest-demand politics in the city of Watsonville have had some measure of success in affecting county and city policy. The April 1969 "sit-in" of city hall (Sheerin 1969:1-2), appears to have hastened the creation of a county housing authority to implement a low-income housing plan; a county housing authority, spearheaded by the EOC anti-poverty center in the mid-1960's, had been the topic of study and debate for years. The editor of the Register-Pajaronian commented (RP 4/29/69) that while housing was not being totally ignored by county and city officials, "perhaps protests will help speed things up in Watsonville, Santa Cruz..."

Nine months after the sit-in, a county housing authority had been created, a director had been found, and a plan was underway to rent out 200 units of subsidized, low-income housing in the county. The new director (Levy 1970:1) called the housing situation in Watsonville "a high priority problem," noting that the city's permanent housing stock was impacted because migrant farm workers were no longer migrating.

As the agricultural changes mentioned above have continued to intensify the industry's need for large numbers of farm workers in the 1970's and through the 1980's, housing has continued to be a major problem for Watsonville. And as Latinos are the community most affected by the lack of housing or substandard living conditions, Latino community advocates have thus continued to press city and county officials for housing relief. A fledgling Housing Task Force created by members of the local LULAC chapter in 1987 has evolved into a body of Latino grassroots leaders sophisticated in housing issues, and of local, county and regional housing experts who have volunteered their expertise and time to address the dire need for housing. The LULAC Housing Task Force has successfully championed their cause before the County Board of Supervisors but has met resistance from the Watsonville City Council.

In the early 1970's, Latino parents discovered that Title I monies received by the Pajaro Valley School District had never been spent on compensatory education for its target populations as mandated by the federal government. Chicano and Mexican parents organized themselves into a group called Comunidad Organizada Para Educacion, and insisted that these monies be spent on items which would facilitate the education of Latino children, i.e., bi-lingual education programs and hiring of bi-lingual teachers' aides, teachers and staff.
Parents attended school board meetings and refused to be deterred from their demands regardless of the tactics employed by the trustees to put them off. Assisted by the anti-poverty agency, the Community Action Board staff, parents wrote for and received funding from the Rosenberg Foundation for the first bi-lingual school in the Pajaro school district; in time, the school district employed its first bi-lingual staff, bi-lingual classroom aides, and increased the number of bi-lingual teachers it employed (Donato 1987).

Bi-lingual education has continued to be resisted in Watsonville, as in other cities across the nation. In 1988, its validity is again being studied by the Pajaro School District, decried by its detractors and defended by its proponents. The Pajaro Valley League of Latin American Citizens (LULAC) is among the latter.

Prior to 1970, only three persons of Mexican descent had received city commission appointments, the first being in 1964; each appointment was for one term. In the 1970's, four Latinos received city commission appointments. Chicano/Mexicano demand-protest politics were expanded to include electoral politics in the 1970's. Chicanos ran for county supervisor, the community college board, school board and city council seats. Chicanos would finally prevail only in school board elections by the mid-1970's.

In the 1980's, members of the Latino community would continue efforts to rectify the social, economic and political inequities its people experienced. In recent years, Watsonville has received national attention because of two major events spearheaded by Chicanos, Mexicanos and their non-Latino supporters. One event involves a voting rights lawsuit against the city of Watsonville; the second was an 18-month-long strike by Teamsters Union workers against what was the nation's largest frozen food processor to maintain their wage levels and benefits.

These two events represent organizing efforts by two of several groups comprising the Watsonville Chicano/Mexicano community as distinguished by occupational status and education. On the one hand, the voting rights lawsuit lay within the purview of middle-class and professional Chicanos and Mexicanos. The Watsonville Canning strike was, on the other hand, an effort largely sustained by working-class Mexicanos and Chicanos. Although the two groups attended to the issue that most closely represented their class interest, both had to confront the same entrenched power structures. Both were also making the same demand to the Anglos who dominated city and union politics, that is, insisting on being part of the decision-making bodies which make policy about the distribution of resources, decisions which ultimately affect the Chicano/Mexicano community.

These two events are of further interest because of the major political roles Chicanas and Mexicanas have played in them. Of the nine Latinos who ran for city council positions from 1971-1985, four are women. Chicana candidate Cruz Gomez was instrumental in bringing the voting rights issue to the attention of MALDEF and in generating support for it by the LULAC membership and in the Latino community in general. Perhaps because of her self-appointed role as Latino community advocate, Gomez was also one of the few middle-class Chicanos who also took an active part in the politics of the Watsonville Cannery strike.

The strike took on the image of being a Mexicano/Chicano struggle since the majority of the 1,100 striking frozen food workers were Mexicanas and Chicanas. Several distinct political groups emerged during the strike, each with its own leadership; El Proyecto Trabajadores Caneria (the Cannery Workers Project) was, however, recognized as representing the majority of strikers during the strike.
Gloria Bettancourt, a twenty-four-year veteran of canning and frozen food processing work, became one of the Proyecto's major spokespersons. Most of the Mexicana strikers had never been involved in politics before the strike; Bettancourt came to symbolize their politicalization and active leadership in the strike. Prior to the strike, she had run unsuccessfully for Secretary of the local Teamsters Union. In 1988, as one of the outcomes of her political activities in the strike, Bettancourt was elected a Jackson delegate for the 16th Congressional District (Monterey) and participated in the 1988 Democratic Convention in Atlanta; she received more votes than any other candidate for delegate in this district.

VIII. THE WATSONVILLE CANNING STRIKE: A POLITICAL VICTORY

Watsonville is the self-proclaimed "Frozen-Food Capital of the World." Before the merger of two major frozen food processing plants (NORCAL and J.J. Crossetti's) in 1988, Watsonville boasted eight such plants. Watsonville Canning Co. was the largest frozen food processor in the country. In the summer of 1985, the company claimed that a loss of profits brought about by less consumer demand for frozen foods and stiffer foreign competition was forcing it to make pay and benefit cuts. The Richard Shaw Company, a competitor of Watsonville Canning's, demanded similar reductions. On September 9, 1985, 1,750 workers from the two plants voted to strike. While the Shaw workers would agree to go back to work six months later, Watsonville Canning workers remained on strike for 18 months. None of the 1,100 strikers crossed the picket line (Bardacke 1987).

Attempts by the plant owners to "bust" the workers' union failed, as did their ploy to replace the strikers with inexperienced crews of strikebreakers. Watsonville Canning Company's owners were finally foreclosed on by Wells Fargo Bank, who sold the processing plant to a vegetable grower. The grower, owed over $5 million by Watsonville Canning, bought the plant in an effort to recoup his losses. Convinced that he would need experienced workers in order to get the plant back running at profitable levels of production, the new owner began to negotiate with the union. He would, however, try to get the union to agree to another concessionary contract that would deny 85% of the workers medical benefits for three years.

Upon rejecting this so-called final offer, the strikers were abandoned by their own union. The Teamsters called off the strike, cut off the strikers' $55 a week strike pay, and declared further picketing to be illegal. Regardless of this added pressure, the strikers staged a wildcat strike for four days, forcing the union and new owner to renegotiate. The strikers emerged victorious, having won industry wage parity and medical benefits which were to begin three months after their return to work.

A detailed description and analysis of the union workers' politics prior to, during and after the strike is beyond the scope of this paper; mention of the strike here serves to demonstrate how participation in one political struggle may foster the transfer of newly-acquired political skills to another political arena. We expect that former strikers will bid for elected positions within the Teamsters Union Local 912; their platform, one potential candidate stated, is to create a union that is more responsive to its workers needs.

