Creating 'Safe' Mexican Food Culture: White Appropriation in Post-World War II Southern California

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Craving a taco? Of *asada* (beef), *pollo* (chicken), or *al pastor* (pork)? Do you want cilantro, onions, and salsa on it too? These are the types of questions we ask ourselves when we are in line to get our meal. However, we rarely stop and think about how tacos and Mexican food in general have become part of America's mainstream cuisine. Living in Southern California, we are all aware of the prominence of Mexican food establishments dotting the landscape. From big corporations like Chipotle and Taco Bell to special event food trucks to little, makeshift stands on street corners, Mexican food heritage is a ubiquitous part of life in Southern California. This research explores how Los Angeles appropriated, "whitewashed," and exploited Mexican people and heritage through aspects of food culture. Mexican food became an important part of the white suburban leisure lifestyle in the 1950s. By the 1960s, Chicano and union farm worker activists made efforts to both reclaim their culture and fight their oppression. For the purposes of this research, food culture is defined as the actual cuisine itself and all the aspects that are related to the consumption, preparation, and the "eating/dining" experience that is attached to it. In addition, the terms "white" and "Anglo" deal with both ethnicity and culture of the population in Southern California.

In the early twentieth century, Anglo Americans met Mexican food with skepticism because they perceived it as "unhealthy" and potentially dangerous. In addition, there was also cultural contention in terms of "sustainability" within Anglo American food culture by the 1940s. However, in the subsequent decade, Mexican food started to gain acceptance through its "whitewashing" of recipes, and therefore, it became more mainstream, modernized, and palatable. During this time period, Mexican presence on agricultural farms increased as general laborers flocked to Southern California due to the Bracero Program. The Bracero Program was a series of agreements negotiated between Mexico and the United States that allowed millions of migrant

Mexican male workers to come to the U.S.[1] Most of the labor contracts tied the migrants to short-term agricultural labor commitments. However, Mexican migrants faced exploitive, discriminatory, low-wage labor throughout the state, especially Southern California. Showing the exploitation in both Mexican food appropriation and agricultural production reveals how the white population in Southern California profited from Mexican bodies and their food culture.

However, Mexican communities resisted their exploitation. They fought back to reclaim their cultural identity. Through the 1960s Chicano activism, the communities exposed social, economic, and political inequalities. Historically, Southern California's white and Mexican populations clashed. The white population viewed Mexicans as a problem in Southern California. Their efforts in "continued labor segmentation, in vocal and electoral expressions of discrimination, and in anxious attempts to mitigate or even block the demographic inevitabilities of the [twentieth] century" demonstrate the white population's attempts to solve it.[2] Nevertheless, the geographical, social, and ethnic spaces and problems enriched Southern California into a complex, historical entity. By using sources such as newspaper articles, art, cookbooks, photographs, and oral histories, this research sheds light on the rhetoric and racial relationships of white and Mexican Californians that have evolved over decades through food culture.

To get a better understanding of relationships between Anglo American and Mexican communities in Southern California before the 1950s, this research briefly turns to William Deverell's *Whitewashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of its Mexican Past* and Mark Wild's *Street Meeting: Multiethnic Neighborhoods in Early Twentieth Century Los Angeles*. In *Whitewashed Adobe*, Deverell examines the relationship between Mexicans and Anglo Americans in the City of Los Angeles. He deconstructs the idealistic image of Los Angeles as a harmonious, multiethnic metropolis in the early twentieth century

[1] "About," Bracero History Archive, accessed March 02, 2021, http://braceroarchive.org/about.

[2] William Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of its Mexican Past* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), 46-47.

and argues that the city was actually a product of complicated relations between the Mexican community and white Angelenos, and the latter's attempts to "whitewash" local Mexican traditions, histories, and spaces.[3] In this article, Mexican food was altered in order to satisfy the tastes of Anglo American palates. It can also be used in spatial terms since Olvera Street was created for Anglos to feel secure and "visit Mexico but without the risk or danger of actually going to Mexico."[4] Therefore, it allowed white Angelenos to transcend boundaries and get a taste of Mexican food culture without the risk of crossing into Mexican dominated spaces that were supposedly dangerous, riddled with vice, and dirty.

