

“We Are This Barrio”: Contextualizing the 1970  
Takeover of Logan Heights’  
“Neighborhood House”

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## **Abstract**

In October 1970, less than six months after the takeover of Chicano Park, an assemblage of Logan Heights residents, student activists, and Chicano organizations seized control of the Neighborhood House in the southeastern quarter of San Diego. While extensive literature exists analyzing the takeover of Chicano Park and its significance within San Diego's Chicano Movement, few scholars have adequately examined the occupation of the Neighborhood House, a former settlement house located in the historically Mexican American neighborhood of Barrio Logan, just a few blocks from the park. This paper argues that the 1970 takeover of Neighborhood House was an equally important claim to place by residents fighting decades of segregation, displacement, and political repression—a seizure of urban space that radically transformed a Progressive-era settlement targeting Mexican immigrants into a community-owned service center. Through a close analysis of personal correspondences, flyers, and Chicano newspapers from the time of its takeover, I demonstrate that residents used the occupation to reestablish community control in response to decades of encroachment on the neighborhood of Logan Heights by the City of San Diego. Community activists saw land and community services as inextricably intertwined with the larger Chicano Movement, and the Neighborhood House became a place for Chicana/o self-expression and solidarity. As such, the takeover of the Neighborhood House was a defining moment in which the Barrio Logan community effectively channeled generational frustrations and hardships into feelings of solidarity and direct action.

## Introduction

In September 2024, the San Diego History Center unveiled to the public an exhibition entitled *La Neighbor: A Settlement House 1914-1972*. This exhibition utilized oral histories, photographs, and ephemera to chronicle the history of the “Neighborhood House,” a facility that once stood at 1809 National Avenue in San Diego’s southeastern Logan Heights neighborhood. Established in 1914 by members of the city’s College Women’s Club (CWC), the Neighborhood House—colloquially known as “La Neighbor”—began as a settlement house seeking to address the subpar health and living conditions of Logan Heights’ growing Mexican immigrant population through the process of “Americanization.”<sup>1</sup> As evidenced by baseball jerseys, scrapbooks, and artwork displayed throughout the exhibition, the Neighborhood House would transform over the course of the 20th century into a vibrant community center and social hub serving the educational, health, and recreational needs of the neighborhood’s predominantly Chicana/o population. By the midcentury, *La Neighbor* became what many residents considered the heart of Logan Heights.<sup>2</sup>

This recent exhibition reflects current efforts by local historical institutions to inform the San Diego public about the existence of a settlement house in Logan Heights and suggests a newfound interest in the institution among scholars. Despite such heightened attention, however, one striking development of the center has received perplexingly limited coverage: its takeover by residents in 1970. Although scholar Kyle Ciani has thoroughly examined the founding of the settlement house and historians have begun mentioning the Neighborhood House in their accounts of the neighborhood’s social and political history, the 1970 takeover has remained a mere footnote in documented histories of *La Neighbor* and Logan Heights.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Kyle Ciani, “Neighborhood Care: Localizing the Settlement House Movement,” in *Choosing to Care: A Century of Childcare and Social Reform in San Diego, 1850-1950* (University of Nebraska Press, 2019), 127-129.

<sup>2</sup> Maria Garcia, *La Neighbor: A Settlement House in Logan Heights*, (self-pub., 2016).

<sup>3</sup> For examples of Kyle Ciani’s works focusing on the founding of the Neighborhood House, see “Revelations of a Reformer: Helen D. Marsten Beardsley and Progressive Social Activism,” *The Journal of San Diego History* 50, no. 3 & 4 (2004): 102-123 and Ciani, *Choosing to Care*. For examples of social and political histories incorporating the Neighborhood House, see Rudy P. Guevarra, *Becoming Mexipino: Multiethnic Identities and Communities in San Diego* (Rutgers University Press, 2012) and Richard Griswold Del Castillo, *Chicano San Diego: Cultural Space and the Struggle for Justice* (University of Arizona Press, 2008).

Though muted in the historical record, the 1970 takeover made much noise and left a powerful impression on the Logan Heights community at the time. On October 5th, 1970, a 60-year-old lifelong resident of Logan Heights, Laura Rodriguez, fearlessly chained herself to the doors of the Neighborhood House, inciting a two-month-long occupation of the building by residents, local university students, and Chicano organizations. The mothers, fathers, elders, and youth of Logan Heights united across gender and generational lines to support and sustain the effort.<sup>4</sup> The Neighborhood House was successfully occupied by protesters until December 6, 1970, when local police raided the occupied facility on suspicion of criminal activity within its walls.<sup>5</sup> While San Diego's mainstream press at the time offered little coverage of the occupation, the city's Chicano press eagerly observed and chronicled its developments, celebrating the takeover as a grand liberation effort by the community of Logan Heights. This language of independence and the involvement of both residents and Chicano activists in the struggle suggest that the takeover was deeply political and meaningful to Logan Heights residents, thus making it a worthy point of study in both the neighborhood's history and the local Chicano Movement. Such a comprehensive analysis of the takeover, however, has not yet been conducted.

One potential reason for the lack of coverage afforded to the occupation of the Neighborhood House is the overwhelming historical and contemporary attention another takeover in 1970 Logan Heights has attracted: the takeover of Chicano Park. In April 1970, six months before the takeover of the Neighborhood House, a militant takeover occurred just blocks away from the facility, on a pocket of land beneath the newly-inaugurated Coronado Bay Bridge. This takeover was an immediate response by residents and student activists to the City of San Diego's plan to build a Highway Patrol Station on the land despite the City Council's promise to allocate the space for a public park. What ensued was a twelve-day occupation of the land in which hundreds of protesters from the neighborhood and across Southern California gathered to form chains around the construction equipment, plow the land, and plant

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<sup>4</sup> "Chicanos Take Over The Neighborhood House," *La Verdad*, October 1970, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, The University of Texas Libraries, Austin, TX.

<sup>5</sup> "The Trial of Neighborhood House 5," 1971, Box 5, Folder 13, Neighborhood House Collection, Chicano Park Museum & Cultural Center, San Diego, CA.

trees, effectively reclaiming the land as their own.<sup>6</sup> Chicano Park—which still stands today, now adorned with vibrant murals depicting elements of Chicana/o identity—serves as an enduring reminder of Mexican American resilience and identity. Moreover, the park remains a popular point of study for historians, who have linked its creation to the ideas of self-determination, community control, and direct action associated with the local and regional Chicano Movements of the 1960s and 70s.<sup>7</sup> Yet, contemporary discussions of Chicano activism in Logan Heights often begin and end with the creation of Chicano Park, failing to acknowledge the takeover involving many of the same actors expressing similar sentiments that occurred months later at 1809 National Avenue.

Another likely reason for the lack of scholarship on the Neighborhood House occupation is the unavailability of sources from the time of the takeover. Indeed, most of the papers once housed at the Neighborhood House—including correspondences between protesters and outside organizations—were destroyed before the end of the occupation, seemingly to protect the identities of protesters.<sup>8</sup> While the disposal of such documents has created several holes in the chronology of the occupation and, thus, has made it a difficult event for historians to study, oral histories by protesters and clippings from Chicano newspapers may help fill in some of these holes. Moreover, a new, developing archive in the Logan Heights area, the Chicano Park Museum & Cultural Center (CPMCC) Archive, is in the process of collecting and cataloguing letters, flyers, and meeting notes associated with the occupation, thus offering the public new, invaluable insight into the causes and unfoldings of the takeover.

This thesis seeks to analyze primary documents from the CPMCC's new archive to determine why the 1970 takeover of the Neighborhood House occurred and what the effort symbolized to the Logan Heights community at the time. By synthesizing information found in oral histories, Chicano newspapers, and correspondences circulated throughout the community, I will identify the participants in the takeover

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<sup>6</sup> “Chicano Park 1970-1977,” *El Chingazo*, 1977, 4, “Aztec Printing Production Files,” Box 61, Folder 12, MSS-0649, Herman Baca Papers, Special Collections & Archives, UC San Diego, La Jolla, CA.

<sup>7</sup> See Martin Rosen and James Fisher, “Chicano Park and the Chicano Park Murals: Barrio Logan, City of San Diego, California,” *The Public Historian* 23, no. 4 (2001): 91–111, <https://doi.org/10.1525/tph.2001.23.4.91> and Eric Avila, “Taking Back the Freeway: Strategies of Adaptation and Improvisation” in *The Folklore of the Freeway: Race and Revolt in the Modernist City*, 149–80 (University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

<sup>8</sup> Maria Garcia, interview by Tina Zarpour, 2024, All In Community Archiving Initiative, San Diego History Center, San Diego, CA, Accessed at <https://allin.sandiegohistory.org/Documents/Detail/maria-garcia-interview/6495>.

and their cited purposes, considering how the specific grievances expressed by protesters reflect shared, intergenerational frustrations among the predominantly Mexican American community of Logan Heights. Moreover, I will consider the occupation's position within the local and regional Chicano Movements, analyzing how the language and strategies adopted throughout the struggle were influenced by the emerging Chicano Movement and its associated ideologies.

I argue that the takeover and occupation of the Neighborhood House was an immediate response by residents to the deterioration of the former settlement house from a vibrant recreational and social center serving the needs of Logan Heights' Mexican American community to a federally-sponsored social service office run by outside professionals. As a result of this transformation—which I identify as beginning in the late 1950s—residents seized control of the Neighborhood House in order to gain greater community control over the facility and restore it to its former glory. Yet, as evidenced by open letters and flyers circulated by protesters during the occupation, the push for community control over the facility was also underpinned by decades of encroachment on the neighborhood by the City of San Diego's industrial enterprises, infrastructure projects, and hypervigilant police authorities, which, taken together, engendered patterns of residential segregation, displacement, and economic/political repression suffered by generations of residents and led to the development of “Barrio Logan.” I reason that the desire for community control fostered by these persistent abuses was successfully articulated and realized at this specific moment in time due to the resources and ideologies offered by the emerging Chicano Movement.

By extending the narrative of Chicano activism in Logan Heights beyond the takeover of Chicano Park in April 1970 and incorporating the lesser-known takeover of the Neighborhood House months later, I will identify an extended, deliberate push for community control in the neighborhood. I reason that the takeovers of 1970 were a means for the Mexican American community of Barrio Logan—subjected to years of encroachment and political repression—to express their grievances and reclaim their community spaces using the language and strategies of self-determination and direct action propagated by the Chicano Movement. To this end, I will interpret the takeover and occupation of the Neighborhood House as a triumphant, organized Chicano resistance against decades of abuses enacted on the barrio, thus

rendering it a defining moment in Logan Heights' history and the history of the Chicano Movement in San Diego.

This thesis is divided into three chapters. Chapter one will examine the evolution of the Neighborhood House and Logan Heights up to the takeover in October 1970. Drawing from oral histories conducted by the San Diego History Center, as well as newspaper clippings found throughout San Diego's mainstream press (*The San Diego Union* and *San Diego Sun*), I will chronicle the Neighborhood House's activities and leadership from 1914 to 1970, detailing the changing character of the settlement house and speculating on the ways its programs influenced generations of Mexican Americans growing up in Logan Heights. The evolution of the House will be positioned within the broader evolution of Logan Heights into "Barrio Logan," with maps from the Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC) and the City of San Diego exposing increased instances of housing segregation, industrialization, and repatriation in the neighborhood. A description of these developments will establish the necessary context for the takeover of the Neighborhood House in 1970, effectively establishing the *who*, *what*, *when*, and *where* of the occupation.

Chapter two will speculate on the *why* of the takeover, engaging with a variety of primary sources from the CPMCC's new archive to identify the specific grievances expressed by protesters leading up to and following the takeover of October 5, 1970. By analyzing the language and rhetoric expressed in the open letters and meeting notes of occupiers, I will consider how such grievances indicate the larger community's frustrations towards years of encroachment and repression in the barrio, as well as reflect sentiments of self-determination and community control associated with the emerging Chicano Movement. Moreover, by compiling correspondences exchanged by protesters, I will establish a rough timeline of the occupation and the events immediately following it, including the establishment of the Chicano Free Clinic.

Finally, chapter three will speculate on the *how* of the takeover, exploring the ways in which the ideological and on-the-ground contributions of student activists and Chicano organizations may have propelled and sustained the occupation effort. This chapter will chronicle key developments in the local

and regional Chicano Movements to examine how the university, the concept of “Aztlán,” and the Chicano press may have contributed to a growing political consciousness in Logan Heights and, ultimately, motivated the takeover, allowing for the eventual creation of the Chicano Free Clinic. Following this chapter, a brief conclusion will reflect on the Neighborhood House’s functional and symbolic significance in Logan Heights and consider the legacy of its takeover within the neighborhood’s social and political histories and the history of San Diego’s Chicano Movement.



**Figure 1. The Takeover of the Neighborhood House, October 1970.**

“Liberacion de La Neighborhood House,” October 1970, Box 5, Folder 5, Neighborhood House Collection,  
Chicano Park Museum & Cultural Center, San Diego, CA.