Clearly, former strikers will not confine their political participation to union politics in the future; one example mentioned earlier is Gloria Bettancourt. Bettancourt developed her political skills as a member of the Watsonville Canning Company Strike Committee and continues to be active in the Santa Cruz Rainbow Coalition as well as in union politics. Other former strikers also
continue to be politically active within and outside of the union; several now serve as board members of the county anti-poverty agency (CAB), immigration center, and other non-profit agencies.

Early in the strike, frozen food workers recognized how their own struggle was fettered by other political institutions which lack Latino representation. In a roundtable discussion held a year after the strike began, strikers were asked if they thought the political climate of the city had changed. The five participants answered in the affirmative. A Mexicano strike leader stated that the police and City Council were on the side of the boss, and against workers. He maintained (Adams et al.1987:12), however, that these institutions had had to make some concessions to the strikers because of the effectiveness of the workers’ political pressures:

They say that they want to help us but that’s because we have pressured them.... of their own free will, they never did that before. What they are doing is now they are looking at the elections that are coming up. They know they depend on us as to whether they will return to power. But something else we have learned is that we have the right to vote, and not only ourselves, but our families.... And we have to look at who we are voting for, which people will represent us.

Gloria Bettancourt added (Adams et al.1987:13):

In the upcoming elections we have to unite and vote to give Latinos more representation, because all the people are white.... the City Council members. The times we have gone there, it has been very noticeable that they see us with great indifference. They don’t care about Raza workers. That is why we want to unite to get more... Latino representation.

IX. CHICANO/MEXICANO QUEST FOR MUNICIPAL REPRESENTATION

Members of the Chicano/Mexicano community have attempted to achieve representation on the Watsonville city council for sixteen years. Since 1971, nine Latinos have run for city council seats, eight as candidates for the council and one for mayor; all were soundly defeated. As a result of this history of failure at the polls, three local Chicanos determined to seek a legal remedy to what they believed was a discriminatory election system. Together with the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF), they filed a lawsuit against the city of Watsonville in 1985 challenging its at-large municipal election system (Gomez vs. the City of Watsonville 1985). The local LULAC chapter, comprised largely of middle-class and professional Latinos, voted to demonstrate their support of the suit by designating themselves as “Friends of the Court.”

Under legal and political duress, Anglos supported a Mexican-American candidate for a city council seat for the first time; in May 1987, Watsonville elected its first Latino councilmember. City officials and their supporters herald this event as proof that a qualified candidate may be elected regardless of his/her race or ethnicity and as disproving MALDEF’s charges of racially polarized voting. Obviously, the election of a minority under these circumstances is hardly indicative of the Latino community’s access to the political process. Latinos simply cannot rely on the good graces of the Anglo electorate to continue to field fewer Anglo candidates than there are vacancies; “if participation is to be labeled ‘effective’ then it certainly must be a matter of right, and not a function of grace.” (Graves v. Barnes, 343 F.Supp. 704, 726, [W.D. Tex. 1972]).
Anglo Rationalization of Chicanos’ Lack of Municipal Representation

In interviews conducted by Takash in 1986-1988, Anglos who deny the existence of institutionalized racism in Watsonville usually explained the lack of Latino representation as a result of their (Latinos’) own lack of qualifications and lack of participation in the community. Speaking before the first meeting of the Hispanic Affairs Committee of the city chamber, attended by approximately forty Latino businesspersons in February 1987, former Mayor Ann Soldo at first apologized that the chamber had failed to make a sustained effort to recruit Latino businesspersons. “This should have happened sooner,” she began. But her apologetic demeanor was quickly dropped. Singling out a founder of the defunct Latino Chamber of Commerce who was among those assembled, she chided him for creating a second chamber; if Latinos really wanted to feel like they belonged, they should not create separate institutions but should begin to participate in the community at large.

The rationale that Latinos have not succeeded in securing elected offices because they have not bothered to involve themselves in the political process nor in community affairs is often reiterated by some Anglos. In a self-congratulatory editorial regarding the district court’s opinion that there was no evidence of racial discrimination in Watsonville for over thirty years, the writer stated (RP 2/4/87):

The city has won its case [at-large election challenge], at least for now (MALDEF may appeal). With a council election coming up this Spring, the city has a chance to show how wrong MALDEF really was in its lawsuit. But for this to happen, Hispanics themselves will have to get involved in local politics at least to the extent of learning something about the candidates and issues, and registering and voting [our emphasis].

After the district judge’s opinion was overturned by the Appellate Court in July 1987, Mayor Betty Murphy continued to insist that Watsonville’s problem is not racism but is “getting Hispanic candidates to run” (Egekgo 1988:1).

What is also implied by this rationale is a Catch-22 situation: one is apparently judged as taking a real interest in the community if one participates in Anglo-dominated institutions, the same institutions which have actively or subtly excluded minorities.

A Question of Qualifications

Watsonvillians who do not support the MALDEF lawsuit against the city explain the Latino candidates’ history of electoral losses by two other rationale. First, they contend that none of the nine candidates was qualified and second, that Latinos were not elected because the majority of their constituency is illegal and thus ineligible to vote. On the former point, the city attorney opined his belief that while a “qualified Hispanic” could be elected in Watsonville, (San Jose Mercury News 1/19/87):

The [past Latino] candidates have not been viable candidates who could appeal to both Hispanics and whites as representing the best interests of the city. The candidates have not been involved in city and community affairs — on boards and commissions and the Chamber of Commerce and other community affairs.
Examining the personal histories of the nine candidates on the criteria of education, occupation, length of residency in Watsonville, active participation in Latino organizations or service agencies, active participation in Anglo institutions, and political ideology, we found the following:

(a) Educational achievement: all candidates had achieved some college education; several held business or college degrees
(b) Occupation: candidates included businesspersons, small business owners or community service employees
(c) Residency: six of the nine candidates were "locals" (born and/or raised in Watsonville), one had lived in the community for over nine years at the time he ran, two had lived in town for less than five but more than two years
(d) Latino organizations: all but one were members of local Latino service organizations, i.e., Latino Chamber of Commerce, LULAC, etc.
(e) Anglo organizations: one served on the city planning commission prior to and during his council bid, one served as director for the local YWCA
(f) The nine ranged from conservative to left of center in their political beliefs.

Moreover, these candidates conducted extensive campaigns. Candidates such as Cruz Gomez had large campaign organizations. Part of the campaign involved the registration of new voters. Members of the campaign conducted these registration drives primarily in the Latino community. Apart from these registration activities, the campaign organization sent out mailers soliciting funds to registered Democrats in Watsonville and the surrounding area. Additional solicitation campaigns were also undertaken. Significantly, a substantial majority of the Anglo contributions came from areas outside of the city of Watsonville.

The Latina candidate also visited Anglo homes seeking support. Receptions were undertaken at several Anglo homes. Additional outreach efforts consisted of attending luncheons sponsored by Anglo organizations. These extensive efforts to seek support from the Anglo community were not successful. Cruz Gomez lost the election because the majority of the voting Anglo community did not support her candidacy.

While the criteria which constitute a "qualified" candidate are never explicitly nor formally delineated, successful candidates' qualifications appear to include, among other criteria:

(a) graduating from the local high school, thus being able to capitalize, vote-wise, on high school friendships and acquaintances, and/or long residency in Watsonville,
(b) kinship through blood or marriage to Anglo-Slavonians,
(c) active membership in any of several fraternal, civic and business clubs dominated by Anglos, e.g., the Rotary Club, Chamber of Commerce, Woman's Club, and
(d) appointments to city commissions, e.g. economic development commission, city planning commission, etc.