Despite their contributions in different industries, especially agriculture, Mark Wild's *Street Meeting* reveals increased anxieties about the Mexican population in twentieth-century California.[5] Southern California's white communities' apprehension allowed for them to advocate the cleansing of different parts of the city.[6] However, white Southern Californians concurrently exploited the Mexican population. Mexicans and other non-white populations fell prey to the Anglo city builders' initiative to "contain, sanitize, and commercialize [their cultures] for their own consumption," which in this research deals with the appropriation and whitewashing of Mexican food culture for Anglo American consumption.[7] Wild argues that workers in the agriculture industry consisted predominantly of the Mexican demographic. Migrant Mexican workers, mainly due to the

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[3] Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe*, 10. Deverell asserts that cities such as Los Angeles "came to age amidst (and in part of because of) specific responses to Mexican ethnicity and Mexican spaces [and therefore, there was] a complex and disturbing relationship between whites, especially those able to command various forms of power, and Mexican people, past, and landscape."

[4] William D. Estrada, "Los Angeles' Old Plaza and Olvera Street: Imagined and Contested Space," *Western Folklore* 58, no. 2 (Winter 1999): 116.

[5] Mark Wild, *Street Meeting: Multiethnic Neighborhoods in Early Twentieth Century Los Angeles* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 57.

[6] Wild, *Street Meeting*, 13. This process of cleansing goes with Wild's term of making city spaces as "white spots" which he defines it as, "a belief in the aesthetic, political, and moral purity of a city that possesses none of the blight, decay, civic corruption, or criminal activity that plagued other urban areas."

[7] Wild, *Street Meeting*, 59.

Bracero program, came to Southern California to pick and package produce. However, they faced social, economic, and political discrimination.

Before analyzing the evolution of Mexican food culture, it is critical to discuss the cultural landscape of Southern California before the 1950s. In Sarah Portnoy's *Food, Health, and Culture in Latino Los Angeles*, she states that in the decades prior, Southern California "had gone from being Mexican pueblo[s] with a majority Mexican population to [becoming a place with] a majority Anglo population."[8] This shift in demographics cultivated prejudices against the Mexican community, particularly their food. To some degree, most of the white population in Southern California viewed Mexican food as "unsanitary, unhealthy, and dangerous."[9] While the white population desired to purify Southern California from historically rooted Mexican food, they also desired to reinvent it to suit their palates, creating a paradoxical dissonance. For example, white communities re-identified Mexican food as "Spanish" food. Daniel Aburto's "How Mexican Food Became 'Mexican': The Evolution of Mexican Food in Southern California" explains that Los Angeles "city boosters were fascinated with selling the city food through a Spanish romanticism palatable to an audience who viewed the increasing presence of Mexicans as a threat to their community."[10] In other words, prominent white communities repackaged Mexican food under a faux "Spanish Fantasy Past" façade.

Carey McWilliams coined the term "Spanish Fantasy Past" in *Southern California: Island on the Land*. McWilliams defines the term as a mythical history to romanticize California's nineteenth-century rancho period.[11] The labeling of "Spanish" or "Spanish-Mexican" perpetuated a sense of "a European, foreign legacy," while the solo term of "Mexican" represented negative

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[8] Sarah Portnoy, *Food, Health, and Culture in Latino Los Angeles* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), Location 203. I used the ebook of this monograph so there are no "page numbers" just text locations.
[9] Portnoy, *Food, Health, and Culture,* Location 212.
[10] Daniel Aburto, "How Mexican Food Became 'Mexican': The Evolution of Mexican Food in Southern California," *Los Angeles City Historical Society* 40, no. 2 (Summer, 2020), 5.
[11] Portnoy, *Food, Health, and Culture,* Location 504.

connotations of backwardness, indigeneity, and dirtiness.[12] In addition, these European connections symbolized a status of "modernity." It is hypocritical how Anglo Americans treated Mexican cuisine; they wanted to avoid it yet were still curious enough to eat it. As Portnoy states, "early Mexican restaurants [in Southern California] cater[ed] to Anglos [by] adopting a white-washed, idealized version of Mexico and Mexican food for a diner who wanted an exotic experience without having to visit a part of the city populated by working-class Mexicans and Mexican Americans."[13] To Portnoy, whitewashed Mexican food provided a "staged authenticity" that served an "exotic" Mexican experience without the risk of crossing over racial-ethnic boundaries.[14]

