

“Transnationalism and Latino Businessmen: Ethnic Mexicans, Business, and Culture in San Jose,
1950-1980”

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Working Paper Series No. 4

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Abstract

By the mid-1950s Latinos, especially those of Mexican descent, were firmly grounded in Northern California’s San Jose. With a sizable number of entrepreneurs, business owners, managers, and employees living and working near downtown, these business people contributed to a growing Latino middle class that was part of a larger expansion of the middle class across the United States. Businessmen of Mexican descent created and participated in organizations that worked diligently to promote their businesses and their culture that helped create downtown into a transnational space. First, with the Mexican Chamber of Commerce and the Comisión Honorífica Mexicana in the 1950s, Mexican businessmen worked to establish a presence downtown, especially through promotion of *mexicanidad* during the fiestas patrias. Later, during the 1970s, the Mexican American Chamber of Commerce continued the struggle to gain representation for ethnic Mexicans in the city but pivoted from highlighting *mexicanidad* and moved towards emphasizing the needs of small businesses, particularly those owned and operated by ethnic Mexicans. Between the 1950s and the 1970s ethnic Mexican businessmen organized themselves in their efforts to establish a physical presence in San Jose’s downtown and frequently utilized their Mexican culture as a way to make political inroads in local politics.

“Desde la más remota antigüedad, la prosperidad de los pueblos se ha manifestado por el grado de adelanto alcanzado en la industria y el comercio. [Since antiquity, prosperity has been measured by the levels of advancement in industry and commerce].” These words were written by San Jose resident and Mexican national, Daniel Saldaña, in 1964 as the opening lines of an article entitled “Pilares Del Progreso [Pillars of Progress].”^[i] Latinos, especially those of Mexican descent, began establishing more permanent roots in San Jose in the late 1930s when they started settling in areas within the city limits. By the mid-1960s Latinos in San Jose and Santa Clara County were firmly grounded in the area with a sizable number of entrepreneurs, business owners, managers, and employees living and working near downtown. These business people contributed to a growing Latino middle class that was part of a larger expansion of the middle class across the United States.^[ii]

Living and working near, in, and around downtown made the central business district an important place for social and cultural activities that contributed to a transnational character of the urban landscape. Ethnic Mexicans spoke Spanish at work, owned restaurants and markets that catered to Latino needs, and patronized theaters and halls that showcased entertainment from Latin America. These actions, along with hosting large-scale social-cultural celebrations like the fiestas patrias, made downtown a transnational space. Ethnic Mexicans imagined themselves as connected to their motherland and created a Mexico de afuera [Mexico beyond] by reproducing Mexican culture in public space.^[iii] In San Jose, the ethnic Mexican businessmen played a key role in helping Latinos claim space in a U.S. city by promoting Mexican culture for public consumption that contributed to the growth of a Mexico de afuera spreading across the U.S. Southwest.^[iv]

These businessmen viewed themselves as leaders in the Spanish-speaking communities and used their status as men of commerce to make political inroads with local politicians. Beginning in the early 1950s and through the 1970s, ethnic Mexicans in San Jose built community and helped create a transnational downtown while Spanish-speaking business owners established relationships with politicians for the purpose of uplifting Latinos and contributing to the community as a whole.

Building Latino Space, Place, and Community in San Jose

Between 1935 and 1940 the federally sponsored Home Owner's Corporation (HOLC) surveyed over two hundred cities and thousands of areas (neighborhoods) across the U.S. for the purpose of determining which neighborhoods were favorable or not favorable for investment. Maps of surveyed cities were graded "A" through "D" and color coded with areas outlined in

green (A), blue (B), yellow (C), and red (D); the colors indicated the best, still desirable, definitely declining, and hazardous areas in a given city that lenders used to determine whether to approve loans. San Jose's survey indicates a "city" in tremendous decline with only one-third of the graded areas colored in blue or green. In general, the remaining two-thirds of the city was described as having "infiltration" of "inharmonious races"—including Negros, Chinese, Mexicans, and ethnic whites—or high percentages of foreign-born populations like "Italians, Portuguese, Slavs, and Mexicans."^[v] The map and survey reports for San Jose were published in September, 1939 and three areas that were "redlined" documented a strong presence or "infiltration" of Mexicans (no area marked as yellow, blue, or green in San Jose contained Mexican, Negro, or Asian residents).

The HOLC map of 1939 presented a physical blueprint for projecting spaces and places where whites and Latinos would come to live in the city. One of the three redlined areas with an "infiltration of Mexicans", D11, was nestled southwest of downtown and the HOLC described it as an "Italian Town" due to the large number of Italian immigrants living in the region. Locals referred to the area as Goosetown because an excess number of geese found refuge in a nearby pond but within a decade the ethnoracial makeup of this area near downtown began shifting. Between 1950 and 1980 San Jose was one of the country's fastest growing cities; the population of San Jose ballooned from 95,280 to 629,531 and the number of Latinos exploded from 6,180 to 140,529.^[vi] During this same period, the population of Goosetown increased moderately from 21,766 to 23,649 but the Latino population boomed from just under 2,905 to 11,659, becoming one of the city and county's highest Latino-populated areas. Clearly, Latinos maintained the neighborhood populated as whites (Italians) moved away from the area in an around downtown. With the out-migration of whites and in-migration of Latinos the neighborhood might have been

called “El Ganso.”^[vii] Latinos maintained a sense of stability in the neighborhood beginning in the 1950s and kept these city blocks populated while white residents moved out of the core. The trend of immigrants, particularly those from Latin America, repopulating abandoned neighborhoods and revitalizing city life has recently been recognized as a phenomenon that occurred across the U.S. after the 1980s; San Jose provides an early example of this trend.^[viii]

During the 1950s, when Latinos living in the eastern peripheral barrios of San Jose earned enough money—and especially if they lived outside of the eastern city limits—they took the opportunity, just as white Americans of the time, to move into “better” neighborhoods. At the time, compared to the barrios in East San Jose and the eastern periphery, “better” barrios, like El Ganso, were located near the center of the city because of superior city services and infrastructure. One resident of Mayfair, a renown Latino barrio of East San Jose, recalled that ““The big shots don’t live in the same neighborhoods with us [in Mayfair]...Even if they once lived here, when they’ve made enough money, they usually move into town [San Jose] or to one of the fashionable suburbs.”^[ix] Relocation from eastern peripheral barrios to neighborhoods like El Ganso were signs of upward mobility; by moving into the city’s core, ethnic Mexicans rejected living in substandard living conditions without city services like running water, paved roads, or street lights. As some ethnic Mexicans improved their economic position, they left the Eastside and settled in San Jose proper, frequently moving into or near El Ganso and downtown to be around other middle-class Americans, especially those of Mexican descent.