**Lack of Anglo Voter Support for Latino Candidates**

The absence of Anglo support for the Latino candidates was extensively documented by Dr. Bernard Grofman, a political scientist and key witness in the MALDEF challenge of Watsonville's at-large election system. According to his analysis, Latino candidates usually placed last or next to last in the election: 1973 -- Estrada: last; Montoya: next to last; 1979 -- Cervantes (mayor): last; Campos: last; Ledesma: sixth; 1981 -- Carabarin: sixth; 1983 -- Gomez: next to last; 1985 -- Bautista: last. Anglo support for Latino candidates ranged from 3% of the Anglo voters in the 1979 mayoral election to 22% of the Anglo voters in the 1983 city council election.
In sharp contrast, the Latino community unanimously supported the Latino candidates: 1973 -- Estrada: tied for first; Montoya: first; 1979 -- Cervantes (mayor): first; Campos: tied for first; Ledesma: tied for first; 1981 -- Carabarin: tied for first; 1983 -- C. Gomez: first; 1985 -- Bautista: first. The presence of racially polarized voting was fairly well established. The federal judge noted:

I find that this evidence strongly suggests to the point of preponderance a proclivity on the part of Hispanic voters and Anglo voters to support candidates who are members of their respective groups. On the issue of polarization, as indicated in Thornburg, the court is principally concerned with the behavior of the Anglo community and whether as a factual reality that behavior dictates the virtual impossibility of the election of an Hispanic candidate under the present at-large election procedures. On the basis of the evidence before me, I conclude that a preponderance of the evidence favors plaintiffs on this issue.

As the statistical evidence indicated, there was a very high correlation between the ethnicity of the voter and the ethnicity of the candidate. The evidence further demonstrated that Anglo candidates supported by the Latino community, with the exception of one Anglo candidate, were not supported by the Anglo community in the elections for 1973, 1979, 1981, 1983, and 1985. Although the federal judge found that there was racially polarized voting and that two minority districts could be created, the minority plaintiffs were unsuccessful in their efforts to invalidate the at-large election system.

**City Commission Appointments: Institutions by Which to “Groom” Latinos**

The first Latino was appointed to a city commission in 1964; only five other Latinos would be appointed during the next fourteen years. From 1980 to 1987, ten Latinos were appointed to commissions under the mayorship of Ann Soldo. That commission appointments are seen as a vehicle to bring minorities into city government is clear from statements made by former Mayor Soldo and her successor, Mayor Betty Murphy. In an interview with the latter city official, Takash (1987) was told that some council members were attempting to “groom” Latinos for public office by appointing them to city commissions. Soldo stated (1/19/87) to a Mercury News reporter that commission appointments are “a step towards having Hispanics on the City Council.” Defending city officials against charges of discrimination and racism by the MALDEF plaintiffs, Murphy (RP 7/27/88) is on record as saying:

> We’ve tried to get Hispanic people on the City Council; that is why Ann Soldo and I have tried to get them appointed to commissions. That is how I got started with the Planning Commission. We’ve tried to encourage them, but it’s not like people are lined up with their tongues hanging out wanting to be on the council. It’s a lot of hard work.

Murphy also stated (Interview #22 1987) that it is only good sense for anyone wanting to serve on the council to become familiar with the operations of the city before running for office by serving on commissions. While one could agree with her contention on the outset, one also has to ask why Murphy was one of very few Anglo councilmembers to serve on a city commission prior to being elected; the practice of appointing Latinos to commissions in order to render them viable candidates in the eyes of the voting majority thus takes on a discriminatory face, as Anglos are not penalized for this lack of experience.
The successful Anglo council candidate in the most recent (May 1987) council race never served in that capacity nor had any other kind of city government experience; born and raised in Watsonville, he has a high-school education, is a graduate of the local high school, the son of a former Watsonville councilmember, is related by marriage to Anglo-Slovonians, and was easily elected. One may surmise that, prior to 1987, Anglos also had more social and institutional opportunities to prove themselves viable public servants to the Anglo voting majority than did most minority candidates.

City commission appointments do provide minorities the opportunity to become familiar with city issues, to develop strategizing, speaking and leadership skills, and to gain entry into social networks otherwise off-limits to him or her. Their participation on commissions also provides a mechanism for those in power to carefully observe minority members and to determine if they share the same values (are culturally assimilated) as the dominant population.

**Watsonville's First City Councilmember of Mexican Origin**

Watsonville's first Latino councilmember, Anthony Campos, served on two city commissions in the 1980's. Just prior to his election, the Latino councilmember publicly stated that he did not support the districting efforts by MALDEF, as he believed the at-large election system worked *(San Francisco Chronicle 1/87).*

Campos lost his first bid for the council nine years before winning in 1987. At the time, he was neither a vocal advocate for the Latino community nor does he appear to have been active in Anglo-dominated institutions. During this nine year hiatus, Campos became active in Anglo community events, participated in the city Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture, served as a community college board member, and was appointed to the design review and planning commissions. He was not a member of the local LULAC or any other Latino organization. Perhaps not entirely by coincidence, Campos was appointed Chair of a new commission, the Hispanic Affairs Commission, created within the city chamber after his candidacy was declared and prior to the elections.

During his campaign, there was some question by sectors of the Chicano/Mexicano community whether Campos could legitimately claim to represent the interests of Watsonville Latinos; as Campos is a wealthy real estate developer, several informants remarked that the interests they believed Campos represents were already well-represented on the city council. Although Campos ran on the platform of representing the entire community, it was clear that his Anglo supporters used his ethnicity to deny their discrimination of past Latino candidates; the former and past mayors of Watsonville and other city councilmembers, all opponents of the MALDEF at-large challenge, were among his Anglo endorsers. The city of Watsonville's legal representative in the MALDEF lawsuit against the city specifically called Campos' ethnicity to the attention of the Appellate Court judges in an attempt to persuade the court that at-large elections do not discriminate against ethnic minorities.

**Factors Affecting Low Latino Registration and Turn-out Rates in Watsonville**

Some opponents of the MALDEF lawsuit also believe that Latino candidates fail at the polls because the majority of the Watsonville Latino population is "illegal," and thus ineligible to vote. At first glance, the large percentage of Spanish Origin population would suggest that the Latino community would have no difficulty in securing election to the city council. However, the
Spanish Origin population percentage also contains persons who are not citizens. According to sample census data, out of the 23,543 total population only 18,102 or 76.9% were citizens. With respect to the Spanish Origin population, out of the 11,466 persons, 6,703 or 58.5% were citizens. Out of the city's total citizen population, the Spanish Origin citizen population comprised 37.0%. Thus the pool of eligible Latino voters was considerably less than the total Spanish Origin population percentage.

The potential Latino impact on the electoral process is further diminished when the levels of Spanish surname registration are examined. The percent of Spanish surname registered voters for Watsonville was 17% in 1973, 15% in 1979, 17% in 1981, 19% in 1983, and 22% in 1985.

Similarly, the registration rate differed significantly between the Latino population and the Anglo population. In 1980, there were 8,936 non-Spanish Origin persons who were eighteen years and older and who were citizens. Out of this eligible voter population, there were 6,554 non-Spanish surname registered voters for a registration rate of 73.3%. For the same year, there were 3,935 Spanish Origin persons who were eighteen years and older and who were citizens. Out of this Spanish Origin eligible voter population, there were 1,338 Spanish surname registered voters for a registration rate of 34.0%.

