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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Conspirando en Los Ángeles

In September 2020, Salvadoran-American writer and journalist Roberto Lovato published his memoir *Unforgetting*, an intimate, time-jumping narrative that reveals the turbulent history of U.S. intervention in Central America. In the first chapter, he recounts his visit to an immigration detention center in Texas in 2015, where several Central American refugee mothers secretly planned a hunger strike to protest their inhumane treatment. By drawing a comparison to the guerilla fighters of the Farabundo Marti Liberation Front (FMLN) in the Salvadoran Civil War, Lovato explains the Salvadoran concept of *conspiracion* (conspiracy in English). Deciphering its Latin roots to mean “[creating] community in the shared, godly breath that contains the spirit”¹, he cites *conspirando* as “an important political tradition in El Salvador and Latin America... going underground to design plans for insurrection.”²

The title of my thesis project, “Conspirando en Los Angeles,” (*conspiring in Los Angeles* in English), alludes to the history of Central American refugees who continued the revolutionary fight against injustice after migrating to the city in the 1980s. I argue that Central American refugees in Los Angeles showed agency through political activism by using MacArthur Park as a base for several protests, marches, demonstrations, and organizational meetings against U.S. intervention. MacArthur Park is a public recreational area near Downtown Los Angeles. Their public displays of resistance

¹ Lovato, Roberto. "Chapter 1," in *Unforgetting: A Memoir of Family, Migration, Gangs, and Revolution in the Americas* (New York: HarperCollins, 2020).

² Lovato, Roberto. "Chapter 9," in *Unforgetting: A Memoir of Family, Migration, Gangs, and Revolution in the Americas* (New York: HarperCollins, 2020).

transformed the park's spatial and cultural meaning into a uniquely Central American space alongside their settlement in the surrounding neighborhood of Westlake. The park helped them connect with American leftist activists who used the space, including leaders of the Sanctuary Movement, labor unionists, and anti-nuclear advocates. Together they worked to counteract President Ronald Reagan's conservative agenda of providing military aid to Central American dictatorships. Their intersectional support proved vital when Central American organizations lobbied for changes in local legislation around immigration policies.

This project adds to the existing literature about the U.S. Central American diaspora and its place in the histories of MacArthur Park and the Sanctuary Movement. Existing scholarship on MacArthur Park covers its early 20th-century architectural history as a product of Los Angeles' outward expansion to become a metropolitan city. There is a tremendous gap in research about the area from the 1970s until the 2000s when scholars in Urban Planning, Criminal Justice, and Sociology took an interest in studying its blighted community affected by crime, drug trafficking, and substandard housing. Newly arrived Central American refugees settled in Westlake due to the cheaper rent and proximity to jobs in the downtown area. At the same time, they dealt with the disadvantages of coming to Los Angeles with little to no family and carrying the traumas of wartime violence.³ This project addresses a gap in research about MacArthur Park, as framing the scholarship around its negative reputation portrays Central Americans in a bad light. My research complicates this narrative with a more positive lens about their activism and community building.

³Segura, Rosamaria. "The Great Migration of Central Americans to Los Angeles," in *Central Americans in Los Angeles*, ed. Segura, Rosamaria (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2010), 27.

Research about the Sanctuary Movement, also known as the Central American Solidarity movement, began to appear in the 1990s. Scholars wrote about how American church leaders protected Central American refugees from the Immigration Naturalization Service (INS) as they continued to flee and enter the United States. They credit the movement with the inception of sanctuary churches across the country, along with the reformation of asylum procedures and federal legislation such as the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act and Temporary Protected Status in 1990.⁴ American sanctuary activists provided Central Americans with much-needed relief. Still, the scholarship notes that Central Americans were often excluded from leadership roles and left little evidence of their contributions to the movement.⁵ In an attempt to restore their agency, this project highlights the role of the local Central American community in political activism during the Sanctuary Movement in Los Angeles. At a time of urgent need, MacArthur Park became an ideal space for marches and protests for Central Americans who shared the space with other leftist movements of the era.

