CHAPTER THREE:

"Contemporary Mexican-American Political Activity"

This chapter focuses on the current activities of Mexican Americans in the political realm of L.A. County, but we are not quite through looking through the lens of historical perspective. We take a step back here to study the political scene south of the U.S.-Mexico border throughout the twentieth century and witness its effects on the political behavior of Mexican Americans in the modern era. Next, a sampling of contemporary Chicano community organizations[1] is offered in the spirit of understanding Chicano political restraint and recognizing the inherent diversity of Mexican-American society. The final phase of this chapter includes a thorough analysis of the questionnaires that I distributed in Mexican-American communities in Southern California.

Politics in the **Patria:** *The Seeds of Electoral Distrust*

Because the flow of Mexican immigrants into the state of California has been constant since the concession of U.S. statehood in the mid-nineteenth century, it is necessary to consider in this project the effects of Mexican political and social history on those individuals who would eventually migrate to the United States. While those California residents of Mexican descent were emerging as a semi-unified political front in the face of social and political discrimination during the mid-twentieth century, Mexicans still residing in their homeland were learning a sad lesson in electoral fraud and political

[1] The importance of Chicano community organizations and special interest groups does not only permeate the political arena, but the cultural one as well. For details, see Oboler: "[Chicano and Latin-American] self-help organizations long served to support the maintenance of the language and cultures Latinos inherited from the Spanish empire in the Americas, as well as to fight against discrimination and the persistent exclusion from access to full and equal rights in this society" (xv).

detachment. In this section, it becomes clearer why modern Mexican Americans are hesitant to politically engage themselves, and it can be traced back to the political system that was in place in Mexico since the pre-revolutionary era.[2] The author Granados Chapa summarizes best the Mexican electoral mechanism that functioned for the last century (until the year 2000) in the following passage:

> Votar, en México, ha sido en la mayor parte de su historia asunto de muy pocos […] Durante el porfiriato, y en los primeros tiempos de la revolución triunfante, votar fue más un asunto de militares y políticos profesionales que de la gente común. A partir de 1929, en que se establecen los fundamentos del actual sistema político, el fenómeno ha adquirido mayor complejidad, pero sigue teniendo esa misma dirección. En efecto, la presencia de un partido dominante, casi único, que cuenta con una fuerza material, económica y política incontrastable con la de sus oponentes, y la experiencia de presuntas o reales deformaciones electorales […] han contribuido a que el fenómeno electoral sea percibido como algo ajeno a los cuidadanos, algo que cocinan los políticos no siempre con los mejores condimentos. (17)

> Historically, to vote in Mexico has primarily been an affair of very few […] During the Porfiriate and in the early stages of the triumphant revolution, voting was more an affair of military and political professionals than of common people. From 1929 on, year in which the fundamentals of the current political system were established, this

[2] The Mexican Revolution lasted from about 1910-1917, with "aftershocks, including local insurrections, assassinations, and a savage but low-intensity religious war [that continued] into the 1930s" (Fox 77).

> phenomenon has acquired greater complexity, although it continues in the same direction. In effect, the presence of a dominant, almost singular, party that relies upon a material, economic, and political strength unrivaled by opponents, and the experience of presumed or actual electoral deformities, have contributed to the perception that the electoral phenomenon is something that does not pertain to citizens, something cooked up by politicians not always with the best ingredients.

In sum, voting was always viewed by Mexicans as a battle "for the *free exercise of existing political rights*" (Schatz 76) in which the outcome never reflected any real influence on the part of voters. That is, although democratic electoral practices were constitutionally proposed, they were not institutionally maintained. The author Schatz concurs: "In electoral matters, the constitution has not stood as the highest authority over the Mexican political system. That authority has rested with the president, as leader of the nation and of the nation's dominant political party" (77).[3] This is a primary explanation for the traditional Mexican lack of trust in its own electoral system.

