Somos de Allá y de Aquí: Tejano Sojourners, Mexican Immigrants, & the Creation of a Familiar Mexican Place in Independence, Oregon, 1950-2000

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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Title: Somos de Allá y de Aquí: Tejano Sojourners, Mexican Immigrants, & the Creation of a Familiar Mexican Place in Independence, Oregon, 1950-2000

As Mexican Americans from southern Texas, who called themselves Tejanos, and Mexican immigrants migrated to Independence, Oregon, in the mid-to-late 20th century, memory became a way to familiarize a foreign place. In the 1950s and 1960s, a few Tejano families migrated from the Lower Rio Grande Valley and replicated a sense of home in the migrant stream that would follow them as they settled in Independence. By the 1970s, Mexicanos arrived to a Tejano community who labeled them as a threat to their home. The flames of diasporic strife were fanned in the 1980s and 1990s when the national debate on immigration became racially charged. However, through engaging in a constant struggle to validate their citizenship in Independence, Tejanos and Mexicanos would blossom into a unified community. By the 2000s, this unity would come to mobilize ethnic Mexicans to cement their place in Independence's historical memory. Although these efforts proved successful, the memories of ethnic Mexicans are quickly becoming shelved. Thus a new effort is required to expand the accessibility of this memory into the heart of Independence.

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Lastly, special thanks are due to my fiancé, Gillian Rhinevault, whose unwavering love and belief in me were foundational to my success as a graduate student. Thank you for the countless times you made me believe that I could reach for the stars.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my great-grandparents, my guardian angels, whose love is felt beyond this world and whose legacy I carry with pride.

To my beloved parents, grandparents, aunt, and sister who have been my source of inspiration and whose moral, spiritual, emotional, and financial support have helped my dreams come true. Your love knows no bounds.

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Introduction

"Quiero que te vayas a escuela pa no que tengas que trabajar como yo."[1]

These words my grandfather spoke have echoed throughout my lifetime, and I have come to remember them as lyrics to a *corrido*.[2] Ostensibly, his words originated from grandfatherly love and his wishes for a better life for his family—as any immigrant would want. However, as I pieced together his life history, I understood the truth behind his words. My grandfather's experiences illuminate his words with the scorching sun, the cold and pouring rain, and the rattling of his tired bones; I can see his life history within his very body. I see it in how he walks, the scars on his back, his calloused and stiff hands, and how he remembers. Over breakfast in June of 2022, I asked my grandfather when he wished to retire, and he responded by turning the question onto me.

"As early as possible," I confidently replied, "I don't want my entire life to be about work. Isn't that what you've always told me? To go to school so I don't have to work like you do." My grandfather slowly sipped his coffee, and I looked up at him and pleaded, "Grandpa, don't *you* ever want to rest and not work?" He carefully placed his coffee on the table, looked down at his hands, and raised them to show me. "No, I can't rest. If I rest, I start to hurt. I can feel it in my hands, my knees, and my back. If I keep moving, I don't feel the pain."[3] That day, I learned that although his labors bore scars and mangled his body, labor is not what gave him

[1] Translation reads, "I want you to go to school so you don't have to work like I do;" Daniel Canela, conversation with author, June 22, 2022.
[2] A traditional Mexican song style derived from poetry and often around topics such as oppression, history, or the daily life of criminals.
[3] Daniel Canela, conversation with author.

meaning. Like all immigrants, he wished to support his family financially, but his ultimate wish was to create a home for us, for me. He intended for a place where his family could live the lives they wanted and where they could achieve more than he could; home is what gave him meaning.

My grandfather, Daniel Canela, was born in Emiliano Zapata just north of Morelia, Michoacán, in 1959 to a family of thirteen. As a child, he was not fond of school and dropped out of the third grade. His father, who owned a large herd of cattle, hired Daniel as a ranch hand. He would watch over the herd as they grazed, even overnight, and helped birth calves. By the age of thirteen, Daniel hoped to earn a small herd from his father, who ended up selling the cattle to fuel his drinking and gambling habits. Following a dispute between the two, Daniel left home with a few pesos to his name as he hoped to cross to "El Norte," the United States. In 1972, Daniel crossed the border with his cousin, who was a *coyote*.[4] Upon arriving in southern California, another cousin of Daniel's, Benjamín, housed him and found Daniel work in the fields. However, in the next year, newer migrants saturated the fields in the area, but Benjamín caught word of plentiful jobs in Oregon's Willamette Valley.

[4] A "coyote" refers to someone who smuggles immigrants across the U.S.-Mexico border; Daniel Canela, personal communications, June 2022.

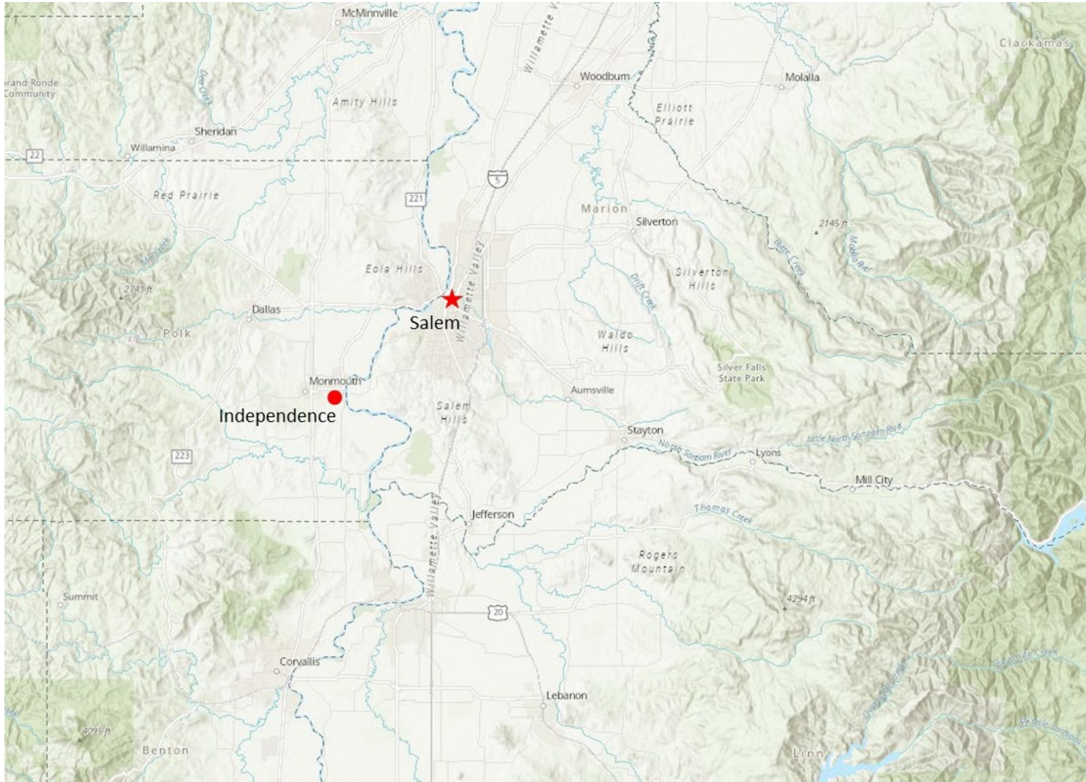

Figure 1. *Map of Independence, Oregon and its surrounding areas*. Map generated by author via PCMAPS 5 from Polk County GIS. June 1, 2024.

The two men then traveled further north to Oregon, and by 1974, arrived in Independence, a quaint rural farming community along the Willamette River, just south of Salem. Despite being in the periphery of Oregon's capital, Independence was a hub that provided year-round seasonal work sustained through word-of-mouth and community connections to local contractors. Additionally, the fertile soil surrounding the area and beyond allowed numerous crops to be grown. For three years, Daniel and Benjamín picked hazelnuts in Kings Valley, cherries in Dayton, hops in Buena Vista, and harvested Christmas trees in Corvallis. As they followed the next harvest, the two men lived out of their car and often cooked over a campfire. By 1977, Daniel and Benjamín rented an apartment in Monmouth, next to Independence.

The year prior, Eduardo Lumbreras of Independence contracted Daniel as a tree faller for the forest service. At the time, Daniel had no ties to Independence's thriving *Tejano* community,

which had blossomed from earlier migrations in the 1950s.[5] However, once Daniel met his future wife, Luzdivina "Lucy" Alvarez, at a park in Independence, he learned of the infamous bailes *parejas*, or "pair dances." These dances were organized by notable Tejano families and were a continuation of traditional dances held in the camps across the farms near Independence. In 1977, Daniel traveled north to Rickreall to dance to see Lucy. Although Daniel was kicked out of the dance because he "had no partner," he made the most of his time dancing with Lucy—the youngest daughter of Guadalupe "Lupe" and Paula Alvarez, one of the first Tejanos to settle in Independence.[6]

Soon, Daniel and Lucy welcomed their first daughter, Esmerelda "Lolly," in 1980 and were married in a white chapel in Reno, Nevada. By 1981, the newlyweds welcomed their second daughter. Griselda. Daniel continued to work in the fields and the forest service while Lucy worked as a teacher's assistant at the YMCA in Dallas, west of Independence. In the winter of 1987, Daniel severely broke his back while on the job as a tree faller on Oregon's northern coast. As he recovered from multiple back surgeries, the family faced financial hardship. Due to Daniel's undocumented status, he was unable to get government assistance at the time. However, he fully recovered and returned to work in 1996 as a janitor at Western Oregon University (WOU) in Monmouth. Within the same year, Daniel earned his citizenship thanks partly to his daughters, who helped him study for the exam. After nine years at WOU, he began working in environmental services at Salem Hospital in 2005, later becoming a supervisor.[7]

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[5] Ethnic Mexicans will be utilized to encompass both Tejanos and Mexican nationals of Independence—both settled-in and migratory. Tejanos will be used to describe people of Mexican descent who migrated from Texas whereas Mexicanos will be used to denote Mexican nationals.
[6] Daniel Canela, personal communications.
[7] Daniel Canela, personal communications.

Over countless decades of labor, my grandfather created a home where his children and grandchildren could grow into their own. His integration with the Tejanos of Independence also illustrates an often-missing complexity in the narrative of Oregon's ethnic Mexican history. As Tejanos and Mexican immigrants situated themselves in a foreign and White space, they relied on what they had: kinship networks and cultural memory. Through the migrant stream, Tejanos cultivated a sense of home with other Tejanos as they followed the harvests. As Tejanos began to settle in Independence, they utilized their intimate memories of home to garner a sense of familiarity. With *Mexicanos*, their cultivation of home was aided by the gains made by Tejanos but became challenging due to diasporic conflicts. In the end, the daily struggle to maintain a sense of home in Independence brought Tejanos and Mexicanos together. Each held dear their memories of a past home and utilized the labor system that was dependent upon their labor to familiarize this foreign place into a familiar Mexican place. Together, ethnic Mexicans imbued these memories into Independence to create a home that acted as an anchor of agency for migrants to contest their relationship with the labor system. Through this home, ethnic Mexicans became active citizens in forming a communal society to better themselves, their families, and their community.

Literature Review

"Somos de Allá y de Aquí" is foregrounded by several works in the field of Mexican and labor history in the American Southwest, Midwest, South, and Pacific Northwest. Beginning with the Southwest, historians such as George Sànchez, David Montejano, Monica Parales, and Natalia Molina spearheaded the examination of identity and community formation in the region. Sànchez

explains the influences of Chicano cultural adaptation and the imprinting of a hybrid identity upon a new environment in 20th-century Los Angeles, California.[8] Shifting to Texas' Lower Rio Grande Valley, Montejano observes the role of segregation in transforming Mexicanos and Tejanos into a low-bar laboring class during the early 17th and late 20th centuries.[9] Sànchez and Montejano exemplified the different systems and hierarchies that ethnic Mexicans navigated to form identities and communities in the Southwest. However, Parales focuses on the role of collective memory in not just creating agency within working people but as an anchor to different social worlds coalescing in a community in 20th-century southern Texas.[10] In keeping with the notion of community anchors, Molina utilizes the framework of placemaking to examine the role of her grandmother's restaurant as an urban anchor in 20th-century Los Angeles, California. This restaurant served as a place of familiarization as newly arrived Mexican immigrants were taken in by Molina's grandmother and provided new life chances.[11]

Although these works expand upon the processes of identity and community formation in the Southwest, one inquiry still stood: how do these processes occur in the periphery of the borderlands? The work of historians Dioncio Valdéz and Marc Rodriguez attempt to demonstrate these processes by examining ethnic Mexican migrations to the Midwest. Valdéz observes how Latino farmworkers navigated the exploitative labor systems in the Great Lakes Region in the early to late 20th century and how these farmworkers constructed communities over time.[12] In

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[8] George Sànchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 10-11, 13-14.
[9] David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the making of Texas, 1836-1986* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), 5, 309.
[10] Monica, Perales, *Smeltertown: Making and Remembering A Southwest Border Community* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 7-8.
[11] Natalia Molina, *A Place at the Nayarit: How A Mexican Restaurant Nourished a Community* (University of California Press, 2023), 9-10.
[12] Dionico Valdéz, *Al Norte: Agricultural Workers in the Great Lakes Region 1917-1970* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991), vii-viii.

his follow-up work, Valdéz examines how Mexicanos differed in assimilation compared to European migrants and the effects of the Chicano Movement in midwestern Mexican communities during the 20th century.[13] Although Valdéz paints a broad brush on the Mexicano experience in the Midwest, Rodriguez enriches this northern part of the Mexican diaspora in Wisconsin. Through analyzing Tejano migrations between Texas and Wisconsin in the 20th century, Rodriguez emphasizes the role of experiences in trans-local politics amidst the Chicano Movement. Moreover, these experiences in liberal Wisconsin empowered Tejanos to emerge as active political presence in a staunchly conservative Texas.[14]

The Midwest provided strong references in examining the ethnic Mexican experiences centered around White-centric places, similar to the Pacific Northwest; however, this left another inquiry unanswered: how did ethnic Mexicans interact with racial hierarchies outside the Southwest? Historians Julie Weise and Cecilia Márquez have examined how Latinos both challenged and adapted to the Jim Crow South. In the case examined by Weise, during the 20th and 21st centuries, Mexicanos often had complex interactions with the racial hierarchy, which were dependent upon regional politics and the influence of regional or transnational institutions.[15] However, Márquez, who examined Latinos in the same period, argued that Latinos could not move away from the White-Black racial binary in the South due to anti-Blackness.[16] Although both interpret identity and community formation through a different lens from previous

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[13] Valdez, *Barrios Norteños: St. Paul and Midwestern Mexican Communities in the 20th Century* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 2000), 2-3.
[14] Marc Rodriguez, *The Tejano Diaspora: Mexican Americanism & Ethnic Politics in Texas and Wisconsin* (Chapel Hill: Nort Carolina Press, 2011), 8-9, 43-44.
[15] Julie Weise, *Corazón de Dixie: Mexicanos in the U.S. South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 3, 7-8.
[16] Cecilia Marquez, *Making the Latino South: A History of Racial Formation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2023), 6.

scholars, their work provide a foundation to examine the navigation of racial hierarchies by Latinos.

The Pacific Northwest provides another diasporic lens to examine the ethnic Mexican experience. Scholars have debated what supported the region's development as an economic powerhouse in the 20th century, with some concluding that it was a mobilization of capital or the mobilization of exploited White labor. However, scholars of Mexican and Latino labor in the region argue that the mobilization of racialized labor was the main driver of this economic development. Scholars such as Erasmo Gamboa, Binda Sarathy, and Mario Sifuentez argue that as the region's industries developed a dependence on this labor, or were Mexicanized, and Latinized, these laborers became the driving force of economic growth.[17] Gamboa examines how contracted Mexican nationals, called braceros, in the region between 1943 and 1946 contributed to the war effort. Although these Mexicanos were far from home, the region's reliance on their labor led to some camps accommodating these men's cultural needs to a degree.[18]

Sarathy expands this lens sociologically by examining the Latinization of the forest industry in southern Oregon during the late 20th and early 21st centuries. She argues that undocumented forest workers embody the inequitable distribution of social harm while maintaining public environmental goods.[19] This embodiment instills power in these laborers as cornerstones of debates on conservation and space and belonging in forestry. Sifuentez builds upon this by examining the Latinization of not just the agricultural industries of the Pacific

[17] Mexicanization refers to the transformation of industries or spaces as "Mexican" in culture, demographics, or familiarity. The same applies for Latinization but for Latinos.
[18] Erasmo Gamboa, *Mexican Labor and World War II Braceros in the Pacific Northwest, 1942-1947* (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 1990), xvii, 66.
[19] Binda Sarathy, *Piñeros: Latino Labour and the Changing Face of Forestry in the Pacific Northwest* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012), 134.