This project aims to bring attention to previously unstudied sources, primarily eleven photographs found on the database Calisphere and thirteen newspaper articles archived by the *Los Angeles Times* and *La Opinion*. Through a synthesis of these sources, I reveal specific details about Central American solidarity organizations and their purpose for organizing at MacArthur Park from 1981 to 1989. Additionally, I employed various items related to Central American community activism that I discovered while

⁴ Stoltz Chinchilla, Norma, Nora Hamilton, and James Loucky. "The Sanctuary Movement and Central American Activism in Los Angeles." *Latin American Perspectives* 36, no. 6 (2009): 106.

⁵ Perla, Hector, and Susan Bibler Coutin. "Legacies and Origins of the 1980s US–Central American Sanctuary Movement." *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees* 26, no. 1 (2009): 7. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48648342>.

volunteering at the Special Collections and Archives Room at California State University, Los Angeles (Cal State LA).

This project contributes to the sub-fields of microhistory and political history as well as the discipline of Central American Studies. MacArthur Park remains an important space for the Central American community in Los Angeles. Los Angeles County holds the greatest share of the Central American population in the United States, at around 565,000 people.⁶ Throughout the 2010s, Central American immigration has caused a new wave of xenophobic backlash in American politics and media. In response, activists in cities like Philadelphia and Atlanta called for a new Sanctuary movement, transforming churches into refugee centers and organizing protests around immigration reform.⁷ Since Central American diasporic communities are growing and becoming a more influential part of the U.S. Latin diaspora, it makes sense to look back at how Central Americans established community early on through political advocacy and protests in places like MacArthur Park.

CHAPTER 2

Historiography

⁶ Babich, Erin and Jeanne Batalova. "Central American Immigrants in the United States" Migration Policy Institute, August 11, 2021, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/central-american-immigrants-united-states>.

⁷ Gammage, Jeff, and Ximena Conde. "'Immigrant Communities Are Welcome Here': Philly Stands Strong on Sanctuary as Gov. Abbott Sends Buses from Texas." The Philadelphia Inquirer, December 3, 2022. <https://www.inquirer.com/news/philadelphia/sanctuary-city-philadelphia-texas-buses-immigration-20221203.html>.

In 1887, Cincinnati-born businessman Henry Gaylord Wilshire paid \$52,000 for a wedged-shaped plot with treeless hills within the expanse of Los Angeles. The property was named Westlake Park, and through an expensive investment, it transformed into a recreational oasis. The booster magazine *Land of Sunshine* once called it “the most popular open-air resort in the city... [with] fine drives, walks, and flower beds.”⁸ The park would become a significant factor in the development of Wilshire Boulevard. Gaylord played a role in organizing La Fiesta, an annual parade hosted by the Chamber of Commerce that largely appropriated Latino culture to attract white settlers from the Midwest.⁹ In his book *Wilshire Boulevard: The Grand Concourse of Los Angeles*, Kevin Roderick writes of this place that would later become MacArthur Park. He describes how the boulevard's construction gave way to Los Angeles' expansion from the 1880s to the 1920s. The growth of the automobile industry pushed Gaylord to construct a bridge in the middle of the track, making Westlake Park connect Los Angeles from its downtown area to the beaches of Santa Monica.¹⁰

Despite being one of the oldest parks in Los Angeles, little is written about MacArthur Park's early 20th-century history and significance. MacArthur Park only began to pique the interest of scholars around the 2000s, over a century after the park's founding. This was in response to the drastic change in the neighborhoods' makeup and reputation that solidified in the 1990s. Westlake Park, now named MacArthur Park, was no longer deemed premier grounds for a pleasant drive or boating. Now, academics

⁸ Roderick, Kevin., and J. Eric Lynxwiler. *Wilshire Boulevard : Grand Concourse of Los Angeles*. First edition. Santa Monica: Angel City Press, 2005, 17.

⁹ Deverell, William. "History on Parade." In *Whitewashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and The Remaking Of Its Mexican Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 61.

¹⁰ Roderick and Lynxwiler. *Wilshire Boulevard*, 18.

sought to study what they described as a drug-trafficking, gang-ridden, poverty-stricken neighborhood made of recently arrived Central American refugees.