This political distrust is a major theme in contemporary attempts at Mexican electoral reform, and Mexican citizens are finally beginning to embrace voting as a truly democratic enterprise, as the last presidential election illustrated. In the year 2000, PRI-member President Ernesto Zedillo refused to choose a successor within his party.[4] The

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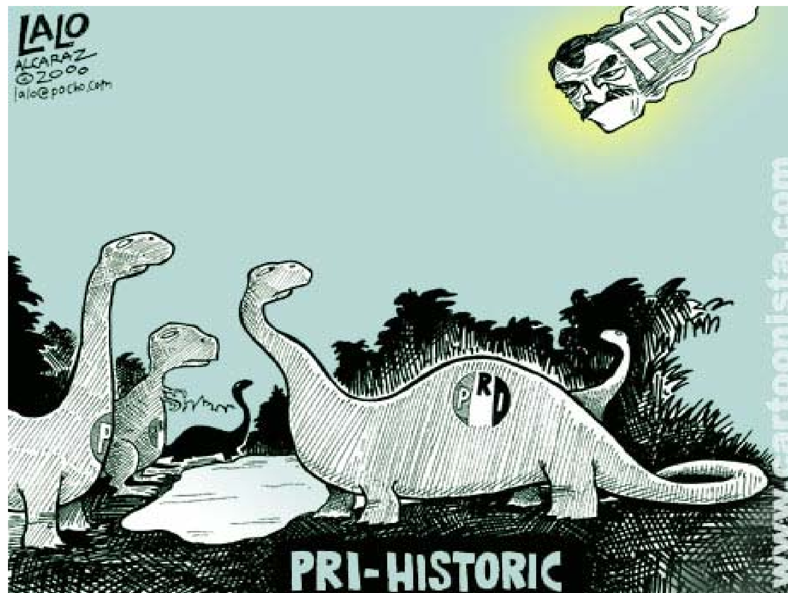
[3] The PRI – or the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (Institutional Revolutionary Party) – is the political party that dominated Mexican politics for the better part of the twentieth century. Wittily summed up by Rich and de los Reyes: "The PRI is not a party in the American sense, but more of a family firm and social insurance scheme. It has successfully packed the ballot boxes of Mexico for more than sixty years" (133).

[4] The presidential elections of 1988 had proved to be the last straw for PRI dominance when Mexican President Carlos Salinas de Gortari ordered the ballots to be burned upon his inauguration in office. An act of pure impunity, no one objected to this blatant display of individual unilateralism and the next PRI president would react by refusing to pass on the torch of an assured political victory (McGirk).

Partido de Acción Nacional (National Action Party, or PAN) took advantage of this negation of traditional "*dedazo*" policy and its candidate Vicente Fox won the nation's presidency. This was the first time since 1929 that the PRI did not have one of its members in the presidential office. This shift in political power demonstrated to Mexican citizens that their vote was no longer just one more aspect of going through the motions of the quasi-democratic process that had been so zealously touted by corrupt government officials for generations.



Cartoonist Lalo Alcaraz captures a significant moment in Mexican history.

However, the primacy of electoral uncertainty had already been inculcated into Mexican political culture, and it combines with some other, more general facets of Mexican society to further explain why Mexicans – and later on Mexican Americans – are not very inclined to participation in civil society. Paternalistic, authoritarian society – as is the case in Mexico[5] – does not generally yield a citizenry primed to jump head-first into American-style politics. The author Fukuyama succinctly explains the reason why: "Paternal authority cannot be the model for political authority; the state derives its just powers from the consent of the governed, and not because it constitutes a kind of 'superfamily'" (285). Therefore, the Mexican style of governance, and of being governed, cannot be easily translated into American participatory democracy.

The Chicano Experience: The Fruition of Electoral Distrust

Mexicans living in the United States – be they Mexico- or U.S.-born – not only rely upon Mexican domestic political traditions as impetus for contemporary political abandon in the United States; they can also find compelling reasons to not trust American "democratic" institutions within the Mexican historical experience on what is now *gringo* soil. If we return to the literal conversion of northwestern Mexicans into southwestern Americans through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, we witness probably the most damaging treatment of Mexicans by the American government, initializing a relationship of distrust that has lasted until the present. According to the author Gutiérrez-

[5] Mexico is categorized as "a modern authoritarian state characterized by a complex array of legal, political, and administrative relationships that include the linkage of the dominant party to the state" (Schatz 77).

Jones, this territorial betrayal sheds light on the current political predicament that plagues Mexican Americans.