The disparity in the registration rates was reflected in the turnout rates, as well. For example, in the 1985 city council elections, out of 6,879 non-Spanish surname registered voters, 1,900 non-Spanish surname voters voted for a turnout rate of 27.6%. In sharp contrast, out of 1,891 Spanish surname registered voters, only 247 Spanish surname voters voted for a turnout rate of 13.1%.

Other factors may also explain in part the low registration and turn-out rates of Latino citizens in Watsonville. There are a significant number of persons who speak Spanish but are not fluent in English. In Watsonville, according to the 1980 census, about 41% of those city residents who are five years old and over speak Spanish at home. In the same age category for Spanish Origin persons, about 3,824 persons spoke a language other than English at home and did not speak English well or did not speak English at all.

Despite this large number of persons who are not fluent in English, the city had not taken any affirmative efforts to involve these persons in the electoral process. From 1953 to 1985, there were 992 persons appointed as election officials. These officials provide assistance to the voter at the polling place. Out of this total number only 30, or 3.0%, were Spanish surname. Without bilingual election assistance, the participation of Latino voters, who do not understand the English language, will continue to be at low levels.

The abysmally low Latino voter participation was due to the at-large election system and the refusal of the Anglo community to support Latino candidates supported by the Latino community. As noted in the testimony provided in a lawsuit challenging at-large elections, Latinos in Watsonville felt that their vote did not count under the at-large election system:

People are not interested in registering to vote. They feel that their vote isn't going to count, that we always lose. The people are even insulted that they are asked to vote. They are angry, there is a feeling that the power is elsewhere, that their vote really doesn't count.
The MALDEF Challenge of Watsonville’s At-Large Election System

MALDEF has charged that the city of Watsonville’s at-large election system disenfranchises the Latino community and is suing for a district election plan, with seven single-member districts, which they believe will provide Latinos with a greater opportunity for political representation in local government. In February 1987, the case was struck down in district court on the grounds that while MALDEF had proven that racially-polarized voting is practiced in Watsonville, they had failed to prove the two other necessary criteria, the geographical compactness and political cohesion of the Latino population. The decision was applauded by the local newspaper editor (RP 2/4/87), city officials, and many community members. A final blow to the Latino community was the judge’s opinion that there was no evidence of racial or ethnic discrimination in Watsonville for at least thirty years despite the fact that plaintiffs are not required to demonstrate historical discrimination according to the 1982 Voting Rights Act.8

The Court in rendering the decision applied a new standard and did not incorporate the plain language of the Supreme Court’s decision in the precedent-setting Thornburg case. Thornburg requires minorities in at-large election challenges to demonstrate that it is possible to create a single member district which contains a numerical majority of a given racial or ethnic minority group.9 The minority plaintiffs in the Watsonville case satisfied this requirement. The plaintiffs, as noted by the trial judge, presented a districting plan containing two minority districts. However, the trial judge established an additional requirement.

According to the trial court, the minority districts, when the minority populations are combined, must contain at least a numerical majority of the city’s entire minority population. The two minority districts presented in the Watsonville case contained only 37% of the city’s Latino citizen population. Thus, the minority plaintiffs did not meet this new standard, even though each of the minority districts contained about an 80% Latino population concentration.10

Thornburg also requires that the minority community be politically cohesive (Thornburg, 106 S.Ct. at 2767). The Supreme Court specifically noted that evidence demonstrating that a significant number of the minority community votes for the same candidates is one way of establishing a minority community’s political cohesiveness. The trial judge recognized that the minority plaintiffs would meet this standard if the focus were limited only to those who actually voted in municipal elections. Instead, the trial judge found that minority political cohesiveness could not be demonstrated because of the small number of Latino voters who participated in municipal elections. The trial judge required the plaintiffs to prove that the Latinos who actually voted were cohesive politically with those Latinos who did not vote.

The trial judge’s standard regarding the proving of minority political cohesiveness is ironic. As testified by the minority plaintiff and the expert witness, at-large elections discouraged Latino participation in the political process. The low Latino voter participation was due to the history of consistent losses at the polls from 1971 to 1985. These losses were attributable to the at-large election system which permitted the Anglo electorate to defeat the candidates preferred by the minority community.

Congress, in amending the Voting Rights Act, recognized that discriminatory at-large elections can in fact depress minority political participation. Thus, according to the statutory standard, low minority voter participation is a factor supporting a conclusion that the challenged election system does discriminate against minority voting strength. However, the trial judge in Watson-
ville did not utilize the low minority voter turnout to support a finding of a violation of the Voting Rights Act. Instead, the trial judge utilized this low minority voter participation as a factor in concluding that the minority community was not politically cohesive, thereby negating a finding that the challenged at-large election system violated the Voting Rights Act.

It appears that eliminating the discriminatory at-large election system in Watsonville is crucial for creating a more responsive municipal government and for politically integrating the Latino community. A municipality such as Watsonville cannot continue to have a substantial community which is not part of the body politic. Such exclusion is not conducive to establishing the foundation for creating a more cohesive community. Such political exclusion is even more unwarranted when the minority community is characterized by low levels of educational achievement, high rates of unemployment and poverty, and linguistic differences with the dominant English speaking population.

It also appears that a system of district elections in Watsonville would provide greater accountability and might result in more responsive governmental action toward meeting the particularized needs of the Latino community. The needs of the Latino community in Watsonville are many. Some of these needs cannot be directly addressed by the city council. However, by responsive governmental action, the city council can provide the necessary leadership to address these pressing community needs.

In summary, the Latino community in Watsonville has many particularized needs in the areas of educational achievement, housing, employment, and voting. As a result of the at-large election system, the members elected to the city council may conveniently ignore these needs. Under the at-large election system, there is simply no local community accountability. With district elections, however, whoever is elected from a particular district will need to address the specific needs of the Latino community. If these needs are not addressed, then the voters of the district can select another representative.

**Effect of the Appellate Court Decision**

The case was heard by the appellate court in San Francisco in January 1988; seven months later, the three judges comprising the court unanimously found in favor of the plaintiffs, thereby reversing the district judge's decision. The decision, written by Judge Dorothy Nelson, ordered the trial judge to preside over a districting plan for the city of Watsonville that complies with the 1982 Voting Rights Act. Nelson wrote that by focusing on the "recent good intentions" of the city officials, the district judge had failed to see that Watsonville Latinos are still suffering from "historical discrimination." Low voter turnout and registration are "indicative of lingering effects of past discrimination." She added, "discrimination against Hispanics in California and the Southwest has pervaded nearly all aspects of public and private life."

While city officials met with their attorneys in "closed door" meetings to determine what they should do next, plaintiffs and supporters of the MALDEF lawsuit celebrated their victory in the church hall of Ascension Catholic Church. The media noted that the decision represents the first time an at-large election system had been invalidated in the West (The Herald 7/28/88; Koss and Egan 1988:1-2; Marks 1988:1) The decision affects cities in all nine states within the 9th Circuit Court: Alaska, Hawaii, Washington, Idaho, Oregon, Nevada, California, Montana and Arizona. At the time of this writing, the Watsonville city officials have determined they will appeal the Appellate Court's decision. Meanwhile the decision has already begun to affect other California cities which hold at-large elections.
Watsonville is not the only rural California community where the minority community has challenged the system for electing representatives to the city council. In Stockton, black and Latino plaintiffs are challenging the implementation of an at-large election with six residency districts; the MALDEF Watsonville victory most likely strengthens the Stockton plaintiffs’ case.

Under the proposed Stockton election structure, there will be a primary in each of the six districts. In the primary, only those persons residing in the residency district can file for office and vote for their candidate. The two persons receiving the most votes will advance to the general election. The general election will be conducted on an at-large basis. Thus, the city’s entire electorate will select the representatives of the residency districts.