Northwest but also rural communities during the mid-20th century and mid-21st centuries.[20] In his argument, Sifuentez positions the making of a Mexican Pacific Northwest through the formation of migrant networks, ethnic Mexican institutions, and empowerment of unionism or other "weapons of the weak."

"Somos de Allá y de Aquí" presents a new lens to examine the contributions of ethnic Mexican migrant labor in the Pacific Northwest through placemaking which emphasizes migrants' significant power as placemakers. As Tejanos and Mexicanos collectivized their intimate memories through kinship networks, they created a new home in Independence, Oregon. This home decenters the labor system as the migrant's source of meaning and empowers them to act upon their agency. By gaining a sense of control over their conditions, migrants then utilize the labor systems to benefit their families and community. This familiar Mexican place in Independence provided an anchor where ethnic Mexicans could take control of their conditions while being a part of a community rather than be pushed to the margins of society.

Though a few Mexican American history and labor scholars centered memory on being a part of the formation of identity and community for ethnic Mexicans, placemaking has rarely been the focus. In the case of the Pacific Northwest, Erasmo Gamboa, Binda Sarathy, and Mario Sifuentez have touched on placemaking, but their arguments were not framed around the subject. Each attempted to place ethnic Mexican labor within the economic and environmental development of the region, which led to a missing perspective on the development of cultural places in the region. Conversely, Monica Perales and Natalia Molina were the scholars who directly included memory *and* placemaking, to an extent, within their frameworks. However, these frameworks often centered on physical "place" rather than memory as a driving factor in

[20] Mario Sifuentez, *Of Forest and Fields: Mexican Labor in the Pacific Northwest* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2016), 2-3.

forming intimate attachments to place, identity, and community. By framing the mobilization of memory in the migrant experience, this paper seeks to understand how migrants constructed a sense of belonging in the migrant stream and then in Independence while away from the cultural hearth of the Southwest.

This history of ethnic Mexicans in Independence attempts to draw attention to these laborers' cultural contributions to the Pacific Northwest. The wholehearted embrace of placemaking attempts to paint migrant laborers as placemakers and their contributions to creating multicultural communities across the Pacific Northwest. Moreover, this history contributes to the understanding of the Tejano experience in the assembly of ethnic Mexican communities in the United States. Aside from Marc Rodriguez, whose work solely focuses on Tejanos, other historians such as Julie Weise, Dionico Valdéz, and Cecilia Márquez speak sparsely about the role of Tejanos within their histories. This gap stays true in Oregon, where the Tejano experience is briefly explored in one chapter by Sifuentez's *Of Forest and Fields*. The missing voice of Tejanos in the literature leaves open a new level of complexity to the Mexican diaspora's history in the Pacific Northwest and the United States through not just their cultural memories but also political ideology and definition of citizenship.

Theoretical Framework

How we remember "home" is not limited to the physical locale, but the memories associated with this place. We can visualize this home but also feel the intimate experiences of bygone generations—invoking a powerful metaphysical attachment. This attachment allows us to access these memories and familiarize ourselves with foreign and unwelcoming places. Whether

locating familiar cultural places, nearby kin, or replicating cultural practices, our memories of home provide sanctuary and a means to make place. This familiarization of place through remembering intimate cultural ways is how the Mexicanization of Independence, Oregon, by Tejanos and Mexicanos in the mid-20th century will be framed—a process I coin as "migrant placemaking."

The notion of "place" is explained by Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan as a convergence of countless intimate experiences and emotions through several generations; thus, "place" is defined as a "center of meaning constructed by experiences."[21] This physical place we consider home is limited in scope within the migrant experience. Due to frequent migrations and the financial obstacles to returning home, migrants relied upon a more mobile means to connect to home through memory. Although Tuan insinuates that "place" centers experiences, for the migrant, memory centers place. Migrants recall generations of collective memory to remember the life histories of elders, kinship networks, generational foodways, and cultural traditions. Moreover, the memory of cultural ways can be adapted and expressed physically and metaphysically to familiarize a foreign and exclusive place.

For Tejano and Mexicano migrants, remembrance of cultural ways served as a means of survival and community formation. As historian Monica Perales noted in her hometown in southern Texas, "The creation of community, and later the re-articulation of community through collective memory, served as a mechanism by which working people found agency within their limited range of choices."[22] Through remembering, we learn life lessons from our elders, where we come from, where we belong, and who we are; we learn how to dance *norteñas*, how to make tortillas like our grandmothers, and understand the intricacies of family drama. This knowledge

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[21] Yi-Fu Tuan, "Space and Place: Humanistic Perspective," *Philosophy in Geography 20, (1979):* 388.
[22] Perales, 3.

manifests into “cultural capital” that is carried with migrants across multiple generations and locales. In essence, “migrant placemaking” illuminates the power of the migrant’s collective memories that imbue a sense of agency to transform a White and foreign place like Independence, Oregon, into a familiar Mexican place, a home.

Methodologies

This study draws from local and state-wide sources such as census records, newspapers, government reports, and oral histories from Western Oregon University, the University of Oregon, Oregon State University, the Oregon State Library, the Oregon State Archives, the Independence Heritage Museum, the “Explore Our Heritage” public history project, and through my insider community networks. I paint pre-bracero, bracero, and post-bracero migrations throughout the Willamette Valley through the data gathered from the census, newspapers, and government reports. The focus on these different eras allowed for a greater understanding of the ethnic Mexican presence in the area before the given era of my study. This data assisted in the knowledge of the racialization of these laborers and the perception of them by White residents. Additionally, the data from these sources provided contextual gaps within this regional history by providing other exemplary placemaking efforts. These ranged from community events and cultural expression in the local school district. The oral histories from the archives and those I conducted gave a more intimate perspective into the complexities of migratory life during the

post-bracero period, conflicting views on incoming migrants from Mexico, and the formation of community and fictive kinships.[23]

To observe how Oregon policymakers viewed its relationship with the predominantly ethnic Mexican migrant population, data from various government reports on rural labor, migrant education, and welfare was utilized. I corroborated the post-bracero migration patterns using data from the rural labor reports while carving out locations for the various farms around Independence. The reports on migrant education and welfare provided data on day-to-day operations at the state and regional level, pedagogical approaches, working and living conditions, and adult-centered courses around life skills and citizenship preparation. Through the "Explore Our Heritage" project, I viewed how Dr. Erasmo Gamboa organized local professionals, junior scholars, and the community to participate in collecting artifacts, primary sources, oral histories, and financial support to document part of a documentary by Oregon Public Broadcasting around farm labor. The project provided needed primary sources for this research while also serving as a model to examine the influences of public history on the process of placemaking.

An integral part of this methodology is that as an insider to the ethnic Mexican community of Independence, I was able to utilize long-established kinship networks to assist in the research of this thesis. These insider networks allowed for many of these narratives to be understood contextually and intimately through stories told by my elders. My positionality within this thesis is unique and it directly molded the way this is written. I attempted to write this history as if it were being told in the same way many of our stories were told to provide an intimate view into the argument of this thesis.

[23] Fictive kin, or fictive kinships, are referred to by anthropologists and ethnographers to describe forms of kinship or social ties that are based on neither blood ties nor marriage ties. Those who are fictive kin are unrelated but have a close relationship that one is considered like family.

Chapter I

Siguendo Las Mariposas: Early Migrations & the Paths of Place (1920-1960)

"If I come back, I will build my house in Oregon. This is beautiful country. Everywhere you look around, it looks like you are in Heaven with angels and saints."[24]

The Mexican diaspora has long been attracted to the "beautiful country" of Oregon. From skilled Mexicano migrant laborers in southern Oregon to railroad workers and farmworkers who maintained Oregon's industries during the two world wars, Oregon became a key destination. This place provided not only economic opportunities for these migrants but a place of refuge from violence and economic instability in the Southwest. As Oregon would become dependent upon these laborers over time, Mexicanos interacted with White Oregonians more frequently and became racialized. As the braceros arrived in World War II, they would drastically change the dynamic between Mexicano laborers and White Oregonians. By challenging the negative caricature of Mexicanos, these laborers would allow for a more welcoming Oregon for later Tejano migrants in the 1950s. This more accepting environment in Oregon allowed Tejanos to cultivate a sense of belonging within the migrant stream and across numerous camps in Independence. Coupled with a new sense of control to better their conditions, Tejanos would ground themselves in community by utilizing collective memories within kinship networks. Additionally, because Tejanos were welcome to express their culture in the camps around Independence, they became well-versed in organizing a community in the migrant stream. This mobile community would later transfer from the migrant stream to Independence as Tejanos

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[24] *Nosotros: The Hispanic People of Oregon: Essays and Recollections*, eds. Erasmo Gamboa and Carolyn M. Buan, (Portland: Oregon Council for the Humanities, 1995), 13.

settled in the town by the mid-1960s and kickstart the Mexicanization of a place only known in passing.

Nos Vemos Pronto: Early Mexican Migrations in Oregon

The aftermath of the Mexican-American War of 1846-1848 led to an exodus of Mexicano migrants searching for relief from the violence and chaos that engulfed their former homelands. Looking to the Oregon Territory, the first wave of migrants were single men skilled in trades such as *vaqueros*, mule packers, or herders, often hired by White ranchers or the military in eastern Oregon during the mid-19th century.[25] These migrants found relative success and peace in their respective occupations, such as the vaqueros, who had a significant presence in eastern Oregon, with some owning ranches or, in one case, becoming the superintendent of the Pacific Livestock Company.[26] In contrast, Oregon's Willamette Valley saw little to no Mexicano migration during the late 1800s until the 1900s. This was mainly due to the utilization of unskilled contracted labor in the 20th century, which brought Mexicanos to the railroads and fields of the valley.[27]

Between the late 1800s and early 1900s, Oregon was in the process of developing its railroads and other vital infrastructure to compete with outside markets. Within this development period, the Willamette Valley became one of the state's most profitable agricultural regions. These profits were especially notable during the region's investment in the hop crop, which

[25] Erasmo Gamboa, "Mexican Mule Packers and Oregon's Second Regiment Mounted Volunteers, 1855-1856," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 92, No. 1 (Spring 1991), 53-54.
[26] Richard Slatta, "Chicanos in Oregon: An Historical Overview," (Master's Thesis, Portland State University, 1974), 12; James Michael Slone, "The struggle for dignity: Mexican-Americans in the Pacific Northwest, 1900-2000." (Bachelor's thesis, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 2000), 15.
[27] Erasmo Gamboa, *Bracero Railroaders: The Forgotten World War II Story of Mexican Workers in the U.S. West* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016), 21-22.

would soon find Independence at the heart of the valley as "The Hop Capital of the World." The town of Independence was founded in the mid-Willamette Valley in 1885 by incorporating Elvin A. Throp and Henry Hill's "Towns of Independence."[28] The town stretches near the west side of the Willamette River to the south of Ash Creek. Because of Independence's proximity to the river, the town gained notoriety as a shipping point for exporting agricultural goods. Once the hop crop began to be cultivated in nearby farms in the 1880s, Independence held the state's highest concentration of hop growers by the early 1900s. The most notable hop growers being Wigrich Ranch, owned by Wiggins, Richardson, & Co., and Horst Hop Ranch, owned by Emil Clemens Horst.[29]

The labor-intensive nature of harvesting hops caused a significant strain on local labor pools and led to the racialization of stoop laborers. After White people began to see hop picking as beneath them, Indigenous and Asian laborers sought to work the harvests in Independence. However, just as each was quickly welcomed and praised, the quicker they became racialized, or othered, by White residents.[30] This was due to the perception that non-White migrants occupied jobs where the sparseness of community populations in the valley made jobs scarce. These non-White pickers were segregated, underpaid, and scrutinized, which often had growers frustrated due to the lack of consistent labor. Growers soon concluded that "they preferred White labor over all others" and appeased White nativism to continue their outputs of the hop crop.[31]

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[28] Sidney Newton, Early History of Independence, Oregon (Salem: Panther Printing Co., 1971), 1, 7.
[29] Peter A. Kopp, *Hoptopia* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 75.
[30] The term "racialization" refers to the political process of ascribing ethnic or racial identities to a relationship, social, practice, or group that did not identify itself as such for the purpose of domination and social exclusion. Additionally, I use racialization to include how the dominant group assigns particular groups to different labor sectors that fit with the group's "inherent traits." See Michael Omi and Howard Winant, "Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s," (Routledge: Chapman & Hall, 2015), 64. See also David Karjanen "Gender, Race, and Nationality in the Making of Mexican Migrant Labor in the United States," *Latin American Perspectives* 35, No. 1 (January 2008), 54.
[31] To read more on the experiences of non-White hop labor, see Kopp's subsection "The Diversity of the West Captured in the Hopyards" in the fourth chapter (64-71); Kopp, 70.

Although Mexicanos were not in these initial hop pickers, the racialization of these marginalized groups provides an insight into how the concept of race developed in Independence, this concept being through the separation between migrant and resident. White residents viewed the migrants as temporary and "invisible" due to these laborers' presence on the farms which segregated them from White residents thus conserving the White dynamic of Independence.[32]

What attracted the first Mexicano migrants to Independence was the section of the Southern Pacific Railroad that crossed through the town.[33] On June 4th, 1920, Mexicano railroad laborers, or *traqueros*, would arrive to the town to a less than warm welcome. This was due to a divergence from the housing of non-White laborers. In earlier instances, these laborers would be housed on the farms near Independence and hidden away from White residents; however, these traqueros were housed within Independence. *The Polk County Post* and *Independence Enterprise* reported 20 Mexicanos composed of men, women, and children being kept at the McHenry Shack at the corner of 4th and G Streets.[34] *The Post* reported the event as a "race problem," which caused White residents to be "aroused to wrath by this invasion of foreigners."[35] Several residents, including A.M. Bingman, Mike Wooley, Ray Sandblom, and B.F. Swope brought a petition to protest the housing of Mexicans in Independence. After the city council passed it unanimously, the city also ordered the homeowners of the McHenry Shack to "make certain sanitary arrangements."[36] Although much is not known about what happened to these Mexicanos, this event signaled a shift in the racial outlook of Independence.

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[32] Of the non-White migrants, the Japanese were able to create a small community in the early 1900s. This community existed until the 1940s due to the internment of Japanese by the U.S. government. However, little is known of the history of this community and the interactions experienced with White residents. For reference see Eiichiro Azuma, "A History of Oregon's Issei, 1880-1952," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 94, No. 4 (Winter 1993/1994), 334. See footnote 56.
[33] *The Polk County Post*, June 4, 1920; *Independence Enterprise*, June 4, 1920.
[34] *The Polk County Post*; *Independence Enterprise*.
[35] *The Polk County Post*.
[36] *Independence Enterprise*.

Before 1920, Independence residents had no prior interactions with Mexicanos, and their reaction to the arrival of Mexican traqueros was unprecedented. However, the census data for Independence between 1900 and 1920 revealed a vital piece of context for this reaction. Between 1900 and 1920, a small stream of White people from the Southwest were settling in the town.[37] This presence may have led to the dissemination of a racial outlook on Mexicanos that was formulated in the Southwest previously. Through contracting Mexicanos to several railroads crossing through Oregon, such as the Southern Pacific, in the 1910s and 1920s, Oregonians became well-versed in the racialization of Mexicanos. The early 1900s saw numerous Southwestern railroads employ primarily Mexicanos due to their abundance, low pay, and limitations on Chinese and European immigration.[38] These traqueros would be contracted by a wartime labor program that saw them maintain rail lines during World War I. However, after the war, White nativists began to question the presence of Mexicanos in the United States.