> Because this document guaranteed to the former Mexican national inhabitants of the lands ceded to the United States legal rights even beyond those defined in the Constitution – rights which were not honored by the United States – it is, in the eyes of these scholars, a key to understanding the social situation in which Chicanos find themselves. (1)

Thus it is not difficult to understand why Mexican Americans treat the U.S. political machine and institutions with such suspicion, disenchantment, and bitter disregard.[6]

In theory (and some would argue in practice),[7] the United States is host to one of the most successful multicultural societies in the global community. As it is "dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal," the U.S. government is responsible for bringing together "disparate peoples who do not necessarily share a set of cultural beliefs or moral standards" (Fukuyama 252). Instead of the establishment of a "moral community, there is law; in place of spontaneous trust, formal equality and due process" (Fukuyama 252). With these legal "guarantees" of equality of opportunity, minority groups are given the hope of someday achieving equal footing with the dominant political actors on the American scene (read: white political actors).

Political maturity is the ultimate expression of a successful democracy, which the United States truly believes itself to be. The author Fukuyama asserts that, "in any

[6] The author Pérez-Torres suggests that these negative feelings toward gringo outlets of authority are indeed profoundly grounded in Chicano ethnic and cultural identity.
[7] Although painfully aware of its downsides, the author Reed edits a volume that lauds the complexity of multiculturalism in the United States; that is, he does not portend the eruption of a race war any time soon.

meaningful democracy, the interests and wishes of the different members of society have to be articulated and represented through political parties and other kinds of organized political groups" (357). If this is indeed the case, the formation of Mexican-American political action groups would be the next necessary step to achieving empowerment in the modern regime. Oh, but this has already come to pass. In fact, Chicanos can already attribute to themselves several generations of this kind of political organization.

Despite this fact, Mexican Americans have not been able to successfully tap into America's central cultural tradition that is "originally the attribute of a particular religious and ethnic group" (Fukuyama 270) in order to fully exploit U.S. political institutions for their own benefit. This culture, which supposedly has become "deracinated from those ethnoreligious roots and became a broadly accessible identity for all Americans" (Fukuyama 270), somehow remains elusive to Chicano communities. Chicano politicians or political organizations that achieve success in politics are often criticized by the more radical elements of the Mexican-American community – for example, activists such as those belonging to the Mexica Movement – for losing touch with cultural roots.[8] Chicano politicians or political organizations that remain more closely connected to cultural themes in their political discourse are usually rejected by mainstream political institutions and actors.[9] Any successful Chicano politician or political organization must find a delicate balance between the two cultural conduits in order to please all; it is a difficult task. The same basically goes for non-Chicano politicians in these communities as well:

[8] These more radical factions appear to relish in the "political alienation" – "a belief that one is altogether separated from the decision-making process and has no influence on the actions of those govern" (Brischetto and De la Garza 3) – that so many Chicanos have struggled to overcome. Navarro offers more on the subject (68).

[9] California Lt. Governor Cruz Bustamante, a recent gubernatorial candidate, was painted by political adversaries as a radical Chicano separatist due to his past affiliation with MEChA during his university days; some say that this may have cost him the election (Arellano; "LULAC Press Release").

watered-down treatment of issues specifically pertaining to Mexican Americans is not recommended when aiming for electoral success.[10]

This illustration from the OC Weekly website pokes fun at the portrayal of California Lt. Governor Cruz Bustamante as a radical Chicano activist by gubernatorial campaign rivals in the Fall of 2003. See Footnote 80 on the previous page for an explanation why.

In contrast to the positive connotation given to the American central cultural identity by the author Fukuyama, the author Vélez-Ibáñez possesses a different concept of the cultural conundrums faced by Chicanos. He asserts that the goal of U.S. political institutions to assimilate all ethnicities and cultures found in the United States into one fundamental American culture is degradation to the Chicano community. “The general [Mexican American] household strategy employed has been to struggle for cultural and social survival in the face of racist poison and political and economic policies designed to

[10] All voters – not only Chicanos – are more supportive of their Congressional leadership when district-specific issues are treated publicly and head-on (Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart 136-138).

homogenize the population culturally and to separate its members physically from their points of origin" (142). According to many Chicanos as well as members of other minority groups, the unofficial cultural requirements for participation in American political processes does not leave much room for the retention of original cultural traditions and are hence discriminatory in nature. The author Gutiérrez-Jones lays out the modern predicament of Mexican-American communities with interesting perspective:

> While both the school and the court produce a means of accessing the traditions of culture and law, these institutions perpetuate specific relations to both which differ for different people. Chicanos recognize this precise state of affairs when they both protest for better educational programs and move toward declining graduation rates, when they both support civil rights activism and express fear about legal institutions. Their experience consistently tells them that they will be treated differentially – that is, as Chicanos, not as race-neutral citizens. (Gutiérrez-Jones 11)