While *Wilshire Boulevard* explains how the park came to be, most of the literature relevant to this research topic were journal articles and book chapters about the Central American community in Los Angeles, primarily published after the late 1990s. Many scholars in Sociology, Anthropology, Political Science, Communications, Criminal Justice, Urban Planning, and Psychology wrote about the Sanctuary Movement, a national campaign run by a network of American churches, lawyers, and activists who sought to provide refuge for Central Americans fleeing their home countries affected by U.S. intervention. Notably, historians have not examined MacArthur Park during the 1980s. It may be odd to call this analysis of the literature historiography. Still, each source explains the contemporary settings which compelled the scholars to write about Central Americans in Los Angeles and the Sanctuary Movement more broadly. Although this shows that the U.S. Central American diaspora is severely understudied in the discipline of History, academics have made efforts to document this community's background.

Sanctuary in Los Angeles

The earliest work relevant to my research topic was written in 1998 by anthropologist Susan Bibler Coutin. In "From Refugees to Immigrants: The Legalization Strategies of Salvadoran Immigrants and Activists," Bibler Coutin claims that the legalization strategies devised by immigrants and their advocates shaped 1990s U.S. immigration policies to challenge the criteria for who is granted political asylum. She

reviews the efforts of Salvadorans in the 1980s who sought official governmental recognition as political refugees, detailing how they challenged the legal definition of a refugee. Bibler Coutin's work contributes to migration theory by highlighting the power of immigration law in negotiating citizenship and the agency of immigrants in court. Most importantly, she touches on the movement's gatekeeping power in reserving aid for specific Central Americans. Bibler Coutin explains that movement activists had a screening process to determine which refugees qualified for political asylum, stating that "... those who were considered economic immigrants were either left to cross the border on their own or given some other sort of assistance."¹¹ While they conducted these screenings for individuals whose cases could challenge U.S. immigration law, American allies of the Sanctuary movement could not fulfill the needs of all Central Americans. Building on Bibler Coutin's work, I argue that Central Americans began to create their own organizations once they arrived in the United States to become self-sufficient apart from the aid of American solidarity groups.

Bibler Coutin's work emerges from broader scholarship on U.S. immigration law, but few would pioneer the study of the Central American community growing in Los Angeles. In *Seeking Community in a Global City*, Nora Hamilton and Norma Stoltz Chinchilla write about the multiple dimensions of Salvadoran and Guatemalan migration to Los Angeles from the late 1970s to the late 1990s. Both scholars worked with the Central American community in the 1980s, showing an intimate understanding of the struggle to assimilate, find work, and seek justice in American politics that refugees faced upon settling in the city. In particular, their fourth chapter, "Struggle for Survival" looks

¹¹ Coutin, Susan Bibler. "From Refugees to Immigrants: The Legalization Strategies of Salvadoran Immigrants and Activists." *The International migration review* 32, no. 4 (1998): 907.

at the transformation of the Los Angeles economy in the 1980s, when low-wage jobs became widely available at the expense of upward mobility. The subsection about the political climate and labor organizing highlighted the increased role of Latines in unions and pointed out that the newly found freedom they found in the city empowered some Central Americans to organize.¹² I add to this research by using photographs that show MacArthur Park as a common meeting place for May Day protests and Labor Day rallies for the local community.

In this thesis, I have chosen not to focus on Pico-Union, a sister district to Westlake and an extension of its large Central American community. MacArthur Park is closer to the Westlake neighborhood, but these two areas blend into each other culturally and geographically. Elana Zilberg writes about Pico-Union in her journal article “A Troubled Corner” about the aftermath of the 1992 Los Angeles Riots and the Rampart police scandal in the local area, but the private redevelopment projects that followed extended into Westlake throughout the decade. Her most extensive critique of Rebuild LA’s private sector redevelopment plan concerns its neighborhood committee’s exclusion of labor leaders who represented many Central Americans in low-wage jobs.¹³ Although this article covers 1990s history, it still connects to the importance of Central Americans as workers in Los Angeles and how labor unions represented their political interests.