To remedy national outcries, employers sought to justify their recruitment of Mexicanos by fabricating a positive social and racial image of them as the best laboring race. Employers praised Mexicanos' ability to work in desert-like conditions, their strong backs, and their abundance.[39] These stances were reiterated through a testimony by E. Clemens Horst, the owner of Independence's Horst Hop Ranch. Writing to the Congressional Committee on Immigration and Naturalization in 1928, Horst stated that "Mexican laborers can, of course, be herded like cattle; they put up with any [part] of the camp and living conditions; that importation of that sort

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[37] *Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900,* Independence, Polk County, Oregon, Enumerated District 0175; *Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920,* Independence, Polk County, Oregon, Enumerated District 0368.
[38] Gamboa, *Bracero Railroaders*, 18, 48.
[39] Gamboa, *Bracero Railroaders*, 48.

of labor reduces [living] conditions for ranch labor below the standard that any American workers [can] or ought to be expected to work."[40]

Moreover, employers argued that Mexican migrants would return to Mexico and had no desire for White women—as eugenicists saw Mexicanos as a threat to the American gene pool. These stances reiterated by Horst held strong through inquiries on immigration quotas in the 1920s, and contracted Mexican labor was saved from quota revisions.[41] However, as the Great Depression brought employment to record lows, Mexicanos became a scapegoat for the country's economic troubles. During the 1930s, the event known as Mexican Repatriation would see many Mexicanos in Oregon repatriated to Mexico either voluntarily or through coercion.[42]

The next significant migration wave of Mexicanos to Oregon came during World War II. As Oregon opened its agricultural enterprises through irrigation, electrification, and dam projects in the 1940s, growers could cultivate more diverse crops. However, these harvests required a large labor pool that became depleted once the United States entered the war in December 1941. Once again, Mexicanos were called upon to maintain U.S. industries. In April 1942, the U.S. and Mexico agreed to another wartime labor program called the bracero program which began in 1943. For the next three years, around 15,000 braceros would be imported to Oregon and spread across farms and railroads. In the summer of 1943 alone, Independence saw over 1,000 braceros

[40] "Immigration from Countries of the Western Hemisphere: Hearings before the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization February 1 to April 5, 1928." 738.

[41] To illustrate Oregon's changing view of Mexicanos, during the debates around immigration, the Oregon legislature wrote a memorial pressuring Congress to pass immigration quotas on Mexicanos; Marcela Mendoza and Erlinda V. Gonzales-Berry, *Mexicanos in Oregon: Their Lives, Their Stories* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2010), 23-24.

[42] Gamboa, *Bracero Railroaders*, 28; Gonzales-Berry, et al., 25; Jerry Garcia, "Latinos in Oregon," *Oregon Encyclopedia*, last modified November 8, 2023, https://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/hispanicsinoregon/#deportation

scattered across the town's numerous farms. By the following year, Independence would become one of the largest concentrations of braceros in Oregon.[43]

Like their counterparts in the Midwest, braceros in Oregon arrived in an "unusual land" whose cold, wet, and White climate proved challenging to become accustomed to. In addition to facing dehumanizing working conditions, the braceros were culturally isolated and endured violence from White residents surrounding their camps.[44] The program itself only intended to fill in the need for farm labor and only considered braceros' physical, mental, and cultural well-being after the program's implementation.[45] However, as the braceros adjusted to this environment and the program, many exercised their collective agency. In addition to striking, other braceros focused on addressing their cultural needs. Braceros organized celebrations for Mexican holidays within the first year of the program. By 1944, Oregonian White women began to lead bridge-building efforts between braceros and surrounding communities. In Salem, north of Independence, White women organized English-Spanish language exchanges, sponsored entertainment by local musicians, and aided the planning of Mexican celebrations in tandem with the braceros. Additionally, as many braceros were Catholic, locals in Salem organized feast celebrations and transported braceros to Catholic masses in Independence.[46]

The braceros illustrate a significant shift in the perception of Mexicanos in the eyes of White Oregonians. Through attempting to find a sense of home in the camps, braceros familiarized White Oregonians with an authentic representation of Mexicanos. These interactions

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[43] Gonzales-Berry, et al, 31, 33-34, 43; *The Oregon Statesman* September 2, 1943; September 4, 1943; October 1, 1943.

[44] Dionico Valdes, *Al Norte: Agricultural Workers in the Great Lakes Region, 1917-1970* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991), 103; Erasmo Gamboa, *Mexican Labor and World War II: Braceros in the Pacific Northwest, 1943-1947* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990), 96-97, 115-118.

[45] Gamboa, *Bracero Railroaders*, 114.

[46] Gonzales-Berry et al, 42-44; *The Oregon Statesman*," August 14, 1945; Gamboa, *Mexican Labor and World War II,* 104-107.

with genuine Mexican culture challenged the racial caricature of Mexicanos as bandits and womanizers. Many growers and residents were surprised at the comportment and "satisfactory work" of the braceros.[47] These changes in attitudes towards Mexicanos instilled a sense of familiarity in White Oregonians that provided an easier means of acceptance for later Tejano migrations in the 1950s. Since Tejanos are culturally similar to Mexicanos, White Oregonians thought no different once Tejanos came to the fields of Oregon. Moreover, Erasmo Gamboa, whose family was a part of the migrant stream from Texas to Oregon, attested that "we were *needed*." And due to the earlier familiarity with braceros, White Oregonians "treated us surprisingly well."[48]

Solomente para la Correa: Tejano Migration to Oregon

In the post-war era, Texas witnessed a mass exodus of Tejanos to Oregon and other states nationwide. Those residing in the turbulent Lower Rio Grande Valley, or "El Valle," experienced job scarcity due to braceros who broke or overstayed their contracts and were quickly recruited by contractors. This scarcity of employment was primarily caused by the industrialization of Texas' agricultural industries during World War II. This caused a scarcity of unskilled jobs for Tejanos in El Valle.[49] Subsequently, Oregon needed unskilled agricultural labor as the cost of importing braceros became too high for growers.[50] Thus, many turned to Mexican Americans in the Southwest, such as Texas, due to their abundance and ability to transport themselves and their

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[47] *The Oregon Statesman*, September 19, 1943.
[48] *The Oregon Statesman*, September 19, 1943.
[49] David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), 270-271.
[50] Gamboa, *Mexican Labor and World War II*, 150.

families. This differed from the traditional recruitment of single men as growers believed the vulnerability of younger laborers would enable an environment of docility that was rarely seen during the bracero program.[51]

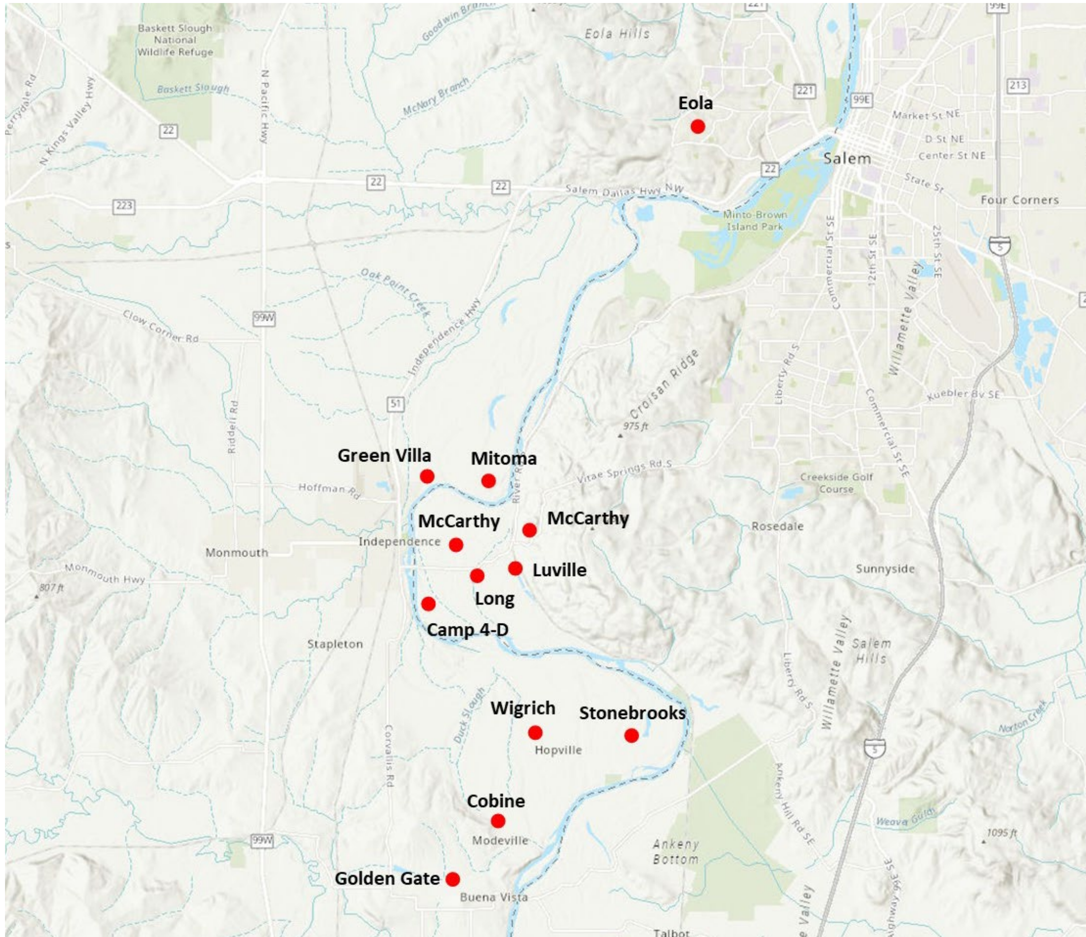

Figure 2. *Map of the farms near Independence that employed Tejanos during the period 1950-1970*. Map generated by author via PCMAPS 5 from Polk County GIS. June 5, 2024.

Given Texas' economic condition and historic anti-Mexican sentiment, the choice to migrate to Oregon was relatively easy. Between the 1950s and 1960s, several Tejano families, including the

[51] Gamboa, *Mexican Labor and World War II*, 124-127.

Luna, Gonzales, Coronado, Morales, Navejar, Castilleja, Carrillo, Garcia, Delgadillo, Armijo, Dortida, and Alvarez families of Edinburg, Texas, migrated to Independence, Oregon. As each family arrived, they spread throughout the numerous farms around the town such as McCarthy Ranch, Camp 4-D, Long Ranch, Green Villa Farms, Wigrich Ranch and Eola Ranch, among others.[52] As for other Tejanos, such as the Leos and García families, they arrived through contractors in the 1950s and 1960s, respectively. Although despite the contractors' optimism regarding earning potential, neither family could afford to return to Texas in the winter. Both families decided to stay in Independence because "they were already there," and travel was costly.[53]

Like their migratory predecessors, Tejanos gained knowledge of Oregon through relatives, friends, and community members. Other Tejanos became aware of Oregon's potential to provide year-round employment due to the state's proximity to Washington, Idaho, and California. Erasmo Gamboa recalled his father learning of these year-round opportunities from a relative in 1947. What also attracted Tejanos to Oregon was the differing economic and social environment. In addition to the absence of sales tax in Oregon, which allotted more buying power to Tejanos, they attained higher positions in agricultural work such as supervisors or camp managers.[54]

Migrating provided multiple means to be economically prosperous to certain degrees while living a relatively peaceful existence in the camps. Many Tejanos were eager to leave Texas and make a better life for themselves which allowed them to feel a sense of control over their lives for the first time. Similarly, Tejano veterans were empowered to claim their rights as

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[52] *Nosotros: The Hispanic People of Oregon: Essays and Recollections*, eds. Erasmo Gamboa and Carolyn M. Buan, (Portland: Oregon Council for the Humanities, 1995), 13.
[53] Gonzales-Berry et al, 58-59.
[54] Gamboa, Nosotros, 12-13.

Mexican Americans through their service in World War II. These rights coincided with non-veterans acting upon a sense of control over their lives to create something of themselves through the migrant stream. Following his honorable discharge in July of 1945, my great-grandfather, Guadalupe Alvarez, returned to Edinburg, Texas, and began work as a truck driver. In 1946, Lupe migrated to Washington with friends to work in the fields, where he would eventually meet Paula García of Edcouch, Texas. In 1947, the couple traveled to McAllen, Texas, to get married and quickly returned to Washington that same year. After five years, the Alvarez family left their friends and migrated to Oregon, where Lupe caught wind of more available jobs in Independence.[55]

As Tejanos arrived at the numerous camps in Independence, many were met with less-than-ideal housing conditions. Erasmo Gamboa's recollection of his family's time at the Golden Gate Hop Ranch (later renamed Wigrich Farms), south of Independence, provided an insight into camp life for these Tejano farmworkers.[56] During the war, much of the housing available on the farms near Independence was left in disrepair with rotting wood and subpar foundations. Each house in the camp was equipped with a wood-burning stove, a table, wooden benches, and small cots. Although the weather in Independence proved to be less "temperate" than advertised, the cold did not damper the social lives of Tejanos. Families would organize dances outdoors with musicians in the camp who played their guitars and accordions, a hallmark of *música norteña*.[57] In other camps, such as Green Villa, Tejanos would organize dances in the barn across from the

[55] Guadalupe Alvarez, interview by Teresa Ganz, March 23, 2001; Antonio L. Nuñez, "Oregon Pioneers," 12.
[56] It should be noted that Gamboa's parents were born in Mexico and migrated to Texas where they built a life in a town in the Lower Rio Grande Valley called Edinburg. The Gamboa's were a well-known family when they migrated through Independence had connections with the other Tejano families. Their experiences were one of the more vivid accounts of camp life.
[57] This is a subgenre of regional Mexican music often derived from Northern Mexico and the borderlands related to polka and "corridos." Famous musicians of this genre include Los Tigres del Norte and Ramón Ayala y Sus Bravos del Norte.

fields. However, for occasions when musicians were unavailable, camp residents would use a phonograph to play records pooled from the laborers.[58]

Oktoberfest was a much-anticipated event at the end of the harvest season; however, Tejanos were unfamiliar with the concept. Many began to refer to it as "el fin de la corrida," or the end of the harvest. Growers brought entertainment to the camps and provided food for the celebration, which Tejanos greatly anticipated each year. These events often blurred the racial and social lines between Tejano, Black, and Indigenous residents of the camp, in addition to the White managers who danced along with them.[59] Additionally, as Tejanos ventured into Independence, they established Mexican foodways with local vendors. Gamboa remarked on how his father connected a local grocery store with a supplier of Mexican foodstuffs in Washington.[60] The replication of intimate memories of home within the social lives of Tejanos in the camps demonstrates how familiarization occurred in these spaces. To make their circumstances more comfortable, Tejanos replicated cultural practices from Texas to capture a sense of home through food, dance, customs, and music.[61]

The introduction of Tejano kinship networks into the camps and the migrant stream became the driving force for replicating cultural practices in the camps. With many Tejanos already familiar with one another either by long-established kinship networks in south Texas or

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[58] Gamboa et al., *Nosotros*, 15; Farm worker life at Green Villa Farm, Independence, Oregon, 1961," Special Collections and Archives Research Center, Oregon State University Libraries, 7:36-7:58 https://media.oregonstate.edu/media/t/1_jn97w38e.
[59] Gamboa et al., *Nosotros*, 15.
[60] Gamboa et al., *Nosotros*, 15.
[61] What differentiates Tejano culture from the rest of the Mexican diaspora is the Indigenous, Spanish, Northern Mexican, and American influences in the food, language, and most notably, in their music. Tex-Mex is an adapted culinary tradition stemming from the vaqueros and the survival of Tejanos during the turbulent aftermath of the Mexican-American War. This cuisine is often characterized by the usage of certain spices, beef, and flour tortillas. The Tejano language is reminiscent of "Spanglish" or a hybrid language combining certain words or speech patterns in English and Spanish. For further reading see Jessica Ortiz, "Tejano Culture: Cultural Evolution as a Means of Social and Economic Advancement." (Bachelor's thesis, University of Wisconsin-EAU Claire, 2013).

through new connections in the migrant stream, Tejanos were able to form a mobile community with many becoming *compadres*.[62] The Alvarez and Carrillo families frequently migrated together throughout Oregon, Washington, California, New Mexico, and Arizona. The daughter of the Carrillos, Anita Cantu, recalled the two families arriving at a camp called the 11-mile Corner in Arizona. Lupe was a contractor at the time and stayed in apartments across from the camp, while Cantu's family stayed in segregated army barracks. The families grew so close to where Lupe married Pablo and Herlinda Carrillo, the parents of Cantu, in the camp of Green Villa.[63]

By the 1960s, many Tejano families had begun to settle in Independence, and so would their kinship networks. Maria de Jesus Lopez and Rogelio García, and their daughter Consuelo "Connie," knew the Alvarez family during their time as migrant farmworkers. Connie García remembered that long after the two families settled in Independence their relationship never dwindled. García recalled several times where she would send her daughters to the Alvarez home where she knew Lupe was making *carnitas*.[64] "When I was first married, I had two little girls, and they went over to Lupe's. They would knock on the door and ask, 'Don Lupe, are you going to make carnitas?' And he would say 'you can have some if you sing a song for me,' and my girls would sing 'you are my sunshine,' and then they'd bring over to me."[65] The kinship networks further developed by the Tejanos allowed for a sense of community to be established as many continued to settle in Independence throughout the 1960s.