## Chapter 1: The Evolution of Logan Heights' Neighborhood House (1914-1970)

### I. An "Americanization Factory"

The establishment of the Neighborhood House in 1914 was a response to the early 20th-century influx of Mexican immigrants into the Logan Heights neighborhood. Beginning as a settlement house, the Neighborhood House was founded by San Diego's College Women's Club (CWC), a white female reform network established in 1911, primarily devoted to enacting child labor protections and implementing "city beautification" campaigns at a time of increased tourism in the city.<sup>9</sup> A settlement in Logan Heights was deemed necessary by the CWC after the *Pathfinder Social Survey*—a report conducted by the "Settlement Committee" of the CWC and published in 1914—cited subpar living conditions and heightened infant mortality rates suffered by immigrant families in the area. The survey emphasized the distinctly "slum conditions" and issues of overcrowding present in the southeastern region of San Diego along the waterfront. Such conditions, the study emphasized, negatively impacted the image of San Diego amongst tourists and promoted the spread of tuberculosis and venereal diseases.<sup>10</sup>

These issues of overcrowding and poor sanitation, the study posited, could be attributed to the absence of available, affordable housing options for newly-immigrated Mexicans in the city. Indeed, Logan Heights would become a Black and Mexican enclave, in part, due to restrictive covenants in San Diego that severely limited the housing options available to racial minorities at the beginning of the 20th century. These covenants, coupled with the supposed tendency of individuals to settle near those of similar ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, have been cited by social historians as probable explanations for why Black and Mexican families overwhelmingly settled in Logan Heights at the beginning of the century and why the neighborhood's white populace began to "flee" to the surrounding suburbs by the 1920s.<sup>11</sup> In the shadow of this "white flight," the proportion of Mexican Americans in the southeastern

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<sup>9</sup> Ciani, "Neighborhood Care," 128.

<sup>10</sup> College Women's Club of San Diego, *Pathfinder Social Survey of San Diego: Report of Limited Investigations of Social Conditions in San Diego, California*, (San Diego: Labor Temple Press, 1914), 12.

<sup>11</sup> Leroy E. Harris, "The Other Side of the Freeway: A Study of Settlement Patterns of Negroes and Mexican-Americans in San Diego, California," (PhD diss., Carnegie-Mellon University, 1974), 165-175.

quarter of the city would only continue to increase, with more and more Mexican families being pulled to Logan Heights in the wake of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920). While many of these immigrants initially found success securing construction jobs for the San Diego and Arizona Railway line and in fish canneries, they disproportionately lacked basic economic and health resources, as observed in the CWC study.<sup>12</sup>

It is amidst these contexts and the neighborhood's changing demographics that the CWC would recommend the establishment of a social program to ameliorate the subpar living conditions of immigrants in southeastern San Diego. The Neighborhood House would subsequently open in 1914 on 1809 National Avenue as a formal settlement house encouraging the assimilation and "Americanization" of Logan Heights' Mexican immigrants.<sup>13</sup> Though settlement houses were abundant in the urban centers of the East and most often targeted European immigrants, they were not as common in the West, and few explicitly served the needs of Mexican immigrants. To be sure, a 1919 *San Diego Sun* article claims that the Neighborhood House settlement was "the only social settlement on the border where the work is among Mexicans."<sup>14</sup> Evidently, from its inception, the Neighborhood House differed greatly from other settlement houses of the Progressive Era in its geographical positioning and the populations/cultures it targeted. Such a unique positioning would doubtlessly determine the specific programs and strategies adopted in the early years of the settlement.

Nonetheless, the basic philosophy of the Neighborhood House was aligned with that of the American settlement house movement at large. Historically, Progressive-era settlements sprang up in industrial cities and targeted immigrants and the poor, seeking to instill immigrants with American values and virtues and provide inhabitants with vital health, education, and childcare services.<sup>15</sup> The Neighborhood House was no different. Though never explicitly citing "Americanization" as the

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<sup>12</sup> Frank Norris, "Logan Heights: Growth and Change in the Old 'East End,'" *The Journal of San Diego History* 29, no. 1 (Winter 1983): 28-40.

<sup>13</sup> "Neighborhood House Association," 1937, Box 18, Folder 10, Leonard Fierro Papers, MS-0439, San Diego State University Special Collections & University Archives, San Diego, CA.

<sup>14</sup> Inez Anderson, "Drive for Funds Planned Beginning May 5; Social Settlement Benefits Many," *The San Diego Sun*, April 29, 1919.

<sup>15</sup> Ruth Crocker, *Social Work and Social Order: The Settlement Movement in Two Industrial Cities, 1889-1930* (University of Illinois Press, 1992).

settlement's purpose, Neighborhood House founders Helen Marston and Edith Shatto King, writing for *The Survey*, emphasize the importance of educating the Mexican immigrant on the American virtues and ways of life so that they may escape their "primitiveness."<sup>16</sup> Newspapers, however, were much more explicit in the settlement's perceived objectives, with a 1919 *San Diego Sun* article praising the patriotism of the settlement's early Anglo workers for nurturing "intelligent, educated, loyal citizens of one's country."<sup>17</sup>

Like other Progressive-era settlements, the Neighborhood House viewed women—specifically mothers—as the "vessels" through which such Americanization would occur. Scholars have extensively examined the ways in which traditional conceptions of womanhood and motherhood shaped Americanization strategies and efforts well into the Progressive Era.<sup>18</sup> As once such scholar, Gayle Gullett, surmises, the Progressive vision emphasized social cohesion and interdependency, which, insofar as immigrants were concerned, required their assimilation and Americanization. The new generation of female reformers associated with the Progressive Movement interpreted this vision through a heavily gendered lens, envisioning the home, where the mother is the center, as the "channel" through which American values were diffused, loyal citizens were raised, and, ultimately, social order was established.<sup>19</sup> Accordingly, settlements, historically run by white, middle-class women, overwhelmingly targeted female immigrants and encouraged their adoption of Anglo-American ideas of domesticity. It is for this reason that both Marston and King, in their *Survey* articles, thoroughly describe their experiences working with Mexican women and their children but indicate limited interactions with Mexican men and fathers. This

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<sup>16</sup> Helen Marston, "Mexican Traits," *The Survey* 44, no. 16 (August 1920): 562-564; Edith Shatto King, "My Mexican Neighbors," *The Survey* 37, no. 22 (March 1917): 624-626.

<sup>17</sup> "Reconstruction Work at Neighborhood House Wins Praise; Help Needed, Too," *The San Diego Sun*, April 22, 1919.

<sup>18</sup> See Paula Baker, "The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780-1920," *The American Historical Review* 89, no. 3 (1984): 620-47, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1856119>; John F. McClymer, "Gender and the 'American Way of Life': Women in the Americanization Movement," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 10, no. 3 (Spring 1991): 3-20, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27500838>; and James R. Barrett, "Americanization from the Bottom Up: Immigration and the Remaking of the Working Class in the United States, 1880-1930," *The Journal of American History* 79, no. 3 (December 1992): 996-1020, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2080796>.

<sup>19</sup> Gayle Gullett, "Women Progressives and the Politics of Americanization in California, 1915-1920," *Pacific Historical Review* 64, no. 1 (1995): 71-94, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3640335>.

framework would contribute to the particular reliance of Logan Heights' population of Mexican women on the Neighborhood House and its services.

Like most Progressive reformers, the Neighborhood House founders envisioned a link between the Americanization of the immigrant family—through the women/mothers of the household—and their improved standards of living. In a 1920 article written by Neighborhood House director Rebecca Halley, Juanita, a young (likely fictional) Mexican girl, learns all about the “American ways” of living at the Neighborhood House and effectively “Americanizes” her entire household, greatly improving their economic situation and “respectability” in the process.<sup>20</sup> This article reflects the utopian belief held by Progressive reformers that by merely adopting American practices and customs in the home, immigrants could elevate their social and economic standings, gradually lifting themselves out of poverty. It is also worth noting that, in the article, it is Juanita, a young woman, who early reformers visualized as the “vessel” that could most effectively diffuse Anglo-American values throughout her entire family. As evidenced by this article, many early activities at the Neighborhood House focused on the teaching of “American ways”—particularly to Mexican women—so as to, presumably, encourage the economic development of Mexican immigrant families in the area.

Yet, the Neighborhood House also provided services that directly addressed the subpar health and economic conditions disproportionately endured by Logan Heights' Mexican immigrant community. As early as 1916, the Neighborhood House boasted milk stations, baby examinations, and “Little Mothers” classes that focused on teaching women how to care for young children.<sup>21</sup> In 1920, a prenatal clinic was established, quickly becoming the most frequented and utilized resource of the settlement house.<sup>22</sup> Newspaper articles suggest that such efforts dramatically improved the infant mortality rates observed in the CWC's 1914 *Pathfinder* report, while also protecting young children against the growing threats of influenza and tuberculosis.<sup>23</sup> In the realm of education, a kindergarten class and library helped to promote

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<sup>20</sup> Rebecca Halley, “Americanization; A Plea for Neighborhood House,” *The San Diego Sun*, May 8, 1920.

<sup>21</sup> “Baby Week Will Be Observed in Escondido,” *The Daily Times-Advocate*, March 2, 1916.

<sup>22</sup> “Clinic Assists Women in Need,” *The San Diego Evening Tribune*, April 16, 1920.

<sup>23</sup> “Wage Campaign to Obtain Milk for Many Ill-Nourished School Children,” *The San Diego Union*, April 1, 1920.

literacy and socialization among immigrant children.<sup>24</sup> Such health and education initiatives targeting recently immigrated mothers and their children further explain why the Neighborhood House, in its early days, primarily saw Mexican women come through its door and rely upon its services. Yet, a sizable number of Mexican men are cited to have frequented the Neighborhood House, particularly to attend the English and citizenship courses offered for adults, which were devised to help new immigrants successfully “settle” in the country and navigate the local workforce.<sup>25</sup>

Despite its focus on Americanization, the Neighborhood House allowed (and perhaps even encouraged) Mexican immigrants to retain elements of their culture and language, fostering a landscape of cultural pluralism that would remain a defining characteristic of the house throughout its history. While one of the settlement’s founders, Helen Marston’s, reformist vision was greatly influenced by her time spent at Wellesley College and working for settlements in Boston and New York City, her childhood spent in San Diego and her early interactions with Mexican families seemingly caused her to develop a “romanticized” image of the Mexican migrant, which she often imparted on likeminded Progressives in order to secure funding and support for the settlement.<sup>26</sup> Fiestas, for instance, were frequently held, with the first “old-time Mexican fiesta” held in modern San Diego being hosted by the Neighborhood House.<sup>27</sup> As previously suggested, while these cultural celebrations were rife with stereotypes and were primarily intended to raise funds for the Neighborhood House—which, in its early years, relied solely on private and Community Chest funding—it is worth considering how such activities may have encouraged, to some extent, cultural retention, especially among the new generation of young Mexican Americans. Of significance is also the Neighborhood House library, which housed several Spanish books, as well as plays chronicling Mexican history that were frequently held at the house (Figure 2).<sup>28</sup> Such features of the

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<sup>24</sup> “Neighborhood House Program is Outlined: Branch of City Library and School Conducted; Many Activities Entertain,” *The San Diego Union*, November 8, 1920.

<sup>25</sup> “Report for Year Issued by Neighborhood House,” *The San Diego Union*, April 18, 1920.

<sup>26</sup> Ciani, “Neighborhood Care,” 146.

<sup>27</sup> “Neighborhood House to Hold Mexican Jamaica For Benefit of Playground Fund Sept. 4-5,” *The San Diego Union*, August 20, 1922.

<sup>28</sup> “Neighborhood House Workers Have Meeting,” *The San Diego Union*, March 10, 1921; “Mexican Play at Neighborhood House Tonight,” *The San Diego Union*, January 6, 1923.

settlement encouraged its primarily Mexican clientele to retain elements of their culture, language, and history, while simultaneously assimilating to Anglo-American society. As will be observed, such a state of cultural pluralism likely influenced the attitudes and behaviors of the generations of Mexican Americans who frequented Logan Heights' Neighborhood House over the decades.



**Figure 2. Drama Group at the Neighborhood House.**

Guy Sensor, 1929, Black and White Photograph, Guy Sensor Photograph Collection, San Diego History Center.

## II. A Community Center & Social Hub

The new generation of Mexican Americans who grew up in 1920s-1940s Logan Heights watched as the Neighborhood House transformed from a formal settlement house into a vibrant community center. This transition was an informal one, marked by a turn away from explicit Americanization efforts—as the Progressive Era came to a close in the 1920s—and towards an emphasis on recreational activities and social clubs. This change was accompanied by more and more community members beginning to take up

paid and volunteer positions for the Neighborhood House. Though health and education efforts remained at the forefront—with the building of an adobe clinic behind the Neighborhood House beginning in the early 1930s—this time period saw the Neighborhood House inaugurate its own baseball and wrestling teams, sponsor numerous boys and girls clubs, and host frequent community dances.<sup>29</sup> Accordingly, during these decades, the Neighborhood House lost its “settlement house” affiliation as it became a key site of socialization in Logan Heights, encouraging the development of connections, community, and, significantly, leadership.

The Neighborhood House and its clubs played a crucial role in the social development of Logan Heights’ Mexican American community during this time period.<sup>30</sup> Interviewees recall a plethora of social clubs associated with the Neighborhood House, including the Huskies, the Toltec Club, and, later, Los Gallos and Los Chicanos. Most of these clubs were geared towards young boys, as fraternal organizations have always been a significant element of Mexican American culture, as argued by Ruben and Carlos Garriero.<sup>31</sup> While the specific activities of these clubs varied, they all emphasized social functions and shared the common goal of community service and improvement, making their members more attuned to the needs of their local community. For instance, an early prototype of the Toltec Club, established by Frank Peñuelas at the Neighborhood House, used athletics as a way to provide counseling and guidance for the young people of the community.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, individuals like John Bareño and Armando Rodriguez recall how the baseball and wrestling teams sponsored by the Neighborhood House taught

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<sup>29</sup> Garcia, *La Neighbor*.

<sup>30</sup> Much of the knowledge on these social clubs can be attributed to the oral histories conducted by the San Diego History Center and Maria Garcia in the past two decades. Maria Garcia is a lifelong Logan Heights resident who was deeply involved in the occupation effort of 1970 and has since worked to chronicle the history of the Neighborhood House. Her self-published book, *La Neighbor*, and her periodical for the *San Diego Free Press* include numerous oral histories she has conducted on Logan Heights residents, as well as her own insights into the House’s activities and its takeover. Garcia was also instrumental in the SDHC’s *La Neighbor* exhibition, conducting many of the interviews featured in the exhibition.