During the 1950s, many markers helped establish middle-class status, but no other marker was more representative than homeownership and Latinos were not absent from this achievement. “Un Nuevo Tipo de Casa ‘ESTUDIO’ Construida en su lote por solamente \$2,570. [A new ‘studio’-style home built on your lot for only \$2,700,]” read one advertisement in a local

Spanish-language newspaper, *El Excéntrico*. The ad promoted home ownership for the Spanish-speaking population of San Jose and was paid for by Samuel G. Arrazate, a Latino real estate agent from San Jose. As part of the emerging professional, white-collar, middle class, he worked in an industry that celebrated and created the middle class. The announcement continues by encouraging those interested to visit Mr. Arrazate's office, located at 65 N. San Pedro Street in a corridor of the city's downtown business district.^[x] Printing the ad in Spanish identified Arrazate's target audience as Spanish-speakers residing in or near San Jose and reveals an existing or burgeoning market for Latinos as customers and, more importantly, as middle-class homeowners. In fact, at mid-century ethnic Mexicans lived in 126 owner-occupied dwelling units valued between \$5,000 and \$9,999 in San Jose's Goosetown neighborhood near downtown.^[xi] The total number of owner-occupied dwelling units in this price range for all whites in Goosetown was 1,601 making 8% of these units owned by Spanish-surnamed people. Although relatively low, these numbers show Latinos occupying space and claiming places near downtown as their permanent home. This humble number of Spanish Surname-owned dwelling units near the city's core, made up one-third of all San Jose's Spanish-surname-owned dwelling units in that price range.^[xii] Although relatively small, a significant number of Latino families in San Jose owned their home during the 1950s. Latino families established themselves as a key demographic in several neighborhoods near downtown and moved into the middle class.

At midcentury, a growing number of middle-class Latinos not only lived near downtown but also worked in businesses catering to the needs of Spanish speakers in the city and the county. While the majority of Spanish speakers worked in Santa Clara County's thriving agricultural sector, either in the fields picking fruit or in factories canning the county's goods, a cohort of business-minded Latinos emerged and they took the mantle of leadership early on in

the efforts to uplift their colonia in San Jose and Santa Clara County. Ethnic Mexicans reproduced Mexican culture and promoted Mexican nationalism, making their neighborhoods and downtown transnational spaces by contributing to an expanding “Mexico de afuera.”

Mexican Identities, Space, and Political Inroads in San Jose

Since the United States takeover of the Southwest in 1848, people of Mexican descent have maintained and preserved relationships with one another on both sides of the geopolitical border. Ethnic Mexican communities throughout the region persisted, grew, and thrived into the twentieth century providing a foundation for the growth of colonias and barrios that reproduced Mexican culture in the United States. The reproduction of Mexican culture in these Mexican spaces, especially after the Mexican Revolution in the 1910s, sustained and contributed to the growth of what Mexican intellectual Jose Vasconcelos called “Mexico de Afuera [Mexico from abroad].” Vasconcelos was a major architect of the cultural understanding that came to be known as Mexicanidad (Mexicanness) after Mexico’s revolution when he served as the Secretary of Public Education. Mexicanidad permeated throughout Mexican social, cultural, and political discourse for over half a century after the end of the armed Revolution and was utilized as a tool to unite a fractured Mexico by disseminating ideas, images, and sounds that promoted a shared cultural identity. The effectiveness of Mexicanidad in uniting Mexicans traversed the U.S.-Mexico border as the Mexican government and many Mexican nationals who fled to the U.S. worked to maintain some form of loyalty to Mexico by those living beyond its northern border.

While a Mexico de Afuera certainly existed before the 20th century, it was the refugees of the Mexican Revolution that truly sparked its growth. These Mexican refugees relocated especially to places in the Southwest where most ethnic Mexican people, settlements, and

communities already existed. In an effort to reach these emigrants and encourage them to maintain loyalty to Mexico while on their assumed sojourn the Mexican government created a formal line of communication with Mexican nationals residing in the Southwest, primarily through the Mexican Consular Service.^[xiii] In the 1920s, *Comisión Honorífica Mexicanas* (CHMs) were created in ethnic Mexican communities to serve as official extensions of the Consular Service. The CHMs aided Consulate attorneys in providing assistance to Mexican nationals in U.S. cities. *Comisiones* were ubiquitous throughout the Southwest and served as a means of communication between the sprinkled *colonias Mexicanas* in the region and the nearest Consul. Throughout the region it was clear that “[t]he overriding importance of the *comisión* was its position as the consulate’s ‘official representative’ to the *colonia Mexicana* and the Anglo society.”^[xiv]

In Southern California, there were thirty-nine *Comisiones* in five counties that reported to the Consul in Downtown Los Angeles.^[xv] These Consuls and their *Comisiones* provided service and support to Mexican people and are clearly an example of official political transnationalism where official offices of the Mexican government (Consuls) extended support and provided a presence in cities across the U.S. Southwest through smaller extensions (CHMs). The CHMs helped promote and reproduce Mexican culture, or *Mexicanidad*, that helped create and expand a *Mexico de Afuera*. Although the official Consul was an appointee from the Mexican government, sent to the U.S. to serve as its representative, the directory board of the *Comisiones* was comprised of Mexican nationals already living in the United States who looked to help their communities by serving as official liaisons to the Consul.