[62] This moniker often refers to godparenthood and friends but also "family friends."
[63] Antia Cantu, interviewed by Victor Ochoa, May 3, 2023.
[64] This is a Mexican pork dish made from stewed pork shoulder.
[65] Connie García, interviewed by Victor Ochoa, June 11, 2023; The title of "Don" is often given to elder ethnic Mexicans and Latinos in the community out of respect. This can also be used in the female equivalent of "Doña."

The Tejano migrations to Independence, Oregon, solidified the paths of place sowed by earlier Mexicano migrations before the mid-20th century. As the braceros sought to amend the previous experiences of contracted Mexican labor in Oregon, they also challenged previous racial caricatures. By expressing their agency in addressing their cultural needs, the braceros cultivated an image of the Mexicano as a noble and hardworking individual. In the eyes of White Oregonians, many saw their negative perceptions of Mexicanos crumble during the war.

This new perception opened White Oregonians to permitting the existence of Tejanos in the fields as their reasons for being in Oregon were similar to the braceros. As Oregon growers attracted Tejanos, many found mixed success; however, this new frontier, or "Nuevo Norte," provided opportunities not seen in Texas: peace and relative economic prosperity. Moreover, Tejanos found a community within the migrant stream where they could feel a sense of comfort in their social lives in the camps. As kinship networks were rekindled and expanded, the Tejanos could replicate long-held cultural practices to create a piece of Texas in the camps near Independence, Oregon. These tight-knit networks provided the necessary environment for Tejanos to begin settling in the place that made them feel wanted. However, this process of homemaking would come to endure complex obstacles in the 1960s. With growing fears of migrant settlements, the state of Oregon would attempt to racialize Tejanos as ignorant and poor individuals meant to be forever migrants and nothing more.

Chapter II

Llegamos as Casa: The Mexicanization of Independence (1950-1970)

"He talks 'deep' with phrases made and collected in a philosophy of life gained after early attempts to break out had failed. He accepts his condition because his experiences have indicated to him that a Mexican can do no better."[66]

As Tejanos migrated and were key contributors to Oregon's success in its agricultural industries, growers wished to maintain their labor pool. A 1959 report by the State of Oregon Bureau of Labor made these feelings towards Tejanos clear: the migrant is never meant to escape the migrant stream. Moreover, the report asserted which migrant was preferred as possible residents. The authors Tom Current and Mark Infante painted the White migrant as a "professional farmworker" who is "troubled but cheerful."[67] The Tejano, or "Spanish-American," lived in perpetual hopelessness, whose prayers were used to plead for longer workdays; however, this was far from the truth. Although these racialized views of Tejanos were persistent in Oregon's migrant assistance programs, this did not hinder participation. Due to the Tejanos' experiences with Texan discrimination, Oregon's attempt did not impact their efforts on gaining valuable assets in these programs; soon, Tejanos became educated, politically conscious, and socially organized in the 1960s. Though the programs were meant to deter Tejanos from settling in Independence, they became an opportunity for this community to stake a claim to the their home, thus forever altering what the migrant was truly capable of. By the 1970s, Mexican

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[66] Tom Current and Mark Martinez Infante, *Final Report of the 1958-1959 Migrant Farm Labor Studies in Oregon Including Material from the Preliminary Report of the Bureau of Labor:* "*We Talked to the Migrants … and Migrant Problems Demand Action."* Oregon Bureau of Labor, Migrant Labor Division, 1959, 7.
[67] Current and Infante, *Final Report*, 4-6.

immigrants became attracted to Independence for employment *and* a taste of home. Despite Tejanos contested the presence of Mexicanos, culture became a means to temporarily subdue diasporic conflict. In turn, Independence became Mexicanized not just in the fields but in its numerous institutions and cultural spaces where former and current migrants became powerful stakeholders.

What are We to You?: Oregon's Forever Migrant

Migrating was seen as a way for Tejanos to gain new economic possibilities and freedoms never felt or seen in Texas.[68] This newfound sense of control allowed Tejanos to become conscious of opportunities to improve their conditions. For Guadalupe Alvarez, his service in World War II was instrumental in imbuing him with a new sense of citizenship as a Mexican American. His pride in serving his country empowered him to take control of his life and change it for the better outside of Texas. Along with this new sense of control, Tejanos attempted to retain their identity by expressing their intimate memories to replicate long-held cultural traditions. These memories cultivate a sense of home that is contained in these memories from how one speaks, cooks, or remembers.

Mexicanos such as Francisco Barraza Sandoval, who settled in Independence in 1970, epitomized the significance of retaining one's cultural memory; "We cannot deny that our blood is Mexican even though we have obtained a different citizenship, but that is not why it takes

[68] Marc S. Rodriguez, *The Tejano Diaspora: Mexican Americanism and Ethnic Politics in Texas and Wisconsin* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 2011, 6-7.

away the color we wear."[69] Beginning in the 1960s, as Tejanos settled in Independence, this attachment to cultural memory transferred from the camps to their homes. Moreover, as Tejanos bought their homes, they developed a community reminiscent of their time in the migrant stream. This community would come to reshape the very fabric of Independence to create a familiar Mexican place.

The 1950s were a pivotal era for Oregon as its agricultural industries would become dependent upon Mexican American labor.[70] Similarly, in Independence, the first post-war census in 1950 would report 50 people housed at the McLaughlin Ranch near Independence, whose places of origin varied from Texas, California, and Mexico.[71] This was the second time Mexicanos had been in Independence since 1920 and the first appearance of Tejanos and other Mexican Americans. Furthermore, the census data could not account for the dozens more Tejano families who frequented Independence. As this census being taken in April, many of these families were elsewhere then. The census data for Independence in 1950 reflected state-wide trends as the Independence's migrant labor transitioned from White, Indigenous, and Asian to majority Tejano, Mexicanos, and other Mexican Americans.[72] As Independence and the rest of Oregon became dependent upon ethnic Mexican labor in its agricultural industries, the state was included in the national debates on migrant labor reforms by the late 1950s.

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[69] Original text: "No podemos negar que nuestra sangre es [Mexicana] y desendemos de los [Mexicanos] aunque emos obtenido otras ciudadanías. Pero no por eso nos quita el color que llevamos en la piel;" Francisco Barraza Sandoval, interviewed by Jaime Valverde, 2001.

[70] Mario Sifuentez, *Of Forests and Fields: Mexican Labor in the Pacific Northwest* (Rutgers University Press, 2016), 36.

[71] 1950 Census of Population and Housing, Independence, Polk County, Oregon, sheet 74-76.

[72] Between the 1950s and 1960s Oregon reported an influx of majority ethnic Mexican migrants from California, Washington, Texas, and Mexico. Those places in Texas that were the main contributor of Tejano migrants were Asherton, Carrizo, Uvalde, Marfa, Dilley, Alpine, Del Rio, Floresville, Christal City, Brownsville, Laredo, Robstown, Falfurrias, McAllen, Kingsville, Raymondville, and Edinburg. As for Mexico, the states of Aguascalientes, San Luis, Zacatecas, Michoacan, Durango, Coahuila, Chihuahua, and Tamaulipas were supplied a significant number of migrants; Current and Infante, 20, 24-25; Colleen Loprinzi, "Hispanic Migrant Labor in Oregon, 1940-1990," (Master's Thesis, Portland State University, 1991), 9; *Independence Enterprise*, July 16, 1964, 1.

In addition to national pressures, the Oregon Council of Churches and the Oregon State Bureau of Labor were advocating for migrants in the state. By 1957, the Oregon legislature created the Legislative Interim Committee on Migrant Labor. The committee oversaw the development of migrant labor reforms and funding of several migrant assistance programs. One sector of migrant welfare that made Oregon attractive to Tejano migrants was the migrant summer education program that began in the late 1950s. Because many Tejanos had limited educational opportunities in Texas, Oregon provided more equitable opportunities for their children to become educated.[73] The program provided a flexible elementary education in partnership with local school districts, such as the Central School District in Independence, who provided classrooms during the summer program. Anita Cantu was a former student in the Independence program during the early 1960s. She recalled first attending Oak Grove Elementary School, nine miles north of Independence. While her family worked in the fields of McCarthy Ranch, near Independence, a bus would come to take the children to class.[74]

Cantu recalls only being in one classroom and, on occasion, taking swimming lessons at the Oregon College of Education (OCE) in Monmouth. Total class time was often less than a month from the beginning of June to the first part of July to allow children to return to the fields in time for the strawberry and pole bean harvest. After a few years, the Independence program moved locations to Riverside School on south River Road near Independence. Riverside became the school that is often remembered by former migrants whose families frequented the farms around Independence. Cantu remembered how crowded the upstairs classroom became due to

[73] David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1835-1986* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), 192.
[74] Anita Cantu, interviewed by Victor Ochoa, May 3, 2023.

the large number of students attending. This overcrowding would lead the teacher to move the classroom to the basement of the schoolhouse.[75]

Cantu's experiences highlight the initial good done by the program in providing a space for the migrant children to be children and not only farmworkers. However, the program was plagued by systemic issues of racism and paternalism. Many of the program's administrators and instructors held and expressed racialized views of Tejanos and other ethnic Mexican children, who were the majority of the program's students.[76] Tom Current, the Assistant Labor Commissioner, and Mark Infante, the Director of the Migrant Survey, noted several instances of these racist views in the program between 1958 and 1959. One teacher observed that the children could not be forced into an "Anglo-American mold or pattern; they are different. They are elemental and basic in their concepts of thinking; they have different temperaments."[77] Furthermore, Current and Infante reported that "one of the concepts expressed by some schools was that the Spanish-American child is mentally inferior."[78] This was the first recorded instance of Tejanos and other ethnic Mexicans being racialized outside the context of labor.

Additionally, Current and Infante noted the absence of a bicultural education, especially a bilingual education.[79] The program's racial and paternalistic outlooks are reminiscent of the pro-immigrant conservatism observed by historian Julie Weise in rural Georgia around the same period.[80] Oregon's political environment at the time was progressive in terms of migrant-centric policies but remained conservative in maintaining racial and societal hierarchies. However, the political nature around migrant education allowed Tejanos and ethnic Mexican children to gain

[75] Cantu, interview.
[76] *Independence Enterprise*, July 3, 1958.
[77] Current and Infante, "*We Talked to the Migrants*," 51.
[78] Tom Current and Mark Martinez Infante, *The Education of the Migrant Child,"* July, 1958, 7.
[79] Current and Infante, *The Education of the Migrant Child*, 4, 6.
[80] Julie Weise, *Corazón de Dixie: Mexicanos in the U.S. South Since 1910* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 165, 170.

an education, although assimilatory, that was unafforded to them elsewhere. This alternative education provided life chances for migrant children not seen by their parents. Regardless of systemic issues, the Tejanos in the education programs benefitted from its services as many former students would become something of themselves other than farmworkers.

As for the older generation of Tejanos, the growth in their sense of agency in Oregon aligned with the growth of Mexican Americanism after World War II; similarly, historian Marc Rodriguez noted this organization of Tejanos for social progress and ethnic pride stemmed from taking advantage of liberal spaces in Wisconsin.[81] Although Oregon in the 1960s was conservative in maintaining a racial hierarchy, its progressivism came through in the multitude of migrant assistance programs. Despite the systemic issues of racism and paternalism, these programs provided an opportunity for Tejanos to act on their newly found agency to change their circumstances for the better in Oregon. In Independence, the formation of the Spanish American Organization (SAO) in 1966 epitomized the expression of the Tejanos' claim to Independence as their home.[82]

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[81] Rodriguez, 22, 61, 63.
[82] No other sources concluded on the reasoning behind the organization's utilization of "Spanish American."

Figure 3. *The inaugural cohort of the Spanish American Organization*. Photograph from the *Opportunity News*, 1966. Oregon Historic Newspapers.

The SAO was the first instance of Tejanos politically organizing to advocate for their community in Independence. The SAO also provided an alternative option for advocacy as the programs and other organizations aimed to support migrants became hostile and paternalistic. One of these organizations was the Valley Migrant League (VML), formed in 1964 as one of the "first widespread recognition" of Oregon's settled and migratory ethnic Mexican population.[83] The VML used funding from initiatives during the "War on Poverty" to support adult education, the migrant summer school program, and daycare for migrants in the Willamette Valley. However, early VML leadership was dominated by Whites who had no intention of including

[83] Richard Slatta, "Chicanos in Oregon: An historical overview." (Bachelor's thesis, Portland State University, 1974), 28.

migrants on the board above the requirement set by the Oregon Equal Opportunity Office.[84] An interview by the *Oregon Journal* with a White VML administrator summarized the reason for their hesitations: "[migrants] naturally mistreat facilities… They haven't any idea of respect for their own, much less someone else's property… that's why the VML was created... We're trying to educate the migrants."[85] By the time the SAO had been organized, the VML's feelings were made clear: only White Oregonians knew how to care for the migrant population.

As Tejanos began to settle in Independence, with tens of families purchasing homes by 1965, Tejanos quickly sought to establish their citizenship in Independence.[86] In February 1966, a group of majority Tejanos in the settled-in community came to the home of Guadalupe and Paula Alvarez to form the SAO. The group came together under a shared cultural identity as "Spanish Americans" to "help their fellow man and their community."[87] The SAO and their Women's Auxiliary were charged with their community's political and cultural organization in Independence. The SAO coalition hosted large family-centered gatherings from Easter celebrations, complete with piñatas and tamales, to Mexican dinners for Father's Day. On the other hand, the Women's Auxiliary of the SAO empowered Tejanas and others to diverge from the *machista*, or patriarchal, norms of ethnic Mexican culture. Rather than just organizing family-centered events or simply serving as hostesses, the group also participated in community advocacy. In April of 1966, the Women's Auxiliary hosted the American Cancer Society to show a film on breast cancer at the Independence Opportunity Center, a local extension of the VML.[88] At the time, Tejanas were seen as only farmworkers and housewives, not political stakeholders.

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[84] Glenn Anthony May, *Sonny Montes and Mexican American Activism in Oregon* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2011), 61; Slatta, 29.
[85] *Oregon Journal*, August 11, 1965, 7.
[86] *Opportunity News*, April 8, 1966.
[87] *Opportunity News*, February 25, 1966
[88] *Opportunity News*, April 8, 1966.

The Women's Auxiliary presented an opportunity for these women to demonstrate themselves as a political and cultural asset to the community.

The SAO coalition's collaborative efforts were exemplified in the same month when the group hosted the Community Action Council of Polk and Marion Counties (CAC) in Independence. The coalition brought suggestions for the CAC on how to support the migrant community best. The coalition advised implementing job training programs, legal aid, and improved migrant housing.[89] In comparison to other organizations in the 1960s, the SAO differed in approaches and ideology. For example, the "Alianza Federal del Pueblos Libres" attempted to reclaim stolen Mexican land in New Mexico that once belonged to families who were supposed to retain these holdings under the Treaty of Gudalupe Hidalgo.[90] Another example of this radical activism was La Raza Unida Party, a Chicano political party. This group sought to politically radicalize Chicanos in Texas through the ballot box and centering around Chicano nationalism, an ethno-nationalist ideology of Mexican Americans.[91] The SAO was not as radical with these groups in the Southwest but more so was similar to the Community Service Organization (CSO) in California. The CSO led efforts to expand Mexican American citizenship beyond the limits of an ethnic community to act upon their rights as American citizens, not as "radical Chicanos."[92] In this same manner, the SAO worked within Oregon's systems to gain a voice for Tejanos in Independence to demonstrate their claim to Independence.

