

Chicanos in Cowtown

According to Fort Worth activist, Gilbert Garcia, Mexican Fort Worth prior to WWII consisted of “a few tree shade barbers...a few tamaleros selling from carts...lots of cantinas and few tree shade mechanics...there were a few beauty operators working out of their homes. No infrastructure or professionals as teachers or attorneys. No industry” and a couple of social clubs “with the only purpose to have dances.”¹ When Garcia arrived in Fort Worth in 1940 the status quo consisted of a small entrepreneurial class of Mexicans, an informal economy catering to their own, not welcomed outside the barrios.² They lived in the same neighborhoods with unpaved roads, monthly jamaicas, and boys baseball leagues, separate from the White majority. In large part because of the poll tax, only fifty Mexican Americans appeared as registered voters and the city’s White leadership did not hear any needs their community had.³ Garcia came to Fort Worth in 1940 to find work and to attend college. Turned away from Texas Christian University, finding that “no one told me Mexicans could not enroll,” and he found difficulty getting hired to do anything other than work as a “ditch digger...[among the] peons.”⁴

The history of the city of Fort Worth has greatly ignored the Mexicanos who have lived in and helped build its infrastructure and growing economy since the late nineteenth century. The city’s boosters in the early twentieth century created a monolithic picture of Fort Worth as a city of cattle and White cowboys—where the west begins—and successfully erased the history of a multiethnic presence. Their accomplishment continues to permeate into the twenty-first century understanding of Fort Worth’s origins. Recent historical scholarship focused in Fort Worth has not fully included the experiences of Mexicanos nor has historical writing regarding the plight of Mexican Americans in the Southwest focused its analysis on this city. Through newly conducted oral interviews, newspaper archives, family papers (that are not yet archived), and city records

this project aims to begin the process of correcting the narrative of Fort Worth history by placing the activism of Fort Worth Chicanas and Chicanos in the 1960s and 1970s within the context of both the city and in history of Mexicans in Texas.

¹ Samuel Garcia Papers, "Fort Worth 1940," Series I: Personal Papers, Box 2, Folder 10, Fort Worth Central Library Archives.

² Cuellar, *Stories from the Barrio*, 42-43.

³ Marshall Lynam, "GI Forum—It's Hitting Heavy Blows at the Enemy—Prejudice," *Fort Worth Press*, August 19, 1957.

⁴ Samuel Garcia Papers, "Fort Worth 1940," Series I: Personal Papers, Box 2, Folder 10, Fort Worth Central Library Archives.