A similar election system, with an at-large election feature in place prior to 1971, resulted in the absence of any minority representation. In 1971 an election system consisting of nine districts was implemented, resulting in increased minority representation. Presently there are four minorities sitting on the city council. Nonetheless, as a result of a city initiative, the district system has been replaced by the new at-large election system. Recently, a federal district court enjoined the implementation of this new election system until its constitutional and statutory validity could be established at a trial on the merits.12

Other minority communities have been encouraged by the Watsonville decision. Members of a community group in the city of Santa Ana, in Orange County, are considering a similar legal challenge (RP 7/30/88). And city officials of Salinas, Watsonville’s neighbor to the southeast, are already considering accepting a district plan rather than incur the costs of defending the at-large election system in the wake of the Watsonville decision. A special election was scheduled for December 6, 1988, in which registered voters in Salinas would express their support for or against the present at-large election system. Should the voters vote to maintain at-large elections, MALDEF will pursue a legal remedy to eliminate this election system, which they maintain is discriminatory to minority communities and their candidates for elective offices.

It is likely that the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals judgment for the plaintiffs will withstand the appeals to reverse it by the city of Watsonville. Once districts are agreed upon and implemented, they may also have an immediate effect on the ethnic composition of the city council. While the election of non-Latinos from the two “Latino districts” suggested by MALDEF is a possibility, Mexican-American candidates from these districts will have a better opportunity at winning a council seat given the concentration of Latino voters in these designated districts. If one accepts the assumption that greater representation of minorities by minorities increases the possibility of a more equitable distribution of community resources, the Latino community stands to benefit materially as well as symbolically.

X. CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we have described the nature of Latino participation in non-farm labor politics in rural California and have indicated some of its implications for Latinos inhabiting both rural and urban places in this state. We have suggested the following:

1. Although the majority of Chicano/Mexicanos in California live in urban places, research about Latino political participation must include studies of Chicano/
Mexicano politics in rural California, as the overwhelming majority of Latino elected officials (council members, mayors, school board trustees) are elected in rural places. Chicanos and Mexicanos residing in urban areas are even more severely underrepresented than aggregate numbers of California Latino elected officials imply.

2. Significant concentrations of Mexican-origin populations inhabit urban and rural California; in some towns and cities, Chicanos and Mexicanos comprise over 50% of the population. The sustained demand for new immigrant labor by U.S. business interests, the maturation of network migration to the U.S. since 1970, the intensification of the Mexican economic crisis since 1982, and domestic and foreign policies of the United States have all contributed to the dramatic rate of settlement of Mexican families in rural and urban California.

Policy decisions affecting these populations and host communities at the local, state and national levels are being formulated without benefit of objective data. While much speculation has been generated about the possible sociocultural and political consequences of the latinitization of these regions, little serious research has been conducted in this area to date.

3. As of 1987, there were 17 California cities where Latinos had successfully challenged the status quo at the local level, comprised majorities on city councils, and served in other important capacities. These towns are, however, still exceptions to the rule that minorities are excluded from local government. The majority of these towns were also small -- under 5,000 inhabitants -- at the time when Latinos came into power. Also, the Latino minority-Anglo majority social and political relations manifested in our case study of the city of Watsonville may be more representative of California towns of its size or larger which "suddenly" find themselves the unwilling hosts of "permanent guests" upon whom their economic survival depends.

Aside from the now dated research on the city of Parlier, nothing is known about the ethnoracial political transition of municipal governments which Chicanos dominate. Implicit in the struggle for minority representation is the assumption that there will then be a more equitable distribution of resources to the minority community; future research on the ethnoracial political transition of Chicano-dominated local governments should address this feature as well.

4. Latina women have participated in all manner of community politics. In the case of Watsonville, it appears that Latinas have engaged in confrontational politics as often as have Latino men. In the 1980's, more Latinas are also gaining elective offices. The continued neglect by scholars of the role of Latina women in the political process will only insure a skewed understanding of Latino politics in particular and of ethnic minority politics in general.

5. Many towns in which Chicano officials dominate are among the poorest cities in California. Further research should explore possible correlations between poverty and Chicano/Mexicano rural politics.
6. As the experiences with Watsonville demonstrate, at-large elections are in large part responsible for the absence of any Latino representation on the governing boards of local political subdivisions in rural and urban areas. This absence of Latino representation in many communities which have substantial Latino populations reflects the low levels of Latino participation in the political process. In view of their extensive use throughout California, any study of political participation in rural areas will need to examine the impact of at-large elections on the efforts of the Latino community to secure a representative who will be responsive to its particularized needs.\textsuperscript{13}

7. Finally, in this paper we have focused on non-farm labor politics in rural California in an effort to broaden our understanding of Latino political participation in these regions; in the past, studies of non-urban Latino political protest have focused on farm labor politics to the virtual exclusion of other forms of Latino political struggle in rural areas. Nonetheless, continued research on farm labor politics is essential to any understanding of politics in rural California. The continuing struggle in the 1980\textquotesingle s waged at local, regional and national levels by the United Farm Workers Union on behalf of farm laborers is central to this discourse.
ENDNOTES

1 In this review paper, we utilize the general definition of "rural California" as proposed by the Working Group on Farm Labor and Rural Poverty, as those areas outside the three major metropolises -- San Diego, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. According to the 1980 Census, there are a total of 13,931,804 persons residing in these metropolises which consist of ten counties. The counties excluded from the rural area definition are as follows: Los Angeles, Santa Clara, San Diego, San Francisco, Alameda, Solano, Napa, Contra Costa, Sonoma, and Marin. The remaining 48 counties containing 9,736,098 persons would be classified as rural according to this definition.

   Definitions of rural places vary. According to the 1980 Bureau of the Census [Census of Population, General Social and Economic Characteristics, California, PC80-1-c6, Calif., p. A-2], the rural population is defined as that population which is not urban. The urban population is defined as follows:

   More specifically, the urban population consists of all persons living in (1) places of 2,500 or more inhabitants incorporated as cities, villages, boroughs (except in Alaska and New York), and in towns (except in the New England States, New York and Wisconsin), but excluding those persons living in the rural portion of extended cities; (2) census designated places of 2,500 or more inhabitants; and (3) other territory, incorporated or unincorporated, included in urbanized areas.

   Within this rural population, there are significant concentrations of Spanish Origin populations residing in cities. For example, Fresno county has 15 cities. The percentage of Spanish Origin populations ranges from 91.3% in Huron to 13.1% in Clovis. As an added example, Imperial County has 7 cities. The percentage of Spanish Origin population ranges from 94.1% in Calexico to 35.6% in Imperial City. Finally, San Bernardino County with a total population of 895,016, has 17 cities. The percentage of Spanish Origin population there ranges from 56.0% in Colton to 4.0% in Big Bear Lake.

   Focusing on rural counties such as Fresno, Imperial, and San Bernardino, which contain significant Spanish Origin populations is appropriate since such rural counties represent a large sample of the total rural population. For example, there are 22 rural counties containing 10% or more Spanish Origin population. The total population of these rural counties comprises 79.6% of the total rural population.

2 Key words used for the computer search included Mexican American, Mexican-American, Chicano, Hispanic, Spanish, and Spanish-American politics.

3 The 1973 California Roster of Elected Officials lists only one Chicana councilmember: Sylvia Montenegro. Lemus (1973) lists two Chicana councilmembers for that same year: Montenegro and Manuela Rios.