This claim would come to see Tejanos being empowered to become stakeholders in not just Independence but the programs they utilized to amount political and educational power; the

[89] *Opportunity News*, April 15, 1966, 2.
[90] Juan Gómez-Quiñones, *Making Aztlán: ideology and culture of the Chicana and Chicano movement, 1966-1977* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2014), 105-106.
[91] Ernesto Chávez, *Mi raza primero! (My people first!): nationalism, identity, and insurgency in the Chicano Movement in Los Angeles* (Berkely: University of California Press, 2002), 6, 80.
[92] Rodriguez, 28.

first of these stakeholders was Anita Cantu. Because Cantu was afforded a solid educational foundation from the migrant education program, she became one of the first Tejano graduates of Central High School in Independence in 1966. This was a significant moment as many elder Tejanos at the time saw a high school diploma as the pinnacle of success for their children. Only a decade later, in 1977, Cantu was hired as an instructional assistant for the migrant summer school she once attended. Cantu's integration into the program signaled a new stage of migrant placemaking where Tejanos began to view themselves as stakeholders in these migrant programs in Independence.[93] During Cantu's time in the program as a student, the children had limited cultural connections. Often, children would fulfill their cultural needs through friends, family, or in the camp community, but not so much within the migrant education program. As Cantu was brought into the program a decade later, so was the extension of cultural familiarity for the children.

In addition to the program in Independence hiring Tejanos, the program's state directors realigned the program's goals for the migrant child to develop "a desire for learning some positive attitudes towards the world that lies outside migrant camps and a sense of belonging in this other world."[94] To further expand the child's worldview, the Independence program organized field trips across the local area of the mid-Willamette Valley and beyond. Cantu fondly remembered the memories of her students visiting the zoo in Portland, the Oregon Coast, Enchanted Forest theme park, and the Columbia Gorge, most likely for the first time. Cantu especially recalled a steamboat that took the children on a tour of the gorge and students being taken to McDonald's and getting ice cream throughout these field trips.[95]

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[93] Cantu, interview.
[94] *The Oregonian*, May 23, 1963.
[95] Cantu, interview.

Through hiring Tejanos, such as Cantu, the Tejano culture became infused in the program. However, including this culture in the curriculum proved challenging through the 1970s and 1980s. Speaking on these experiences, Cantu was frustrated by the inconsistencies in including bicultural education in the program. At first, the program included bicultural education when someone had complained to the Central School District that the migrant children should be "learning their own language."[96] However, as another person complained about including bicultural education, the program rescinded their efforts. This was even though the majority of the program's students were majority Tejano, Mexicano, and Mexican American, with a minority of White students. Additionally, most of the bilingual work was done by instructional assistants who often translated for the teacher before the program hired bilingual teachers. The late inclusions and their inconsistent utilization proved challenging for the accessibility of ethnic Mexican students.

In one particular year, Cantu observed that once bilingual teachers were employed, the classes became segregated with "all the Mexican students in this classroom and the White students in the other one."[97] Furthermore, it is believed that White stakeholders in the Central School District caused the constant change in the implementation of bicultural education. These inconsistencies reflected a sense of confusion among White residents as they came to terms with the changing racial dynamics of Independence. These acts of segregation and keeping the Tejanos and other ethnic Mexicans in their own spaces illustrate the extensive nature of the systemic racism in the program and its assimilatory practices. However, the Tejanos in the program's staff found ways to mediate the impact of these societal views on their community.

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[96] Cantu, interview.
[97] Cantu, interview.

As part of the initiative to expand the migrant students' worldviews, the program sought to include parents as much as possible. Anita Cantu, along with being an instructional assistant, was given another position in the Independence program as a kindergarten homeschool consultant. Through this position, Cantu would visit several families across many farms near Independence, such as Camp 4D, Green Villa, Hannah, Mitoma, Stonebrooks, Luville, and Cobine. During these visits, Cantu would bring various learning materials for her kindergarteners and walk the parents through on how to work through these materials with their children. Cantu's experience as a farmworker allowed for a deeper understanding of the predicament many migrant families were in. This asset would give Tejano, Mexicano, and Mexican American migrants she worked with a sense of familiarity, which eased the process of educating the children. In tandem with parent outreach in the fields, Cantu recalled the migrant school, now housed at the Independence Elementary School, invited parents for parent nights and end-of-the-year picnics, which brought together parents, students, staff, and administrators.[98] This bridging of the summer school and the parents allowed Tejano, Mexicano, and Mexican American migrant families to integrate into the established Tejano community. This instance of bridge-building through the program was one of the first instances of Tejanos and other ethnic Mexicans coming together to cultivate a sense of familiarity.

The life history of Anita Cantu and the rise of the SAO in Independence presents a firm refutation of the narrative of the "forever migrant" centered by the observations Current and Infante made. This notion insists that the "foreignness" and "poorness" of the migrant bars them from assimilating into the host community. However, as Oregon became highly dependent upon ethnic Mexican labor, Independence and the rest of the state became Mexicanized in the sense

[98] Cantu, interview.

that many programs somewhat adapted to Tejanos and other ethnic Mexicans. This can be seen in the Mexicanization of the migrant summer education program through the inclusion of bicultural education, bilingual instructional assistance, and bilingual teachers in the 1970s. Another concept of the "forever migrant" is that they live a pitiful, transitory, and poor existence, which disqualifies them from becoming citizens in the host communities. Current and Infante claimed this to be the migrant's "philosophy of life," which led the migrant to believe that a "Mexican can do no better" because they often failed to break from the migrant stream.[99]

Furthermore, these failures led the migrant into what David Liang of the Oregon Health Project called a "vicious cycle of poverty." [100] Through studying the migrant community in Independence during the mid-1960s, among others in the Willamette Valley, Liang diagnosed the migrant's helplessness, docility, and lack of ambition caused them to be forever a part of this "cycle of poverty."[101] In contrast, Anita Cantu and the SAO directly opposed the idea of the "forever migrant." These histories illustrated the ambition and agency of these former migrants in not only leaving the migrant stream and settling but also adapting Independence into their new home. They were no longer the strangers who arrived for the harvest but residents whose citizenship empowered them to create a society they wished to live in. Assimilation was not the end for these ethnic Mexicans of Independence but rather an opportunity for new, fruitful beginnings.

[99] Current and Infante, "*We Talked to the Migrants…,"* 7.
[100] *Independence Enterprise*, August 6, 1964, 5.
[101] *Independence Enterprise*, August 6, 1964, 5.

Francisco Barraza Sandoval, born in Guanajuato, Mexico, made the journey to Independence in April of 1970. Following an invitation from his *cuñao* and a compadre, Barraza made his way to cross at El Paso, Texas, with a passport in hand.[102] On his way to Independence, Barraza traveled through New Mexico, Utah, and Idaho before running out of money. After calling his cuñao to pick him up in Idaho, Barraza quickly found work as a tree planter while staying with his cuñao's family. Two months later, Barraza sent for his wife and children in Mexico. Without a second thought, the family decided to settle in Independence. Barraza described the main reasons he settled in Independence were kinship ties, economic opportunities, year-round school for his children, and the small-town atmosphere.[103] As Mexican nationals immigrated north in the 1970s due to the unraveling of the "Mexican miracle," an economic boom which began in the 1940s, the settled-in Tejanos would come to contest the Mexicano presence in Independence. As historian Lori Flores noted in a similar diasporic convergence in California, this conflict would come to position Mexicanos as obstacles for Tejanos to assert their Americanness especially within the political climate of the Cold War.[104] Although Barraza's integration into the settled-in Tejanos in Independence was easy, according to his oral history, the integration of Mexican nationals in Independence was far more complex.

My grandfather's life history presents an exemplary case of this complexity. While courting Luzdivina, the daughter of Guadalupe and Paula Alvarez, Daniel faced an unsupportive environment among the Alvarez siblings. Often, the siblings would tell Lucy that Daniel was

[102] The translation for the word "cuñao" is brother-in-law or in-law(s).
[103] Francisco Barraza Sandoval, interview.
[104] Lori A. Flores, *Grounds For Dreaming Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the California Farmworker Movement* (Yale University Press, 2016), 107.

only with her to obtain his papers.[105] On one occasion, one of Lucy's sisters used her phone to call Daniel at work to tell him that immigration was looking for him as a joke. For a while, Daniel felt like an outsider with the Alvarez siblings, but the animosity was not reciprocated on his part. However, the antagonisms subsided as the Alvarez siblings spread amongst Polk and Marion counties.[106] Moreover, this indifference between Mexicanos and Tejanos was illustrated in the interview with Anita Cantu as she described the demographics of ethnic Mexicans in Independence in the 1970s. Cantu prefaced with, "we were true migrants that came from Texas," after asking her to clarify what she meant by "true migrants," Cantu replied, "To me, true migrants are Mexicanos that were U.S. citizens… True migrants [were] Mexican American families that migrated from state to state" while Mexicanos never returned to Mexico.[107] Although this convergence of the Mexican diaspora in Independence presented challenges for a unified community, this was an opportunity to meld a collective cultural memory, a vital component of migrant placemaking.

As the Tejanos Mexicanized Independence through their ethnic community and the migrant programs, Mexicanos became attracted to Independence for its economic opportunities *and* familiarity; for Mexicanos, this familiar Mexican place was a small slice of home for them. As historian Mario Sifuentez noted, in Ontario, Oregon, bailes, or dances, were a way for Tejanos and Mexicanos to blur diasporic lines and come together in cultural remembrance.[108] In Independence, bailes became a staple within the camps during Tejano migrations and became a way for Tejanos to find comfort and community in the migrant stream. While remembering the

[105] Daniel Canela, personal communications, August, 2023.
[106] Daniel Canela, personal communications.
[107] Cantu, interview.
[108] Mario Sifuentez, *Of Forests and Fields: Mexican Labor in the Pacific Northwest* (Rutgers University Press, 2016), 56.

camp life at Green Villa Farms, Connie García described Green Villa as *the* place "where everything was" and Saturday nights were often "hopping with music" with "little dances" held in the barn.[109] Migrants from all around Independence would flock to the dances at Green Villa. *Conjuntos*, or three-member bands, provided the music made up of camp residents who knew how to play the accordion, guitar, or drums. In the film reel, "Farm worker life at Green Villa Farm, Independence, Oregon, 1961," one of these bailes was captured. Several couples and some children are seen dancing while the conjunto band plays música norteña.[110]

The second rendition of these bailes came through the rise of the SAO and became a community sensation in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Members of the SAO and other Tejanos in the community assisted in planning the event, which took place in a building northwest of Independence in Rickreall. Organizers would recruit *bandas*, or regional Mexican bands, from Woodburn to play, Tejano families made food to sell, and others would help prepare the venue. Anita Cantu shared a pleasant memory of the bailes, where the women would put curlers in their hair and leave them while they picked in the fields. Once the workday ended, they hastily got ready for the bailes and their curls would be perfect.[111] Although Mexicanos had little involvement in organizing the bailes, the event served as a cultural olive branch that temporarily relieved diasporic conflict.

The organization of the bailes by the Tejano community of Independence signaled a new cultural identity stemming from the migrant stream. This cultural organization of this identity demonstrated the power these former migrants had in taking advantage of the migrant stream and Oregon's pro-migrant politics to stake a claim to Independence as home. Through the cultural

[109] Connie García, interview by Victor Ochoa, June 11, 2023.
[110] *Farm worker life at Green Villa Farm, Independence, Oregon, 1961*, 07:39-08:02.
[111] Cantu, interview.

and political organizing of Tejanos, Independence became Mexicanized. By ingraining themselves in Independence's migrant programs and political bodies, Tejanos extended cultural replication from the camps to their newly purchased homes. Moreover, this new familiar Mexican place attracted Mexicanos as Independence became a slice of home for them.

In the case of Anita Cantu, the education provided by Oregon's migrant summer education program empowered her to become a stakeholder through the Independence program. The SAO built upon these claims to home in Independence through cultural and political organizing to form a settled community and imprint an ethnic Mexican identity in Independence. The bailes culminated these placemaking efforts to Mexicanize Independence physically and at its heart. The place that migrants only knew during the picking season became a familiar place where the migrant can become more than just laborers but free actors to shape their lives and communal society, where the migrant can create a home reminiscent of his homeland to declare "somos de allá y de aquí"—that we are from there and here.

Chapter III

¿Qué Te Pasa Jefe?: Expanding the Claim to Independence (1975-2000)

As ethnic Mexicans in Independence became multigenerational residents, their means of placemaking changed. Through the 1950s and 1960s, Tejanos worked within the given systems to carve out a space for themselves in Independence. Moreover, little contention with White residents amounted to a tolerance of ethnic Mexicans *if* they remained within their own spaces. This segregated environment cultivated a sense of conservatism amongst Tejanos, who often did not support radical politics to maintain their gains in Independence. However, by the 1970s, Chicanismo would arrive in Independence in attempt to challenge that dynamic. Although radical action did not envelope similarly to the Southwest, the legacy of Tejano elders instilled a sense of self-determination. While anti-immigrant sentiments rose in the 1980s and 1990s, racism against ethnic Mexicans would cause Tejanos and Mexicanos to defend their claim to home in Independence. This racism forced both groups to put aside their animosities to organize politically, socially, and culturally as ethnic Mexicans.[112] As active citizens, ethnic Mexicans would come to expand their definition of citizenship beyond ethnic limits to encompass the entirety of Independence. This new sense of citizenship propelled them to expand their roles within presumed White spaces in local community institutions in addition to fortifying their attachments to Independence in the face of racism. This diasporic unity would bring the development of a multicultural community that empowered ethnic Mexicans to fully express themselves culturally and politically.

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[112] This chapter will be utilizing the all-encompassing identifier of "ethnic Mexican" more to signal the unification of Tejanos and Mexicanos through the struggle of maintaining their claims to Independence as home.

As the bailes ended by the late 1970s, strife amongst Tejanos and Mexicanos was reignited. This diasporic conflict was kindled within the immigration debates in the 1980s and 1990s. Within these debates concerning increased undocumented immigration, the rhetoric increasingly became anti-Mexican. Moreover, these immigration debates essentialized any group perceived to be "Mexican," including Tejanos, in the eyes of White society. Inevitably, the Americanness of Tejanos was no longer enough to differentiate themselves from "foreigners."

The first instance of this drastic change came in 1977 in the federal district case *Treviño v. City of Independence Police and Polk County Sheriff*s. In January 1977, Delmiro Treviño was sitting at the Hi-Ho restaurant in Independence when he and three other Mexican Americans were approached by Officer Janet Davidson and three deputy sheriffs.[113] The officers were suspicious of Treviño on the grounds he looked like an "illegal alien" and proceeded to interrogate Treviño about his citizenship. Their actions were stopped only due to one of the sheriffs recognizing Treviño as a resident of Independence and quickly released him. In the aftermath, Treviño's wife, the sister of Connie García, hired then civil rights attorney Frank "Rocky" Barilla to file a lawsuit.

While preparing for Treviño's case, Barilla learned of others who experienced the same treatment. Barilla then organized the case into a class action lawsuit against the Immigration and Naturalization Service, the Sheriff of Polk County, Independence's Chief of Police, Officer

[113] Treviño v. City of Independence Police and Polk County Sheriffs, (U.S. District Court of Oregon).