Casa Verdugo, a restaurant that operated in the early twentieth century, reinvented Mexican food. Railroad baron Henry E. Huntington and his real estate associate Leslie C. Brand, who advocated and planned for Casa Verdugo's remodeling, reflected "how popular Spanish romanticism and boosterism coincided with food consumption."[15] Playing off the romanticized "Old California" aesthetics of Spanish-style adobe structures and lush rancho landscapes, the restaurant attracted numerous visitors. Casa Verdugo's transformation exemplified an Anglo city boosterism tactic. In his book *Becoming Mexican American*, George Sanchez states that "by depicting [Los Angeles's] Latino heritage as a quaint, but altogether disappearing element in [the city's] culture, city officials [and those of influence] inflicted a particular kind of obscurity on Mexican descendants... by appropriating and then commercializing their history."[16] In addition, it was clear that Casa Verdugo sold Mexican food; however, the restaurant owner made an effort to label herself and the menu as Spanish.[17]

Cookbooks also demonstrate the remaking of Mexican food culture as "Spanish." Bertha Haffner Ginger, a white

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[12] Aburto, "How Mexican Food Became 'Mexican,'" 5-6.
[13] Portnoy, *Food, Health, and Culture,* Location 216.
[14] Portnoy, *Food, Health, and Culture,* Location 352.
[15] Aburto,"How Mexican Food Became 'Mexican,'" 6.
[16] George J. Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 71.
[17] Aburto, "How Mexican Food Became 'Mexican,'" 6.

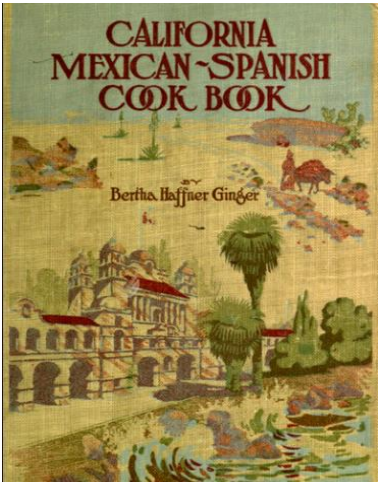


Figure 1 – Cover of Bertha Haffner Ginger, *California Mexican - Spanish Cookbook* (Bedford: Applewood Books, 1914).

homemaker, published *California Mexican Spanish Cookbook* seen in Figure 1, in 1914. Ginger's work created her as one of America's first celebrity chefs of Mexican food.[18] Gustavo Arrellano notes that Ginger "packed lecture halls nationwide and [her] published cookbook whett[ed] the country's appetite for a cuisine that wouldn't travel outside of the borderlands in earnest until the 1950s."[19] However, Ginger's book title signaled to her audience that Mexican food is "safe" and in vogue through its misleading, incorrect usage of "Spanish." Her introduction gave the reader different information by stating that Mexican cuisine really has nothing to do with Spain. Ginger wrote "it is not generally known that Spanish dishes as they are known in California are really Mexican Indian dishes... bread made of corn, sauces of chile peppers, jerked beef, tortillas, enchiladas, etc., are unknown in Spain as native foods."[20] The terms "Spain" and "Spanish" clearly have nothing to do with the Mexican recipes in this cookbook.

Lastly, another example is Plaza Olvera, a historic street in Downtown Los Angeles. Tourists and citizens could "eat, drink,

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[18] Gustavo Arellano, "For Over 137 Years, No Newspaper Has Covered Mexican Food Better Than The L.A. Times", *The Los Angeles Times*, September 12, 2019.

[19] Gustavo Arellano, "Maven of Mexican; Los Angeles Times Staffer Bertha Haffner-Ginger Helped Introduce Olvera Street, L.A. to Main Street, U.S, With Her 1914 Cookbook", *The Los Angeles Times*, April 21, 2012, Proquest Historical Newspaper; Scott Harrison, "From the Archives: 1914 Times Cooking Class", *The Los Angeles Times*, July 5, 2018.