<sup>31</sup> Garcia, *La Neighbor*; Rubos and Carlos Garriero, interview by Maria Garcia, 2024, All In Community Archiving Initiative, San Diego History Center, San Diego, CA, Accessed at <https://allin.sandiegohistory.org/Documents/Detail/interview-with-ruben-and-carlos-garriero/6496>.

<sup>32</sup> Maria Garcia, “The History of Neighborhood House in Logan Heights: Testing the Meaning of ‘Americanized,’ Part I,” *The San Diego Free Press*, August 16, 2014, <https://sandiegofreepress.org/2014/08/the-history-of-neighborhood-house-in-logan-heights-testing-the-meaning-of-a-mericanized-part-i/>.

them how to work with a team, while also exposing them to discrimination as they interacted with outside teams.<sup>33</sup> Accordingly, involvement in these clubs allowed the new generation of Mexican Americans in Logan Heights to socialize and work with one another, while also exposing them to inequalities and social issues within and outside of their communities.

Crucially, the social clubs at the Neighborhood House also aided in the political and professional development of its members. Such clubs introduced many to the political process, providing their members with knowledge of “parliamentary procedures” and teaching them “how to run a meeting,” as argued by Johnny Lopez, who would go on to teach Chicano studies.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, Armando Rodriguez, in his 2007 book, *From the Barrio to Washington*, asserts that his first experience with leadership came after landing a job as the Neighborhood House’s recreation supervisor. This experience, he charges, would be invaluable as he became the Assistant Commissioner of Education and an avid proponent for bilingual education.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, an impressive number of Logan residents who were involved with the Neighborhood House and its social clubs growing up would eventually take up jobs as teachers, counselors, politicians, and lawyers, while also becoming staunch proponents for Mexican American health and education within their fields. Moreover, many of the social groups introduced at the Neighborhood House would evolve into explicitly Chicano organizations advocating for social change in the 1960s and 70s. For instance, the Toltec Club, which traces its origins to the Neighborhood House, would directly inspire the Chicano Federation, an organization co-founded in 1969 by Leonard Fierro, a frequent Neighborhood House attendee.<sup>36</sup> In the context of Logan Heights’ Chicano activism, then, the organizations offered at the Neighborhood House in the decades leading up to the 1970 takeovers undoubtedly played a role in

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<sup>33</sup> Maria Garcia, “A History of Neighborhood House in Logan Heights: John Bareño, 1930’s,” *The San Diego Free Press*, June 14, 2014, <https://sandiegofreepress.org/2014/06/a-history-of-neighborhood-house-in-logan-heights-john-bareno-1930s/>; Armando Rodriguez, *From the Barrio to Washington: An Educator’s Journey*, (University of New Mexico Press, 2007).

<sup>34</sup> Garcia, “Testing the Meaning of ‘Americanized’ Part I”; Johnny Lopez, interview by Augie Bareno, 2024, All In Community Archiving Initiative, San Diego History Center, San Diego, CA, Accessed at <https://allin.sandiegohistory.org/Documents/Detail/johnny-lopez-interview/5772>.

<sup>35</sup> Rodriguez, *From the Barrio to Washington*.

<sup>36</sup> Leonard Fierro, “Objectives,” Box 18, File 17, Leonard Fierro Papers, MS-0439, San Diego State University Special Collections & University Archives, San Diego, CA.

developing and shaping the political consciousness of the community, while also empowering them with the political tools and community resources necessary to carry out direct action.

As the Neighborhood House expanded to incorporate recreational activities, women and young girls were initially excluded from such social functions. Indeed, as previously mentioned, most of the early social clubs were fraternal in nature, and a double standard existed that discouraged Mexican girls from taking part in those recreational and social activities that Mexican men were encouraged to. As Emma Lopez contends, though not formally prohibited from participating in sports and clubs, the Mexican American girls of the neighborhood were advised by their family and community members to visit the Neighborhood House *only* to attend classes and to address their health needs, while also occasionally permitted to attend its dances.<sup>37</sup> Despite this, while at the Neighborhood House, girls organized their own clubs promoting their social and professional advancement. The 1930s “Clinic Club,” for instance, gathered young girls interested in pursuing medicine to observe the nurses and doctors as they interacted with patients from the community each Saturday morning.<sup>38</sup> Such clubs gave women a valid “excuse” to gather together at the Neighborhood House, while also introducing them to the health concerns of the neighborhood and teaching them invaluable, applicable skills in the realm of health.

In the late 1940s, after World War II, more women's organizations focusing explicitly on socialization and community service emerged. Such a shift was likely due to the increased political and economic involvement of women in their communities during and following WWII, with more women in Logan Heights, specifically, taking up jobs in the local canneries and joining unions.<sup>39</sup> The women-led “Lucky 13” club, for instance, was founded at the Neighborhood House during this time. This club

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<sup>37</sup> Maria Garcia, “The History of Neighborhood House in Logan Heights: Emma Lopez,” *The San Diego Free Press*, August 2, 2014, <https://sandiegofreepress.org/2014/08/the-history-of-neighborhood-house-in-logan-heights-emma-lopez/>; Josephine Atayde, interview by Augie Barenó, 2024, All In Community Archiving Initiative, San Diego History Center, San Diego, CA, Accessed at <https://allin.sandiegohistory.org/Documents/Detail/josephine-atayde-interview/6491>.

<sup>38</sup> Maria Garcia, “The History of Neighborhood House in Logan Heights: Tulie’s Story,” *The San Diego Free Press*, March 7, 2015, <https://sandiegofreepress.org/2015/03/the-history-of-neighborhood-house-in-logan-heights-tulies-story/>.

<sup>39</sup> “Logan Heights, Mexican Enclave (San Diego, California),” in *America’s Changing Neighborhoods: An Exploration of Diversity through Places, Volume 2: Neighborhoods: F-L*, ed. Reed Ueda (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2017), 797.

created an environment for socializing among women of the neighborhood and frequently provided community services, such as volunteering at nursing homes.<sup>40</sup> Other women's clubs like the Shebas, Blue Velvets, Madonnas, and Faberges would soon follow.<sup>41</sup> Though certainly less numerous than the fraternal organizations of the Neighborhood House, these women-led social clubs likely provided the Mexican American women of Logan Heights with similar experiences in leadership, while also exposing them to pertinent community issues and concerns.

Among the new generation of Mexican American men and women in Logan Heights, the Neighborhood House's social and recreational clubs of the 1920s-1940s evidently encouraged the social, professional, and political development of their attendees. The interactions of these individuals with their own and external communities familiarized them with local and regional social issues, while also providing them with valuable training, leadership opportunities, and knowledge of political procedures. This, coupled with the discrimination and segregation endured by some of these organizations, undoubtedly helped foster a political consciousness among the new generation, which would be further demonstrated by their development into explicitly Chicano organizations by the 1960s and 70s. This political consciousness, however, would also be shaped by a myriad of social and urban developments beyond the community's control.

### III. A Changing Social & Urban Landscape

The aforementioned transformation of the Neighborhood House took place amidst a changing composition and image of Logan Heights, which became a majority Mexican American community by the 1930s and contained 15% of San Diego's Spanish-speaking population by 1940.<sup>42</sup> As the number of

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<sup>40</sup> Maria Garcia, "The History of Neighborhood House in Logan Heights: Mary Dora Garcia and the Lucky 13 Club," *The San Diego Free Press*, October 18, 2014, <https://sandiegofreepress.org/2014/10/the-history-of-neighborhood-house-in-logan-heights-mary-dora-garcia-and-the-lucky-13-club>.

<sup>41</sup> Maria Garcia, "The History of Neighborhood House in Logan Heights: Girls Social Clubs and the Signs of the Coming Occupation," *The San Diego Free Press*, June 20, 2015, <https://sandiegofreepress.org/2015/06/the-history-of-neighborhood-house-in-logan-heights-girls-social-clubs-and-signs-of-the-coming-occupation/>.

<sup>42</sup> Norris, "Logan Heights."

Mexican Americans in Logan Heights increased, so too did citizenship rates among Mexican families. As one *San Diego Sun* article asserts, by 1938, citizenship classes were more popular than ever at the Neighborhood House, as many “American-reared” families no longer desired to return to Mexico and wished to settle in the United States permanently.<sup>43</sup> Unlike the first generation of Mexican immigrants in Logan Heights—who were, for the most part, seeking work opportunities rather than permanent residence—the new generation of Mexican Americans likely felt a heightened sense of permanence in their communities as citizens born and raised in the United States, thus viewing themselves as valid social and political actors in American society.

Yet, this sense of belonging would be challenged by increasingly hostile attitudes of the Anglo-American public and the state/national government towards Mexican Americans. The perceived “immigrant problem” of the 1920s—in which immigrants were identified as the greatest threat to the nation’s social and economic fabric—resulted in the repatriation program of the 1930s, whereby hundreds of thousands of Mexican families living in America were forcibly deported to Mexico. Additionally, the 1931 Lemon Grove Incident revealed the experiences of segregation and discrimination frequently suffered by Mexican Americans in San Diego County, especially in the realm of public education.<sup>44</sup> To be sure, relations between Mexican immigrants and the American public were so tense by the 1930s that when Jane Addams, pioneer of the settlement house movement, visited the Neighborhood House in 1931, she began her speech to workers of the house by acknowledging that the “alien problem” was “so much in the foreground” in California.<sup>45</sup>

In this hostile political landscape, Logan Heights came to be increasingly disparaged and avoided by white homeowners and mortgage lenders, thereby further entrenching the patterns of residential segregation established by the racial covenants and “white flight” of the early 20th century. A 1938 map by the Home Owners' Loan Corporation tracking lending risk reveals that Logan Heights was marked “D

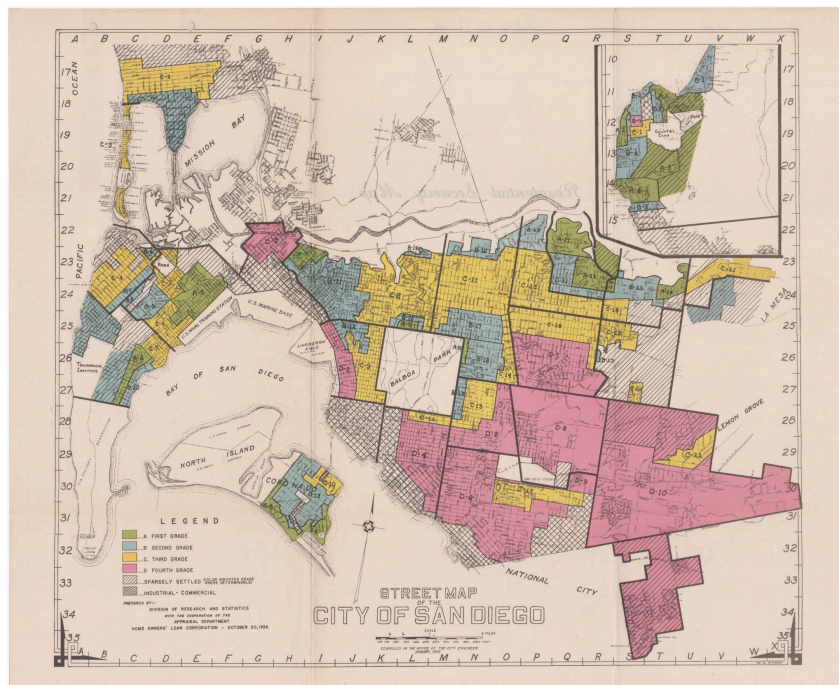
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<sup>43</sup> Willis Werner, “The Fact-o-Graph,” *The San Diego Sun*, May 4, 1938.

<sup>44</sup> David Torres-Rouff, “Becoming Mexican: Segregated Schools and Social Scientists in Southern California, 1913–1946,” *Southern California Quarterly* 94, no. 1 (2012): 91–127, <https://doi.org/10.1525/scq.2012.94.1.91>.

<sup>45</sup> “Jane Addams Speaks Here,” *The San Diego Sun*, April 1, 1931; “‘Whiskey Ring’ Lots Worse Than Present-Day Racketeers, Says Jane Addams,” *The San Diego Sun*, April 2, 1931.

- Hazardous” for home loans, the lowest grade assigned by the HOLC (Figure 3). This classification is indicative of the reduced quality of housing, lower rent values, and the (non-white) racial/ethnic composition of the neighborhood by the mid-1930s. Moreover, this “Hazardous” classification would make it difficult for residents to access home loans and make the neighborhood generally less appealing to newcomers, thus creating a spiral of declining real estate values, racial segregation, and economic immobility.

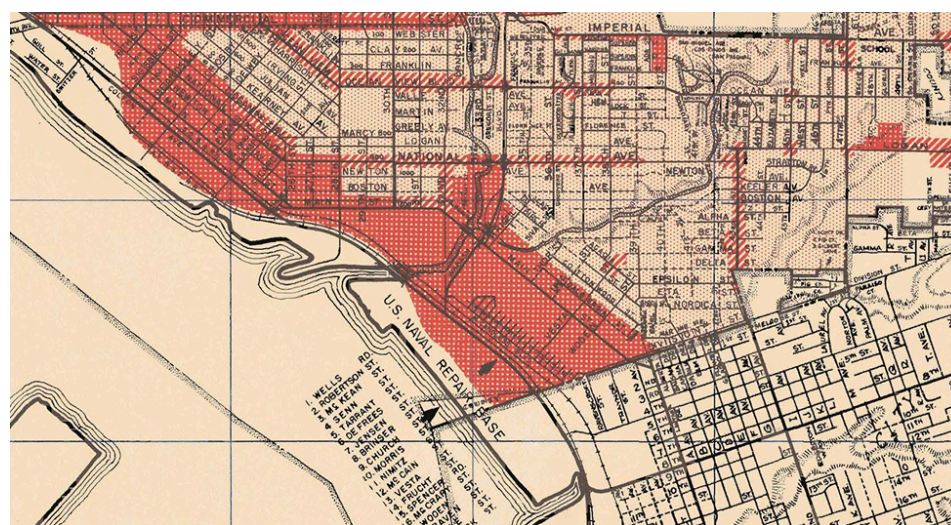


**Figure 3. Home Owners' Loan Corporation Map, 1938.**

Home Owners' Loan Corporation, *Map of Home Owners' Loan Corporation, San Diego, California, 1938*, “Mapping Inequality: Redlining in New Deal America,” Research Institute's Geospatial Data Collection.