Davidson, and the three sheriff deputies. As the case hearings began, Connie García organized other Tejanos and ethnic Mexicans in a march in Monmouth that ended at Independence City Hall. The march ended in a rally where Garcia spoke about Treviño's case to the community and eager journalists from local newspapers.[114] The case was dismissed after the INS agreed to clarify its policy on the justification of local officers and deputies. The INS barred town police officers and county deputies from "stopping, questioning, or detaining individuals in order to determine their immigration status, and brought the deputies into compliance with federal law."[115]

The Treviño case sent waves of fear throughout the Tejano community of Independence, and many became suspicious of those attempting to bring "trouble" to the community. As the national debate on immigration became increasingly anti-Mexican, the Tejanos became aware of their predicament. This fear of being grouped with Mexican immigrants caused Tejanos to develop an ideology of conservatism in an effort of self-preservation, with many segregating themselves from Mexicanos. Moreover, the Treviño case shattered the image of Oregon as a welcoming place and instilled the fear that Oregon could replicate the same anti-Mexican environment witnessed in Texas.[116] Maria "Elena" Peña, the daughter of Monserrat and Antonia Vasquez, saw this fear in her community as a threat to sustaining the home she came to know in Independence. Peña knew the importance of unity and its significance in maintaining Tejano and Mexicano's claims to Independence as home. If Tejanos and Mexicanos could coexist, their combined presence would be able to expand their claims to home to the entirety of

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[114] García, interview.
[115] Mario Sifuentez, *Of Forests and Fields* (Rutgers University Press, 2015), 71; This case would come to inspire Barilla as he became Oregon's first Latino legislator where he would sponsor a sanctuary law which was passed unanimously in 1987.
[116] David Montejano, Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), 265.

Independence. Furthermore, Peña observed the importance of opening the Tejano community to White residents to cultivate a multicultural community.

Peña's insistence on inclusion and unity was a lesson learned by observing the rapid rise and fall of the cultural center, "Compañeros de Polk," in Independence during the late 1970s.[117] The committee, made up of majority ethnic Mexicans, wished for the center to be purely an ethnic Mexican space, but Peña argued against it. She wanted the doors to be open for the entire community. "Rather than just focus on Hispanic or Latino because there are Mexicans who are married with White and Black people. You can't just say this is for Hispanic people, you know, because they're going to be connected somehow… To connect to people, you got to make it seem like a community thing."[118] Although the center did not survive past initial meetings, Peña salvaged the next community sensation from its ashes.

Determined to cultivate an all-inclusive communal space, Peña and other community members began organizing the Community Fiesta in 1981.[119] Through meetings at St. Patrick's Catholic Church in Independence, the first organizers were parish members, including long-established Tejano families such as the Lumbreras', and Mercedes Falcón, a Mexican immigrant. However, "they got tired," Peña recalled, "They didn't want to do it because it was too much work," but she refused to "let it die."[120] Peña soon sought community members to assist in organizing the Community Fiesta, with many new participants being Mexicanos. Including Mexicanos in the planning process was a significant shift in the migrant placemaking process. The Community Fiesta provided an open space for Mexicanos to express their cultural memory

[117] The sourcing surrounding the center was scarce and the oral history of Elena Peña was heavily relied upon to construct this portion of the narrative.
[118] Maria Elena Peña, interview by Victor Ochoa, June 30, 2023.
[119] Peña, interview.
[120] Peña, interview.

in Independence and thus begin cultivating their own sense of belonging. Peña was adamant about involving Mexicanos in the events planning and often credited Falcón with formatting the fiesta after "Kermes," a Mexicanized Carnival.[121] This festival is held outdoors and is characterized by the celebration of culture and community with entertainment from music or dance performances. Although many Tejanos being unfamiliar with the Mexican carnival, Mexicanos were eager to share cultural customs, which signaled the beginning of a unified existence in Independence.

The inaugural Community Fiesta began in Monmouth near South Ecols Street and East Main Street. The fiesta welcomed local vendors who sold handmade goods out of an old trailer loaned by St Patrick's Catholic Church, and local bandas were invited to play during the event. For a few years, my great-uncle, Santos Ledezma, and his banda were frequent headliners of the Fiesta.[122] Other forms of entertainment included Falcón's folklorico group, which performed traditional dances to music from various regions of Mexico. Although the fiesta grew to be an anticipated annual event, their locations varied yearly. According to Peña, Monmouth residents complained about the noise from the music, which had the fiesta move between Monmouth and Independence.

Similarly, in rural Georgia, a fiesta organized by ethnic Mexicans drew scrutiny from White residents who complained of seeing the once-migrant community in their public spaces.[123] This incident of a "noise complaint" against the fiesta illustrated the racial dynamics of Independence and Monmouth. With its majority White population, Monmouth has been known to be reminiscent of John Winthrop's "city upon a hill," a purely White place, whereas

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[121] Peña, interview.
[122] Peña, interview.
[123] Julie Weise, *Corazón de Dixie: Mexicanos in the U.S. South Since 1910* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 2015,), 174.

Independence was seen and still often described as "little Mexico."[124] Only in 1987 did the Community Fiesta permanently stay in Independence's Riverfront Park in the historic district. As the event continued, Peña often faced burnout and relied upon Falcón and other Mexicanos to continue the fiesta's success. Since the 1980s, the Community Fiesta has become a staple of Independence for over forty years and a testament to a unified ethnic Mexican community. Nearing the end of my interview with Peña, she reflected on the message of the fiesta's success. With a bright smile, she said "If we work together like a community, we can do more because look how big it's gotten."[125] Through the Community Fiesta, Independence was no longer just for Tejanos or Mexicanos but an ethnic Mexican space of belonging encompassing the entirety of Independence.

Although cultural empowerment had been a tried-and-true formula for Tejanos and Mexicanos to stake a claim to Independence, it had its limitations. The cultural identity of ethnic Mexicans was solidified, but this burgeoning community's political identity was still developing. Due to the political nature of Tejano conservatism, being passive was often the means of survival. This limited ethnic Mexicans from not only exercising their rights as they once did in the 1960s but also understanding their rights as citizens. Given this liminal political environment and the rise of anti-immigrant sentiment, Chicanismo challenged this passive political identity to enact radical means of affirming place. Chicanismo was the cultural consciousness that ignited the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Through identifying with their indigenous roots,

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[124] John Winthrop was the former governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in the 1600s whose lecture "A Model of Christian Charity" described expectations for the colony to be a shining example for the world. The correlation between this phrase and Monmouth, Oregon is due to the town's class and racial differences compared to Independence. On a personal note, I grew up knowing Monmouth as where upper-middle class White people lived while Independence was for poor White people and Mexicans. For reference on Monmouth's White population in 1980 see U.S. Department of Commerce Bureau of the Census, "General Population Characteristics 1980 Census of Population," 12. https://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/1980a_orABC-02.pdf
[125] Peña, interview.

Mexican Americans asserted that they are native to the land of the Southwestern United States rather than merely immigrants.[126] As the Chicano Movement swept the country, the empowerment of Chicano youths to take control of their rights struck a chord with Connie García. While witnessing the protests by Chicano students against unequal conditions in the high schools of the Los Angeles Unified School District, better known as the "Chicano Blowouts," in 1968, García became inspired by these students who were "demanding an education they were entitled to."[127]

As a teacher at Central High School (CHS) and an advocate in the community, García embodied the Chicano spirit. In the late 1990s, García became the advisor of a M.E.Ch.A. chapter at CHS only by default as she was the only ethnic Mexican faculty member.[128] Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Atzlán, or M.E.Ch.A., is a student organization that promotes higher education, culture, and history founded upon the principles of self-determination which stemmed from the Chicano Movement. Several chapters exist in both collegiate and high school spaces which often participated in numerous political activities to promote Chicano voices.[129] In keeping with the organization's radical activism, García intended to replicate the radical actions of other chapters across the Southwest during the Chicano Movement, however, Chicanismo developed differently in Independence, Oregon than other places in the Southwest.

Before the 1990s, the only experience Independence had with Chicanismo was in the spring of 1974 at the Oregon College of Education in Monmouth. A group of Chicano students

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[126] Ernesto Chávez, *Mi raza primero! (My People First!): nationalism, identity, and insurgency in the Chicano Movement in Los Angeles, 1966-1978* (Berkely: University of California Press, 2002), 5.
[127] Connie García, interviewed by Victor Ochoa, March 19, 2024.
[128] García, interview.
[129] Chávez, 6.

called “Nosotros” organized a week-long celebration of Chicano culture at OCE. The event, known as “Chicano Culture Week,” held art shows, film viewings, and a fiesta at Talmadge Junior High School in Independence.[130] The event also had a panel of Chicano educators at OCE’s Music Hall to discuss the topic of bilingual education. The panel participants “challenged the [Oregon] system of higher education to be responsive to the needs of Chicano students.”[131] Moreover, “Oregon, it was pointed out, is... behind in preparing bilingual students who can reach in bicultural settings.” Although the panel slightly challenged the traditional power structure vocally, no more was recorded.

A significant factor in the development of Chicanismo in Independence was the lack of higher education received by the Tejanos. As elder Tejanos did not receive primary education in Texas, many equated a high school diploma as the pinnacle of success. To them, a high school diploma allowed their children to “work indoors,” meaning they would find work outside of the fields such as clerks, janitors, or receptionists.[132] On the other hand, those pursuing higher education expanded their worldview to encompass Chicanismo’s principles of self-determination and cultural empowerment. For García, the education she received through Eastern Oregon University’s bilingual teacher program exposed her to Chicano philosophy and literature. These learning experiences empowered her to seek the same changes in the education system as seen in California in the 1960s. However, the challenge presented by Tejano conservatism in Independence created a complicated Chicano experience because, as García observed, Tejanos and Mexicanos were very complacent out of fear.[133]

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[130] *Lamron*, May 9, 1974.
[131] *Lamron*, May 9, 1974.
[132] García, interview.
[133] García, interview.

These social and political limitations embraced by Tejanos were further illustrated during García's time as the advisor for M.E.Ch.A. in the late 1990s. The chapter was small and inconsistent in its number of participating students over the years. García observed no cohesiveness between the "established Chicanos" and those from Mexico.[134] Furthermore, CHS caused Mexicano families to feel uncomfortable and unwelcomed. These factors proved to be limiting to what M.E.Ch.A. was able to accomplish for the community; however, García was determined for her students to gain something from the experience by focusing on encouraging them to continue their education after high school. García would coordinate campus visits and invite advisors from local colleges to speak with the students.

Additionally, García would accept the invitation to host the annual Chicano Conference at CHS in 1997. This conference would rotate annually to different high schools throughout Oregon and Independence was selected as the next host. In the Spring of 1997, Chicanos from high schools all over Oregon flocked to Independence to meet guest speakers, authors, and college advisors. The conference was held annually by several schools in the Willamette Valley and Portland Metro area, who agreed to be hosts.

[134] García, interview.

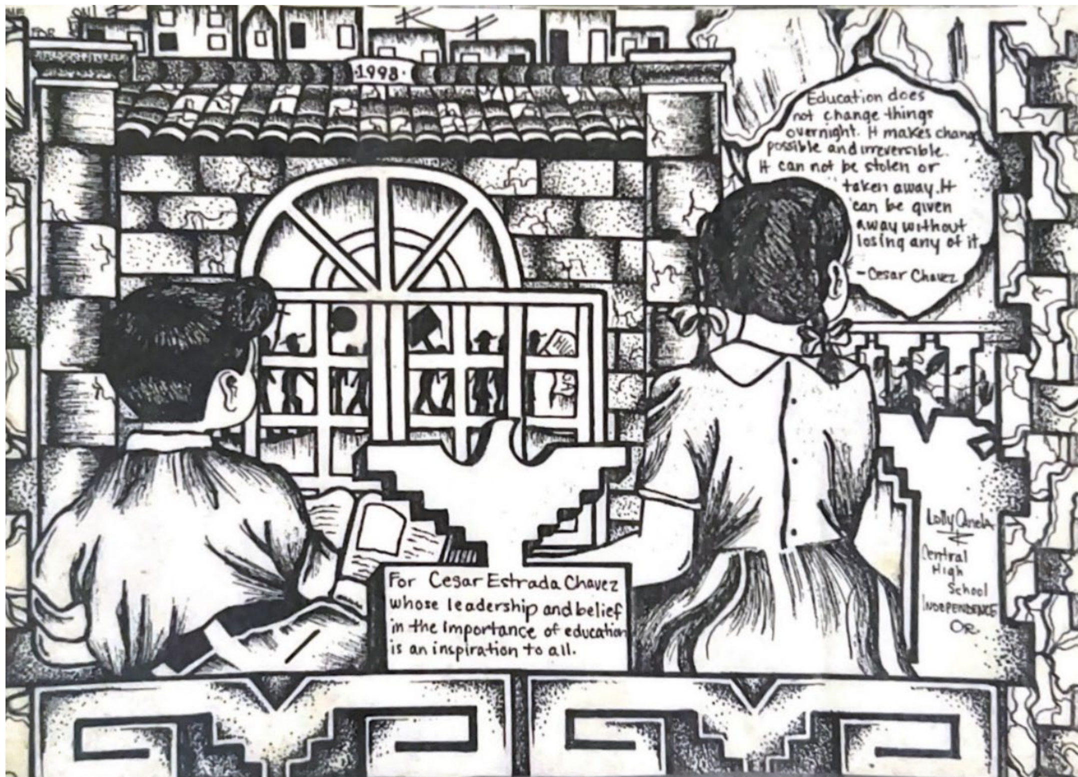

Figure 4. *Lolly Canela's winning artwork*. Image from the Alvarez Family Collection, 1998. Independence, Oregon.

The chapter also participated in the annual Cesar E. Chavez Leadership Conference in Portland in 1998. The conference provided opportunities for students to participate in leadership workshops and network with college advisors. The conference also included a student essay and art contest where students submitted their work around a theme or prompt decided by the organizing committee. Independence's M.E.Ch.A. had only one winner in the art contest, my aunt, Lolly Canela, the granddaughter of Guadalupe and Paula Alvarez. Her artwork, as shown above, reflects the teachings of the Chicano principle of self-determination. As youths look upon a line of protestors, they see the possibilities their education holds in causing systemic change. A child looks towards the words of Cesar Chavez etched in stone illustrate the permanence of an

education. These powerful symbols took form as García's continued to push her students to pursue a higher education and become conscious of their sense of agency over their lives.

Although Chicanismo did not fully take root in Independence, Oregon, as it did in California and elsewhere in the Southwest at the time, its principles were rooted in García and Peña. These Tejanas observed how their elders made a place for themselves decades prior through the Spanish American Organization, the bailes, and the summer migrant education program. Conversely, these Tejanas noticed how divided their community had become due to the fears raised by Tejanos in the aftermath of the Treviño case. Each took it upon themselves to see to it the survival of their home. Peña saw the melding of diasporic animosities through the organization of the Community Fiesta, through the involvement of Mexicanos, and incorporating their cultural memory within the fiesta, which was unprecedented. Moreover, Peña wished to include all residents of Independence in the cultural celebrations of the ethnic Mexican community to mold a unified multicultural community.

García's objectives intended to circumnavigate the social and political environment of Independence in relation to the principles of self-determination of Chicanismo. García wished to empower her students to expand their worldviews through investing in higher education. She bore witness to how elder Tejanos became limited in their opportunities outside of farmwork and their lack of criticality in adopting Tejano conservatism. Higher education was a way for her students to attain new life chances but also a critical lens that she found at Eastern Oregon University. Although García wished to create more radical change, she encouraged her students not to be limited in viewing "White spaces," such as higher education, as unavailable but rather as new opportunities. Through these experiences, García and Peña created the foundation for ethnic Mexicans to become citizens rather than passive residents. This new citizenship

empowered these Tejanas to reform community society will be what defends the ethnic Mexican community from the rise of anti-Mexican sentiment in the coming years.

Mi Patria: Advocacy & the Reaffirmation of Home

The Community Fiesta enabled the exchange of olive branches through a shared cultural experience that amended diasporic conflict between Mexicanos and Tejanos. This newfound unity came to be tested as Tejano conservatism began to be unraveled, and anti-Mexican sentiment crept its way into Independence once again. In 1982, a fight broke out in a bar in Independence between ethnic Mexican residents. The Police Chief of Independence at the time, George Weaver, issued a statement in the *Itemizer Observer*. Weaver was quoted as saying the reason why so many bar fights occurred was that it was part of the Mexican culture.[135] Once Connie García and other community members heard about Weaver's statement, they organized a protest. The group marched through downtown Independence to the city hall, where Weaver addressed the crowd and reiterated his previous statement. This riled the crowd, and many were chanting, giving speeches, and addressing local media. The unified strength of the ethnic Mexican community caused Weaver to not have his contract renewed by the city of Independence. Moreover, this unified protest demonstrated the intimate attachment ethnic Mexicans had to their home and the lengths they would go to defend their claims to Independence.

[135] García, interview.