¹² Hamilton, Nora and Norma Stoltz Chinchilla. “The Struggle for Survival: Working in Los Angeles,” in *Seeking Community in a Global City: Guatemalans and Salvadorans in Los Angeles*, ed. Nora Hamilton and Norma Stoltz Chinchilla. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 75.

Latine is a gender-neutral version of Latino and Latina. I use this term to be inclusionary of non-binary people or groups in which more than one gender is represented in this community.

¹³ Zilberg, Elana. “A Troubled Corner: The Ruined and Rebuilt Environment of a Central American Barrio In Post-Rodney-King-Riot Los Angeles.” *City & Society* 14, no. 2 (2002): 193.

Around 2010 there was an increase in the literature about Central Americans in the United States, possibly because of the increased visibility of Latines becoming politically organized around immigration reform. What Bibler Coutin recognized about the Sanctuary Movement's ability to gatekeep aid reappears in her following work with Hector Perla, "Legacies and Origins of the 1980s US–Central American Sanctuary Movement." This article reflects on the contemporary sanctuary politics of 2009 concerning the safety of Salvadoran immigrants. The authors combine their expertise in Anthropology and Political Science to reexamine the movement, arguing that the transnational connections between North American and Central American activists made the movement impactful. The two scholars point out that Salvadoran immigrant activists had to abstain from leadership roles and remain invisible for the cause to seem legitimate and urgent. Perla and Coutin assert that despite having to "[embrace] identities that, to some, implied weakness or passivity, such as "refugees" or "victims," Salvadorans turned this "strategic invisibility" into leveraging power within immigration courts.¹⁴ This strategy went far in granting Salvadorans Temporary Protected Status (TPS) through the 1990 Immigration Act, thus reforming asylum procedures throughout the decade.

Norma Stoltz Chinchilla, Nora Hamilton, and James Loucky wrote another reflection on the Sanctuary Movement in the same year "Legacies and Origins" was published. While Perla and Coutin's article centers on federal legislation, "The Sanctuary Movement and Central American Activism in Los Angeles" provides a microhistory of different churches and advocacy groups organizing in the city. Chinchilla, Hamilton, and

¹⁴ Perla, Hector, and Susan Bibler Coutin. "Legacies and Origins of the 1980s US–Central American Sanctuary Movement." *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees* 26, no. 1 (2009): 9. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48648342>.

Loucky explain that Los Angeles became a major epicenter for Central American migration and activism. One major claim is that Central Americans' testimonies to American parishioners about their personal experiences of violence and persecution helped with their consciousness-building, which they deemed "the most important long-term consequence of a movement" that changed many people's perspectives on U.S. intervention for good.¹⁵ They also provide insight into Central American organizations that formed alongside American advocacy groups, such as El Rescate, the Center in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES), and the Central American Refugee Center (CARECEN). This article includes six accounts of Central Americans benefitting from sanctuary churches and aid in Los Angeles. Only one of the accounts, Mario Rivas of La Placita Church, is about a Central American getting involved in activism.¹⁶ We learned from Coutin that Central American refugees had to stand back during the movement for their safety, making it difficult for scholars to tell the stories of Central American leaders and activists in North American circles. Unfortunately, Chinchilla, Hamilton, and Loucky could not provide examples of how Central Americans expressed their political attitudes through their study. I seek to fill this gap around Central American political agency by applying historical evidence of their participation in political protests in MacArthur Park.

MacArthur Park as a Central American Hub

Starting in the 2010s, new literature appears about the Central American community and MacArthur Park in Los Angeles. This scholarship is primarily concerned

¹⁵ Stoltz Chinchilla, Norma, Nora Hamilton, and James Loucky. "The Sanctuary Movement and Central American Activism in Los Angeles." *Latin American Perspectives* 36, no. 6 (2009): 104.