Racial segregation and housing patterns were also heavily influenced by encroachment on the neighborhood by the City of San Diego for naval and industrial pursuits throughout the 20th century. As early as 1919, the City of San Diego deeded 98 acres of Logan Heights to the Navy, which was to be used for the construction of a docking and fleet repair base. During World War II, this facility was extended all

the way to the southern bayfront, eradicating much of the existing housing in Logan Heights and denying the community waterfront access.<sup>46</sup> Naval enterprises—in addition to the development of the steel, lumber, and canning industries in the neighborhood—thus led to the destruction of numerous housing units in Logan Heights while subjecting those remaining in the neighborhood to constant noise, pollution, and endless junkyards. Indeed, a zoning map by the San Diego City Council (depicted in Figure 4) reveals that, by 1955, Logan Heights had been marked as an industrial, rather than residential, zone. This industrial displacement—authorized by the City of San Diego—had the twofold effect of degrading residential land values in the neighborhood and eroding the image of Logan Heights, both of which further entrenched patterns of residential segregation and intensified the stigma surrounding the community.<sup>47</sup>



**Figure 4. Zoning Map by the San Diego City Council, 1955.**

San Diego City Council, *Zoning and Street Map: San Diego Metropolitan Area, 1955*, Office of the City Clerk

Archive Collection, City of San Diego.

<sup>46</sup> Patrick Barley and Michael Pearlman, *Barrio Logan and Western Southeast San Diego Historical Survey*, June 1980, City of San Diego Historical Site Board.

<sup>47</sup> Frank, “Logan Heights.”

The displacement of Logan Heights residents due to city-sponsored projects would reach its height with the construction of Interstate Highway 5 and the Coronado Bay Bridge in the late '50s and early '60s, which tore right through the center of the neighborhood. It was as a result of these infrastructure projects that a northern and southern section of Logan Heights would be established, and *Barrio Logan* (the southern section) would be distinguished, thus literally and figuratively splitting the neighborhood in half. Numerous oral histories by residents affirm that the freeway tore apart families and fragmented the once vibrant, united community of Logan Heights.<sup>48</sup> While exact figures have remained undisclosed, former resident Josephine Talamantez maintains that 75% of the community's residents were lost through eminent domain, with many families leaving the community never to return.<sup>49</sup>

It is amidst this evolving social and urban landscape that new generations of Mexican Americans in Logan Heights—including those who would go on to become protesters and activists in the takeovers of 1970—were reared. Born and raised in America and deeply involved in the Logan Heights community, these individuals and their sense of belonging/autonomy would be repeatedly challenged by the rampant displacement and segregation they endured at the hands of their city officials, state/national government, and the Anglo-American public. Such tensions would have undoubtedly heightened the political consciousness of these generations, exposing them, first-hand, to a myriad of social, political, and economic injustices that may account for their future direct action.

#### IV. The “Big” Neighborhood House

The erosion of Logan Heights' urban and social landscapes would be reflected in the deterioration of the original Neighborhood House location throughout the 1950s and '60s, setting the stage for its eventual takeover in 1970, the focus of the next chapter. During these decades, the Neighborhood House, which had garnered a reputation in the neighborhood as a social and recreational center providing vital

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<sup>48</sup> See Garcia, “John Bareño, 1930’s”; Josephine Atayde, interview; and Adela Garcia, interview by Augie Bareno, 2024, All In Community Archiving Initiative, San Diego History Center, San Diego, CA, Accessed at <https://allin.sandiegohistory.org/Documents/Detail/adela-garcia-oral-history-interview/5768>.

<sup>49</sup> Josephine Talamantez, interview by Tomas Montoya, October 30, 2023, The Sacramento Movimiento Chicano and Mexican American Education Oral History Project, California State University, Sacramento Library.

health services to the community, came to focus almost exclusively on federally-sponsored social welfare programs. By the 1960s, professional social workers from outside the Logan Heights community were assigned to the Neighborhood House and tasked with enforcing these federal welfare programs, replacing the local community members and Mexican American residents who made up most of the staff prior to the midcentury.

Several correspondences exist revealing the heightened tensions emerging between residents and the Neighborhood House during this time. In a 1959 letter to Mary Marston written by Charles Kassier, the President of the Board of Directors at the Neighborhood House, Charles calls attention to several “lacks” of the agency that have been alleged by community members. Among these lacks, Charles cites a lack of Spanish-speaking staff members, limited efforts to develop neighborhood leadership, and a lack of Board membership from the immediate community.<sup>50</sup> Though Charles claims that these criticisms are unfounded, they reveal the attitudes of community members towards the changing character of the Neighborhood House by the 1960s and their desire for greater community control over the organization and its activities.

President Lyndon B. Johnson’s Great Society and War on Poverty of the 1960s would further change the character of the Neighborhood House. A Headstart Class replaced the facility’s beloved preschool, and numerous job training programs replaced the social and recreational activities once hosted by the Neighborhood House.<sup>51</sup> One Great Society program offered at the Neighborhood House taught students how to package and seal canned goods as part of a job training program in food retail (Figure 5). While such programs were indeed intended to alleviate poverty and provide economic opportunities—and likely saw some success—such programs were geared towards the needs of welfare recipients at large, rather than the specific needs of the Logan Heights community. Moreover, such programs were carried

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<sup>50</sup> Charles M. Kassier to Miss Mary Marston, June 10, 1959, “Neighborhood House Research,” Box 18, Folder 10, Leonard Fierro Papers, MS-0439, San Diego State University Special Collections & University Archives, San Diego, CA.

<sup>51</sup> Garcia, *La Neighbor*.

out by a staff of outside professionals who replaced the former staff community members who were more attuned to the needs and wants of the local community.



**Figure 5. Job Training Program Offered at the Neighborhood House, 1968.**

UT85:G9570-7, May 21, 1968, Black and White Photograph, San Diego Union-Tribune Collection, San Diego History Center.

This transformation was not exclusive to the Neighborhood House and, rather, was reflective of a growing emphasis on social work and professionalization that infiltrated former settlements and led to their collapse by the final quarter of the century. As Judith Trolander argues in her 1987 book, *Professionalism and Social Change*, the growing trend towards professionalization associated with the 1960s Great Society and War on Poverty had a devastating impact on former settlements, causing them to

evolve into “problem-oriented social agencies” without much care for preserving the intimate relationship and identification with the communities they served.<sup>52</sup> According to Trolander, this professionalization resulted in the “scattering” of settlements as they grew increasingly disconnected from their communities, explaining their rapid decline by the 1980s. Indeed, the infiltration of outside social workers and welfare programs into the Neighborhood House resulted in the replacement of services that the Logan Heights community had relied on and celebrated for decades, deeply troubling and disillusioning the community.

These tensions between what the Neighborhood House had become and what it once was would culminate in the late 1960s. The vibrant community center that had once served various social functions and provided mothers and their children with necessary health services would be reduced to a lifeless administrative office for the newly-established, federally-funded “Neighborhood House Association” (NHA). With federal money in hand, the NHA set its sights on expansion, establishing a service center on Market Street and directing a majority of its staff, resources, and programming to the new location. Accordingly, in the wake of this expansion, the 1809 National Avenue location—which would, from that point forward, be distinguished by the community as “Big Neighbor”—was abandoned.

As previously touched upon, these changes took place amidst city-sponsored infrastructure projects that eroded the urban and social landscapes of Logan Heights. The construction of Interstate 5 and the inauguration of the Coronado Bridge in 1963 and 1969, respectively, displaced numerous families and brought even more noise, pollution, and junkyards to the neighborhood (now deemed “barrio”). Residential segregation was exacerbated, and those who remained in the barrio—now, overwhelmingly, Mexican American—watched as the community around them continued to deteriorate. All the while, the center they had once relied upon as a refuge and site of socialization and community care deteriorated as well, becoming a professional social welfare agency run by unfamiliar faces removed from the needs and wants of the local community.

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<sup>52</sup> Judith Trolander, *Professionalism and Social Change: From the Settlement House Movement to Neighborhood Center, 1886 to the Present* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 233-238.

It is under these circumstances that lifelong Logan Heights resident, Laura Rodriguez, would chain herself to the doors of Big Neighbor on October 5, 1970, inciting a two-month-long takeover in which occupiers presented several demands to the Neighborhood House Association's Board of Directors, affirming, in the process, that Neighborhood House was for the community. The next chapter will analyze documents available from the time of the takeover to construct a rough timeline of the occupation, as well as to identify the actors involved in the protest and their cited reasons for occupying the facility. I will consider how the demands and grievances expressed by the protesters suggest resistance to the years of encroachment on the neighborhood by city officials, developers, and police authorities, as touched upon in this chapter.

## Chapter 2: “Neighborhood House is the Raza’s”

### I. 1970, A Year of Takeovers

The takeover of the Neighborhood House occurred just six months after the takeover of Chicano Park on April 22, 1970. Located a few blocks away from 1809 National Avenue, the takeover of the land that would become Chicano Park was an immediate reaction by residents and student activists to the City of San Diego’s plan to build a Highway Patrol Station on a pocket of land under the newly-inaugurated Coronado Bridge, where the City Council had promised Logan Heights residents they could establish a park of their own. This park, it was hoped, would provide a green space for residents to gather that could offset the effects of the city’s recent infrastructure projects.<sup>53</sup> However, when young Logan Heights resident, Mario Solis, discovered from a construction worker that the plans for the park had been neglected, he went door-to-door and informed his fellow residents—as well as his fellow San Diego City College students—of the broken promise.<sup>54</sup>

Subsequently, on April 22, 1970, a twelve-day occupation of the land under the Coronado Bridge began, and hundreds gathered to form human chains around the construction equipment, plow the land, and plant trees, effectively reclaiming the land as their own (Figure 6). Protesters were primarily barrio residents and students from local high schools and universities—though some activists from Los Angeles and Santa Barbara also traveled south to join in on the struggle. Together, these protesters persisted and, after twelve days, construction of the Highway Patrol Station was called off. In the following months, the Chicano Park Steering Committee would lead negotiations and a young artist, Salvador Torres, would begin an initiative to brighten the grey pillars of the Coronado Bay Bridge with vibrant murals depicting elements of Chicano and Mexican American identity and culture.

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<sup>53</sup> Jose Gomez, Invitation from the Chicano Park Steering Committee, January 25, 1980, “Subject Files,” Box 20, Folder 6, MSS-0649, Herman Baca Papers, Special Collections & Archives, UC San Diego, La Jolla, CA.

<sup>54</sup> “Chicano Park - La Tierra Mia,” *El Gallo*, May & June 1978, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, The University of Texas Libraries, Austin, TX.



**Figure 6. Jose Gomez and Adolph Rodriguez at the Takeover of Chicano Park, April 1970.**

UT86:14840-3, April 15, 1970, Black and White Photograph, San Diego Union-Tribune Collection, San Diego History Center.

Extensive literature exists chronicling the takeover and creation of Chicano Park, considering its significance in Logan Heights history and San Diego Chicano history, more broadly. Indeed, the creation of the park has been interpreted by scholars as a reflection of the ideas of community control and self-determination propagated by the growing Chicano Movement in Southern California at the time. Additionally, several scholars have interpreted the establishment of Chicano Park and Torres's mural project as an example of the unorthodox and symbolic ways in which Mexican Americans have expressed their political voices and have taken ownership of their communities.<sup>55</sup> Yet, despite this extensive array of

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<sup>55</sup> Avila, "Taking Back the Freeway"; T.V. Reed, "Revolutionary Walls: Chicano/a Murals, Chicano/a Movements" in *The Art of Protest: Culture and Activism from the Civil Rights Movement to the Streets of Seattle* (University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

literature, few accounts thoroughly consider the community-specific social, political, and urban influences that may have motivated the takeover in Logan Heights. Moreover, most accounts view the takeover of the park as an independent, one-off event, failing to acknowledge similar forms of direct action that occurred in Logan Heights at the time—namely, the takeover of Big Neighbor that occurred just six months later. When these two protests are viewed in conjunction with one another, a sustained, multifaceted push for community control in 1970s Logan Heights is revealed, calling into question what community-specific forces may have motivated such a prolonged effort. By taking a closer look at the takeover of Big Neighbor and the attitudes of protesters through correspondences, flyers, and meeting notes housed at the CPMCC’s new archive—which, until this point, have been objects of limited study—we can determine those community-specific forces that propelled Laura Rodriguez to chain herself to the doors of the Neighborhood House, inciting the 2-month-long occupation.