Academe has not, however, remained oblivious to this unsatisfactory state of minority/Chicano affairs. In fact, the very nature of U.S. democracy has been called into question on a variety of fronts. Fukuyama contends that the failure to resolve this political inequality in any short-term scenario becomes an issue of confidence in American political institutions, and stricter governmental action may become necessary. "Democratic political institutions no less than businesses depend on trust for effective operation, and the reduction of trust in a society will require a more intrusive, rule-making government to regulate social relations" (Fukuyama 361). That is, if Chicanos are not able to embrace U.S. political processes in order to remedy intra-societal ailments,

then the U.S. government will have to make accommodations to facilitate more widespread minority political participation. This is also in politicians' best interests as well, since they will then be able to take advantage of the hundreds of thousands of potential votes emerging from such minority political mobilization.

Interest Group Profiles: Variety Rules[11]

The League of United Latin American Citizens remains not only an active political organization to this day, but it also serves as one of the largest national forums for Latino – especially Mexican-American – issues. Adopting the mission statement of the advancement of the "economic condition, educational attainment, political influence, health, and civil rights of the Hispanic[12] population of the United States," LULAC's website conveys the group's exemplary participation within the dominant American political structures to consummate its ends. A self-proclaimed "grass-roots" movement drawing its political strength chiefly from its members, LULAC claims to have improved the "quality of life for Hispanics across the country."

LULAC administers various programs that focus on the protection of Latino civil rights in the areas of immigration, social services, education, and economic opportunity. The organization claims that its membership – comprising over 600 councils nationwide – includes people of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, and Central and South American descent. The League's goals cover issues relating to education, political participation, and

[11] The list of Chicano and Latino political/community groups is too extensive to fully broach in this project, but I would like to mention a few organizations worthy of additional study: the Southwest Voter Registration and Education Project (SVREP), Mexican-American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF), and National Council of *La Raza*. See the works of Fox and Navarro for details.

[12] LULAC's adherence to the term "Hispanic" is a clue that points toward its loyalty to U.S. governmental institutions. Despite the group's name, its political discourse of only working within the system to effect positive change is ostensibly naïve and anachronistic.

community service projects. Boasting one of the largest Latino scholarship programs in the nation, LULAC also provides academic enrichment programs to elementary, middle, and high school students. The organization frequently sponsors voter registration drives, citizen education programs, letter writing campaigns, and lobbying efforts. The League's website lists organization-sponsored community service projects such as job training, health fairs, mentoring, and business initiatives. Adhering to its original charter dating from 70 years ago and published on the website itself, LULAC continues to work to influence policy making primarily within the halls of Congress. Describing itself as a "powerful advocate," the organization monitors legislation and provides policy makers with the Latino perspective on immigration, affirmative action, business, education, and other issues impacting the U.S. Latino community.

Criticisms of LULAC's political style have not changed significantly in the past four decades. The League's active participation in traditional U.S. political institutions has caused it to remain on the periphery of many of the cultural struggles experienced by members of the Mexican American public. Potential victims of the label "whitewashed," LULAC members often become so involved in the fight for political recognition at the highest levels of federal government that they often become unfamiliar with the causes of the lower classes of Latino citizens; recent LULAC support of university-based MEChA in the California media reinforces the notion that it is an organization whose primary policy goals are centered around the upper and middle classes of U.S. Latinos ("LULAC Press Release"). The League's methods are logical and effective, but perhaps it would benefit them to reconsider their outreach recipients.

The Chicano movement of the civil rights era can most radically be interpreted in modern times by the Mexica Movement, an L.A.-based activist group whose call to action is "Arming Our People with Knowledge." Functioning primarily on the fringes of Southern California society and spreading their word primarily via the Internet, the Mexica Movement denounces the labels "Hispanic" (claiming its definition to include only those of Spanish origin) and "Latino" (attributing the title to Euro-American efforts to erase any national allegiance among peoples of Mexican and Central and South American origin). The Movement also encourages members to commit themselves to the study and teaching of pre-European history of western-hemisphere civilizations, the recognition of the true cultural identity of Chicanos as the culture of Anahuac and Aztlán, and the re-claiming of the lands of Anahuac and Aztlán (now the southwestern United States, Mexico, and Central and South America). The group's online forum declares that all efforts on the part of Chicanos to partake in the mythical "American Dream" has been historically sabotaged by the Eurocentric U.S. political and social structure; hence, the Mexica Movement proposes the establishment of Mexica schools, the cultivation of Mexica leadership, Mexica media liaisons, and Mexica separation from "sellouts," those individuals of Mexican descent who deny their status as indigenous people.[13]