¹⁶ Stoltz Chinchilla, Hamilton, and Loucky. "Sanctuary Movement", 113.

with Westlake in the 1990s and beyond. Nonetheless, these works helped me understand the various perspectives of scholars that have studied this topic. Scholars of multiple disciplines have failed to do more than briefly describe the community of the 1980s. At this time, there appear two exciting features in the new literature. First, scholars outside the social sciences began to take an interest in MacArthur Park in the 2000s. For example, in “Police and the Reclamation of Public Places: A Study of MacArthur Park in Los Angeles,”; criminologists William H. Sousa and George L. Kelling write about the police-led Alvarado Corridor Initiative from 2003 that aimed to solve the issue of open-air drug trafficking and crime in the park. Through interviews and focus groups with neighborhood residents, they claim that the park was much safer with police officers “‘owning’ the corridor”, asserting the importance of police in preserving the integrity of public spaces.¹⁷ The authors claim the initiative was successful through community-policing tactics. Still, they do not mention the local Latino community and how the local Rampart Division previously had a reputation for corruption and abuse in Westlake.¹⁸ In Chapter 4, I describe how Los Angeles City Council passed a sanctuary policy that prohibited LAPD officers to arrest people based on their undocumented status, which helped protect several Central Americans from being targeted by police. My research takes a nuanced approach to policing in the Westlake area.

The second shift we see is the new wave of research by people of the Central American diaspora writing about their communities in the United States. In 2010, as a part of the *Images of America* book series, Rosamaria Segura wrote *Central Americans in*

¹⁷ Sousa, William H., and George L. Kelling. “Police and the Reclamation of Public Places: A Study of MacArthur Park in Los Angeles.” *International journal of police science & management* 12, no. 1 (2010): 45.

¹⁸ Costanza-Chock, Sasha. “MacArthur Park Melee.” In *Out of the Shadows, Into the Streets*. The MIT Press, 2014. 3.

Los Angeles. In her acknowledgments, she notes, "This collection of memories would have not been possible without the efforts of numerous individuals and organizations that have collected and safeguarded the images and stories of these Central American immigrants."¹⁹ She compiles a series of photographs together and recounts the history of the Central American diaspora in the city from the 1950s to the late 2000s. In the second chapter, "The Great Migration of Central Americans to Los Angeles," Segura highlights how Pico-Union and Westlake continued to attract new Central American immigrants due to the low rent, public transportation, access to jobs in the downtown area, and the existing Latino culture there.²⁰ Although she includes three photographs of protests at MacArthur Park in this chapter, Segura does not provide more context besides asserting that the park was "a niche for most of the Central Americans' civic and social engagements."²¹ With my research, I aim to explain the photographs of protests at MacArthur Park in more detail to reveal more about resistance by the local community against injustice in Central America.

Although Rosamaria Segura did not expand on activism at MacArthur Park, Sasha Costanza-Chock's book chapter "MacArthur Park Melee" addresses a particular example of the May Day protests in 2007, where troops from the Los Angeles Police Department began attacking hundreds of protestors and members of the media at a post-march rally at the park's bandshell. As a communications scholar, she analyzes the media coverage of the incident, which largely favored the LAPD's account, and how immigrant rights activists produced media that counteracted their biased report.²² Because my project

¹⁹ Segura, Rosamaria. "The Great Migration of Central Americans to Los Angeles," in *Central Americans in Los Angeles*, ed. Segura, Rosamaria (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2010), 7.

²⁰ Segura. "Great Migration", 27.

²¹ Segura. "Great Migration", 27.

²² Constanza-Chock. "MacArthur Melee", 6.

argues that MacArthur Park has a legacy of activism, I cite this book chapter to show how it continues to be an important place for protests in the city. Moreover, the chapter shows that immigration and labor continue to intersect as major concerns for the Latino community of Los Angeles. Lastly, I connect Costanza-Chock's book chapter from 2014 to the article by Sousa and Kelling in 2010 about the changing face of the local Rampart police division through community policing tactics. These two works highlight the different ways police have treated local residents and park-goers, but ultimately the 2007 May Day march showed that police still repressed large gatherings at MacArthur Park.