4 Frank Bardacke, (1987a, 1987b) provides a good description of the events leading up to and during the Watsonville Canning Strike. A former Watsonville Canning Company employee, Bardacke is also a founder of the Union Local's chapter of the Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU). His most recent article (1988) provides a comprehensive analysis of the outcome of the 18-month-long strike.

5 Federal courts have relied upon several methods for the determination of the existence of racially polarized voting. The most common method consists of correlating the ethnicity of the voters within a given voting precinct and the votes received by the minority candidate. This correlation is documented by applying a bivariant ecological regression analysis. An-
other method consists of a homogeneous precinct analysis. This method involves examining
the voting behavior of those voting precincts which are either predominantly Anglo or
minority. Another method consists of testimony by local minority community members who
have been actively involved in the political process.

See generally, Thornburg v. Gingles, supra. See also Sierra v. El Paso Independent
School District, 591 F. Supp. 802, 808 (W.D.Tex. 1984) ("Even more persuasive to the Court
than the testimony of the expert witnesses, however, was the testimony of the practical
politicians who are thoroughly familiar with voting behavior in El Paso County. These
witnesses testified unequivocally that bloc voting by Latino for Latino candidates and by
Anglos for Anglo candidates is a political fact of life in El Paso, and one with which all
candidates must deal in plotting their respective campaign strategies"). At least one federal
court has relied upon the use of a political survey conducted during an election to determine
the existence of racially polarized voting. Romero v. City of Pomona, 665 F.Supp. 853
(C.D.Cal. 1987).


8 Gomez v City of Watsonville, Civ. Act. No. 85-20319 WAI

9 The United States Supreme Court in Thornburg v. Gingles, 106 S.Ct. 2752 (1986) recently re-
affirmed previous judicial determinations that at-large election systems had the potential for
discriminating against minority voting strength: "This Court has long recognized that multi-
member districts and at-large voting schemes may 'operate to minimize or cancel out the
voting strength of racial [minorities in] the voting population.'" In footnote 13 of the opinion,
the Court refers to numerous commentators who have discussed the discriminatory potential
of at-large election systems.

10 Evidence presented at the trial demonstrated that the Latino community in Watsonville was
concentrated in the barrios. According to the 1980 census, 70.6% of the city's Spanish Origin
population resided in city blocks containing a 50% or more Spanish Origin population. In
addition, two of the city's census tracts contained a 71.4% and 84.7% Spanish Origin
population concentration.

11 A district form of elections would also be beneficial in cities containing a substantial Spanish
Origin population and Hispanic representation on the city council. Although the at-large
election system would not discriminate against minority voting strength, the at-large election
system would submerge local neighborhood interests. A district system would result in the
election of advocates who would have a particularized interest in improving a local neighbor-
hood. Such a local interest may be at odds with the interests of those persons elected on an
at-large basis, even if they are Latino elected officials


13 Apart from municipalities, school districts are also very important to local communities. As
with cities, school districts are also elected on an at-large election basis. With respect to school
districts, out of 1,028 school boards in California, 987 have an election system which includes
an at-large election feature. Legislative Handout titled “Questions About District Elections,”
Assembly, California Legislature, Committee on Elections, Reapportionment and Constitu-
tional Amendments (relates to Assembly Bills 2191, 2190, and Assembly Constitutional
Amendments 34 and 35) (n.d.: 3).
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DISCUSSION
HISPANIC POLITICAL PARTICIPATION
IN RURAL CALIFORNIA

Moderator: William Flores, Stanford University
Discussant: Victor Lopez, Mayor, Orange Cove
           Roy Rodriguez, City Council Member, Orange Cove
           Juan Arambula, Fresno Unified School Board
LATINO POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN RURAL CALIFORNIA

Papers: Paula Cruz Takash, Dept. of Anthropology, UC Berkeley  
        Joaquin Avila, Attorney-at-Law  
Moderator: William Flores, Stanford University  
Discussants: Victor Lopez, Mayor, Orange Cove  
             Roy Rodriguez, City Council Member, Orange Cove  
             Juan Arámbula, Fresno Unified School Board

The following comments are excerpts from spoken comments. Slight changes in wording have occasionally been made in order to clarify statements for the written page.

Victor Lopez

I come from a poor farm worker family of twelve. I am the individual who went before the city council wanting them to establish a day care center for farm workers and they said, it’s not necessary and if you don’t like it do something about it. So I did, and in 1974 I was the first Hispanic elected official in the history of Orange Cove. Basically I tried to utilize that experience to learn how the system worked. I communicated well with the community and they knew where I was coming from. Sometimes you find out that you really don’t have much power unless you understand the system, how to manipulate it, and how to work with your colleagues to convince them to go along with your projects. The first four years were also spent in exposing the council and showing how they weren’t fairly representing their community.

In 1978, I decided to run for mayor of Orange Cove and I was the first Hispanic mayor ever elected. I ran on a slate with Rodriguez and Villareal and we got elected. Then we started on the agenda for the community, defining its problems and finding solutions. I’m happy to say that in our community we have made several changes. You’re out there in the forefront and people are going to judge you and figure out why you’re there. People are very smart. The Hispanic community is conservative and they expect you to take care of business and they hold you accountable.

It is very important to hold elected officials accountable. You cannot let them slide. If they ran on a certain platform, make them stick to it. Make them deliver, and if they don’t, remove them. The issue isn’t color, it’s accountability.

We are probably the only city in California that has a Chicano city administrator. We have a Chicano chief of police and a Chicano finance director. We must give our people an opportunity, if they qualify, and there are qualified individuals. We don’t need to discriminate against our own; we need to set the example and have role models that are Hispanic and that are able to do a good job and that we can all be proud of.

Why do we run for office, do Hispanics benefit from it? Let me give an example. We contract out millions of dollars and I believe we must assure that a portion of the pie goes to the Hispanic community. An economic base is needed in the community to address the issues of economic justice, of discrimination. I am proud to say that I voted in favor of contracts to minorities in our community. But we have to make sure those individuals deliver a good product.

I am proud that as a mayor I have been able to vote on these issues and to stand on my record. We must be part of the political system. You see the barrios with no curb and no gutter, no streets, no nothing. Why? Because nobody has cared. Some people believe that it’s minute. But it’s not, when you’re blighting the homes of the low-income, because of lack of drainage, lack of infrastructure. I
think we have to address the barrios and make them decent and beautiful places to live in. The tax
dollar belongs to every individual, and when we divide up the pie, we ought to divide it equally
throughout the whole community. If we don’t, we’re doing an injustice.

I hope we don’t elect officials just because of the color of their skin. We ought to elect individuals that
are caring, that do what they say, so that we can all be proud to be Americans. Our system is the
best, it’s a democratic system, where the people decide..

Roy Rodriguez
As the mayor stated, we did come into the city council in 1978, not because we wanted to be city
council members, but because there were needs. People had gone before the previous council and
asked for, and demanded things, such as restrooms in a public park, and low-income housing. At the
time the response was, "we need to do a study, it will be addressed at a different time." Time and
time again, this was the end result of us going before the council that was in power.

It was a council of individuals who had been there for 15 to 20 years and were winning elections by
50 votes. The people were not politically aware. They thought that this is the way it’s supposed to be.
We said, wait a minute, this is not the way it’s supposed to be. We went into the community, house
to house, talking to our neighbors and saying, look, we can do something about your needs and your
wants, and we are willing to put ourselves into the position of asking for your vote in order to take
care of your needs.