Mexica activism is observable in the Southern California community in a variety of forms. Encouraging members to write to MCs, other political officials, and public figures to express disapproval or approbation is a common tactic utilized to spread their message. Boycotts – like a recent demonstration outside Disneyland in protest of an allegedly "white" European actor, Antonio Banderas, being signed to interpret the role of

[13] One of the Mexica Movement's featured Chicano sellouts on its website is the actor/director/producer Edward James Olmos for his participation in a number of film projects that the Mexica Movement claims perpetuate negative images of the Mexica peoples.

Emiliano Zapata, a non-white indigenous person, in a Disney film – is another method.[14] While emphasizing the importance of the vote, the Mexica Movement appears to be more concerned with the education of its followers in the ways of their people prior to the European invasion and "cultural castration" that began in the sixteenth century. According to its website, the Movement does not recognize the legitimacy of the various North, Central, and South American governments as they are considered to be the machines of "illegal, invasive, murderous, lying, enslaving people without honor and the owners of stolen lands and histories." The Mexica Movement is quite possibly one of the most extreme progressions of the Chicano movement.

The likelihood that the Mexica Movement will recuperate lost lands is slim. The only realistic hope of the Movement is to culturally educate its followers; however, in order to attain true enlightenment, the Movement needs to educate itself further on the origins of peoples in both hemispheres. Every individual of Mexican heritage who becomes educated in U.S. institutions and commences a career in American politics or even speaks out to the American media in order to advocate change within the Mexican-American community is deemed a *vendido*, or a sellout, by the Movement.

Many Mexican-American activist organizations that originated on university campuses in the 1960s and 70s continue to experience growth in their membership bases as the number of Chicano students attending universities also continues to increase. *El Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán* (MEChA) presently enjoys as much if not more popularity than ever at universities across the country. This phenomenon can be

[14] The Movement does not seem to recognize, or perhaps is uninformed, that "people of Spanish descent" is not synonymous with "white." The racial and cultural diversity of Spain – European, Middle Eastern-Moorish, and Northern African, among others – suggests that their assumption that all Spaniards, including actor Antonio Banderas, are ethnically white is rooted in ignorance.

attributed to a theory conceived of by the authors De la Garza, Falcon, and Garcia, that the more culturally incorporated a minority group is in the United States, the more socially and politically aware that group is of discrimination toward itself in the society at large (337). That is, Chicanos who receive a university education are more likely to develop awareness of ethnic and cultural inequalities than are recently arrived Mexican immigrants. Therefore, the generational strengthening of political organizations run by college students such as MEChA is no mystery.

This Alcaraz cartoon, "O'Reilly vs. MEChA," is highly irreverent concerning many of White America's fears of the bronzing of the U.S. population.

According to the University of Stanford MEChA organization website, the group was founded in 1969 in Santa Barbara, California, and continues to encourage its members to foster in themselves and in the broader Chicano community a strong sense of "self-determination" and "nationalistic identity" in order to achieve "socioeconomic justice" for all Mexican Americans.[15] The Stanford chapter contends in its website that MEChA rejects the label "Hispanic," as it "seeks to anglicize and deny [the] indigenous heritage [of Mexican Americans] by ignoring [their] unique socioeconomic and historical aspects." MEChA's "philosophy of liberation (i.e. educational, socioeconomic, and political empowerment) for [their] Chicano and Chicana nation" reflects the massive emphasis on the education of Mexican Americans that is shared by all the political organization strategies mentioned in this project. Resting somewhere between the conservative LULAC and the revolutionary Mexica Movement, the Stanford MEChA website proclaims that its primary methodology does not focus on policy change in Congress but rather on joining with other community-based Chicano organizations to end the "cultural tyranny suffered at the hands of institutional and systematic discrimination that holds [Mexican Americans] captive." In their efforts to "end […] oppression and exploitation of the Chicano and Chicana Community," the MEChA website asserts that the organization's role as a student group allows it to mold the minds of future leaders in the Mexican-American political machine. Since the group's members are all university students, they are almost automatically guaranteed a higher level of professional success