It is unclear how many *Comisiones* reported to the single Consul in northern California, San Francisco, but by the 1940s there was at least one established in Santa Clara County and it

operated out of San Jose. Like its counterparts throughout the Southwest, the Comisión Honorífica Mexicana of San Jose was comprised of “the most respected members of the [community]” and looked to serve, assist, and protect the ethnic Mexican community.^[xvi] The Consul General of San Francisco, along with the San Jose Comisión, frequently reached out to the ethnic Mexican community of the region through *El Excéntrico*, a popular bi-weekly Spanish-language newspaper in print from 1949-1981. Members of the Comisión were men from the colonia, many of whom owned local business in or around downtown San Jose—since its inception, a relationship existed between the CHM, local businesses, and leadership in the community. In fact, while *El Excéntrico* served as a news outlet, it was also a business. The newspaper’s creator, director, and publisher—Humberto Garcia II, was a Mexican national from Chihuahua who frequently served on the Comisión’s Mesa Directiva (Executive Board). During the 1950s and into the 1960s, the CHM served as an important organization in uniting ethnic Mexicans in San Jose and connecting them with their patria (motherland). However, other organizations and small business owners also worked to inspire, inform, educate, and unify the city’s ethnic Mexican community.

While Garcia owned a newspaper and possessed political and social clout within the colonia and San Jose, he was not the only ethnic Mexican in San Jose with a business or with the power to influence. The city was filled with entrepreneurs, managers, and a growing number of professionals who also saw their potential to work together and influence how Latinos in San Jose were treated, viewed, and considered. For example, in 1954 sixteen San Josean men of Mexican descent created “La Camara de Comercio Mexicana ” or the Mexican Chamber of Commerce (MCC). Members of the Camara owned and/or managed a variety of businesses located near the primary business district in downtown San Jose that included restaurants, night

clubs, a barber shop, auto body repair shops, bakeries, tortilla factories, a private physicians practice, a flower shop, and a grocery store. These businessmen provided goods and services to the ethnic Mexican community and expressed their desire to help build a better future for the “colonia.” In an opening address—printed in *El Excéntrico*—the Camara wrote, “San Jose marcha hacia el progreso y con él también nuestra colonia. Nuestros comerciantes Mexicanos se unen con el propósito de mano a mano conseguir el mejoramiento de nuestra colonia. [San Jose marches towards progress and so does our community. Mexican business owners are uniting to work hand-in-hand for the improvement of our community.]” The organization made clear that one of its purposes was to protect members of the colonia from fraud and address any issues that they experienced while shopping downtown, especially if problems occurred with one of the magazine’s sponsors.^[xvii] As business owners, these men viewed themselves as leaders in their community and wanted to create a body that would look out for the interests of its people as consumers.

Despite the MCCs initial introduction to the colonia in San Jose, its effectiveness (or productivity) is unclear, especially since many members may have prioritized their participation in other organizations like the CHM. John Zamora, a Mexican American transplant from California’s San Joaquin Valley, described the MCC as a “shadow organization of the Comisión Honorífica Mexicana” since the Camara’s inception in 1954. Initially, the MCCs membership appears to have been composed mostly of Mexican nationals who participated actively in the CHM. Aside from printing ads in *El Excéntrico* and hosting a few social events, the most prominent activity undertaken by the MCC was supporting the CHM in planning the fiestas patrias. Even the sponsorship of the celebrations was never, arguably, intentional, but rather, by

chance, because of the high level of cross pollination in membership between the CHM and the MCC.

Throughout the 1950s the Comisión Honorífica Mexicana (CHM) was one of the most influential organizations in the ethnic Mexican community. One of its primary goals in San Jose was to spread and promote the nationalist notion of *mexicanidad*, which it successfully continued to do by way of sponsoring the *fiestas patrias* well into the 1960s. It should be understood, however, that despite celebrating commemorative days in Mexican history the public display of Mexican traditions and the outpouring of people to these events was celebratory and political. Paradoxically, the celebration of Mexican nationalism through these public cultural events—sponsored by a Mexican nationalist organization—served as a strategy for American citizens of Mexican origin to claim space downtown as their own and use the event as a gateway to prompt local leaders to pay attention to them. The manner in which Mexican Americans politicized these functions and the reasoning behind the politicization were twofold. First, ethnic Mexicans took over public space in the urban core of not only the city but the county as well, staking claim to public spaces and inserting themselves into the public eye as part of the San Jose and South Bay community at large. Second, with the large number of participants and spectators, ethnic Mexicans tried to ensure that local government officials could not ignore them—this was how U.S. citizens used Mexican celebrations to make political inroads. The *fiestas patrias* were magnanimous displays of *mexicanidad* that ethnic Mexicans strategically employed as a means to ensure they were not forgotten or ignored.

These celebrations typically consisted of two parts: a parade downtown followed by a banquet. During the parade, cars were converted into floats with ethnic Mexicans promoting their businesses, mariachis performing as they promenaded down the avenue, and spectators

watching with anticipation for the *reina* to make her appearance. For months, young women from San Jose and nearby cities gathered votes and sponsorship to be named the *reina* and become the center of attention during the parade and banquet that followed. During the procession, Latinos filled the streets, coming from as far away as San Francisco and Watsonville (both roughly forty miles away from San Jose). The Mexican flag was raised by a color guard, *baile folclórico* dancers performed, and horses mounted by *rancheros* made their way across downtown. Often, these celebrations garnered a lot of attention from public figures as well. Over the years several U.S.-elected government officials, local and state, were frequently photographed next to Mexican consuls and leaders in Santa Clara County's ethnic Mexican community.

Although the parade drew the most attention, the banquets following the afternoon activities were also well attended by public figures and ethnic Mexicans eager to keep the festivities going. The Civic Auditorium in downtown opened in 1936 and since at least 1949 always served as the venue for the banquet. The banquet programs presented a schedule for the dinner, always beginning with a presentation of the *Himno Nacional de México* (Mexican national anthem). Paying homage to the patria with the Himno Nacional was customary but so were the activities that followed: performers singing and dancing for entertainment, the presentation of the *reina* and her court, and a final dance. Again, these banquets, like the parades, reveal the continued practice of performing cultural traditions that promoted pride in having connections with Mexico. The fiestas patrias converted both public and private spaces—areas where ethnic Mexicans lived, shopped, and played—into places where ethnic Mexicans manifested their transnational character by recreating social-cultural activities practiced in Mexico.