Orange Cove is a small community, about 6,000 people, but to us it’s home. What was it like when
the people were in the council who had served since the city was incorporated? What is it now like?
Now, we’re addressing the needs of the people that are not the well-to-do, that are not the farmers.
As you know, in these rural towns, the farmers call the shots. When they controlled the city council,
they were not interested in meeting the immediate needs of our people. We mean all the people of
Orange Cove, Filipinos, Whites, Hispanics and Indians.

We came into this position because we would like to have the people who are providing the services
at City Hall and at public works represent the people that live in the city, and even speak the
language if necessary. There was a time that you couldn’t even find one individual that you could go
to and say, "I need help," in your native language. We said to ourselves, we need to address this
situation. We are not talking about discrimination against anybody, we’re just saying we want to
address the needs. That is why the mayor and myself are in this position at this time.

Juan Arambula
I am somewhat the oddball in this group. I am someone who ran in an at-large election and won.
Let me give you some background on my campaign. First of all, I think I have been preparing for this
all my life. My parents were farm workers and we travelled around, and as you travelled around you
saw a lot of injustices. At some point I determined that if I ever had an opportunity, I would try to
redress some of these injustices.

Last year I was a member of a committee dealing with dropouts. I began to see the magnitude of the
problem and I felt that the school district was not taking the correct approach to resolving it. I began
to consider the possibility of running for the school board. What finally tipped me over the edge, or
drove me off the cliff, was that there was a school board member — and I say there was — who said
that he was not particularly concerned that certain areas of town were not receiving their equal
share of resources. He basically said that if these children are not doing well, then perhaps we’re
better off taking resources away from them and putting them in the north side of town where
children are doing better. Now that really ticked me off, because some years ago I would have been smack dab in the middle of that group of students that he was so cavalierly dismissing. My parents spoke no English and didn’t have any formal education, we were migrants, and I would have been in the group that this board member was dismissing. And I said, that’s just not right.

When I started to seriously consider the possibility of running, I had to assess the situation. First of all, no Chicano had won any type of position in Fresno for a number of years. People were very disappointed. There was a thirst for a successful election. At the same time, nobody wanted to run, in part, because no one had won in a long time, and in part because it was an at-large election, which required running in all of Fresno. Fresno Unified School District has 300,000 people, and more than 160,000 registered voters. It seemed impossible for an Hispanic candidate to win, particularly because the incumbents for the two open positions had been there for 8 and 16 years. I was told by the other Hispanic who had been on the school board back in the 70s that I should run, but with the expectation that I would lose, and that I should try again the next time. I said, forget it, I’m not going to do this twice, and I determined to do everything that was humanly possible to win this time around.

I figured that since we didn’t have the votes just among our own people, that we would have to be a little more sophisticated about how we ran our campaign. Throughout the campaign, we used the analogy of a duck: on the surface we apparently weren’t doing much, but underneath we were paddling furiously to get the election going. We didn’t want our opponents to get too anxious and mount a counter-attack. We wanted essentially to lull them into a sense of security and then when it was too late, good-bye! And that’s what happened. It was the first time in the history of Fresno Unified that an incumbent had been beaten. I beat both incumbents by a large margin. This has had a very dramatic effect on other people. Other people are now getting very animated for running. It has had a tremendous effect on the psychology of the political situation here in Fresno.

How did we do it? We ran in what’s called a diminished universe. In other words, we targeted where the votes were. We discovered that most of the votes were in north Fresno, and that’s where I walked. I walked and I walked and I walked. We carried practically every precinct in Fresno. We knew we’d have a tremendous amount of support from the Hispanic community in the southeast, and we had many friends in the Black community, and we knew the balance of power lay in the north. We won by a very healthy margin.

You should have seen the pandemonium the night of the election. When the absentee ballots came in we were slightly behind, and each time the results came in we were getting closer and closer. Finally we tied for second place and the next time the results came in we were in first place and we never looked back.

There have been a number of benefits that I think people like myself can bring to a job like this. It does affect the way we are treated by other folks. For example, having put together somewhat of a machine, now people court us: will you please endorse us for city council, for supervisor, they say. We wield a great deal of power collectively.

I think that I bring a lot of human skills to the job. It’s not just having my master’s degree in school administration, nor my law degree from UC Berkeley, nor my undergraduate degree from Harvard. All the Anglos would say, that’s one smart Mexican, we ought to consider voting for him. But there’s also a lot of human skills. In my family, one of the things I learned was how to get along with people. I come from a large family, and my people skills are serving me very well on the board in terms of being able to put together coalitions with the other board members, at least on most issues. People
like ourselves, once we do get into positions of authority, have a lot to offer. We are able to see what we have in common and we are able to humanize the electoral process. It's just a matter of trying to get over the hump, trying to get elected.

I decided to run not just to raise issues. There had been a number of candidates who ran before me who ran to raise a particular issue that was near and dear to their hearts. I figured, I can do that once I am elected. I'm not going to put my family through this ordeal just to raise some issues; I can deal with them once I'm in office. In fact, that's what we are doing. We have been able to come through on a number of commitments I made during the election. We have pared down on administration, we have put more teachers back in the classroom, and we are holding folks accountable from the top on down.

When I ran, I tried to stress values that we all share. Many times other parties have tried to steal our issues. For example, why should the Republicans be the only ones who care about family? Hard work? Discipline? There's no sense shying away from these issues. I was surprised to find that practically everyone in the city was agreeing with the issues I was raising. Even being of Mexican descent helped in many cases, because many of the people here in Fresno are immigrants. People liked the fact that I was stressing what we had in common. I didn't run against the other candidates, I ran on issues and qualifications. I didn't team up on slates.

In this particular case, the people of Fresno were willing to give me a chance. Since then I've been very well received and I hope that during the next four years I have a track record of having accomplished a great deal. We have a number of problems, dropouts and so on, and we are making some inroads. As a final point, I never would have run if I had been one single candidate. What made it practical for me was that there were at least two other board members who were not up for re-election that I knew I could work with very closely, and that we would be able to teach the administration of the school district one simple thing: how to count to three.

Bill Flores
Before we open it up for questions, I would like to introduce a little debate and controversy into the discussion. Joaquin recommended changing from an at-large system to a district system of voting. AB 2191 is before the state legislature right now, which, if passed, would require that cities that have school districts with average daily attendance of more than 1,000 have district elections. That would have a profound effect on school board elections throughout the state of California. There seems to be some dissent here, and I'd like Victor Lopez and Juan Arambula to comment on this issue, since you both won in at-large elections.

Victor Lopez
I would be in favor of district elections, even though I was elected at-large. Orange Cove and Fresno are the only communities in Fresno County where mayors are elected directly; in other places they are appointed by the city council. I believe that the council seats should be elected by district to give better representation.

In my community, Orange Cove, about 67% of the population is Hispanic. But about 50% of those cannot vote, they're not American citizens. We're voting 100% in my community. I'm probably the only mayor who knew he had won thirty days before the election. I knew I had the votes in the bank, from the absentee ballots. Small rural communities are not that bad if you go at-large. I am more concerned about the larger communities that have no representation at all. I would worry more about communities of over 10,000. In the smaller communities, people are closer to the community and voters can understand who will best represent them.
Joaquin Avila
AB 2191 provides that school districts that have more 1,000 students in average daily attendance would have a special election to determine if they would continue to have at-large elections. At that special election, the electorate would have to vote in favor of maintaining at-large elections by a two-thirds majority. If it did not meet that vote, single member districts would be implemented after the 1990 census. With respect to the size threshold at which an at-large election would be divided into single member district elections, federal courts have not made any distinction. They have applied single member districts to cities as small as 1,000 inhabitants. The reasoning behind it is that, if you have racially polarized voting, there is the tendency that at-large elections can submerge minority voting strength. In California, there is no guarantee that any city will retain its demographic profile. In Northern California, the percentage of minorities has in some cases decreased because, for example, people are living in places like Stockton and working in San Francisco, etc. Just because a city is 70% or 80% Hispanic doesn’t mean it’s going to maintain that demographic structure.