This unity did not end with the protests but were continued through the immigration processing program led by the parish of St. Patrick's Catholic Church.[136] The Catholic Church actively participated in the civil rights era of the 1960s, such as organizing farm workers in California. The church's efforts continued through the 1960s in Oregon whereas the Archdiocese of Oregon assisted in the processing of immigration documents in the 1980s. The U.S. government authorized the immigration counseling service associated with the archdiocese to become a QED (qualified agencies and volunteers).[137] These efforts were replicated locally in Independence through St. Patrick's Catholic Church from 1984 to 1987. Moreover, the parish was among the first in Oregon to connect with Margaret Godfrey, a long-time immigrant advocate. Who trained parishioners in processing immigrant documents.[138] Along with Elena Peña, her family, White residents, and other ethnic Mexicans made up the force that assisted immigrants who came to Independence from all over Oregon and across many states.

Alongside the Catholic Church, the farmworker organization Piñeros y Campesinos de Noroeste, or PCUN, held a significant presence in Oregon's Willamette Valley in assisting undocumented immigrants at the time. In addition to processing immigrants, PCUN also established the migrant and poor housing project, "Colonia Amistad," in Independence in 2007. There were no other direct campaigns, labor organizing, or interactions between PCUN and ethnic Mexicans in Independence aside from those who travelled to Woodburn to seek assistance.[139] Despite having little connection with major organizations, St. Patrick's program was largely successful.

[136] Sourcing on the role of St. Patrick's Catholic Church in assisting the ethnic Mexican community of Independence was limited due to inaccessibility. I was denied access to the parish's records by both the pastor and the Archdiocese of Portland.
[137] Erlinda V. Gonzales-Berry and Marcela Mendoza, *Mexicanos in Oregon: Their Lives, Their Stores* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2010), 108.
[138] Peña, interview.
[139] Daniel Canela, personal communications, May 16, 2024.

Peña recalled immigrants coming from as far south in Oregon as Coos Bay and a few traveling from California. Those immigrants receiving assistance from the parish often called friends and family who would also make the trip north to Independence. A common occurrence would be for immigrants who received their documents to return to Independence and thank those who helped them. Additionally, many would proudly show the workers their newly attained green cards. Peña fondly remembered the first person to thank her, a young man named Marco. "He was the first one that came that said, 'hey, Elena, I made it.' He was so excited, and he brought me a big cake saying, 'thank you, Elena.'"[140] Although parishioners gladly supported their work in helping immigrants, the donors, other parishioners, and community members had different opinions. Peña recalled that she would have to deal with prejudiced phone calls about the program helping "illegals."[141]

As the ethnic Mexican community of Independence was blossoming through a decade in constant defense of their home, Mexicanos would come to expand their sense of belonging. The formation of an intra-diasporic coalition in the 1970s and 1980s presented an opportunity for Mexicanos to claim Independence as home. As Mexicanos became active agents in cultivating cultural spaces and fomenting a defense against anti-Mexican sentiments, Mexicanos claimed their citizenship to Independence. This expanded sense of belonging and growing advocacy for Mexican immigrants attracted then-Ph.D. candidate Richard Keis of the University of San Fransisco. Keis was responsible for creating the "Libros y Familias" program, a family-centered bilingual literacy program, in 1995. The program addressed parental involvement and

[140] Peña, interview.
[141] Peña, interview.

participation "to create a meaningful dialogue between home and school with Spanish-speaking families."[142]

The program partnered with local libraries and was run through Independence Elementary School and Henry Hill Elementary School in the local school district. Throughout its five-year existence, the program allowed Mexican families to advance their literacy skills through workshops to produce books authored by families. This would be accomplished through fostering cultural pride and "high self-esteem" by cultivating a sense of belonging. In the selected books, often written by Latino authors, the program would have families write or illustrate on themes related to the migrant experience. Families grew a sense of community through sharing their stories in groups, and these spaces allowed parents "to release feelings and thoughts that they were seldom asked to share."[143] Additionally, the program held spaces for cultural expression by sponsoring Mexican celebrations such as Cinco de Mayo and el Día de los Tres Reyes Magos. The program also subsidized the local children's Folklorico group, *El Ballet Folklórico de Niños de Independence*, led by Mercedes Falcón.[144]

Libros y Familias provided a space for Mexicanos to cement their status as citizens in their new home in Independence. Like their Tejano predecessors, Mexicanos utilized the program to cultivate community and encourage themselves to be active citizens in molding their communal society, reflecting their *pueblos* in Mexico.[145] This objective nurtured the redefining of citizenship for Mexicanos whereby at the end of the program, one participant named Susana Cervantes noted that "it was more important to change the way Mexicans viewed themselves"

[142] Richard B. Keis, "Developing Authorship in Latino Parents: A Case Study of the Libros Y Familias Program" (PhD diss., University of San Franscico, 2002) 3.
[143] Keis, "Developing Authorship in Latino Parents," 88-89.
[144] Keis, "Developing Authorship in Latino Parents," 101-102.
[145] This term refers to their villages or communities in Mexico.

rather than fixate on how Anglos viewed the Mexican community.[146] The program allowed Mexicanos to see themselves as capable of accomplishing more than just a new future for their children but also for themselves. Another participant, Mercedes Falcón, noted how ethnic Mexicans were "becoming more motivated to study and better themselves." Falcón observed this as an instructional assistant at one of the elementary schools where many parents attended GED classes to support their children's learning. Keis noted that their growth of an optimistic perspective "is an important stage in the journey toward critical consciousness."[147] Furthermore, the growth of communalism practiced amongst the ethnic Mexican community in the program and outside of it allowed Mexicanos to cement their place in Independence. One participant of the program, Olga V. Walmisley, illustrated her sense of belonging to Independence in her writing during the final year of the program:

What I like best is the mixture of races. When I am seated in my garden eating fresh pears from our pear tree and watching our children and the ducks play, I can hear Mexican music coming from a passing car, the children on bicycles are speaking English sometimes, Spanish other times. Our neighbors are Mexicans and Whites and we get along with everybody.[148]

Walmisley's words not only illustrate my very childhood but also demonstrate the development of migrant placemaking in Independence. The program allowed Mexicanos to affirm their place in Independence as their Tejano predecessors did. Moreover, by infusing Independence with the communalism of their pueblos, Mexicanos saw Independence already as a multicultural place and not as a White place or a Tejano place. The latter half of the 20th century

[146] Keis, "Developing Authorship in Latino Parents," 213.
[147] Keis, "Developing Authorship in Latino Parents," 214-215.
[148] Original text: "Lo que más me gusta es la mezcla de razas. Cuando estoy sentada en mi jardín comiendo peras frescas de nuestro peral y viendo jugar a nuestros hijos y patitos, puedo oir música mexicana de un coche que va pasando, los niños que pasan en bicicleta hablan a veces inglés, a veces español. Nuestros vecinos son mexicano y norteamericanos y nos llevamos bien con todos." Keis, "Developing Authorship in Latino Parents," 128-129.

signaled a transition in the migrant placemaking process. In this era, the collective experiences of ethnic Mexicans empowered them to claim rights and space not just in the ethnic Mexican community but in Independence as a whole.

This initial connection of younger Tejanos, such as Connie García and Elena Peña, grew up knowing illustrated the difference of belonging between the generations. Despite the obstacles of rising anti-Mexican sentiment and Tejano conservatism, these Tejanas redefined the nature of ethnic Mexican citizenship in Independence. In doing so, they ignited the creation of an intra-diasporic coalition in the defense of their home through the Weaver debacle and the immigrant processing program. This collective activism furthered the Mexicanization of Independence by expressing ethnic Mexican agency. No longer were Tejanos limited in their gains from the mid-20th century, nor were Mexicans relegated to the shadows of rural society. The hard-fought continuation of this Mexican mecca led to a multicultural community that is still seen today. However, a new challenge would arise to contest the historical memory of one of the oldest ethnic Mexican communities in Oregon.

Chapter IV

Acuédate de Nosotros: Preserving Memories of Home (2000-Present)

After half a century of defining their claims to Independence as home, there was only one major front remaining for ethnic Mexicans: preservation of their historical memory.[149] Despite the intimate memories created by ethnic Mexicans in their home of Independence, their home had yet to remember them. Before the year 2000, there had not been an intervention until the return of Erasmo Gamboa, whose family were migrant farmworkers in Independence from Edinburg, Texas. Through organizing the "Explore Our Heritage" project, Gamboa mobilized ethnic Mexicans and the Independence community to record this historical memory. Moreover, the project empowered ethnic Mexicans to imbue their intimate memories of Independence in the town's written history. Since the project's completion in 2001, there has not been a similar mobilization to record the ethnic Mexican history of Independence. However, involvement through this thesis has encouraged another intervention in how the historical memory of ethnic Mexicans in Independence should be recorded *and* told. Although relations between the Independence Heritage Museum and ethnic Mexicans have improved, their historical memory has still not become ingrained in Independence, only passed down in familial memory. To change this outcome, the museum's role must be reimagined from a static community institution to an active and mobile replicator of historical memory. These efforts of placemaking through the historical record illustrate a vastly ignored means to sustain the memories of marginalized groups.

[149] I will refer to "historical memory" as how groups and communities construct and identity with narratives or a particular historical event.

De Vuelta a los Campos: Exploring Our Heritage

"Life is a journey since the day we are born, later is a voyage to a new experience to the unknown. It is a new challenge and adventure to the decisions that we make now that later affects and reflects our life, our future, and most of all, our families." [150]

Amid the "Explore Our Heritage" project, many ethnic Mexicans in Independence felt the weight of remembering the community's history. One was Antonio Nuñez, whose family migrated from the Lower Rio Grande Valley in Texas. Nuñez attempted to write a book encompassing the oral histories he gathered of veterans in the community titled "Oregon Pioneers." The partially completed manuscript exemplifies the transition from ethnic Mexicans sharing their memories at the dinner table or between family and friends at gatherings to historians, museums, and the public. The political nature of historical preservation hinders the opportunities to collect a community's historical memory. For minority groups, this environment causes individuals to be fearful of sharing their experiences or, more commonly, individuals lack confidence in the significance of their life histories. These conditions existed within Independence and many other established ethnic Mexican communities across Oregon. These silences in the historical memory of Oregon drew Erasmo Gamboa, an Assistant Professor of History at the University of Washington, to return to the state his family once knew as farmworkers. Moreover, these silences led Gamboa to a homecoming where his family began their lives in Oregon: Independence.

Through a larger project, producing an episode in the docuseries "The Oregon Story" about Latino agricultural workers, Gamboa led efforts to organize the "Explore Our Heritage"

[150] Antonio Nuñez, *Oregon Pioneers*. Manuscript. From Independence Heritage Museum, *Explore Our Heritage Documents*.

project in 2001. Through collaborations with the Oregon Council of the Humanities, Western Oregon University in Monmouth, Libros y Familias, Oregon State University in Corvallis, and with funding from the rural Business Cooperative Service of the USDA Rural Development, "Explore Our Heritage" was underway. The community gathered under an advisory committee consisting of members of well-known families and stakeholders in Independence. Those part of the committee were Maggie Rivera, Linda Garcia, Chachi Treviño, Kira Daczewitz, Mary Oliveros, Felix Inocencio Oliveros, Felix Oliveros, Berta Diaz, Elena Peña, Maria "Nena" Barba, John Oliver, Efrain Diaz-Orna, and the Executive Director of the Independence Heritage Museum, Dennis Moung.[151] Libros y Familias also assisted in the coordination of community efforts by circulating a flyer around the Independence community. The flyer provided information on how community members could participate, as well as the proposed outline of "Explore Our Heritage" and events for visiting scholars and authors. It advertised a fundraising effort by selling posters of a painting done by Felix Oliveros. Additionally, when the documentary was finished, Libros y Familias hosted a special public screening in the cafeteria of Central High School.[152]

The methodology of "Explore Our Heritage" was community-forward, whereby the advisory committee played a strong role in the project's research. Members of the committee spearheaded the collection of photographs and other materials while overseeing the identification of possible subjects for oral interviews.[153] Although Gamboa was one of the principal researchers in the project, he aimed to include community members in the research process. In addition to gathering newspaper articles and photographs and assembling migrant patterns, the

[151] "Advistory Board," *Explore Our Hertiage Collection*, Independence Oregon, 2001.
[152] "Libros y Familias Flyer," *Explore Our Hertiage Collection*, Independence Oregon, 2001.
[153] "Advisory Board," 2001.

oral history component provided a more intimate window into Independence's ethnic Mexican community. Aside from the community members assigned to interview subjects, Western Oregon University, formerly the Oregon College of Education, supported this effort. In the spring term of 2001, a sociology course tasked undergraduate students with collecting oral histories of Independence's ethnic Mexican community.[154] Each student, or pair of students, was given interview questions that included annotations to support the student during the interview. Students then compiled their data into a term paper that was then shared with the project's researchers. The compiled research proved to be an enriching contribution to the documentary, which captured the heart of the ethnic Mexican community of Independence. Throughout the documentary, the audience could feel the swelling of pride in these community members, showing the filming crew photos, old buildings, and telling the stories of their families.

"Explore Our Heritage" proved groundbreaking for the ethnic Mexican community of Independence. The return of Gamboa encouraged ethnic Mexicans to understand the significance of their life histories. Furthermore, Gamboa was the bridge that expanded placemaking efforts by sparking dialogue between ethnic Mexicans and the Independence Heritage Museum. Presently, as one visits the heritage museum there may be one of these community members at the front desk greeting guests or participating in the curation of exhibits. Moreover, the project became a moment of communal unity in which White residents actively participated in the project's research and coordination. "Explore Our Heritage" demonstrated ethnic Mexicans' embodiment of homemaking as migrant placemakers. The intimate memories captured by ethnic Mexicans imbued a sense of pride in writing their history and the experiences shared as a community. In that moment, ethnic Mexicans exemplified their intimate attachment to Independence by

[154] "Oral Histories," *Explore Our Hertiage Collection*, Independence Oregon, 2001.

remembering the town once as a temporary place in the migrant stream to a home that would last for many lifetimes. This familiar Mexican place would come to raise a historian whose purpose is to remember his family and the many others who created and sustained the place he calls home.

No Te Olvidaré: Remembering Our History

As a child, I was always around my great-grandparents Guadalupe and Paula Alvarez, "Apa and Ama." My earliest memory was running across the linoleum floors in the kitchen to their bedroom to watch *telenovelas* with them on their small television. I vividly remember how much they began to smile as I walked into the bedroom. Sometimes, I would sit with Ama on the bed or with Apa in his old black leather recliner. Although I had very few memories of my *bisabuelos*, I learned of their life histories from family members—especially in the early stages of this thesis. The more memories I learned, the more I began questioning why this was not public knowledge. As a student at Henry Hill Elementary School, I recall the first piece of local history I learned about the pioneers who traveled the Oregon Trail from Independence, Missouri and settled in Independence, Oregon. As a senior at Central High School in 2018, I wrote a paper that would eventually become this thesis. During my research, I contacted the Independence Heritage Museum for artifacts or anything relating to the Mexican history of Independence. Once those at the museum said they had items for me, I drove to the old location on the corner of B and 3rd Street. I was handed a manila folder with a printed copy of an encyclopedia entry, "Latinos in Oregon," from the Oregon Encyclopedia. This made me believe that Independence

had no written history of my community, even though my family had passed on numerous stories and life histories.

However, through the research done for this thesis, I found this to be false through the uncovering of the "Explore Our Heritage" collection at the Independence Heritage Museum. However, this encouraged a different inquiry as to why my community's historical memory is not well-known to residents nor presented on placards around Independence. How can ethnic Mexicans sustain their attachment to Independence if their historical memory has been shelved? To what extent does the "shelving" of historical memory contribute to a challenge of my community's claim to home in Independence? The reason for these inquiries lies in the sustainability of this historical memory. As elders in the ethnic Mexican community age, there is a potential loss of this memory, and as more youths leave Independence, the less likely this memory will be passed down.[155] To prevent this loss of identity, I will present a suggested framework to sustain the historical memory of ethnic Mexicans in Independence.