## II. The Occupation of Big Neighbor Begins

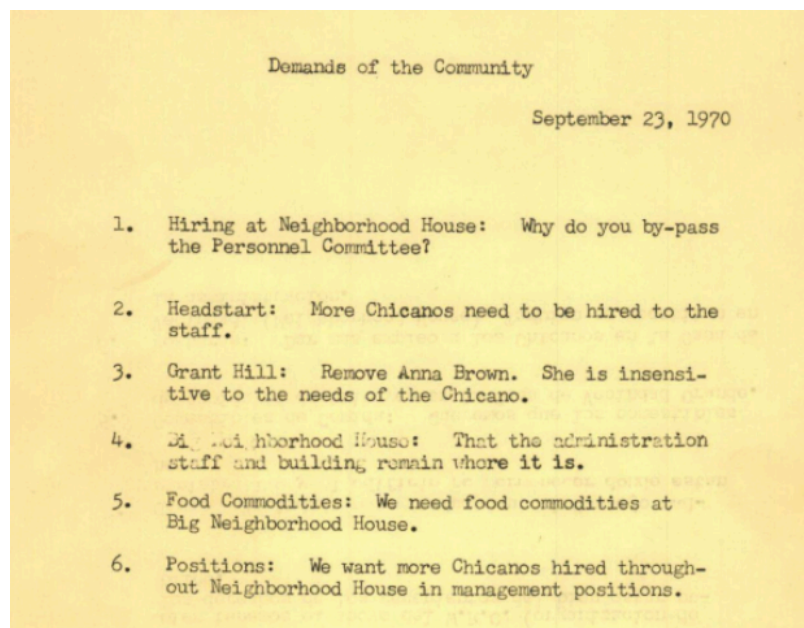
In the months leading up to the October 1970 takeover, community members vehemently expressed their discontent to the NHA regarding what had come of the Neighborhood House and began to organize community action groups to address these concerns. In a letter circulated by Logan Heights’ very own Chicano newspaper, *La Verdad*, in April 1970, community members boldly declared that “Neighborhood House is the Raza’s,” claiming that the Neighborhood House and its board of directors had ceased to serve the needs of Logan Heights since federal funds began coming in. In addition to demanding that the association’s board of directors be elected by community members, barrio residents listed ten demands for the NHA to meet. Some of the demands included the establishment of Spanish classes, Mexican dance classes, childcare programs for working mothers, and civil rights education courses.<sup>56</sup> Such demands reflect a desire amongst barrio residents for Big Neighbor to readopt the

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<sup>56</sup> “Neighborhood House is the Raza’s,” *La Verdad*, April 1970, Box 5, Folder 5, Neighborhood House Collection, Chicano Park Museum & Cultural Center, San Diego, CA.

initiatives and programs characteristic of the house's earlier years, as well as for greater community control over the organization.

Receiving no response from the NHA, a follow-up letter was written on September 23, 1970, just weeks before the takeover. In this letter, six additional demands of the Barrio Logan community were laid out to the board of directors (Figure 7). Among these demands, community members called for more Chicanos to be hired throughout the Neighborhood House in staff and management positions, as well as for food commodities to be provided and distributed at the 1809 National Avenue location. Evidently, residents' concerns had not yet been adequately addressed by the NHA, and they remained displeased with the assemblage of estranged, outside professionals that had come to assume the Neighborhood House's staff and leadership positions. To the dismay of residents, this open letter, like the previous one, would fall on deaf ears. The October 5th takeover of Big Neighbor, however, would force the Neighborhood House Association to respond.



**Figure 7. Demands of the Community, September 23, 1970.**

"Demands of the Community," September 23, 1970, Box 5, Folder 2, Neighborhood House Collection, Chicano Park Museum & Cultural Center, San Diego, CA.

Receiving limited coverage in the mainstream press at the time, the concrete details of October 5, 1970, are fuzzy, but oral histories reveal the key events leading up to and immediately following the takeover of Big Neighbor. According to Maria Garcia—who was involved in planning the takeover but was advised by Laura not to take part in it—residents Laura Rodriguez and Jose Gomez had announced the idea for a takeover on October 4, 1970, at a meeting of the Community Action Council (CAC), just a few blocks away from Big Neighbor.<sup>57</sup> After the announcement was made, community members present at the meeting walked to Big Neighbor, where they saw Laura chaining herself to the front door of the building, which would effectively prevent police from entering the building. Prior to this, Laura had deceived Neighborhood House administrators by asking for a key to Big Neighbor under the guise of holding a meeting in its auditorium. Now in possession of the key, Laura was able to allow protesters to enter the building the following day, on October 5th, and an assemblage of barrio residents, Brown Berets, and El Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA) students—who had been in on the plan—swarmed the building, beginning their two-month-long occupation of 1809 National Avenue.<sup>58</sup>

### III. Grievances & Goals

The reasons Laura Rodriguez cites for chaining herself to the door of Big Neighbor that October night mirror those grievances expressed in the letters addressed to the Neighborhood House Association in the months leading up to the takeover. Laura Rodriguez, like so many other Logan Heights residents, grew up frequenting the Neighborhood House. At the house, Laura learned to cook and sew and received essential medical care.<sup>59</sup> Laura, who, at the time of the takeover, was in her 60s, would witness the gradual

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<sup>57</sup> According to Garcia, Laura advised her not to take part in the occupation of Big Neighbor due to her plans to become a teacher. Laura did not want Garcia to partake in any illegal acts that may jeopardize her professional career.

<sup>58</sup> Maria Garcia, “The History of Neighborhood House in Logan Heights: The Occupation of Neighborhood House,” *The San Diego Free Press*, June 20, 2015, <https://sandiegofreepress.org/2015/07/the-history-of-neighborhood-house-in-logan-heights-the-occupation-of-neighborhood-house/>.

<sup>59</sup> Maria Garcia, “The History of Neighborhood House in Logan Heights: Laura Rodriguez, the Family Matriarch Who Became Barrio Activist,” *The San Diego Free Press*, October 25, 2014, <https://sandiegofreepress.org/2014/10/the-history-of-neighborhood-house-in-logan-heights-laura-rodriguez-the-family-matriarch-who-became-barrio-activist/>.

deterioration of the Neighborhood House, which went from providing the community with social activities and essential medical services to functioning as a mere administrative office for the NHA.<sup>60</sup> In fact, Laura grew up in Logan Heights during the Neighborhood House's founding years, even living with founder Helen Marston's family at the infamous Marston House for some time. Accordingly, Laura experienced all of the Neighborhood House's greatest milestones: the opening of the preschool, the inauguration of the prenatal clinic, the construction of the playground, etc. Yet, Laura, remaining in Logan Heights throughout her adulthood, would also watch these beloved services wither away by the 1970s, becoming estranged from the neighborhood it had served so devoutly for generations.

Laura's dissatisfaction with the new character of the Neighborhood House was evidently shared by the greater barrio community, with protesters pointing to it as the immediate cause for occupation in their declaration following the October 5th takeover. The decision to occupy Big Neighbor was formally documented and quickly circulated among the Chicano press in a letter signed by the "Colonia of Southeast California" on October 5, 1970. The letter begins as follows:

There comes a time in the lives of each community when they must decide whether they are to remain under the direction and guidance of others who dictate to them their needs and aspirations. There comes a time when each community must realize that they themselves possess the power and potentiality to govern those institutes which decide the direction of their lives and the lives of their offspring...

The letter then ousts the Neighborhood House Association's current board of directors from their positions and concludes by reaffirming the need for a new board of directors composed of community members and barrio residents who will reestablish Spanish classes, food programs, and a childcare center at Big Neighbor.<sup>61</sup>

This letter reflects the frustration felt by Laura and other barrio residents towards the Neighborhood House's transformation. As evidenced by the letter, the key grievance expressed by

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<sup>60</sup> Maria Garcia, interview.

<sup>61</sup> Colonia of Southeast California to the Neighborhood House Association, October 5, 1970, Box 5, Folder 4, Neighborhood House Collection, Chicano Park Museum & Cultural Center, San Diego, CA.

occupiers is the inability of the former community center to serve the specific needs and wants of barrio residents, with protesters explicitly seeking to reestablish the center as an organization run by and for the community, with health and education at the forefront. Moreover, the letter expresses sentiments of community control and self-determination, suggestive of the growing Chicano Movement. Like the protesters who formed human chains and planted trees at Chicano Park months prior, the occupiers of Big Neighbor, in their letter to the NHA, insisted on their right and capacity to “govern” and “decide the direction” of their lives and communities.

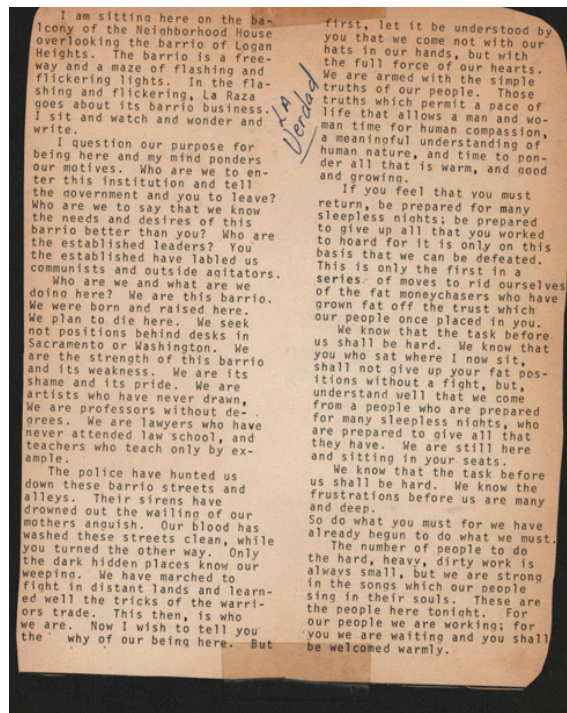
Such a desire for community control is further reflected in meeting minutes from the takeover’s “Negotiating Committee.” Established immediately after the takeover, the purpose of this committee was to correspond and negotiate with the directors of the NHA, ensuring that occupation of Big Neighbor continued until their demands were adequately met. In meeting minutes from October 12, 1970, one week after the occupation began, a framework for the “liberated Neighborhood House” was laid out. The “immediate goals” of the committee included the establishment of a dental clinic and daycare center, the hosting of recreational events, and the starting of a library at Big Neighbor—all features once boasted by the Neighborhood House. Also noted in the minutes are a few “long-range goals,” including the placement of barrio residents in management positions and finding work for residents currently serving prison sentences.<sup>62</sup> This desire for Mexican Americans to occupy professional leadership positions, once again, reflects broader trends in the Chicano Movement towards self-determination, while also suggesting a lack of professional training and job opportunities afforded to Mexican Americans in Logan Heights.

These long-range goals thus hint at the existence of intergenerational, deeply-rooted frustrations and injustices felt by barrio residents. Indeed, additional primary sources suggest that the takeover was not merely an immediate response to the actions of the NHA’s board of directors, but rather a form of resistance against the abuses Logan Heights residents had been subjected to for decades. In what is perhaps the most illuminating, emotionally-charged document written during the occupation, a piece

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<sup>62</sup> “Neighborhood House de la Genta,” October 12, 1970, Box 5, Folder 4, Neighborhood House Collection, Chicano Park Museum & Cultural Center, San Diego, CA.

entitled “An Open Letter From the Neighborhood House” (Figure 8) expresses the multitude of grievances felt by barrio residents in 1970 that prompted and justified the takeover of Big Neighbor and similar forms of direct action in the community. In this letter, an unnamed author addresses the Neighborhood House administrators and government officials who have questioned the motives of the occupiers and their desire to govern the business of the barrio. To this audience, the author powerfully declares, “We are this barrio. We were born and raised here. We plan to die here.” The author then charges that, while the barrio’s residents are not trained professionals from Sacramento or Washington, like the new NHA administrators, they are the artists, teachers, doctors, and lawyers who have kept Logan Heights living and breathing for generations. Once again, such rhetoric reflects a rejection of the professionals and bureaucrats who have infiltrated the Neighborhood House and a belief in the self-determination and self-sufficiency of the Logan Heights community.



**Figure 8. Open Letter From Neighborhood House Occupier, October 1970.**

“An Open Letter From the Neighborhood House,” *La Verdad*, October 1970, Box 5, Folder 9, Neighborhood House Collection, Chicano Park Museum & Cultural Center, San Diego, CA.

The author continues this list of grievances by calling attention to the heightened police activity in Logan Heights, where “blood has washed these streets clean.” Indeed, since the composition of Logan Heights came to be predominantly Mexican American by the 1940s, the incidence of racial profiling and subsequent confrontations between police and residents increased dramatically. Newspaper clippings from the 1940s through 1960s reveal that the police were especially concerned with the presence of gangs and drug users in the neighborhood, frequently detaining Mexican American residents without probable cause under suspicion of “bad behavior.”<sup>63</sup> Chicano Park’s muralist, Salvador Torres, was one such individual, being unjustly arrested in 1967 and 1970 for “looking in parked cars” and “running through a parking lot.”<sup>64</sup>

While such racial profiling and undercover police activity were so common that they rarely generated widespread coverage, a police beatdown at the Neighborhood House on May 22, 1970, incited calls for protest among barrio residents. According to attendees, precisely one minute after midnight, police broke up a dance for the youth hosted at the Neighborhood House, declaring it an “illegal assembly.” The police then proceeded to make several arrests and charge at Mexican Americans with their clubs and fists, including unsuspecting passersby who were not even in attendance at the dance.<sup>65</sup> Such frequent and violent behavior towards Mexican Americans by local police fueled feelings of mistrust and contempt for the authorities among barrio residents. As suggested by the open letter, the desire for community control of resources by Neighborhood House occupiers may have emerged, in part, due to an exhaustion with police infiltration and encroachment on community spaces. This may help explain why the decision to build a Highway Patrol Station at the site designated to become Chicano Park provoked such immediate outrage among the barrio’s residents. Barrio residents didn’t just want the new class of Neighborhood House professionals to take their hands off their community assets; they also wanted the

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<sup>63</sup> “No Justice for Chicanos,” *La Verdad*, August 1969.