In 2015, two urban planning scholars, Kelly Main and Gerardo Sandoval, wrote about MacArthur Park for an environmental psychology journal. Their article "Placemaking in a Translocal Receiving Community: The Relevance of Place to Identity and Agency" explores the remaking of the park by the local Central American immigrant community. They conducted six in-depth interviews and 180 shorter interviews using a survey to collect statements that could help them detect the identity and emotional meaning they associated with the park. As a result, they found that the participants had a close emotional connection to the park, priming them to act and protect it. Main and Sandoval acknowledge that the local immigrant community has influenced MacArthur Park, stating that "overt political and civic action in the park, related to both Central American and broader immigrants' rights issues, includes everything from small press conferences to mass political rallies that are attended by thousands of people."²³ Their study validates my pursuit of uncovering the history of Central American protest at the

²³ Main, Kelly, and Gerardo Francisco Sandoval. "Placemaking in a Translocal Receiving Community: The Relevance of Place to Identity and Agency." *Urban studies* (Edinburgh, Scotland) 52, no. 1 (2015): 80.

park because scholars recognize that the local community has transformed this park over the years.

The following year, Gerardo Sandoval wrote a book chapter titled “Transforming Transit-Oriented Development Projects via Immigrant-Led Revitalization: The MacArthur Park Case,” an extension of his article with Kelly Main. He expands on how “Mesoamerican” immigrants created a robust local community in the face of large-scale development in Westlake, including the 1992 construction of the Metro Red Line at MacArthur Park. The strength of the community stems from a complex set of arrangements and collaborations between real estate developers, the city government, the police, and community organizations. Lastly, he notes the role of police, like two previous sources I cited, acknowledging the local law enforcement’s transition from corruption and brutal treatment of racialized youth in the 1990s to community policing strategies in the 2000s.

In 2017, Meredith Reitan, an urban planning historian from the University of Southern California, published an article for KCET’s Lost LA series called “MacArthur Park Reds.” Using USC’s archives, she analyzed photographs of MacArthur Park’s development and the various leftist political protests that took place there throughout the 20th century. She explains that by the start of the Cold War in the 1960s, the park “became the focal point for rallies and demonstrations for peace.”²⁴ The 1980s photographs she cites in her article demonstrate how leftist activists manifested at the park and allowed them to attract the local Central American community to their cause. While Reitan and I share some primary sources in our work, my project cites photographs

²⁴ Reitan, Meredith D. “MacArthur Park Reds.” KCET. April 30, 2017. Accessed November 6, 2022. <https://www.kcet.org/shows/lost-la/macarthur-park-reds>

throughout the 1980s, whereas the history she recounts in her article starts at the beginning of the 20th century and ends in 1981.

Lastly, an important source that led to the development of this project came from the quintessential book *U.S. Central Americans*, edited by Karina Alvarado, Alicia Ivonne Estrada, and Ester E. Hernandez in 2017. With multiple contributors working in the emerging field of Central American Studies, this book includes chapters on the lives and experiences of Central Americans in Los Angeles. One chapter by Maritza Cardenas titled “Performing Centralamericanismo: Isthmian Identities at the COFECA Independence Day Parade” provides a sociological analysis of how Central Americans in Los Angeles create an identity through public performances of identity and nationalism. Since 1983, the Central American Independence Day Parade has taken place in the Pico-Union-Westlake area and culminated at MacArthur Park with a cultural festival hosted by the organization *La Confederacion Centroamericana* (COFECA). While Cardenas notes that “many mestiza/os, as well as black and indigenous communities like Mayas and Garifunas, do not necessarily “ascribe to a pan-Central American identity,” there was an inclination for the diaspora in Los Angeles to move towards a group identification as “Central Americans”.²⁵ In the 1980s, Central Americans were perceived “as racial Others within the U.S. American imaginary, [and] were also invisible within the local Los Angeles landscape.”²⁶ This homogenization of identity comes with its challenges within the diasporic community of Los Angeles because it is primarily made up of a mestizo Salvadoran and Guatemalan population. *U.S. Central Americans*, along

²⁵ Cardenas, Maritza E. “Performing Centralamericanismo: Isthmian Identities at the COFECA Independence Day Parade” in *U.S. Central Americans: Reconstructing Memories, Struggles, and Communities of Resistance*, eds. Alvarado, Estrada, and Hernandez [et.al.](#) (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2017), 128.

