

THE CHICANO MOVEMENT

1965-1975

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established a strong presence in Pilsen, as did CASA, led by the energetic Rudy Lozano. In 1972, the Brown Berets created the Benito Juárez Health Clinic (BJHC) to serve community needs. In the following year, feminists in Pilsen formed *Mujeres Latinas en Acción*, a woman's advocacy group that gradually expanded beyond its birthplace and continues to provide much-needed services for Latinas in Chicago and its suburbs to the present.⁵⁸ Shortly afterwards, the barrio's educational problems were addressed when residents transformed an old dilapidated school into the new Benito Juárez Community Academy (commonly known as Juárez High School), which opened in 1977.

Not all community groups were run by working-class residents. Some of the most enduring and consequential were Chicano organizations set up by professionals. Perhaps the two most productive associations of this type were the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) and the Southwest Council of La Raza (SWCLR). MALDEF was conceived in 1967 by Chicanos in Texas who hoped to provide much-needed legal services to the community.⁵⁹ Founders included Peter Tijerina, Gregory Luna, and Mario Obledo. Eventually, after moving its headquarters to San Francisco, MALDEF was able to prosper not only because of its effectiveness in securing funding from private foundations and by winning cases but also because of its outstanding leadership, notably executive directors Vilma Martínez, Joaquín Ávila, and Antonia Hernández. Its impact has been profound. "MALDEF," according to the political scientist Maurilio E. Vigil, "has done more to address the problems, needs and concerns of Chicanos than any other contemporary Chicano organization."⁶⁰ Among its most impactful legal victories were *Plyler v. Doe* (1982), which guaranteed undocumented children the right to a public education, and *Gómez v. City of Watsonville* (1987), which granted local governments the right to redistrict through the creation of single-member districts.

The SWCLR was established in 1968 in Phoenix to provide technical assistance and help fund community-based organizations in border states. Four years later, it went national, changing its name to the National Council of La Raza (NCLR) and establishing its headquarters in Washington, DC. Raúl Yzaguirre, from San Juan, Texas, took the initiative in forming the powerful advocacy organization, which he led for almost forty years. He was aided by his colleagues Hermán Gallegos, Henry Santiestevan, and Maclovio Barraza. Other prominent Chicanos identified with NCLR were Bert Corona and Ernesto Galarza, both of whom seemed to have been involved with virtually every major civil rights initiative during these halcyon years.

From the old SWCLR came the idea, in 1975, for the Southwest Voter Registration Education Project (SWVRP), a Texas-based organization that was extremely effective, under the leadership of ex-LRUP leader Willie Velásquez (1944-1988), in mobilizing Mexicanos to participate in the political process.⁶¹ The SWVRP eventually turned its attention to litigation, working closely with MALDEF.