This proposed outline will adopt the theoretical framework of *confianza* coined by the team of the Boyle Heights Museum in Los Angeles, California. Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, a team of professors, graduate students, undergraduate students, and community members toiled over how to "uplift the voices of community members, students, and researchers of colour in the museum world."[156] The framework centers on an intergenerational "mutual kinship collaboration" that considers how collaborators' "sense of place and connection with the local community manifests in their museum work."[157] Confianza is a more recent iteration of

[155] Diane Barthel, "Getting in Touch with History: The Role of Historic Preservation in Shaping Collective Memories," *Qualitative Sociology*, 19 (3), 1996, 347.
[156] Jorge Leal, et al., "Building Confianza: Collective Public History in the Time of Distance – a Joint Reflection from the Boule Heights Museum Team," *The Journal of the Historical Association*, 107 (375), (March 2022): 1-2.
[157] Jorge Leal, et al., 3-4.

"restorative history" from community-based museums in the 1960s. One scholar noted that the "history of no history" was vital in maintaining racial power structures that were seen in Black and Indigenous communities.[158] Similarly, in Independence, these racial power structures are still pervasive within the school systems and the historical record of Independence. Without a proper extension of ethnic Mexican historical memory within the town and its institutions, ethnic Mexican youth will lose the ability to access our community's intimate attachments to Independence. Furthermore, by reframing the Independence Heritage Museum's collaborations with ethnic Mexicans around the ideas of confianza, the museum could be adapted from a traditional static institution to an entirely community-based museum.

Recently, the museum has transformed into a more welcoming place for minority groups in Independence and their histories. As I have had the privilege of collaborating with the staff over the last two years, the museum has become more critical of its role as a center of knowledge. Moreover, the museum has been keener on collaborating with community members to curate exhibits and collect historical narratives. One of the areas lacking in their collection was the history of the ethnic Mexican community of Independence. The museum staff acknowledged the challenges in collecting artifacts and histories from ethnic Mexicans in the community, such as the lack of trust or familiarity with museums. Although "Explore Our Heritage" had worked to repair this rift, newer ethnic Mexican community members had no prior experience collaborating with a museum. Moreover, a suggested remedy for this unfamiliarity is expanding the museum's presence in the community and the local classrooms. A suggested mode to expand the Independence Heritage Museum's presence is cultivating digital accessibility and investing in mobile exhibits.

[158] Fath Ruffins, "Grassroots Museums & The Changing Landscape of the Public Humanities," *Daedalus* 151 (3), (August 2022): 111.

A foundational principle of confianza is the incorporation of community stakeholders in the process of the preservation and teaching of their history. This approach to accessible historical memory could be alleviated by cultivating a digital archive and exhibits. Similarly to "Explore Our Heritage," this would be done in collaboration with the Independence Heritage Museum and local history departments in colleges and universities such as Western Oregon University, Oregon State University, and Chemeketa Community College. These collaborations would see college and university students digitizing the "Explore Our Heritage" collection and other documents in the Independence Heritage Museum archives. These research efforts would also collect ethnic Mexican oral histories, artifacts, and other materials to revise or construct the narrative captured in "Explore Our Heritage." The purpose of this corroboration would be to include more recent perspectives and attempt to revise any gaps within these histories. The ultimate objective of this research endeavor would be to curate digital exhibits on these histories. Moreover, this additional research could be coordinated through an advisory committee composed of community members, museum staff, and academics. However, an emphasis should be made on including youths in this committee to cultivate a relationship with the entirety of the ethnic Mexican knowledge-holder base.

Creating a digital archive and subsequent digital exhibits would allow for a more permanent representation of Independence's ethnic Mexican historical memory. This endeavor would bring together the community once again and create a direct dialogue with ethnic Mexican youths in the community. As one scholar puts it, "Museum histories have often been thought of as histories of concentration, of the accumulation of objects assembled in one place."[159] Through their participation as part of the advisory committee, youths could be imbued with pride and

[159] *Mobile Museums*, eds., Felix Driver, Mark Nesbitt, and Caroline Cornish (UCL Press, 2021), 5.

curiosity as they oversaw the recording of their community's history. Moreover, the youth's participation in the process would instill a sense of realness. Just as one would handle historical artifacts and documents and visit historical sites or monuments, the experience of seeing what academics and books discuss invokes a strong connection to these items. To maintain accessibility to the ethnic Mexican historical memory, the research conducted for the digital exhibits could aid in developing K-12 history curricula that mobile exhibits could utilize.

Most museums have initiatives meant to connect with local school districts through creating resources for history education. However, the Independence Heritage Museum has yet to take advantage of this opportunity to connect with the local youth outside the museum building. In contrast, the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County in California has recently implemented mobile museums that can be brought to local schools and events.[160] The NHM utilized buses and converted them into several exhibits, each with a unique learning experience. Each mobile museum is equipped with labs in which students will interact with various artifacts to teach principles such as evolutionary relationships and methods of scientific inquiry. These mobile museums organized learning objectives derived from California's education standards that founded their lessons.[161] The mobility of these resources in Los Angeles County illustrate how museums circulate knowledge within and external to their collections.

History education can often be a cumbersome task that cannot connect directly with K-12 students. However, the NHM of Los Angeles County devised a direct remedy to this issue. As the museum would have digital exhibits on the topic of Independence's ethnic Mexican community, a transition could be made to mold these exhibits into the mobile museum. These

[160] "Mobile Exhibits," Natural Museum of Los Angeles County, accessed April 22, 2024, https://nhm.org/educational-resources/mobile-museums
[161] "Mobile Exhibits."

vehicles used for the mobile museums would be renovated buses used to transport farmworkers to pay homage to Independence's past and current farmworkers. These buses could also be a blank canvas for art students at the local high school, college, or university to paint a mural representing Independence's history. However, this is not a vital piece of the mobile museum; it is the learning experience for students. I would advise those creating the mobile museum curriculum to collaborate with Western Oregon University's education department. The reason for another collaboration is to ensure that the history curricula for these mobile exhibits are founded upon Oregon's Ethnic Studies Standards and Social Studies Standards. Moreover, this would also be an excellent opportunity for social science teacher candidates to gain experience collaborating with local museums. Another advantage of the Independence Heritage Museum's development of K-12 learning experiences is the opportunity to publish them on the open-access website "Open Educational Resources." OER would allow teachers across the state of Oregon to teach these lessons on the history of Independence's ethnic Mexican community.

In discussing how Texas is remembered through romanticized fabrications shielding the reality of race and ethnic relations in Texas, historian David Montejano writes that "the failure of memory, then, is as much sociological as it is historical."[162] Society at large determines how a place's historical memory is constructed. A place's politics and racial thought become pervasive in how people remember family, events, and their homelands. White residents of Independence will more likely remember the golden era of the hop, the town's time as "The Hop Capital of the World." They will remember how the pioneers settled in Independence and the multiple economic and cultural contributions White people have made to the town. White residents remember interacting with ethnic Mexicans, but these are not included in Independence's

[162] David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), 1.

historical memory. In contrast, ethnic Mexicans remember how our elders only thought of Independence as another place to work. We remember how our community found ways to belong in a community that did not want Tejanos or Mexicanos. We remember the transgressions made by Police Chief Weaver, the lack of equitable education in the Central School District, and how Oregon once viewed us as unworthy of becoming citizens in this state.

These experiences provide an enriching and complex historical narrative of the greater history of Independence. The outline provided to imbue a new lens to the public history of ethnic Mexicans in Independence would allow the community to open its eyes to the entire historical narrative, not just the pleasant memories. Independence is part of the ethnic Mexican community just as much as we are a part of this place. This is why the museum is an essential asset in solidifying placemaking efforts that began nearly 75 years ago: written history is a powerful tool that either uplifts a community or relegates it to the margins. Thus, the outlined avenues to improve ethnic Mexican visibility in Independence's historical memory is a direct challenge to the sociological memory of Independence. Moreover, this is why these avenues have been framed to transform the Independence Heritage Museum as a mobile replicator of historical memory. In tandem with framing these endeavors with confianza, the ethnic Mexican sense of home and belonging will permeate Independence's sociological memory. No longer will my community be remembered only as farmworkers but as placemakers whose memories of home, past, and present are forever attached to Independence.

Conclusion: Un Lugar Para Mi Chachito, Mi Hito

On the day that I die,
I won't take anything with me,
You must live life to the fullest,
For it ends too soon.
Of all that happens in this world,
All that's left are the memories.
When I die, all I'll take is a fist full of dirt.[163]

These words, sung by Ramón Ayala, illuminate how significant the act of remembrance is due to the attachment of memories to intimate places in our lives. These memories are cultivated over generations to construct an intimate place, a home. Similarly, one historian who wrote the history of their border community in southern Texas noted that "my family's memories became my memories."[164] These memories constitute knowledge that allows for cultural reproduction in the younger generation, such as foodways, customs, kinship networks, and other cultural practices. Moreover, these memories reaffirm our sense of belonging to the place we know as home. This reaffirmation comes from the teachings of our elder's past experiences. As Tejanos migrated from their homelands in Texas, many continued long-held cultural practices within the migrant stream and in the camps across Independence. Through holding bailes and continuing kinship networks from Texas, Tejanos collectivized intimate memories of home to maintain a sense of home in the migrant stream.

[163] Original text: El día que yo me muera, No voy a llevarme nada, Hay que darle gusto al gusto, La vida pronto se acaba, Lo que paso en este mundo, Nomás el recuerdo queda, Ya muerto voy a llevarme, nomás un puño de tierra; Ramón Ayala Y Sus Bravos Del Norte, "Un Puño de Tierra." Track 16, Antología de un Rey. Freddie Records, CD, January 29, 2007.
[164] Monica Perales, *Smeltertown: Making and Remembering A Southwest Border Community* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 9.

As Tejanos settled in Independence, many followed their compadres*,* thus bringing these kinship networks to the town. Once again, Tejanos collectivized their intimate memories of home through kinship networks to Mexicanize the town of Independence. This burgeoning community would anchor other Tejanos to leave the migrant stream. This anchor would allow Tejanos to exercise their agency and utilize the value presented in Oregon's migrant assistance programs. Although these programs were racist and paternalistic, Tejanos were not fazed due to their experiences in a violent and anti-Mexican environment in Texas. Thus, Tejanos were able to overcome these obstacles and reap the value. This newfound sense of control that transferred to the migrant stream encouraged Tejanos to organize socially, culturally, and politically. The organization of this community imbued Tejanos with a sense of citizenship in their new home, where they could advocate for themselves and their community through the Spanish American Organization.

What this emergence of advocacy demonstrated was the consciousness of Tejanos in seeing how much the labor system in Independence relied upon them. This reliance was illustrated through the adaptations of Oregon's migrant assistance programs to Tejanos and other ethnic Mexican groups. Through these programs and empowered by this sense of control, Tejanos used the migrant stream to expand their claims to Independence outside the fields. A prime example was the hiring of Anita Cantu as an instructional assistant for Independence's migrant summer education program. The introduction of Tejanos as stakeholders outside the community signaled a new perception of this community's role in shaping society in Independence.

By the later part of the 20th century, Mexican nationals arrived in Independence, bringing a new dynamic to this newly Mexicanized place. This convergence of the Mexican diaspora

caused deep strife as Tejanos segregated themselves from Mexicanos in an effort of self-preservation from the growing anti-Mexican sentiment. However, as Tejano youths witnessed their elders creating a home in Independence, they did not wish to lose their home. These youths saw this diasporic rift as a threat to their home and sought to unify Tejanos and Mexicanos. Elena Peña collectivized the Tejano *and* Mexicano cultural memory to create the Community Fiesta. Additionally, Peña led efforts to aid incoming immigrants through processing documents through the local Catholic parish. These actions became the olive branches, which brought about the emergence of a unified ethnic Mexican community. This new community claimed their stake in Independence as a home without limiting themselves to just their ethnic community but the entirety of Independence. By the time Chief Weaver riled up the ethnic Mexican community through his racist statements, this newly unified community was mobilized to defend their claims to home in Independence.

Over seventy-five years, Tejanos and Mexicanos created intimate memories attached to Independence; however, these memories had not yet been written into Independence's historical memory. The unity of the ethnic Mexican community would again be mobilized through the "Explore Our Heritage" project to overcome the last major front to their placemaking efforts. The encroachment of ethnic Mexicans into the public history frontier allowed their memories to become imbued within the historical memory of Independence. As one historian noted in south Texas, the significance of rearticulating community through collective memory provided a means to "rewrite their presence onto a landscape from which they had been erased."[165] Although the efforts of "Explore Our Heritage" provided a recognition of the ethnic Mexican community's historical memory, it was not a permanent solution.

[165] Perales, 3.

A new project must fully articulate the historical memory of ethnic Mexicans to demonstrate the complex narrative presented in this thesis. Thus, a suggested outline of how to better interpret this history calls for the transformation of the local museum. Through the framework of *confianza*, the Independence Heritage Museum would become a mobile replicator of historical memory rather than a static institution. This would be achieved through cultivating a digital archive and exhibits by re-engaging in research efforts begun by “Explore Our Heritage.” These efforts would involve community members, students, and academics to bring a fresh perspective that is long overdue. The work completed in this research endeavor would allow for materials to be developed for mobile exhibits or museums that connect students to their community's history. Through this suggested outline, the museum would become a trusted community institution that would fully ingratiate the historical memory of ethnic Mexicans within the very fabric of Independence. This intervention in Independence’s sociological memory by the community would allow ethnic Mexicans to take control of the creation of their history so that it would not be shelved again.

“Somos de Allá y de Aquí” illuminates the significant power migrants have as placemakers and in the memories they hold of home. By replicating a sense of familiarity within the migrant stream, the migrants’ kinship networks would anchor them to their host communities. These new homes imbued with memories of old would become places of power to challenge the exploitation of the labor system. They would begin to find meaning within their communities rather than in the labor system. These blossoming communities would act as empowering spaces to awaken the migrant to their agency and create new life chances through the migrant stream, whether through migrant assistance programs or expanding kinship networks. Similarly, one historian observed this concept in an emerging immigrant community in

Los Angeles, California. She concluded that homemaking became a way for migrants to make sense of themselves not as laborers or foreigners but also as free actors who could construct a better life and community.[166] This history of ethnic Mexicans in Independence contributes a new lens from which to examine Mexican labor in the Pacific Northwest as not providing economic contributions but cultural contributions as well.

"Somos de Allá y de Aquí" is not just a history of ethnic Mexicans creating a home in a rural town in Oregon's mid-Willamette Valley but my family's history and the home I inherited their love for. Throughout the writing of this thesis, I bore witness to the power of memories that empowered my elders to claim Independence as their home many times over. I observed how deeply our intimate memories attach my community to Independence in the many elders who aided the research of this thesis. As a child, I remember how captivated it was to hear the multitude of stories from my family. Moreover, as my *bisabuelos*, my Ama and Apa, had passed when I was only 8 years old, I thought I did not have much to remember them by—but I was wrong.[167] Over the years, my family told me the many memories they had with my bisabuelos, and those memories became a part of me.

The stories of Apa's service in World War II encouraged me to become enamored with history, something I inherited from him and my grandfather, Daniel. As a high school senior, I began researching what would later become this thesis. I merely wished to explore why my family had settled in Independence and why this town had such a strong Mexican presence. Little did I know that this simple child-like wonder would lead me to discover the rich histories of my beloved Ama, Apa, my family, and the many others who created this familiar Mexican place. I

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[166] Natalia Molina, *A Place at the Nayarit: How A Mexican Restaurant Nourished a Community* (University of California Press, 2023), 10.
[167] "Bisabuelos" is translated as great-grandparents. "Ama" and "Apa" are the names that my grandparents, Guadalupe, and Paula Alvarez, were referred by.

would like to imagine Apa playing his guitar beside Ama, celebrating their *cachito*, their *hito*, their great-grandson, writing their histories, and remembering their love for their family and Independence.[168] Although I may not have Apa's guitar, Ama's sewing machine, or their old Chrysler van, I am a product of their efforts as placemakers. Their memories will live forever etched in my consciousness and in the historical memory of Independence, Oregon, and the field of Mexican American labor history.

Figure 5. *Guadalupe and Paula Alvarez with their great-grandson Victor Ochoa*. Photograph from the Alvarez Family Collection, ca. 2002. Independence, Oregon.

[168] "Cachito" and "hito" were nicknames given to me by my great-grandparents.

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