<sup>64</sup> State of California Department of Education to Salvador Torres, October 19, 1970, “Subject Files,” Box 38, Folder 8, MSS-0649, Herman Baca Papers, Special Collections & Archives, UC San Diego, La Jolla, CA.

<sup>65</sup> “Incident at Neighborhood House,” 1970, Box 5, Folder 13, Neighborhood House Collection, Chicano Park Museum & Cultural Center, San Diego, CA.

police and associated authorities—who had encroached on the area for decades—to stay out of their community spaces.

Further evidenced by the open letter, such a desire for community control was also fueled by the aforementioned infrastructure projects—beginning in the first quarter of the 20th century—that rapidly deteriorated and severed Logan Heights’ physical landscape and social fabric. Opening the letter by describing Barrio Logan as a “freeway” and “maze of flashing lights,” the author calls attention to the industrial development of Logan Heights that began with the induction of the naval base in the 1920s and sped up rapidly in the 1960s with the construction of Interstate 5 and the Coronado Bay Bridge. As a 1969 *San Diego Union* article mournfully observed, the southeast region of Logan Heights was a place where “once quiet residential neighborhoods are being split with earth embankments” and where “commercial and industrial tentacles have reached along major streets to mingle with homes.”<sup>66</sup> Indeed, several newspaper articles from the time describe the overwhelming “greyness” of the industrializing neighborhood, calling attention to the noises and odors generated by the many junkyards scattered throughout the barrio. These junkyards, in particular, would become so loathed by residents that a movement dedicated to their eradication, called “Barrio Si, Yonkers No,” would emerge in the 1970s.<sup>67</sup>

The human impact of such industrial developments and their effect on barrio attitudes can be further discerned in the oral histories of Logan residents who grew up subjected to these constant industrialization projects. A common sentiment held by interviewees is that Logan Heights was a lively, united community until the freeway came through.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, city-sponsored infrastructure projects severely diminished the autonomy of barrio residents, forcing them to watch as their community rapidly changed color and character, while many were forcibly removed from their homes and severed from their communities. As touched upon, this 1960s development was not unprecedented and, rather, was part of a historical disposition of the City of San Diego to neglect the livelihoods of Logan Heights residents in

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<sup>66</sup> Nancy Ray, “Southeast San Diego’s Search,” *The San Diego Union*, October 20, 1969.

<sup>67</sup> “Barrio Si, Yonkes No,” 1978, “Barrio Logan Research and Survey,” Box 13, Folder 16, Leonard Fierro Papers, MS-0439, San Diego State University Special Collections & University Archives, San Diego, CA.

<sup>68</sup> Garcia, “John Bareño, 1930’s”; Adela Garcia, interview.

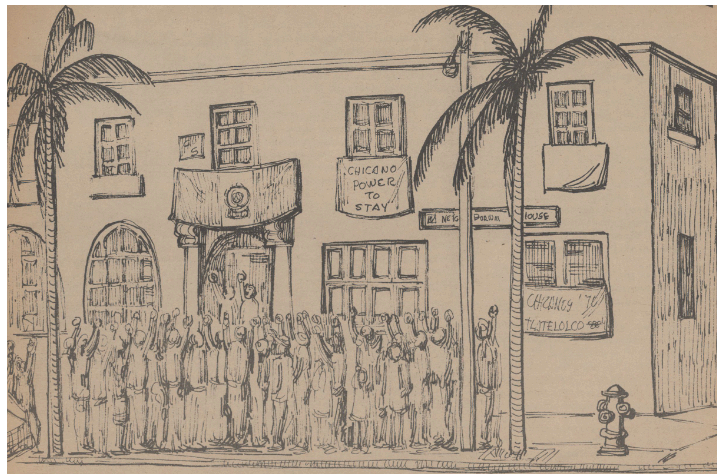
order to pursue profitable commercial, industrial, and naval projects. As the open letter may suggest, this constant encroachment on the barrio and its transformation into a “maze of flashing lights” likely contributed to the desire for community control among residents by 1970 and propelled the reclamation of community spaces through the takeovers of Chicano Park and the Neighborhood House.

As the open letter and other documents from the time of the takeover reveal, the occupation of the Neighborhood House was an immediate response to the changing direction of the NHA and its growing estrangement from the local community. Barrio residents were disturbed by the Neighborhood House’s transition into a problem-oriented social service agency run by professionals detached from the neighborhood and out of tune with the community’s immediate needs. Occupiers thus sought to restore the Neighborhood House to its former glory, ousting the board of directors from their positions of power and allowing community members to dictate its future leadership and activities, which were to focus, once again, on healthcare, education, childcare, and recreation. At the same time, the language used by protesters reveals long-standing frustrations of barrio residents towards the abuses suffered by their community at the hands of the City of San Diego. Generations of Logan Heights residents witnessed their neighborhood being encroached upon by hypervigilant police, money-seeking developers, and unconcerned City officials, enacting a great human toll as numerous families were displaced and exposed to a reduced quality of life. The Neighborhood House was one of many community spaces eroded, with time, by apathetic, self-interested outsiders. Viewed in conjunction with the takeover of Chicano Park just six months prior, the takeover of the Neighborhood House reflects a prolonged effort by Logan Heights residents to reclaim community space and establish community control in response to decades of encroachment.

#### IV. The End of the Occupation

During its occupation, Big Neighbor continued to provide services to the neighborhood. Volunteers hosted sports tournaments, taught dancing and rugmaking classes, established a new library,

and screened Chicano movies, free of charge.<sup>69</sup> The Chicano press enthusiastically promoted these events and closely followed the events of the occupation. While *Street Journal* provided ample coverage, it was Logan Heights' own Chicano newspaper, *La Verdad*, that provided the most frequent and extensive reporting of the takeover. Incorporating into their issues sketches and correspondences between the Negotiating Committee and the Neighborhood House Association, *La Verdad* kept residents up to date on the unfoldings of the takeover, taking great pride in the efforts of occupiers and seeking to gather/sustain community support.



**Figure 9. Illustration of the Neighborhood House Takeover in *La Verdad*, October 1970.**

“Chicanos Take Over The Neighborhood House,” *La Verdad*, October 1970, The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, The University of Texas Libraries, Austin, TX.

Meanwhile, negotiations between the Negotiating Committee and Neighborhood House Association appeared to reach a standstill. While the Negotiating Committee's open letters were widely circulated among the barrio and Chicano press, they appeared to have prompted little noise from the NHA's board of directors. To be sure, correspondences pertaining to the occupation are scant, and, aside from those housed at the CPMCC, do not appear in public archives. The likely cause of this discrepancy

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<sup>69</sup> “Programs at the Neighborhood House,” 1970, Box 5, Folder 5, Neighborhood House Collection, Chicano Park Museum & Cultural Center, San Diego, CA.

is the fact that, during the occupation, papers housed at Big Neighbor were thrown away for an undisclosed reason (likely to protect the identity of protesters), causing a great deal of history to go “rushing out the window,” as affirmed by Maria Garcia.<sup>70</sup> Thus, while it is possible that formal exchanges between the two negotiating bodies took place, these correspondences have not been preserved—or have not yet been identified—in the historical record. To this end, my analysis of the exchanges (or lack thereof) leading up to the end of the occupation remains murky and is certainly not complete. Nonetheless, I will try to construct a portrait of the relations between the two parties as best I can with what primary documents are available.

Perhaps the most illuminating correspondence exchanged during this time that I was able to identify is a letter dated November 18, 1970, from Jesse Ramirez, Executive Director of the Chicano Federation, to David H. Thompson, President of the United Community Services in San Diego. In this letter, Jesse Ramirez claims that he, on behalf of the Chicano Federation, was to act as the “go-between” during the early stages of negotiations between Big Neighbor occupiers and the NHA. Ramirez suggests that he and the Chicano Federation understood the grievances of barrio residents but would not take any decision-making or leadership roles in the occupation. Ramirez, instead, tasked Chicano Federation members with observing the occupation so as to protect the Neighborhood House property, encourage the orderly conduct of protesters, and, ultimately, alleviate the conflict.<sup>71</sup> Though this letter exposes several missing pieces in the story, it also helps construct a timeline of the occupation. From Ramirez’s words, it can be deduced that, by mid-November, over a month after the start of the occupation, no significant negotiations had been made between occupiers and the Negotiating Committee, but that a formal negotiation process was indeed being devised. Moreover, Ramirez’s assignment of Chicano Federation members at the Neighborhood House to maintain order suggests a concern among local service agencies and Chicano organizations regarding the behavior of occupiers and the ramifications of such behavior on the well-being of the community and the image of the Chicano Movement. This concern suggests that the

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<sup>70</sup> Maria Garcia, interview.

<sup>71</sup> Letter from Jesse Ramirez to David Thompson, November 18, 1970, Box 5, Folder 3, Neighborhood House Collection, Chicano Park Museum & Cultural Center, San Diego, CA.

occupiers of Big Neighbor may have been particularly “rowdy” in their protests, posing a potential risk to the immediate community—though no explicit incidents are cited by Ramirez, and several sources confirm the overwhelming barrio support of the occupation.<sup>72</sup>

Perhaps it is this perceived “rowdy” behavior that caused local police to break down the back door of Big Neighbor on December 6, 1970, leading to the arrest of several occupiers and an official end to the occupation. Oral histories and flyers circulated by community members after the break-in suggest that the reason for police intrusion was suspicions of criminal activity and “stolen goods” present in the building, though protesters contend such goods could have been placed there by anyone and that they were used as an “excuse” to extinguish the protest.<sup>73</sup> Whatever the case may be, the continued occupation of the premises by protesters from November 18th to December 6th suggests that those few weeks saw no significant, fruitful negotiations between the Negotiating Committee and the Neighborhood House Association, regardless of the negotiating framework that may have been devised.

The abrupt end to the occupation would force protesters to adopt a new strategy in order to see their demands fulfilled. Accordingly, the Negotiating Committee pivoted its stance to one of judicial (but not financial) separatism, seeking to establish distinct, autonomous governing bodies over Big Neighbor and the Neighborhood House Association. In a statement from the Negotiating Committee signed December 10, 1970, the committee laid out a detailed framework for how they desired Neighborhood House programs to be carried out moving forward. This framework required an Advisory Committee composed of community members to approve the selection of staff members to Big Neighbor at the 1809 National Avenue location. Any actions taken by the staff at Big Neighbor were *not* to dictate the other, external programs of the Neighborhood House Association. Yet, under this new configuration, the NHA would still be required to fund the activities at the 1809 National Avenue location.<sup>74</sup> Evidently, the Negotiating Committee continued to prioritize, above all else, community control over Big Neighbor.

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<sup>72</sup> “The Trial of Neighborhood House 5,” Neighborhood House Collection.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid; Maria Garcia, interview.

<sup>74</sup> “Statement by the Negotiating Committee,” December 10, 1970, Box 5, Folder 3, Neighborhood House Collection, Chicano Park Museum & Cultural Center, San Diego, CA.

In response to this proposal, President of the Neighborhood House Association at the time, Ellsworth P. Pryor, asserted in a letter dated February 5th, 1971, that the full funding of Big Neighbor was not a possibility, as it was not budgeted in their contractual grant for the current and following fiscal years. Yet, the NHA made vague promises to help bring programs desired by the community back to the center.<sup>75</sup> Though not recognized by the NHA, a Neighborhood House Advisory Committee was nonetheless elected by the Logan Heights community and, in a letter dated May 19, 1971, the body charged that the promises made by the NHA had not been kept, as the desired programs had not been brought to Big Neighbor.<sup>76</sup> As a result, Big Neighbor, represented by the Advisory Committee, would separate legally and financially from the Neighborhood House Association in 1971, leaving the formerly occupied 1809 National Avenue building in the hands of the committee representing the community.

Out of the Neighborhood House's ashes, Laura Rodriguez—the woman who incited the October 5th takeover by chaining herself to the door of Big Neighbor—would found the Chicano Free Clinic in 1971 at 1809 National Avenue, restoring vital health services to residents in Barrio Logan. For years, Laura would work tirelessly to establish and fund the Chicano Free Clinic, volunteering to help with any and all clinic tasks (from sweeping to mopping to cooking) and organizing luncheons to raise money for the clinic.<sup>77</sup> Indeed, no longer receiving funding from the NHA or the Community Chest, the clinic relied solely on volunteers and fundraising in its early years. The clinic received plentiful donations and help from local doctors, the University of California, San Diego (UCSD), and even the Navy, who painted the clinic walls.<sup>78</sup> Three years after its founding, the clinic was incorporated into the Family Health Centers of San Diego, eventually becoming the “Logan Heights Family Health Center,” which still stands today, providing a multitude of health services to the local community.<sup>79</sup> Laura, the clinic's devoted founder,

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<sup>75</sup> Ellsworth P. Pryor to Leonard Fierro, February 5, 1971, Box 5, Folder 3, Neighborhood House Collection, Chicano Park Museum & Cultural Center, San Diego, CA.

<sup>76</sup> “Neighborhood House Advisory Committee Meeting Invitation,” May 19, 1971, Box 5, Folder 1, Neighborhood House Collection, Chicano Park Museum & Cultural Center, San Diego, CA.

<sup>77</sup> Garcia, “The Legacy of Laura Rodriguez.”

<sup>78</sup> Garcia, “The Occupation of the Neighborhood House.”

<sup>79</sup> “Services Available,” Logan Heights Family Health Center, Accessed February 3, 2026, <https://www.fhcsd.org/services-and-programs/>.

would continue to volunteer her efforts at the clinic and would be awarded the Point of Light Award by President George H.W. Bush in 1991.<sup>80</sup>



**Figure 10. Laura Rodriguez, Founder of Chicano Free Clinic.**

Photograph courtesy of the Family Health Centers of San Diego.