[20] Bertha Haffner Ginger, *California Mexican - Spanish Cookbook* (Bedford: Applewood Books, 1914), 19. This is the available ebook version of this cookbook, and may not match page numbers on the original print since it seems like it is scanned.

and purchase selective goods and services in an idealized 'Mexican Land' that is somewhat insulated from the real world and danger but that evokes at least a veiled sense of excitement and foreign adventure."[21] From 1950 onward, the connection between Mexican and Spanish food weakened since it was challenged and commodified by suburban Anglos for its acceptance into mainstream American cuisine. As Rosario Curletti stated in her 1958 article "Mexican Cookery Delights: Epicurean Treasure Won With California," when the United States and Mexico signed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, ending the Mexican-American War in 1848, "the Yankees, Gringos little dreamed that they had acquired a gastronomic treasure that become part of that warp and woof of American cooking heritage."[22]

The 1950s eventually saw a subtle change in the perceptions of Mexican food. Skepticism still plagued Mexican food on whether it would be able to enter the mainstream. For example, a photograph dated back to 1951 depicts Councilman E.R. Roybal with a young, beautiful female accomplice.[23] The California Health Department questioned if the Mexican diet is "adequate" to enter mainstream American cuisine. Roybal persuaded otherwise by showcasing the "tostada" which is both nutritious and healthy. Roybal asserted that Mexican cuisine has more health qualities than the American standard of cokes, hamburgers, and potato chips. The post-WWII period also shows that Mexican food evolved into being a commodity for Anglo American consumers. Very reminiscent of previous decades when exoticism played into Mexican restaurants catering to whiter audiences, comes from a

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[21] Estrada, "Los Angeles' Old Plaza," 116.

[22] Rosario Curletti, "Mexican Cookery Delights: Epicurean Treasure Won With California", *The Los Angeles Times*, November 6, 1958. There are terms that some may not be familiar with. For clarification, the phrase "warp and woof" in the quote means an essential foundation or base of any structure or organization. This term is taken from weaving. "Epicurean" is a philosophy that is based on the teachings of Epicurus. This school of thought seeks to find pleasure and indulgence in reference to food, comfort, and other luxuries.

[23] *Roybal and the Mexican Diet*, 1951, B&W Photograph, Los Angeles Herald Examiner Photo Collection. Roybal was the first councilman of Mexican descent for Los Angeles in more than 70 years. He was a member of the LA City Council for 13 years (1949-62) before becoming a US Representative for the next 30 years (1963-93) of his political career.

1954 advertisement in the *Desert Sun* promoting "Another Mexico Night at the Chi Chi." The advertisement announced a restaurant gathering at the Chi Chi with the theme being "A Night in Old Mexico."[24] The restaurant apparently hosted it again since it was popular with the patrons. The Chi Chi restaurant described their menu as having tacos, tostadas, frijoles, fried rice, enchiladas, and chili rellenos. In addition, they featured Mexican singers and a band to serenade the guests at night. The ad exemplifies a caricatured Mexican event which allowed white suburbanites to sample Mexican cuisine without crossing lines of segregation in 1950s Southern California.[25]

The process of Mexican commodification not only benefited larger restaurant chains such as Taco Bell, but it also seemed to help the common, white, suburban housewife of the post-WWII era. An article for the *Madera Tribune* from 1959 titled "Tacos and Mexicali Salad, Equals America's Burger Deluxe" stated, "from down Mexico way, comes an exciting idea for informal luncheon and supper parties popular with people of all ages." Mexican food was seen as a commodity for these types of events since it was something "new" and "enticing" to accentuate a get-together. This is corroborated later, when the article stated "if you like to be the first with such things better read on and serve it soon."[26] In a widely circulated cookbook from 1958 called *Discovering Mexican Cooking* by Alice Young and Patricia Stephenson, the authors also highlighted how "[Mexican food] is fun to eat in a restaurant; it is also fun to serve at home. Mexican food is inexpensive, and so adaptable to informal entertaining."[27] The popularity of white suburbanites experimenting with Mexican food was so great that newspapers all around Southern California "taught Mexican cooking classes, frequently plugged community pop up dinners, and published hundreds of user submitted recipes in its cookbooks."[28] An article from 1953 in the *Los Angeles Times* that boldly reads "Bracero Dishes: Add Spice to Your Menu" is

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[24] "Another Mexico Night Tonight at the Chi Chi," *Desert Sun*, July 29, 1954.
[25] Portnoy, *Food, Health, and Culture*, Location 669.
[26] Zola Vincent, "Tacos and Mexicali Salad, Equals America's Hamburger Deluxe," *Madera Tribune*, April 23, 1959.
[27] Alice E. Young and Patricia P. Stephenson, *Discovering Mexican Cooking* (San Antonio: The Naylor Company, 1958), vii.
[28] Arellano, "For Over 137 Years."