[15] The Chicano poet Alurista's "Spiritual Plan of Aztlán" has served as one of MEChA's conceptual trademarks for the past several decades, and it is often considered unsettling by whites as it talks of a Chicano recuperation of Aztlán, the lands that constitute the modern American Southwest and were fraudulently usurped by the United States under the Treaty of Hidalgo. "Although Chicanos sometimes like to frighten Anglos by talk of retaking this territory [mythically portrayed as the original home of the Aztecs], what Alurista wrote was of a spiritual rather than a political connection to the land" (Fox 121).

than activists in groups like the Mexica Movement, but the goal remains to never fully integrate into the white-American political environment, to instead work within Congress and the traditional American political structure while fighting for the preservation and dissemination of Chicano culture and the Spanish language.

The future of student organizations like MEChA is secured by the new generations of Chicano students flooding into U.S. universities in larger quantities every year. After graduating, however, the future of individual members of these organizations is uncertain. The creation of invigorating new organizations in the society at large that emphasize educational reform, widespread political participation, and acceptance of Mexican-American culture and the Spanish language as valid forms of expression in the United States will ensure the success of future generations of Mexican Americans.

Word on the Street: Policy Concerns and Preferences from the Mouths of Chicanos

In this section, I would like to begin by presenting some prevailing characteristics of the Mexican-American population in the United States, comparing some basic political behaviors with those of another minority group. While a large number of Chicanos self-identify as being politically "moderate" or "conservative," an even larger number of them are affiliated with the Democratic Party (Hero 64-65, 69-70; Brischetto and De la Garza 5). Mexican Americans are in essence as liberal as blacks, sharing basic "material concerns" with them, such as jobs, housing, and educational issues (Hero 61-62, 66). As the reader will note ahead, Chicanos share policy concerns with most other urban populations, regardless of minority status (Hero 1-2).

Imagine the shock of primarily Democratic Mexican Americans when seemingly innocent movie star Arnold Schwarzenegger turned out to be the "Mexterminator," as characterized in this Alcaraz cartoon.

The questionnaire that I distributed and collected in the streets of Los Angeles among Mexican-American citizens should now be observed and analyzed. The questionnaire (which can be seen in its entirety in Appendix Two) is composed of two sections. The first section recovers personal data such as age, sex, occupation, marital status, and generation born or years living in the United States; that information will be revealed as we go. And the second section is composed of four questions regarding the individual's policy concerns, personal relationship with and desired qualities in their Congressional representative, and community solidarity.

During elections, which political issues are most important to you and/or your family? What kinds of changes do you expect your Congressional representative to enact while in office? These questions aim to reveal the most basic, individual policy concerns that a citizen considers his or her top priority in the implementation of a political agenda, as well as the citizen's expectations that their Member of Congress will promote this agenda. The most common policy concerns reported on the questionnaire were issues relating to healthcare and health insurance, education, and the "economy" (creation of jobs). Other issues mentioned were "car registration fees," "civil matters," housing, immigration, retirement, Social Security, and welfare. According to one individual – a 47-year-old library clerk at a high school in Paramount, California – a Congressional representative in her community is expected to "make changes that impact the issues I worry about in a favorable way and to create sources of work." At that same Paramount high school, a 33-year-old bilingual assistant revealed her desire for universal health insurance and additional funding for schools. And a 56-year-old maintenance supervisor in the city of Bell Gardens expressed a desire for the creation of more jobs in his district as well as for the return of businesses to California; he proposed the establishment of retention strategies such as incentive programs for businesses to work and produce in his home state.

Drawing from these questionnaires, an individual's personal data – such as occupation or number of children – seems to be directly linked with their political priorities. Both our library clerk and our bilingual assistant – in addition to two other educators who filled out questionnaires for this project – cited educational funding and improvement of educational facilities on their Congressional wish lists; our maintenance

supervisor – a father of three in a blue-collar work environment – cited the economy and jobs as his primary concern.