While not all the services and programs desired by the Advisory Committee were restored to the 1809 National Avenue location, it is hard to view the establishment of the Chicano Free Clinic as anything but a triumph for barrio residents. Indeed, the clinic brought back to Logan Heights the most relied-upon service provided by the original Neighborhood House facility: health care. As Maria Garcia charges in her oral history, the founding of the Chicano Free Clinic in place of the Big Neighbor did not create a “hole” in the community but, rather, deeply enhanced the community, reestablishing those services desperately desired by the barrio and upholding the original purpose of the Neighborhood

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<sup>80</sup> “Laura Rodriguez,” Point of Light, Accessed February 3, 2026, <https://www.pointsoflight.org/awards/laura-rodriguez/>.

House.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, the establishment of the clinic and the ousting of the Neighborhood House Association from the 1809 National Avenue location signified a successful attempt to reclaim a community space and assert community control after years of segregation, political repression, displacement, and encroachment on the neighborhood by city officials and self-interested outsiders, which, taken together, greatly diminished the autonomy of residents. The takeover of the house was thus a material and symbolic achievement for the barrio, revealing the potential for the self-determination and self-sufficiency of the local Chicano community. In this respect, the takeover of the Neighborhood House and the establishment of the Chicano Free Clinic should be celebrated alongside the infamous Chicano Park takeover as a significant moment in the history of Logan Heights and San Diego's Chicano history. Analyzing precisely how occupiers were able to channel their frustrations and grievances into such an organized, meaningful, and effective effort will be the focus of the final chapter.

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<sup>81</sup> Garcia, interview.

### **Chapter 3: The Occupation in the Context of the Chicano Movement**

Like the takeover of Chicano Park, the takeover of the Neighborhood House united protesters across class, gender, and generational lines. Young men and women of the barrio and local college campuses dedicated their days and nights to guarding and securing the building at 1809 National Avenue. Middle-aged professionals conducted the educational and recreational programs offered by Big Neighbor during the occupation.<sup>82</sup> Mothers of the area hosted outings for young girls of the neighborhood and helped to garner community support.<sup>83</sup> Even older residents of the barrio got involved in the effort. Indeed, it was Laura Rodriguez, who was well into her 60s when she chained herself to the doors of Big Neighbor, who would become the face and igniting force of the takeover.

Identifying precisely how barrio residents of such varied backgrounds were able to effectively unite under shared grievances and a common strategy is worthy of study and will be the focus of this final chapter. While we know from the previous chapter that generations of barrio residents were united in their feelings of frustration and dismay at the displacement, segregation, and repression they suffered at the hands of city officials and outside professionals, precisely how residents came together to express such uniform, powerful convictions of community control, self-determination, and self-sufficiency at this specific moment in time (1970) remains unclear. However, the involvement of Chicano organizations in the effort and reliance on the rhetoric and language of the Chicano Movement by protesters in their open letters suggests that the emerging Chicano Movement and its associated ideologies played a significant role in shaping the political consciousness of the community in the years and months leading up to and immediately following the takeover. The following sections will thus identify explicit material and ideological developments of the local and regional Chicano Movements and consider how such developments touched Logan Heights residents by 1970 and, ultimately, contributed to the success of the takeover effort.

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<sup>82</sup> "Programs at the Neighborhood House," Neighborhood House Collection.

<sup>83</sup> "Neighborhood House de la Genta," Neighborhood House Collection.

## I. Student Activism & Chicano Studies

The takeovers of Chicano Park and the Neighborhood House in 1970 were orchestrated and led by students from across San Diego's college campuses, including San Diego City College, San Diego State University, and the University of California, San Diego. The majority of students engaging in these protests were affiliated with Chicano organizations and/or Chicano studies programs at their respective campuses. Indeed, by the 1970s, universities in San Diego and Southern California were hotspots for the development and diffusion of Chicano history, ideology, and identity, thereby fostering a heightened political consciousness among the new generation of Mexican American students and rendering them effective, capable political actors in their communities.

To be sure, students and the university played a key role in Southern California's Chicano Movement from its very inception. Many historians identify the beginning of the Chicano Movement in California as 1965, when Cesar Chavez joined Filipino farmworkers from Delano in a strike against grape growers. California students quickly mobilized to support this strike. *Huelga* (strike) committees sprang up across college campuses, and the slogan "¡Sí Se Puede!" ("it can be done") was quickly adopted by Mexican American students.<sup>84</sup> Clearly, awareness of the long-standing social and economic injustices endured by Mexican Americans and migrants was growing, and students began engaging in forms of direct action to protest these injustices. The ideology that would go on to underpin and sustain such efforts would be articulated at a 1967 meeting of student activists in Los Angeles, where the idea of the "Chicano" and "Chicanismo"—identities embracing the common histories of Mexican Americans and encouraging their self-determination—was introduced to a new generation of Mexican American students.<sup>85</sup>

Quickly, ideas pertaining to this cultural and political identity spread across college communities in Southern California, and students on these campuses called for the establishment of Chicana/o studies courses. At San Diego State University, Mexican American students founded the Mexican American

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<sup>84</sup> Isidro D. Ortiz, "'Si, Se Puede!': Chicana/o Activism in San Diego at Century's End" in *Chicano San Diego: Cultural Space and the Struggle for Justice* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2008), 129.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

Youth Association (MAYA) and successfully advocated for the establishment of the Mexican American Studies Department in 1968, the first department in the United States devoted to the study of Chicana/o history and experiences.<sup>86</sup> The following year, the Chicano Coordinating Committee on Higher Education created the “El Plan de Santa Bárbara,” a masterplan for Chicano higher education that required the expansion of Chicana/o studies courses across the nation, as well as more Chicanas/os occupying professional and teaching positions.<sup>87</sup> Attendees to the 1969 conference, where the “El Plan de Santa Bárbara” was drafted, also organized the Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán, or MEChA, a student organization whose key objective was to increase the enrollment of Chicanos in higher education, believing education to be a vessel that could elevate the political consciousness of Mexican Americans.<sup>88</sup> Following the conference, MEChA chapters sprang up across local San Diego college campuses, with the largest being established at the nearby San Diego City College.

Such calls for the establishment of Chicano studies programs and Chicano educators would even emerge in Logan Heights by the late 1960s. On April 17, 1969, a walkout was held at Memorial Junior High School, located on 2850 Logan Avenue, with students from both the junior high and local colleges publishing a list of demands to the school’s administrators that included Black and Brown history to be taught to students, more Chicano counselors, and bilingual Chicano TAs to be chosen from the community.<sup>89</sup> This walkout reveals the eagerness and capacity of the new generation of Mexican American students to demand change through direct action, explaining why so many local students were ready and willing to organize and partake in the barrio takeovers of 1970. Moreover, the list of demands from the students strikingly resembles those levied by Big Neighbor’s Negotiating Committee in October of 1970, with both documents stressing greater community involvement in and control over community

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 131.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 132.

<sup>88</sup> Gaspar Oliveira to Incoming San Diego State Students, August 18, 1970, Box 5, Folder 2, Neighborhood House Collection, Chicano Park Museum & Cultural Center, San Diego, CA.

<sup>89</sup> “Reasons for Walkout: Immediate Demands,” April 17, 1969, “Association of Mexican-American Education, 1966-1995,” Box 11, Folder 2, Leonard Fierro Papers, MS-0439, San Diego State University Special Collections & University Archives, San Diego, CA.

spaces/institutions. Such parallels point to the ideas of self-determination and self-sufficiency developed and propagated by Chicano students, which will be discussed more in-depth in the next section.

Evidently, by the 1970s, on a local and regional level, schools and universities were in the process of establishing programs and resources that embraced the shared history and struggle of Mexican American communities in the United States. As a result, the history of the Chicano/a infused the cultural and political consciousness of Mexican American communities, with conceptions of this shared history reaching both old and young individuals. Moreover, as a result of the emergence of Chicano studies programs and organizations on college campuses, a new generation of Mexican American youth was being politicized and organized in a way they had never been before across local universities. By 1970, Chicana/o students in San Diego were thus well-attuned to the needs of local Mexican American communities and were willing to engage in direct action to bring about change. This explains how and why students served at the frontlines of the 1970 takeovers in Barrio Logan, with an overwhelming number of MEChA students present during the occupation of the Neighborhood House. The new generation of student activists, therefore, not only provided much of the physical labor required for the takeovers of Chicano Park and the Neighborhood House, but also provided essential ideological contributions. Through their demands for Chicano studies programs and higher education initiatives, students were, in large part, responsible for generating and circulating ideas pertaining to Chicana/o history and struggle throughout their communities.

## II. Aztlán, the Chicano Nation & Chicano Organizations

One ideological framework widely circulated by Mexican American student activists that is deserving of particular attention for its influence on the 1970 takeovers is the “Myth of the Aztlán.” This ideology emerged at the first Chicano Youth Liberation Conference, which was held in Denver in March 1969. Outlined by a poet called Alurista in the “El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán,” Aztlán was a mythical space for Chicanos, where they were united under a common heritage and past history of repression and

powerlessness at the hands of Anglo-Americans and the United States government.<sup>90</sup> While Alurista's Aztlán concept envisioned liberation through a separate but united Chicano nation, separatism was deemed an unrealistic approach to liberation by Chicano activists who, instead, saw protest and community control as the most realistic means of realizing the Aztlán vision.<sup>91</sup>

The concept of Aztlán would be adopted by local Chicano organizations across San Diego, subsequently guiding their activities and strategies in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s. Isidro Ortiz, scholar in Chicana/o studies, explicitly links the actions of the Brown Berets, the Chicano Federation, the La Raza Unida Party, and the Barrio Station—all of which were active in/around Barrio Logan during this time period—to the ideas associated with the Aztlán concept.<sup>92</sup> The Brown Berets, especially, emphasized community control and the self-sufficiency of Mexican American communities. According to Chicano sources, the first San Diego Brown Berets branch was formed in Logan Heights, with their mission being to “serve, observe and protect” the barrio.<sup>93</sup> In a 1970 interview with *La Verdad*, an anonymous local Brown Beret member expressed contempt towards the “Anglo educational system” and charged that, if such a system doesn't change, Chicanos would have no choice but to create their own schools. The interviewee then emphasizes the need to teach the Mexican American youth how to provide for their communities so that they will never need to split from the barrios in which they occupy.<sup>94</sup> Such attitudes and convictions of Chicano/a unity, self-sufficiency, and self-determination reflect the emerging Aztlán ideology articulated at the Chicano Youth Liberation Conference of 1969.

The influence of the Aztlán concept on these groups is significant due to the role such Chicano organizations played in the 1970 takeovers in Logan Heights. As Maria Garcia recalls, during the takeover of the Neighborhood House, the Brown Berets were specifically tasked with maintaining a constant presence in the neighborhood, acting as the around-the-clock security. Five Beret

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<sup>90</sup> Ortiz, ““Si, Se Puede!”” 133.

<sup>91</sup> Ortiz, ““Si, Se Puede!”” 134.

<sup>92</sup> Ortiz, ““Si, Se Puede!”” 133.

<sup>93</sup> “La Lucha - Winds of Change,” *El Chingazo*, 1977, 1, “Aztec Printing Production Files,” Box 61, Folder 12, MSS-0649, Herman Baca Papers, Special Collections & Archives, UC San Diego, La Jolla, CA.

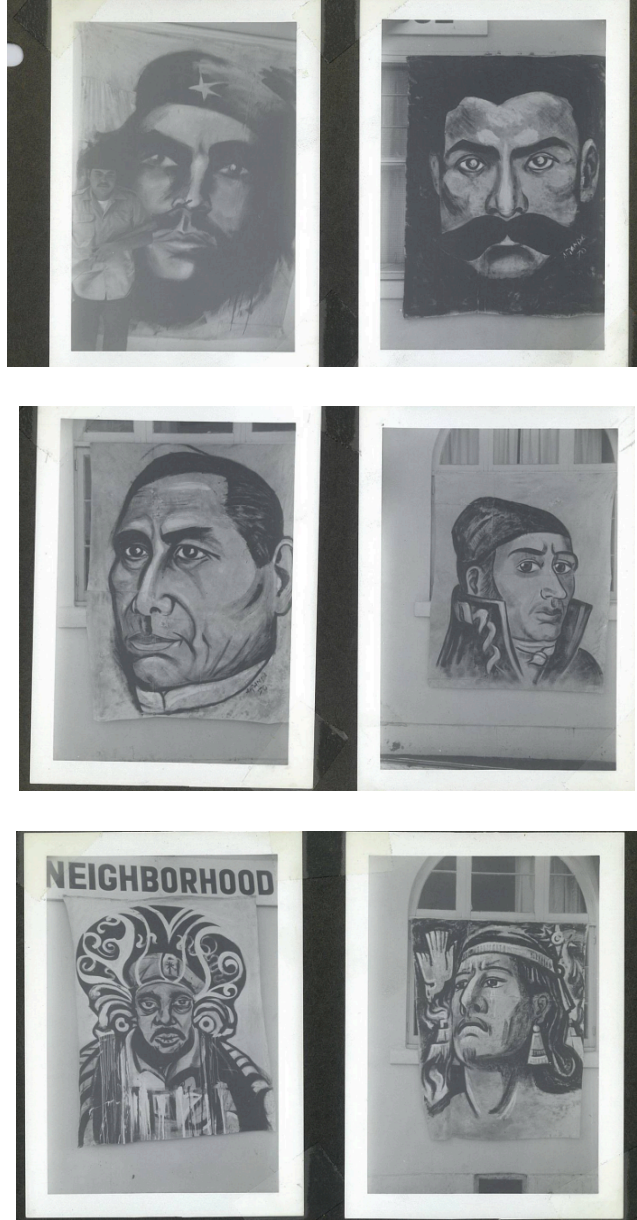
<sup>94</sup> “Brown Berets - Interview with *La Verdad*,” September 1970, “Subject Files,” Box 18, Folder 2, Herman Baca Papers, MSS 0649, Box 18, Folder 2, Special Collections & Archives, UC San Diego.

members—David Rico, Jose Gomez, Rico Bueno, Manuel Savin, and Joe Ortega—barricaded themselves inside the building on the day of the takeover.<sup>95</sup> It can be reasonably assumed that the presence of such groups—and their Aztlán-inspired ideologies—influenced the specific strategies and rhetoric adopted and applied by the protesters over the course of the occupation. Indeed, it is probable that the fierce rhetoric used in open letters by occupiers and the Negotiating Committee to the NHA administrators expressing ideas of self-determination and self-sufficiency was, in part, inspired by the ideas circulated among the Chicano organizations present during the occupation.