another example of Mexican food appropriation. It suggested that readers try "native" Mexican dishes most popular among the Mexican braceros working on county ranches. The typical menu included a "combination salad, chicken en mole, baked shells with tomato sauce, refried pinto beans, whole kernel corn, corn tortillas, mixed stewed fruits, and coffee, punch or milk." The side of this piece displays step-by-step recipes to "tempt those jaded palates" which were curated by the cooks of the Citrus Grower's housing unit for Mexican nationals.[29]

Many aspects are to be picked up from this article. First being the paradoxical dynamic of Mexican food being promoted as something to try, but in the process, it was also Americanized to make it seem healthier. Since the citrus industry supplied these "native" Mexican meals, they stated that braceros "cannot be expected to adjust to American foods and customs during their short-term contracts in this country." The article also shows that "American foods are added however, to improve the nutritional balance of each meal."[30] This is considered Mexican food appropriation because elements of it have been taken out and then modified to suit the tastes of a wider white American audience. The modification of Mexican food mirrors a *Los Angeles Times* article written in 1951 by Timothy Turner called "Predatory Dietician." This article criticizes the diet of the Mexican working class. The California Health Department surveys the sustainability of Mexican food which they are concerned that the "Mexican diet" under-nourishes.[31] Sustainability in these terms means if Mexican food can influence, contribute, and position itself within American cuisine. The article also doubted that "tortillas, frijoles, a scrap of meat, chili and cheese, with a little tomato and shredded lettuce thrown in, form an adequate diet."[32]

The "Bracero Dishes" article also shows how citrus farm owners congratulated themselves on their success regarding the preparation of food for the bracero workers. They bragged that "last year, for example, 1,000,000 meals were served in the five

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[29] "Bracero Dishes."
[30] "Bracero Dishes."
[31] Timothy G. Turner, "Predatory Dietician," *The Los Angeles Times,* August 29, 1951.
[32] Turner, "Predatory Dietician."

dining halls used by the braceros... the cost to each worker didn't exceed $1.75 a day."[33] This is reminiscent of "company towns" whose owners used the guise of corporate paternalism to manipulate workers into seeing them in a positive, caring light. Consequently, employers fostered worker loyalty to the company, who in turn exploited them for their labor. Lastly, tortilla processing was "modernized" during the 1950s. Tortilla-making has long been a process that is *hecha a mano,* which translates to "made by hand," since tortillas are a principal staple in the Mexican diet and were made fresh daily. The "Bracero Dishes" piece stated that the rate of tortilla consumption for the average farm worker was [fifteen] tortillas a day. The mechanized process of mass tortilla making needed to be available for the heavy demand. Citrus farm-owned housing units "modernized" this archaic process by creating a tortilla machine where "one [machine] turn[s] out hundreds of dozens of tortillas a day for field workers. The "Predatory Dietitians" article stated that "these chaps live on tortillas, beans and chili plus what meat they can come by, and they are [as] healthy and strong as oxen."[34] However, the meals given out to braceros weren't always great and nutritious, as this article glorifies. In his oral history from the Bracero History Archive, Florencio Magallanes Parada, who came to the US in 1954 through the Bracero program, recalls the poor living conditions and food service.[35] Florencio and his companions complained of the food being inedible and they still had to pay for it whether they ate it or not. In addition, sometimes there wasn't enough food to fully fill their stomachs. In Gustavo Arellano's book, *Tacos USA: How Mexican Food Conquered America*, he notes that a bracero also agreed that the food was "disgusting" and that the portions were so meager and gross that famished braceros filled them with dog food.[36] We can see the polar differences in Mexican food being served at specialty restaurants and "at-home" recipes versus the food that were presented to Mexican braceros

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[33] "Bracero Dishes."

[34] Turner, "Predatory Dietician."