²⁶ Cardenas. “Performing Centralamericanismo”, 130-131.

with much of the literature in Central American Studies, focuses heavily on mestizo Salvadorans, so its limited scope of representation of different Central Americans is a weakness of this book.

Overall, the scholarship portrays MacArthur Park as a place with a difficult history of crime and corruption while acknowledging how the local community has changed its local reputation. Scholars also revealed how the Sanctuary Movement helped Central American refugees find their footing in the United States while making them invisible as organizers. I aim to address both sides of the literature by uncovering the history of Central Americans living in Los Angeles during the 1980s, of which there is a scarcity in the literature. Additionally, my primary sources show that the mobilization and visibility of the Sanctuary Movement in Los Angeles relied on the networks and actions of Central American refugee organizations.

CHAPTER 3

Research Methods

In the summer of 2022, I drove to the Center of the Study of Political Graphics in Culver City to rifle through a collection of 1980s political posters. After sifting through stacks of large folders, I found the one item listed on their finding aid that I was searching for: a screen-printed poster advertising the Central American Independence Day Parade

in 1985. In bright blue ink, it featured the symbols of five Central American countries and the image of independence leader Francisco Morazan. It said the parade would take place on September 14th at 1:30 pm and end in a festival at MacArthur Park.

To me, this source represented a great hope that I could find more sources like it. In 2021, I became a part of the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship and began developing a research project about the history of Central Americans living in Los Angeles. I relied heavily on digital collections in the program's first year for self-isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, I could not find reliable digital collections dedicated to Central American history. A year later, Cal State LA resumed in-person class instruction, which meant I had access to the Special Collections and Archives Room at Cal State LA. Their Central American L.A. Solidarity Network collection included a set of small boxes filled with bulletins and newsletters by Central American activist groups. Returning to campus, I applied for a minor in Latin American Studies and began to meet professors who led me to legitimate online archives and gave me many book recommendations. All of this helped me write a paper about 1980s Central American political protests at MacArthur Park for my History research capstone class, which became the foundation of this thesis project.

I gathered eleven photographs and thirteen newspapers surrounding protests at MacArthur Park that involved Central Americans, whether it meant that they had organized on their own and/or were in participation with other movements or protestors outside of the Westlake community. The photographs were found on the website Calisphere, a database of digitized photographs from all ten University of California campuses and important libraries, archives, and museums across the state of California.

The photographs were largely taken by photographers from the *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*. Then I accessed contemporary newspapers from the Historical *Los Angeles Times* (1881-1994) and *La Opinion* Archives (1926-2008) through the Cal State LA library and cross-examined them with the photographs to understand their context. I cited additional newspaper articles to write about changes in city legislation relating to immigration and key decisions by the CIA and the Reagan administration over the wars in Central America.

To improve my interpretation of my primary sources, I used the *Princeton Guide to Historical Research*, published by Zachary M. Shrag in 2021. In the book, Chapter 4, “Sources” explains the purpose and uses of photographs and newspaper articles in writing about historical events. I used a website called Notion to keep track of my research materials and citations. Notably, I created a database of all the primary sources that were relevant to my project. It allowed me to sort them chronologically and pair newspaper articles with photographs that were about the same event. Using the Special Collections Room at Cal State LA inspired me to begin volunteering there in February 2023. I was assigned to a newly donated collection that was named the Central America Memoria Historica Archive. Much of the material relates to 1980s Central American organizations and community leaders, which became an essential resource this semester. Although I have not completed processing this collection, I utilized some of these materials in my research with permission from Special Collections Librarian Azaelea Camacho.