The influence of the Aztlán concept on the Neighborhood House takeover may be more clearly discerned through an analysis of the paintings hung on the windows of Big Neighbor during the first month of the occupation. These paintings, which depict various indigenous, nationalist, and revolutionary figures in Chicano and Aztec history, may symbolize freedom from oppression and powerlessness at the hands of intruding governments and institutions—a key component of the Aztlán concept. From what I can discern, these figures (illustrated in Figure 11) include Che Guevara (top left), an Argentine revolutionary; Emiliana Zapata (top right), a leading figure in the Mexican Revolution; Benito Juarez (middle right), Mexico's first Indigenous president who led the nation against the French Intervention; José María Morelos y Pavón (middle right), a leader of the Mexican Independence Movement; and an Aztec Cuauhtémoc emperor (bottom right). These paintings, commissioned by local Mexican American artists, conjure up images of a national identity and symbolize the historic Aztec resistance to encroaching, intruding foreign powers—an intrusion protesters likely saw reflected in the actions of the NHA and city officials leading up to the takeover. Their use in the takeover of the Neighborhood House suggests the influence of the Aztlán and Aztlán-inspired concepts on Chicano organizations at the time of and the role such concepts played in shaping the language and rhetoric of the takeover, as well as fostering feelings of unity, cultural pride, self-determination, and self-sufficiency among Chicanos and barrio residents.

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<sup>95</sup> Garcia, "The Occupation of Neighborhood House."



**Figure 11. Paintings Hung on the Windows of Big Neighbor, October 1970.**

“Paintings on Windows of Big Neighbor,” October 1970, Box 5, Folder 11, Neighborhood House Collection,  
Chicano Park Museum & Cultural Center, San Diego, CA.

As Emmanuelle Le Texier argues in her analysis of political participation in Barrio Logan, internal solidarity has historically emerged among barrio residents as a result of a shared language and history, as well as feelings of belonging to a common place.<sup>96</sup> The enduring concept of Aztlán, coupled with the emergence of formal Chicano studies programs and organizations, undoubtedly played a role in bringing awareness to a shared Chicana/o history and, subsequently, heightening feelings of cultural unity among Mexican American residents of Barrio Logan. Though by 1970, barrio residents were increasingly dispersed and fragmented as a result of decades of segregation, encroachment, and displacement, the circulation of both a mythical and real past for Mexican Americans by student activists, Chicano organizations, and Chicano studies programs likely helped to unite residents across age, class, and gender under their common heritage and experiences with oppression. As Le Texier maintains, such feelings of solidarity among barrio members can engender a “civic and moral commitment” to a shared space that, with time, may transform into group consciousness, group identity, and eventually into feelings of political efficacy and capacity.<sup>97</sup> This process may explain how the Aztlán concept and similar ideologies—developed and disseminated by Chicano students and organizations—influenced the language and attitudes of barrio residents and, ultimately, united them under a shared goal and common strategy in the occupation of the Neighborhood House in 1970. Such a development of group consciousness through a shared history is perfectly encapsulated in the final lines of the aforementioned “Open Letter From the Neighborhood House,” with the author affirming that the people of Barrio Logan will do whatever they can to defend and reclaim their community, as they descend from a people of great resilience and perseverance.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Emmanuelle Le Texier, “The Struggle Against Gentrification in Barrio Logan,” *Chicano San Diego: Cultural Space and the Struggle for Justice*, ed. Richard Griswold Del Castillo, University of Arizona Press, 2007, 202–21.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> “An Open Letter From the Neighborhood House,” Neighborhood House Collection.

### III. The Chicano Press

The “Open Letter From the Neighborhood House”—like so many other correspondences relevant to the October 5, 1970, takeover—was widely circulated among the Chicano press in San Diego. Unlike the mainstream press, which afforded some coverage to the takeover of Chicano Park and little (if any) to the occupation of the Neighborhood House, the newly emerging Chicano press vehemently chronicled the Big Neighbor’s occupation and related Chicano affairs. As such, it can be argued that while the Aztlán concept provided an ideological framework for student activists and Chicano organizations to effectively articulate their sentiments of self-determination and community control, the Chicano press acted as the vessel through which these ideas could be circulated and propagated among local Mexican American communities.

The role of San Diego’s Chicano press in the city’s Chicano Movement has remained grossly unexplored by scholars. However, a 2019 dissertation by Francisco Beltran entitled “Voices of the people: The Mexican American Alternative Press in San Diego, 1963-1978” thoroughly traces the development of the Chicano alternative press in San Diego and considers how these publications may have reflected and influenced the attitudes of the city’s Chicanos throughout the 1960s and 70s. In his paper, Beltran identifies the Chicano community newspapers of *Street Journal* and *La Verdad* as two significant publications that may have acted as “vessels” in diffusing Chicano ideas among San Diego’s neighborhoods. Of these two publications, the Chicano nationalist newspaper of *La Verdad* played an especially important role in the 1970 takeovers, as it emerged directly from Barrio Logan. According to Beltran, from 1968 to 1972, 30 issues of *La Verdad* were published and would be consumed by audiences all across San Diego.<sup>99</sup>

*La Verdad*’s primary consumers, however, were residents of Barrio Logan, the newspaper’s place of origin. A browse through publicly available editions of the paper reveals that the publication addressed a myriad of social, economic, and political problems particularly pertinent to the community of Logan

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<sup>99</sup> Francisco Beltran, “Voices of the people: The Mexican American Alternative Press in San Diego, 1963-1978,” (PhD diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 2019), ProQuest (2307785614), 114.

Heights. For instance, *La Verdad* closely followed police activity in Logan Heights, frequently calling attention to incidents of residents being scapegoated, profiled, and beaten by local police authorities.<sup>100</sup> *La Verdad* also voiced dissent against city infrastructure projects and the building of more junkyards and commercial buildings in the barrio. By identifying common problems suffered by Barrio Logan residents and closely following the events/developments of the neighborhood, *La Verdad* came to be frequently read and relied upon as a source of news by community members of all backgrounds by the 1970s.

In the context of the Chicano Movement specifically, *La Verdad* also offered extensive coverage on the local and regional Chicano Movements, regularly celebrating the efforts of Chicano activists and organizations and offering insights into their ideologies. *La Verdad* frequently conducted interviews with members of Chicano organizations across San Diego, including the Chicano Federation and Brown Berets, inquiring about their ideologies and strategies.<sup>101</sup> School walkouts by Mexican American students across San Diego schools in the late 1960s and early 1970s were thoroughly documented as well, as were those Chicano conferences and demonstrations held outside of San Diego, including the establishment of the “El Plan de Santa Barbara” in April 1969 and the Chicano Moratorium held in Los Angeles on August 29, 1970.

Evidently, in the years leading up to the takeover of the Neighborhood House in 1970, *La Verdad* and other Chicano newspapers had been consistently and thoroughly updating local communities on Barrio Logan affairs and local/regional Chicano developments. As these publications were widely circulated throughout Barrio Logan, it is highly probable that these newspapers helped to publicize and disseminate Chicano and Aztlán thought and ideology in the neighborhood. Moreover, these publications likely played a significant role in raising awareness on the abuses suffered by Barrio Logan residents to audiences outside of the barrio. Indeed, the Chicano press would have helped inform activists from beyond the immediate Logan Heights area of the need for direct action in the barrio—perhaps explaining

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<sup>100</sup> “No Justice for Chicanos,” *La Verdad*.

<sup>101</sup> “Brown Berets - Interview with *La Verdad*,” Herman Baca Papers.

the enthusiastic contributions from students of the greater San Diego and Los Angeles/Santa Barbara areas in the takeovers of 1970.

At the same time, *La Verdad* and other Chicano newspapers also played a more immediate, practical role in the takeover of the Neighborhood House. As discussed in chapter two, the Chicano community newspapers of *La Verdad* and *Street Journal* closely followed the unfoldings of the takeover, documenting key developments and promoting the community services provided by the center amidst the occupation effort. By calling for Chicano volunteers and informing audiences of the grievances and objectives of the occupiers, the Chicano press directed both publicity (which was not provided by the mainstream press) and tangible resources (in the form of volunteers and human labor) towards Big Neighbor, which undoubtedly helped to sustain the long, tiring effort. Taken together, the diffusion of Chicana/o identity and the awareness of local developments/affairs among audiences promoted through Chicano newspapers of the late '60s and early '70s allowed for those ideologies primarily developed and propagated by the new generation of Mexican American students, youth, and professionals to reach the broader Chicano community and, thus, unite Mexican Americans across class, gender, and generational lines.

## Conclusion

The takeover and occupation of the Neighborhood House was an immediate response to the transformation of the facility from a beloved recreational and social center serving the specific needs of Logan Heights' predominantly Mexican American population to an estranged, federally-sponsored administrative office run by outside professionals. At the same time, through analysis of primary documents from the time of the takeover, this paper has revealed that the occupation was also underpinned by years of encroachment on the neighborhood by the City of San Diego's industrial projects, infrastructure pursuits, and hypervigilant police authorities, which, taken together, contributed to patterns of residential segregation, displacement, and economic/political repression suffered by generations of residents. These social and urban developments in what would become "Barrio Logan" galvanized residents to fight for greater community control over their shared spaces—a fight that took shape in two critical takeovers of Chicano Park in April 1970 and the Neighborhood House in October 1970.

Significantly, both 1970 takeovers appear to have been propelled by the emerging local and regional Chicano Movements. As argued in chapter three, the attempt for increased community control through the occupation of the Neighborhood House was facilitated, to a great extent, by the ideological and on-the-ground contributions of young Mexican American students and local Chicano organizations, who used the university, the concept of Aztlán, and the Chicano press as tools and resources to articulate and circulate their ideas and, effectively, unite barrio residents across class, age, and gender lines. The takeovers of Chicano Park and Neighborhood House, which stand just blocks away from one another, can thus be interpreted as a representation of one historically marginalized urban community channeling years of frustration—with the help of emerging cultural and political ideologies—into radical, explosive forms of direct action and resistance.

The takeover of the Neighborhood House and the subsequent creation of the Chicano Free Clinic, therefore, deserve to be remembered alongside the takeover of Chicano Park as a significant, defining

moment in Logan Heights' history and the history of the Chicano Movement in San Diego. The Neighborhood House, whose extensive, dynamic history and daring takeover have received little coverage beyond that offered by the Chicano press of the 1970s, deserves to be celebrated today as the triumph and spectacle it was. Beginning as a small settlement house on 1809 National Avenue focused on the assimilation and Americanization of Mexican immigrants, the facility would blossom into a social and recreational center that empowered generations of Mexican Americans in Logan Heights until, ultimately, being reclaimed by the community of Barrio Logan as a health center that continues to provide a multitude of services to the immediate Logan Heights area, which remains predominantly Mexican American. While most of the early settlements across the nation continued to erode after federal funds began coming in and disappeared completely by the 1980s, the Neighborhood House defied the odds and underwent a glorious transformation, being reclaimed by the barrio as an enduring source of health and life. This metamorphosis occurred amidst and in spite of continued industrialization, severe underfunding, and rampant poverty in the barrio.

The Neighborhood House and Chicano Free Clinic, ultimately, symbolize the perseverance and resilience of the Barrio Logan community and their unwillingness to be silenced and eliminated by the forces of segregation, repression, and displacement to this day. Over the decades, the barrio has proudly and defiantly reclaimed its shared community spaces, adorning the expanse of grey infrastructure that once cast a cloud over the neighborhood with vibrant murals celebrating its Chicana/o identity and history—a constant reminder of their cultural diversity and historical resistance against forces of oppression. Interpreted by residents as the “year of the Chicano,” 1970 should be commemorated as a year in which the Barrio Logan community was able to effectively unite to channel generational frustrations and hardships into feelings of solidarity and direct action, but it should not be regarded as the end of these efforts.<sup>102</sup> Indeed, to this day, Barrio Logan remains disproportionately exposed to poverty, crime, and pollution, but its people, just as they did in 1970, persevere.

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<sup>102</sup> *Chicano Federation Newsletter*; “A Chicano Community Call,” March 1975, Box 5, Folder 5, Neighborhood House Collection, Chicano Park Museum & Cultural Center, San Diego, CA.

## **Afterword**

This thesis was written from the months of November 2025 to March 2026, a time of heightened brutality against immigrants in the United States, as the Trump Administration has carried out a deportation crackdown of unprecedented scale. Mexican American communities across the nation have been disproportionately targeted by these attacks and continue to make up a large number of ICE detainees forcibly taken from their homes and ripped from their communities—all while being politically scapegoated and increasingly dehumanized by the administration and general public. Amidst this political violence, it is more important than ever to recognize and celebrate the resilience and perseverance of Mexican American communities throughout the nation, who, in the face of political repression and violence at the hands of apathetic, self-interested governments, have historically and presently united to celebrate their shared culture, language, history, and struggle.

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