[35] "Florencio Magallanes Parada," interview by Myra Para-Mantilla, *Bracero History Archive*, Item #10, accessed October 16, 2020. http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/10

[36] Gustavo Arellano, *Taco USA: How Mexican Food Conquered America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013), 269-270.

in mess halls. The irony is telling of how Mexican food was starting to be accepted (with modifications to suit Anglo American palates better) while Mexican people in Southern California were simultaneously being treated poorly, discriminated against, and excluded from white communities and society. As Arellano states in his Mexican food history column for the *Los Angeles Times*, local newspapers and magazines "mirrored the attitude of Southern Californians: Praise Mexican cuisine while demonizing the people behind it."[37]

It is also worth noting how symbolism plays into food distribution and those who work in the fields to provide the produce. In Figure 2, large letters highlight "The Lazy Peon" on top of the label. This was a shipping label for avocados that was distributed by the Cal-Royal Company, Inc., a company that was based in Vista, California. It depicts a Mexican "peon" who is wearing a huge sombrero with cactus and Spanish pueblo style architecture in the background. The caricature of the "peon" is not an anomalous symbol on this single shipping label, but it was a ubiquitous symbol throughout California. A peon, historically, described an agricultural worker who was in servitude to his landlord. This system of bondage dates back to the Spanish colonial period. As Arellano mentions in the postscript of *Tacos USA*, the symbolism behind the "sleepy peon" is "an emotional and residual reference to Mexico's indigenous, rural, hardworking, thrifty, and resourceful populations ('la gente humilde') and a folk culture that places value on balance, rest, nourishment, and



Figure 2 - Crocker, Lazy Peon, 1940s-50s, Fruit Shipping Crate Label, Cal-Royal Co.

[37] Arellano, "For Over 137 Years."

relaxation in order to carry on."[38] It was used to adversely show that Mexicans were lazy, out of touch, and poor workers. However, this representation was far removed from reality, especially in post-WWII Southern California. Figure 3 shows a 1952 photograph titled, "For Salad Bowls." Its caption reads, "despite encroaching subdivisions, rich soil of the San Fernando Valley still has space for growing crops. Above are Mexican nationals harvesting a lettuce crop along Devonshire St., in the Sepulveda area. Crates of this popular salad-making produce find their way via truck to metropolitan and local markets."[39] These visual examples are part of the next development in this research which shows the relationship of Mexican laborers and the agriculture sector and how they claimed their identity through activism later in the late 1960s.



Figure 3 – "For Salad Bowls," June 5, 1950, B&W Photograph, 21x26 cm, Valley Times Collection.

There is a reason why Orange County came to be named as such. During the first half of the twentieth century, this county became a major producer of citrus in the United States and around the world. The citrus industry was so expansive that it had produced more wealth than gold and ranked second under the oil industry in California's economy from the late-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth. This success was only made possible by the thousands of Mexican nationals that migrated to work on these farms. However, they were not met with entirely open arms in white-dominated communities. These immigrants who were "recruited, [were] generally exploited for their labor, and often excluded either through direct deportation or legal pressure[s]."[40] The racial discrimination didn't stop there. Mexican laborers and

[38] Arellano, *Taco USA*, 269-270.
[39] *For Salad Bowls*, June 5, 1950, B&W Photograph, 21x26 cm, Valley Times Collection.
[40] Jesse La Tour, "The Roots of Inequality: The Citrus Industry Prospered on the Back of Segregated Labor," *The Fullerton Observer*, December 17, 2019.

their families faced being at the bottom of Southern California's social hierarchies and went through segregated housing and schooling. Covenants were also in place in which Mexican families were excluded and restricted from "public parks, swimming pools, theaters, restaurants, bars, dance halls, clubs and societies." However, in the following years, farm worker and Chicano movements started to gain visibility and influence. Most notably was Cesar Chavez's efforts in which he "straddled the two worlds of the Chicano Movement and the U.S. political mainstream."[41] Chavez organized the Mexican American farmworkers under the National Farm Workers Association by the early 1960s. These groups' tactics included pilgrimages, fasts, and consumer boycotts which captured the nation's attention, elevating Chavez to international fame as a labor and civil rights leader. One of his most important acts of protest was his 25-day fast. The refusal of food is symbolic in the struggle for farm worker rights. The voluntary act of avoiding to eat symbolized solidarity with Mexican farm workers who toiled the fields to bring produce to society in the face of racism and labor exploitation. Chavez was inspired by the philosophies of non-violent protests from leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi. The drastic techniques Chavez used were "meant to highlight the larger issues of deprivation and perseverance of poor laborers."[42] In a 1968 article by the *Los Angeles Times* titled "Chavez Breaks Fast at Mass Attended by Kennedy, 6,000: CHAVEZ MASS," David Larson wrote that Cesar Chavez "swallowed a piece of Mexican bread, ending the 25-day fast he had maintained to dramatize his dedication to non-violence."[43] The choice that Cesar Chavez ate Mexican bread symbolizes owning one's food culture in the face of oppression. Another example of using food as a means of activist symbolism connecting to Mexican Farm Workers movements in the 1960s is an incident that happened at Moorpark

[41] Lori A. Flores, *Grounds for Dreaming: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the California Farmworker Movement* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 182.
[42] Flores, *Grounds for Dreaming,* 183-184.
[43] David Larsen, "Chavez Breaks Fast at Mass Attended by Kennedy: 6,000: CHAVEZ MASS," *The Los Angeles Times,* March 11, 1968.