The MCC's success as an independent organization appears ambiguous with its major achievements tied only tangentially to the CHM's fiestas patrias. However, fifteen years after its founding, the business organization seriously attempted to reassert itself as an independent group with its own ambitions to serve the colonia. In 1969, there was a "reorganization" of the MCC and for two years the organization held a steady presence in the community with more frequent ads and announcements in *El Excéntrico*. The MCC held more frequent and consistent public meetings and encouraged local business owners to join by hosting membership drives and awards dinners for members. In 1970 the MCC broke with the CHM and attempted to sponsor its own fiestas patrias. The celebrations were still sites of contention where organizations and individuals squabbled to assert themselves as leaders and representatives of the community. Although the celebrations were supposed to represent unity through culture, they often highlighted mounting internal struggles and tensions within the community where issues of identity, class, and citizenship manifested. In 1970 the number of Mexican Americans greatly outnumbered the Mexican nationals in the city. Certainly the representation of Mexican American business owners was greater than those identifying as purely Mexican and more Mexican American membership in the MCC might explain the fracture between the two organizations. Despite trying to come into its own, efforts by the MCC were short lived and the organization soon faded out of the public eye.

As leaders in the community, especially as strong economic contributors to San Jose in general, several members of the Camara, and other businessmen, undertook high-ranking positions in other civic organizations and met with local government officials. As leaders of their community these businessmen had some level of influence when it came to local politics and addressing issues pertinent to the community.

Mexican American Chamber of Commerce

However, the Mexican American community in San Jose and across the Southwest was growing and so was their business community. Mexican American and other Latino businesses were sprouting across the United States during the 1970s as new immigrants made their way north from Mexico, Central and South America, and the Caribbean. Latin American migration to the United States as a whole slowly began repopulating and stabilizing neighborhoods across the country. As such, more Latino entrepreneurs opened businesses in their neighborhoods to fulfill the catering and social-cultural needs of the spaces where they lived. With a growing Spanish-speaking population across the country and a high concentration of ethnic Mexicans in the Southwest, a movement to unify the entire Spanish-speaking business community in Mexico's old territory emerged out of Northern California with San Jose playing a crucial role.

In 1972 a National Mexican American Chamber of Commerce (NMACC) was founded and established its headquarters in Stockton, California. By 1973 the NMACC was comprised of at least three chapters in California—Stockton, Sacramento, and Los Angeles—and looked to San Jose as one of its next potential sites for expansion in the Golden State. Two of the NMACC's Executive Board members organized a meeting with eight members of San Jose's Mexican American business community at the Old Mexico Restaurant at 3166 Monterey Road in San Jose. NMACC President, George Mosqueda, and Executive Director, Joe Flores, explained that "states such as Arizona, Texas, New Mexico, Oregon, Florida, Kansas, and New York were already organizing local chapters," to build clout for the national organization.^[xviii] The process appeared backward, establishing a national chamber before the foundation of local chapters, but the existence of a national organization—even if just in name—helped motivate and encourage small business owners to found local Mexican American chambers of commerce, knowing they

were helping to build the NMACC. Local chapters were to champion the mission and purpose of the National at home and their strength at the local level would strengthen the National. John Zamora, the first elected President of the San Jose Mexican American Chamber of Commerce (SJMACC) for its first five years, described the process as follows:

The new chapters and groupings of all the other states under the National MACC umbrella would give Mexican American owned businesses a powerful vehicle for negotiating change and advancing their interests into the mainstream of Economic Development across the country. The goals of the local chapters would be to serve the same function withing their local communities, to build membership, leadership and survival programs for Mexican American owned businesses and as a non-profit organization, be the voice of small businesses in their local communities.^[xix]

By the end of the meeting eight people in attendance signed on as founding members and selected a temporary executive board.^[xx]

While a MCC existed in San Jose since 1954, it never developed into a fully operational organization with clear purpose, goals, or mission that rendered it nearly inconsequential or ineffective. By 1973, when the SJMACC was founded, the MCC was dormant and non-existent. Rudy Belloumini was a member of the old MCC and helped establish the new SJMACC; he was elected as the SJMACC's first Publicity Chairman. Aside from Belloumini's membership, no other connection existed between the MCC and the SJMACC. In fact, several characteristics distinguished the two organizations including an emphasis on professionalism and accountability from the new SJMACC that the old MCC appeared to lack. In the initial meeting with the NMACC, George Mosqueda made clear that "[t]he Board of Directors of each new chapter had

to be a no-nonsense group dedicated to serving the membership and the community” and needed to avoid promoting personal agendas over the interests of the community as a whole.^[xxi] John Zamora, who served as the SJMACC’s President until 1977, commented that prior to the MACC, Spanish-speaking businessmen and owners in San Jose only gathered occasionally to celebrate events in the city but the events “were poorly organized and often were marred by deceit and fraud to the benefit of the organizers and involved much dissention and infighting among the different groups as a result.”^[xxii] In addition, another difference was that MCC members appeared to be mostly Mexican nationals who espoused mexicanidad (as did the CHM) and refused to speak English at meetings that frequently discouraged non-Spanish speakers of Mexican descent from joining. In contrast, the SJMACC conducted itself in a different manner by favoring English but often accommodating Spanish-speakers. The SJMACC also proved successful in promoting small businesses and informing ethnic Mexican business owners in San Jose on local policies and procedures for operating their stores, restaurants, and offices.