Juan Arambula
I was asked during one of the many innumerable nights before the election whether I favored district elections or at-large elections. At the time, I told people I would defer a decision until after the election and then let them know afterwards, depending on the results. I have thought about it a great deal. There were some folks who were supporting my candidacy, who were very much in support of district elections, but much to their chagrin, I won. It seems, at least on the surface, that this detracts from their argument in favor of district elections.

I don’t think it does. First of all, we spent an ungodly amount of money to win. We simply don’t have the resources to raise this kind of money. I spent somewhere in the neighborhood of $50,000 to win this campaign. In part, it was because I was taking on entrenched incumbents, I was a relative newcomer, and it took a great deal of visibility to win. Now that I am an incumbent, perhaps I ought to be in favor of district elections, because it is very difficult to knock off incumbents precisely for this very reason. It takes a great deal of resources to cover the entire city of Fresno. We have 64,000 students in our district, which is more than many of the towns surrounding Fresno have for inhabitants.

Other reasons that would favor district elections are that some of the reasons for which I ran, such as the unequal distribution of resources, could have been dealt with much, much earlier, had there been a representative from those areas who was sensitive, who was closer to that population, who was accountable. It’s quite conceivable that some of these difficulties never would have arisen.

On the other hand, there are some down sides for district elections, and I speak particularly with regard to some of our city council races here in Fresno. We have a very divided city council; people sometimes seem more concerned with appeasing their particular constituents than doing the best thing for the entire city. I do have the luxury of being an at-large representative, and I can be concerned equally about the problems in North Fresno as I can South Fresno. And this is something that I think speaks well for the at-large system.

However, in trying to balance the pros and cons, in looking at the accountability and the representativeness of the district elections, looking at the expense of at-large elections, I would be inclined to support district elections simply because it gives us more opportunity. We do need experience, we do need to mature and season ourselves as representatives. The only way we are going to do that is by having respectable numbers of representatives who will acquire that experience over the long run. It is going to be messy, there are times when we are going to be at each others’ throats. The fact
is that when you don’t have that experience, you really don’t have anything to base your judgements and decisions on. I have looked at the pros and cons. I seriously hope that my election is not a deterrent to the effort to establish district elections. I think that in that sense, my election would have been a disservice.

**Audience**

Can you address the issue of poor voter turn-out among Latinos? Do you see Latinos as getting more involved in the national political arena?

**Joaquin Avila**

Yes, I do. We can’t just look at places like California. In Texas there has been a great deal of litigation, of legislative advocacy to eliminate a lot of barriers toward voter participation. Some has been due to at-large elections and some has been due to gerrymandered districts. For example, in one particular county in Texas, Crockett County, the county supervisorial districts were gerrymandered— they split the Latino community in half. As a result, although they had one representative on the board, they couldn’t get a second one. After there was a court case, and after the lines were redrawn, they had an opportunity to select a second person. Consequently, over 90% of all the eligible voters in the Latino community registered and over 95% of the registered voters turned out to vote in the Latino community.

The Southwest Voter Registration Project and other organizations have found that when there is a change in the election system, people see that there is an opportunity to have an impact. The turnout figures have gone up. Even though these are local school boards and local cities, it has ripple effects on other elections, so that when you start developing political organizations at local levels, the persons who are running for statewide office are going to come to those local officials and local organizations and get them out to vote. And there’s where a lot of the political trading goes on. That has been going on in places like Texas, and it’s because of all the voting rights litigation activity. No politician who is running for statewide office in Texas can ignore the Hispanic vote. That has not happened here in California, because there are a lot of obstacles at the local level. The philosophy of the Southwest Voter Registration Project is that you have to build a base, and that base has to be at the local level. Once you build a base, then when other elections come around, you have an established base to pick from. In 1988, in November, we’re not going to be in the same stage of development as Texas was in the 70’s and 80’s. I do see, because of the increased interest in the Latino community in participating in this election, that, yes, the impact of Latinos will be significantly greater than in the 84 election. But once we eliminate all these obstacles, and get a very strong base, it will be much higher.

**Paula Cruz Takash**

One of the reasons we all gathered here today is in order to say that we need to know more about voting patterns in the rural areas, we need to know about the political structures, we need to know whether or not the Chicano-dominated city councils are in fact responsive to their Chicano constituents. There is an awful lot that we don’t know.

**Victor Lopez**

I think that one answer to your question would be, for example, in the rural areas, if you have Chicano elected officials running for their positions, they’ll be able to carry other candidates of their choice. For example, in my community, we carried Jesse Jackson. We’re probably the only city in the United States to carry Jesse Jackson all the way.
William Flores
I'd like to go back to the example that was given earlier, of a cannery worker, one of the leaders of the strike committee during the strike, who is now a Jackson delegate. I think the reason she's a Jackson delegate is because Jackson went there to support her strike. She is a person who never would have considered running as a delegate in her life, in fact she never would have considered running for union office had it not been for the strike. A lot of what we are seeing this time around, in 1988 vs. 1984, is that there has been in the last four years, a greater understanding in the rural areas and the city areas about the issues of Jesse Jackson. We are seeing (and I work with Latinos for Jesse Jackson, Northern California co-chair), when we've gone out to different communities, a tremendous response that wasn't there four years ago. So it's hard to say whether or not Jackson is going to win in the rural areas, but I certainly think that he has activated political involvement.

Audience
What kind of state-wide coalitions have developed over issues affecting Hispanics and Hispanic political participation?

Joaquin Avila
There are various coalitions that have developed over issues. One such coalition, with respect to AB2191, has been very impressive in terms of the kind of information that has gone out to our community. Many organizations have participated in those efforts, and I think it's very important to recognize that you may have a coalition for an educational issue that may not have the same participants in the political access arena. Many of these coalitions don't have an endowment, and that's O.K. as long as they recognize what their role is, as long as they recognize their limitations, as long as they can try to leverage other institutions to provide information and take action. That's what coalitions are all about. I would suggest that you talk to organizations like MALDEF, or CRLA.

Juan Arambula
It's helpful to people who are considering running or trying to do something in their communities, to see successes in other communities. There's nothing like success to breed a desire to go even further. If nothing else, what we are doing here will hopefully serve as an inspiration for other people to do likewise. Once you see that it is possible, it makes it you a little bit more inclined to try that bit harder in your community to make a go of it.

One point that hasn't been mentioned in this regard, with regard to the paper that was presented by Paula and Joaquin, is that there was an attempt to make a distinction between rural areas and urban areas. The paper started off by discussing that initially the attention was focused on what was going on with the farm workers in rural areas. Over time, the attention of the academicians and other folks shifted to the urban areas, and now we're looking at the situation in the rural areas again. It isn't really fruitful to make those artificial distinctions. For example, here in Fresno, we have a regional situation where what we do in the city of Fresno affects what is going on in the communities around us. What happens in Orange Cove or Parlier in turn provides inspiration for us here in Fresno. It's very much a mutual relationship, a symbiotic relationship. What happens in Fresno is disseminated through the information sources, through Radio Bilingue and through the newspapers. We're all in close contact with one another and what happens in each of our areas in turn makes it that much easier for the other areas to move an extra step forward.