College in Simi Valley.[44] According to an article by Kenneth Lubas from 1969 titled, "Educator Apologizes for Grapes on Menu," grapes were included on the college's lunch menu for a Mexican-American Studies conference.[45] Grapes were being boycotted at the time because of the Delano Grape Strike. This strike started when Filipino pickers walked out of the grape fields on September 8, 1965 and were joined later by Cesar Chavez and Mexican laborer activists.[46] The strike went on for about five years until California table-grape growers were forced to sign labor contracts. This was a triumph for Chicanos and Filipinos alike since their persistent activism allowed them to reconcile their civil and labor/wage rights. This is why it was insulting to the participants of the Mexican-American Studies conference since "grapes [were] the center of controversy between Cesar Chavez' National Farm Workers Assn: [sic] and the table grape growers of the San Joaquin Valley."[47] Food boycotts were symbolic to Mexican workers as a form of solidarity for their cause.

Southern California's physical and cultural landscape has changed throughout the decades since the postwar period. However, the problematic appropriation of Mexican food culture still persists. Cities like Los Angeles have restaurants that appropriate Mexican street food and add a bourgeoisie, gentrified flair for their hungry audience. Meanwhile, Mexican street food vendors are targeted and fined for selling food without government-sanctioned permits. The whitewashed modifications made to Mexican cuisine in the post-WWII years are now being considered as full-fledged "American." In a recent article by John T. Edge titled, "The Tortilla Takes a Road Trip to Korea," Edge explains how Korean food, an obscure niche in America, is finally making its breakthrough to a wider audience. The remedy? Tortillas. Through fusion cuisine, Korean entrepreneurs create "Korean Tacos" which include "corn tortillas piled with Korean-

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[44] Just to clarify for those not familiar with California geography, Simi Valley is located in Ventura county; however, it is still considered part of Southern California.

[45] Kenneth Lubas, "Educator Apologizes for Grapes on Menu," *The Los Angeles Times*, November 22, 1969, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

[46] David Bacon, "Legacy of the Delano Grape Strike, 50 Years Later," *The San Francisco Chronicle*, September 16, 2015.

[47] Lubas, "Educator Apologizes."

style barbecued short ribs known as kalbi, garnished with onion, cilantro, and a hash of chili soy-dressed lettuce."[48] The reasoning behind this recipe is articulated through Mr. Ban, who is an owner of a Korean taco truck. He states that by using Mexican food influences such as "the tortilla and the toppings [it is a] way to tell our customers this food is O.K., that this food is American." In addition, some popular food items that are in America's mainstream that you may think are "authentic Mexican" are actually created in the U.S., rather than in Mexico. Some examples include: fajitas, sopapillas (fried pastries dusted with sugar or cinnamon), chile con queso dip, taco salads, Mission-style burritos, margaritas, chimichangas, pre-formed taco shells, and tortilla chips.[49] So what can we make of this? From a historiographical standpoint, it is important to acknowledge how Mexican food evolved from not being accepted at all, to partial acceptance with modifications to suit Anglo standards, to being labeled as universally "American." There is a fine line, however, of appropriation and celebration in ethnic food culture. There are ways to enjoy Mexican food while acknowledging and respecting its heritage. However, within American history, the country has had problematic relationships with non-white ethnic groups, including their food culture. Therefore, it is not surprising that white American appropriation of Mexican food culture was utilized in order to "Americanize" Mexicans and other people of color's culture and traditions.

[48] John T. Edge, "The Tortilla Takes a Road Trip to Korea," *The New York Times,* July 7, 2010.

[49] Lauren Schimacker, "'Mexican' Foods That Were Invented in America," *Mashed*, August 7, 2017, https://www.mashed.com/78948/mexican-foods-invented-america/. This article offers interesting information on how and where these different foods originated.