Throughout its first year, the SJMACC struggled to make headway within the community and with the city of San Jose. According to Zamora, people were wary about joining the SJMACC because they did not see the benefit or they conflated the SJMACC with the old MCC and other organizations who proved unsuccessful in bringing projects to fruition. If establishing legitimacy and professionalism was the goal, it did not help that the SJMACC’s first office was located in the home of Treasurer-Secretary Mary Esther. In addition, the city council, the San Jose Chamber of Commerce, and the Downtown Small Business Association refused to acknowledge the need for another business organization. These other organizations argued that they already offered enough support and services for small businesses and that another business organization would waste city funding and resources. Despite the difficulties, Zamora and the

SJMACC forged on, moving their office to the Vintage Towers on Santa Clara Street in downtown San Jose and built their credibility by creating a logo that was placed on stationery and business cards and addressing the problems of their thirty members.^[xxiii]

During the following two years, the SJMACC gained tremendous momentum and earned the respect of the local business community and city government. Re-elected to a second and third term, Zamora began a public relations campaign that involved going into the community and explaining the SJMACC's purpose and goals to Latinos, small business owners (of diverse racial backgrounds), the San Jose Chamber of Commerce, and city council members. He explained to everyone that the SJMACC "wanted to become part of the mainstream in the community, and participate in the process of the governmental decision-making in matters of economic development within our community."^[xxiv] At first glance, "our" might be taken to mean "Mexican American" but a bilingual brochure distributed by the SJMACC provides more information. The pamphlet explained the organization's history, goals, and services but also made clear that the Mexican American label was utilized so that "we can act as a voice that has the respect of not only the small business man but all ethnic groups as well as civil-industrial organizations, for the betterment of *everyone* in the City of San Jose, and Santa Clara County [emphasis mine]."^[xxv] The SJMACC, through business, attempted to bring Mexican Americans, other minority groups, and small business owners to the forefront of conversation for larger businesses and city officials so that the needs of small businesses and minorities be met.

Although this strategy, using business to get in with the "mainstream" business class and local government, was utilized by ethnic Mexican leadership in the past, the SJMACC managed to achieve better legitimacy and respect from the city's movers and shakers. As part of the SJMACC's publicity campaign, the organization spearheaded a membership campaign,

incorporated as a non-profit, and established an Advisory Board. Through the growth campaign the organization multiplied nearly ten-fold, demonstrating not only a tenacity for success but also a desire by local small businesses to participate. In 1975 the *San Jose Mercury-News* reported the membership campaign “raised the total of small business firms represented to more than 250.” The article continued, “[f]rom a one-man operation, the Chamber has also outgrown its first two locations, is now established at 416 N. First St. and has a staff including three full-time secretaries.”^[xxvi] In fact, in just two years of operation, the SJMACC celebrated more membership than the Los Angeles MACC that traced its history to the 1930s.^[xxvii] President Zamora reflected that in 1975 the San Jose MACC became “the darling chapter of the National Organization.”^[xxviii]

Increase in membership grew from tremendous effort on the part of the MACC executive board but announcing an advisory board and its members truly improved the perception of the organization. Zamora recalled that people did not trust the SJMACC but the advisory board, especially because of who was on it, provided much needed legitimacy.^[xxix] Letters were sent out to recognized and respected members of San Jose’s elite class asking for participation in the SJMACC’s advisory committee. Former city manager, Anthony “Dutch” Hamann, received such a letter in April 1975 and accepted the role. By May 28, 1975 the SJMACC Advisory Committee was complete and included thirteen members comprised of two Santa Clara County Supervisors, officials of the *San Jose Mercury News*, the largest development company in San Jose, a city council member, and the President of the San Jose Chamber of Commerce.^[xxx]

As the SJMACC expanded, President John Zamora looked to extend services and expand operations but needed funding to help pay for increased activity. After some inquiries, Zamora realized securing financial support from the city required incorporation, a step in further

legitimizing the SJMACC. On January 1, 1975 Articles of Incorporation for the Mexican American Chamber of Commerce were filed with the State of California. The SJMACC was recognized as a non-profit whose “primary purposes are to promote Mexican-American business, industry, commerce and culture in the City of San Jose, County of Santa Clara, State of California, and the United States of America.”^[xxxix] Later that year, the SJMACC formally asked the city council for a \$12,000 grant to hire a full-time administrator and buy office supplies. City council denied the request in a 5-1 vote with Councilman Joe Colla commenting that the city spent \$280,000 on the city’s main chamber and suggested the SJMACC join. However, Zamora explained the importance of the SJMACC by highlighting several issues including: the cheap membership fee (\$35) compared to the larger chamber (\$120); the emphasis on small business that the larger chamber ignored; and the importance of helping local business. Zamora charged that the San Jose City Chamber of Commerce was “more interested in going to England to get a firm to locate a factory here than in a small merchant’s problems with city codes or the trouble he has getting a loan.”^[xxxix] Despite this minor setback, the SJMACC moved forward with projects like publishing a bi-monthly business magazine, establishing a Sister City Program, and spearheading the arrival of San Jose’s first international trade show.

In 1976 the San Jose MACC released its first issue of *La Cámara* (The Chamber), a bi-monthly business magazine. The publication existed for at least two years and was produced professionally by Directory Publications, a local San Jose business owned and operated. The firm specialized in printing national special-interest handbooks and directories; the company published the Dining and Lodging Guides for the San Jose Chamber of Commerce. Unlike *El Excéntrico*, the SJMACC’s magazine targeted English readers but was meant for anyone interested in learning about business and economic developments in San Jose and the County. As

with their meetings, this was a break from the MCC, too, because *La Cámara* emphasized the “Americanness” of the organization through the use of the English language to promote acculturation. To assure readers about the magazine’s commitment to inform them on the economy and business, the inaugural stated that the magazine “will deal with the industry, commerce and culture of metropolitan San Jose as it applies to the Mexican-American population in particular, and to business and social communities in general.” The publication served as “the official voice” of the SJMACC and “designed to serve the business community and at the same time educate the public on contributions and difficulties of Mexican-American and small business firms generally.” For the duration of its publication, copies of the magazine were given to members of the SJMACC and the San Jose Chamber of Commerce and sold to the public at \$1.50 for a single issue and \$8.00 for a yearly subscription.^[xxxiii]