Have you ever tried to get in touch with your district's Member of Congress? If so, please describe your experience. If not, why not? Half of the questionnaires returned to me were filled out by individuals who had never attempted to contact their Congressional representatives. Some attributed this to never having had a reason why, others to a belief in Congressional inaccessibility, and still others to the fear of not receiving a reply because they are "nobody." The other half of my respondents did indeed try to communicate with their district's MC, some even successfully. Several individuals who achieved contact with their Congressional representative did so through school activities; that is, as part of a high school civics class assignment or through the local community college. Another respondent – a 26-year-old television operations professional – related a very specific incident that motivated him to contact his district's Congressional candidate: he solicited the candidate's support in attempting to rid his street of an "eyesore" – a makeshift basketball court placed in the street in front of the respondent's home. He did not confirm the success of his venture. And finally, one individual admits to having attempted contact with her MC, although she does not recall why. However, she does recall that she was offered no assistance with her plight, so she "never bothered again" to communicate with her Congressional representative. From the responses to this inquiry, the questionnaires conveyed an overall sense of great psychological distance between MCs and their Mexican-American constituents.[16]

[16] MCs go to extreme lengths to eliminate feelings of ideological or psychological disparity between themselves and constituents by "securing the trust and electoral support of their constituents" (Gay 718). According to Gay, this is often achieved by fostering individual identification between the two actors, a

Do you consider yourself to be a member of a "Mexican-American community"? Or perhaps of another kind of community? Please elaborate. After having administered the questionnaire, I realized too late that the wording of this question was problematic, since the answers I received dealt more with geographical communities than with cultural ones.[17] Respondents overwhelmingly replied in the affirmative, explaining that they live or work in communities with large Mexican-American populations. Our bilingual assistant proclaimed, "Sí, la mayoría de mis vecinos son mexicoamericanos (sic)" ("Yes, the majority of my neighbors are Mexico Americans" [sic]). Perhaps I should have posited my inquiry differently; perhaps I should have asked whether or not the respondents felt socially, culturally, and/or politically unified with other individuals of Mexican descent living in Los Angeles County. Nonetheless, the responses I did obtain offer an interesting perspective on the self-imagining of the Mexican Americans of this study. The very fact that nearly all the Chicanos I recurred to for this project are not thinking along the same culturally theoretical lines as many academicians[18] leads me toward a slight deviation here. The Mexican Americans showcased in this project do not consider themselves to be in unique political circumstances because of their cultural roots; indeed, they seem to consider themselves kindred political spirits with other low-

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feat entailing much attention to detail in personal appearance (e.g., clothes fit for an occasion, etc.) and conscientious delivery of policy discourse (718).

[17] Only one respondent replied to this question as I intended, claiming that he feels "distant from my community because their views (such as political or about life in general) differ from mine." This particular respondent – the television operations professional – self-identifies as being the first generation of his family born in the United States and says that he is only interested in politics as far as they can positively affect him financially. His auto-focused views are not entirely atypical: "Human opinion is directed toward individual facts (what does my opponent intend to do?), toward general causal connections (what will reduce inflation?), or toward the future (what will the dollar exchange be in a year's time?)" (Elster 10).

[18] Many of the authors cited in this project are Latino and are oriented by their distinct national cultures in many of their academic endeavors; examples of this can be found in Avila, Madrid, and Portales. I have demonstrated here that the average Mexican-American citizen does not necessarily equate their cultural roots with their political interests, to the potential dismay of the aforementioned authors.

and middle-class L.A. residents who fight for improved health care and increased educational funding.

As a Mexican-American individual, what qualities do you view as valuable in a Congressperson who represents you? The responses to this question were extensive and varied, but nearly every individual emphasized the importance of awareness of the unique issues of Mexican-American and other minority-based communities; these special issues include – but certainly are not limited to – language needs and immigrant legal protection. To be familiar with the needs of Latinos, to be willing to help Mexican-American communities and other minorities, to represent and fight for the needs of Mexican Americans, to possess views focused on *all* minorities, to have empathy with all minorities by understanding them and helping them to assimilate without losing their culture and values, either voluntarily or by force: these are all qualities described by the respondents that they view as ideal in a Congressional representative. Only one individual required that her ideal MC "speak proper Spanish,"[19] and several others mentioned the requirements of experience with the economy, a sincere interest in welfare issues, and a university education.

How many current Members of Congress representing the various districts of L.A. County embody these model qualities? Chapter Four addresses that query by summarizing the results of the questionnaires of this chapter and applying those results towards a constructed ideal of Congressional leadership. No time like the present.

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[19] A politician "must identify the shared concerns of political constituents and get them to act as a group, and speaking the language is an incidental but usually necessary part of what it takes to do that" (Fox 179).