The San Jose MACC thrived locally and its President was elected Vice President for the National Mexican American Chamber of Commerce in 1976. Zamora’s work with the national chamber certainly influenced his thought process regarding the potential scope and reach the San Jose chapter possessed. In addition, his identity as a Mexican American and ability to speak Spanish opened doors for the SJMACC to establish connections and develop relationships with Mexico. In 1975 Zamora began conversations with Mayor Janet Gray Hayes to establish a Sister City Program with the city of Veracruz, Mexico. As a Mexican American with control of the Spanish language, Zamora embraced his transnational character when he imagined the opportunity to connect the organization’s ethnic Mexican make up and its business interests with business people in Mexico. In early 1976 Zamora, along with other SJMACC members, were greeted at the Veracruz airport by members of the city’s own chamber of commerce. The next few days were spent rubbing elbows with Veracruz city officials and local business leaders. At

the welcome reception, Zamora was presented with keys to Veracruz and he delivered letters of introduction from Mayor Hayes and Ned Cicciu, President of Pacific Neighbors, the Sister City coordinators. When the delegation returned, Zamora commented, ““The people were so friendly and beautiful that a close friendship was developed in the short time we were there.””^[xxxiv]

Through the Sister City Program, Zamora and the SJMACC established a government-sponsored transnational connection between San Jose and Veracruz; as a Mexican American, Zamora imagined the possibility for cultural and economic exchange to extend beyond San Jose and the United States.

In fact, while the initial visit from the SJMACC delegation to Veracruz demonstrated efforts to export American culture and ideas to Mexico, Zamora and the SJMACC also worked to bring Mexico to San Jose. Early on, between 1973 and 1974 there were efforts by the SJMACC to build a Mexican themed complex in downtown, along First Street, to host the Mexican Consulate and provide other services for the Mexican American community in San Jose and throughout the region. The proposed project was endorsed by local government officials like Santa Clara County Supervisor Dominic Cortese and San Jose Councilman Alfredo Garza and letters of support were sent to Miles Maynard of the State of California Department of Transportation in San Francisco.^[xxxv] John W. Hamilton, the Project Management Director of the San Jose City Manager’s Office also wrote to Mr. Maynard, “As far as we are concerned, Mr. Zamora’s idea for the Mexican Village seems to agree with our objectives for the core area to provide and encourage new development, especially those which are oriented to providing new life and activity.”^[xxxvi] After two decades of divestment in downtown, the San Jose city officials looked to increase foot traffic and vitality in the old business district; small Latino businesses did enough to keep their local economy afloat but did little to attract visitors from outside the area.

Some local officials viewed the development of a new “Mexican Village” downtown as a way to bring the “mainstream” back to downtown.

Despite broad support in the early 1970s, the project did not come to fruition as a memoranda from 1977 documents continued efforts for a Mexican complex downtown. The memoranda more explicitly details the “Mexican” nature of the proposed project. The SJMACC explained:

We would like to support a project in San Jose which would permit the Mexican Government to develop the various tourist and industrial attractions of the various states of Mexico. This building could also house the Mexican Consul and become a center of activity in Northern California. The building has a second, third and fourth floor which could be partitioned for the display of Mexican products and services. Field representatives could headquarter in these areas and originate orders from that location. Trade shows could be held periodically at the location.^[xxxvii]

The SJMACC pushed to enhance economic activity downtown and utilized a transnational approach to attract funding and business back downtown. They argued for a space downtown dedicated to Mexican interests that would serve, both, Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants through business and leisure activities. And furthermore, suggesting the site as a home for the Mexican Consulate demonstrates a couple of things: 1) the SJMACC recognized the need for a building where the Mexican Consulate could operate (a Consulate had been established by the Mexican government in San Jose in the late 1960s); and 2) serving the interests of San Jose’s largest minority group included appealing to their cultural needs that

required transnational considerations. Although this project also failed, a Mexican Consulate was temporarily established downtown during the 1990s.

It is worth noting that despite these setbacks, John Zamora and the SJMACC played a crucial role in successfully connecting the San Jose Chamber of Commerce with the Office of Fairs and Expositions in Mexico. In doing so, Zamora and the SJMACC helped bring the first international trade show to San Jose in September 1977. While working as the President of the San Jose MACC, Zamora was also highly involved with the National MACC movement and efforts to procure federal funding. In his work with the National, he met the President de Ferias y Exposiciones Mexicanas (PFEM) in Texas during a visit in Texas in 1976 and Zamora asked him to bring a trade show to San Jose. Zamora recalled the PFEM explained to him that the Mexican President, Jose Lopez Portillo, did not enjoy a good relationship with the U.S. government at the time and decided Mexico would only sponsor one trip to the United States in 1977. The trip would be for an annual trade show in San Antonio, Texas that existed for more than twenty years and Portillo did not want to break the tradition. However, the PFEM promised to look into the matter.^[xxxviii]

Later in 1976 PFEM invited Zamora to a celebration in Mexico City where Zamora walked next to President Portillo for the duration of the parade. With a slight chuckle and smile on his face, Zamora recalled in an interview, “you know, I walked next to President Portillo the whole parade and we didn’t speak to each other. But when it was over, he looked at me shook my hand and said ‘va tener su feria, Señor Zamora.’” To avoid looking weak or like he was going back on his word that Mexico would only visit the U.S one time, the PFEM and Portillo planned a route from San Antonio to San Jose to avoid crossing the U.S.-Mexico border, thus making two stops in one visit.^[xxxix] From September 21-25, in conjunction with the Bi-centennial celebration

of San Jose's founding, San Jose hosted over 100 exhibits of Mexican manufacturers and distributors. An advertisement in the *San Jose Mercury News* reads "MEXPO '77 EXPOSITION OF THE INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND ARTISTIC EXPORTS OF MEXICO...The first International Trade Fair in the history of Santa Clara County."^[x1]

By the late 1970s the MCC was a relic of the Spanish-speaking business class and the MACC solidified itself as a champion of small business. The MACC struggled to establish itself at first but quickly earned legitimacy among the Spanish-speaking, other minority business owners, and "mainstream" businessmen and government officials alike. Legitimacy allowed the organization to expand membership, making it one of the largest chapters of the National MACC, giving the local chapter influence to gain support for their projects. The MACC utilized transnationalism to establish a Sister City Program with the city of Veracruz, Mexico and bring the first international trade show to the South Bay.

Conclusion

By the late 1930s Latinos established a permanent presence in a few neighborhoods within San Jose's official boundaries, primarily near downtown and on the Eastside. Their presence near downtown helped establish the area as a transnational space as they opened businesses that catered to their needs and celebrated social-cultural events in the business district. With their booming population, especially between 1950 and 1980, many business leaders in the community utilized their Mexican culture as a way make political inroads. They promoted Mexican social-cultural events, like the *fiestas patrias*, in the business district to unabashedly make their presence in the city known. In doing so, ethnic Mexicans also highlighted their transnational character by proudly celebrating their continued connections to and relationships

with Mexico. Overtime, the business community became more Mexican American than Mexican but the ties to the motherland never diminished. The creation of a Sister City Program with Veracruz, Mexico and the commitment to bring an international trade show from Mexico to San Jose demonstrate the ongoing desire and ability of ethnic Mexicans to imagine their reality beyond the United States that sustains and feeds the growth of a *Mexico de afuera*.

[i] All words written in Spanish from *El Excéntrico* are transcribed in their original form. As such, the newspaper rarely (if ever) included accents. All translations are my own. Daniel Saldaña, “Pilares Del Progreso,” *El Excéntrico*, January 5, 1964.

[ii] The Spanish-speaking population of San Jose was and continues to be over 90% of Mexican descent. However, the presence of other Latin American nationalities should not be ignored as they also contributed to the formation and development of the Spanish-speaking community in San Jose. For the purpose of this paper, the terms Latino, Spanish speaker, and ethnic Mexican will be used interchangeably to represent Spanish speakers as a whole. When it is appropriate, the terms Mexican and Mexican American will be used to distinguish differences in citizenship.

[iii] The term “México de Afuera” was coined by Mexican intellectual and one time presidential candidate José Vasconcelos. He is most popularly recognized as Mexico’s Secretary of Public Education and author of “La Raza Cosmica” (the Cosmic Race) that provided the foundation for Mexico’s nation-building and national identity campaign during the post-revolutionary period, highlighting mestizaje as central to unifying a fractured country. John Skirius, “Vasconcelos and México de Afuera (1928),” *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 7; 3, (Fall 1976): 479-497 as cited in José Angel Hernández, *Mexican American Colonization during the Nineteenth Century: A History of the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 19.

[iv] Transnationalism is a useful concept for analysis especially when dealing with populations who still hold connections to a mother country and recreate social, cultural, economic, and political activities from their motherland in their homeland (host country). In this paper I utilize transnationalism as a way to refer to attempts by ethnic Mexicans to recreate social-cultural norms from Mexico in U.S. cities, neighborhoods, and streets and their efforts to maintain connections with Mexico. For more on this understanding of transnationalism as it pertains to Latino communities see: Andrew K. Sandoval-Strausz, “Latino Landscapes,”; Alicia Schmidt Camacho, *Migrant Imaginaries: latino Cultural Politics in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (New York: New York University Press, 2008); Rubén Hernández-León, *Metropolitan Migrants: The Migration of Urban Mexicans to the United States* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008); Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof, *A Tale of Two Cities: Santo Domingo and New York After 1950* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

[v] Robert K. Nelson, LaDale Winling, Richard Marciano, Nathan Connolly, et al., “Mapping Inequality,” *American Panorama*, ed. Robert K. Nelson and Edward L. Ayers, accessed August 6, 2020, [https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/\[YOUR VIEW\]](https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/[YOUR VIEW]). San Jose. Map of 4th Ward and HOLC Map.

[vi] 1960 and 1980 Census; mention the undercounting in 1960 because of those in peripheral land and only counting those in particular tracts with 250 people or more.

[vii] Today, the general area that was once referred to as Goosetown and what I refer to as “El Ganso” is comprised of several neighborhoods. Some of these neighborhoods include: Alma, Washington-Guadalupe, Goodyear-Mastic, Auzerais-Josefa, Gardner, North Willow Glen, and East Virginia.

[viii] Andrew Sandoval Strausz, *Barrio America: How Latino Immigrants Saved the American City* (New York: Basic Books, 2019).

[ix] Margaret Clark, *Health in the Mexican-American Culture: A Community Study* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1970...2nd edition), 18.

[x] *El Excéntrico Magazine*, “Un Nuevo Tipo de Casa,” August 20, 1953.

[xi] U.S. Bureau of the Census. *U.S. Census of Population: 1950* Vol. III, *Census Tract Statistics*, Chapter 50. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1952. Table 7. “Characteristics of Dwelling Units Occupied by White Persons With Spanish Surname, For Selected Census Tracts: 1950.”

- [xii] U.S. Bureau of the Census. U.S. Census of Population: 1950 Vol. III, Census Tract Statistics, Chapter 50. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1952. Table 3. "Characteristics of Dwelling Units, By Census Tracts: 1950." Also Table 7
- [xiii] Mexican Consular officers were charged with several responsibilities including: 1) to maintain a positive and progressive view of Mexico; 2) act as a civil judge; and 3) perform notary duties. Consuls represented the Mexican government on U.S. soil and their tasks were simple, "to protect the interests and rights of Mexican nationals." For the most part, Consuls only served Mexican nationals but sometimes they also acted on behalf of children born in the U.S. to Mexican parents (by extension of the Mexican constitution the nationality of parents was given to their children regardless of their place of birth). At times, the Mexican Consular Service would invoke their Constitution or the Mexican Nationality and Naturalization act of 1934 (that also cemented Mexican citizenship to children of Mexican-born parents) to extend services or offer support for Mexican Americans. Francisco E. Balderrama, *In Defense of La Raza: The Los Angeles Mexican Consulate and the Mexican Community, 1929-1936* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1982).
- [xiv] Francisco E. Balderrama, *In Defense of La Raza*, 9-10.
- [xv] Francisco E. Balderrama, *In Defense of La Raza*, 9-10.
- [xvi] Manuel Gamio, *Mexican Immigration to the United States: A Study of Human Migration and Adjustment* (New York, NY: Dover Publications, Inc), 132.
- [xvii] "Se forma en San Jose la Camara de Comercio Mexicano," *El Excéntrico*, November 20, 1954; "Better Business Bureau Briefer," *El Excéntrico*, September 20, 1955; "Better Business Bureau Briefer," *El Excéntrico*, August 20, 1955; "Better Business Bureau Briefer," *El Excéntrico*, September 5, 1955.
- [xviii] John Zamora, "The History of the San Jose Mexican American Chamber of Commerce, the first 5 years, 1973," n.d, in my possession, 1.
- [xix] John Zamora, "The History of the San Jose Mexican American Chamber of Commerce, the first 5 years, 1973," n.d, in my possession, 1.
- [xx] Handwritten notes show the signatures of the following individuals: Rudy Belloumini, Noe Longoria, Angie Martinez, Juan Espinosa, Mary Esther Sanchez, Joseph Calderon, Juan (John) Zamora, and Henry A. Verdugo. These notes in conjunction with typed notes document the following: President, Juan Espinosa; Vice President, John Zamora; Secretary-Treasurer, Angie Martinez; Publicity Chairman, Rudy Belloumini; Industrial Professional Chairman, Joseph Calderon; Booking Chairman, Mary Esther; Unnamed position, Henry A. Verdugo. "Mexican American Chamber of Commerce Meeting Minutes," [handwritten] April 2, 1973 (in my possession); "Mexican American Chamber of Commerce Meeting Minutes," [typed] April 2, 1973, 1 (in my possession).
- [xxi] John Zamora, "The History of the San Jose Mexican American Chamber of Commerce, the first 5 years, 1973," [n.d, in my possession], 1.
- [xxii] John Zamora, "The History of the San Jose Mexican American Chamber of Commerce, the first 5 years, 1973," [n.d, in my possession], 1
- [xxiii] John Zamora, "The History of the San Jose Mexican American Chamber of Commerce, the first 5 years, 1973," [n.d, in my possession], 2.
- [xxiv] John Zamora, "The History of the San Jose Mexican American Chamber of Commerce, the first 5 years, 1973," [n.d., in my possession].
- [xxv] "What is MACC?" brochure [n.d., in my possession].
- [xxvi] "Zamora Chosen by C of C," San Jose Mercury News, October 15, 1975.
- [xxvii] John G. Zamora, "The President's Column," *La Camara*, January/February, Volume 1 No. 1 (San Jose, CA: Directory Publications, 1975), 21.
- [xxviii] John Zamora, "The History of the San Jose Mexican American Chamber of Commerce, the first 5 years, 1973," [n.d, in my possession], 3.
- [xxix] Interview with John Zamora, March 5, 2017.
- [xxx] San Jose Mexican American Chamber of Commerce: Advisory Committee, n.d, in Anthony Hamann Papers, Santa Clara University, Box __, Mexican American Chamber of Commerce Folder; San Jose Mexican American Chamber of Commerce: Letter from John Zamora to Anthony Hamann, April 10, 1975, in Anthony Hamann Papers, Santa Clara University, Box __, Mexican American Chamber of Commerce Folder; San Jose Mexican American Chamber of Commerce: Letter from Anthony Hamann to John Zamora, May 5, 1975, in Anthony Hamann Papers, Santa Clara University, Box __, Mexican American Chamber of Commerce Folder; San Jose Mexican American Chamber of Commerce: Letter from Anthony Hamann to John Zamora, May 28, 1975, in Anthony Hamann Papers, Santa Clara University, Box __, Mexican American Chamber of Commerce Folder; John Zamora, "The History of the San Jose Mexican American Chamber of Commerce, the first 5 years, 1973," [n.d, in my possession], 3-4.

[xxxii] “Articles of Incorporation of Mexican-American Chamber of Commerce of the City of San Jose, State of California,” January 1, 1975 [in my possession].

[xxxiii] “Mexican-American Chamber Loses Bid for City Funding,” San Jose Mercury News, October 9, 1975.

[xxxiiii] “Mexican-American Chamber To Publish Own Magazine,” San Jose Mercury News, November 30, 1975.

John Zamora possesses photocopies of every cover of *La Camara* for the first two years. He also possesses photocopies of every “The President’s Column” for these two years (12) which he wrote since he was the San Jose MACC President. Zamora was kind enough to provide me with copies which I now possess. He mentioned that he used to possess original copies of every issue, including those after 1977, but they were lent out and never returned. He now only has in his possession a full copy of the January/February 1977 issue. Information on pricing and the publisher come from this issue, *La Camara*, January/February, Volume 2 No. 1 (San Jose, CA: Directory Publications, 1975), 2.

[xxxv] “Chamber Delegation to San Jose’s Sister City,” *La Camara*, January/February, Volume 1 No. 1 (San Jose, CA: Directory Publications, 1975), 21.

[xxxvi] Letter from Dominic Cortese, October 31, 1973 [in my possession]; Letter from Alfredo Garza to Miles Maynard, State of California Department of Transportation, July 29, 1974 [in my possession].

[xxxvii] Letter from John W. Hamilton to Miles Maynard, November 1, 1973 [in my possession].

[xxxviii] Memoranda, n.d. [in my possession].

[xxxix] Interview with John Zamora, February 27, 2021.

[xl] Interview with John Zamora, February 27, 2021. Zamora left his post as President of the SJMACC in 1977 and went on to garner support for the National MACC movement. After a few name changes, the National Mexican American Chamber of Commerce incorporated in New Mexico as the United States Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. Documentation shows that Juan (John) Zamora was recognized as the Immediate Past President of the organization. “U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Steering Committee Meeting” April 20, 1979 [in my possession]; “Certificate of Incorporation of United States Hispanic Chamber of Commerce,” July 6, 1979 [in my possession].

[xli] “MEXPO ’77,” San Jose Mercury News, September 21, 1977.