The sources categorize this research as microhistory, a subfield of history involving the lives of common, marginalized people through ordinary events or everyday activities. It is characterized by a microscopic scale regarding place, time, and people,

which allows historians to analyze their primary sources down to the smallest details and “gain understanding and insight into the properties of large-scale global processes and events.”²⁷ The topic of this research also fits into political history, which encapsulates the study of elections, party politics, and governance over time. Much of the reasoning behind Central American activism in the 1980s was to show opposition to the Reagan administration in the United States and the dictatorships of various Central American countries. Political history also allows historians to “probe the relationship between formal politics and social movements”, and this project highlights how the Central American solidarity movement created changes in local Los Angeles politics.²⁸ As I explained in Chapter 2, I could only find secondary sources that were written by scholars outside of the discipline of History. Therefore, in order to develop an understanding of the scholarship, it was necessary to expand my choices for literature to other fields.

One limitation of this study is that the primary sources do not reflect a diverse set of Central American activists and organizations. While some of the newspapers I cited made mention of “Central American” participants and that organizers were rallying for issues in Guatemala and Nicaragua, the primary sources overwhelmingly represented Salvadoran activists and organizations making use of the space at MacArthur Park and activism surrounding U.S. foreign policy in El Salvador. I employ the term “Central Americans” throughout my thesis to describe peoples from the geopolitical area of the isthmus, and specifically to not presuppose the ethnicities of the local Latino activists

²⁷ Paul, Jesse. “What Is Microhistory?” *Social Evolution & History* 17, no. 2 (2018): 64.

²⁸ Broxmeyer, Jeffrey D., Lisa M.F. Andersen, Nicolas Barreyre, Rebecca Edwards, Michael J. Lansing, Allan E.S. Lumba, and Tara Y. White. “New Directions in Political History.” *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 22, no. 1 (2023): 65.

participating in the protests and demonstrations at the park. I make distinctions when the primary sources highlight certain organizations that represent specific Central American countries (i.e. Casa El Salvador and Guatemalan Information Center) and activists with distinct ethnicities (i.e. Carlos Vaquerano, Salvadoran).

Another limitation of this study is that the evidence of the events at MacArthur Park is sparse across the decade. This study examines the 1980s and I found that the sources did not document certain years like 1982, 1985, 1986, and 1988. For the rest of the years, the sources provided evidence of organizing at the park for about two or three individual events per year. I managed to cross-examine the evidence I collected to tie the same events together, primarily through photographs and newspapers. There were some years that were particularly well documented and suggest to me that they were active years for activism for the community, such as 1981, 1984, and 1989. However, I believe that the lack of sources for the rest of the decade can be attributed to the small number of sources preserved by archives that include or are dedicated to preserving Central American diasporic paraphernalia. As a researcher, I am incredibly fortunate to have had access to Cal State LA's Special Collections and Archives, as they are one of the few university archives in California that have a collection related to Central American history. Because I began volunteering in late February of 2023, I regret that I did not have more time to assess and incorporate these new sources into my thesis.

Additionally, because the scope of my project is limited by a historical location, I filtered through evidence that related only to events at MacArthur Park, though demonstrations of Central American solidarity were done across Los Angeles. In my research, I found several primary sources about Central American solidarity protests

organized outside of Los Angeles City Hall and multiple INS offices across the county. However, for the purposes of this research project, I wanted to highlight the use of MacArthur Park as a significant space for organizing because the surrounding neighborhood of Westlake became a Central American enclave in Los Angeles during the 1980s. The last limitation in my research was that I was unable to track down specific Central American activists involved in organizing at the park, which I feel would have provided a stronger defense for my thesis about their individual agency. I do believe that the Central American organizations that used the space suffice to argue that MacArthur Park was an important area for protest for this population.

Finally, this project began with my admiration of Maritza Cardenas's theory of *centralamericanismo*, which she presents in her chapter "Performing Centralamericanismo" in *U.S. Central Americans*. She coined this term to encapsulate the ways that the diaspora in the United States connects to one another and comes to define itself as a "Central American" community. This theory became relevant to my study through its themes of community building and diasporic placemaking. She studied the Central American Independence Day Parade in Los Angeles, which I touch on briefly in this thesis to describe the activities outside of protests and marches that enforced a Central American identity at MacArthur Park. However, I did not expand on the racial and gendered aspects to protest and representation at the park. I found that I could not do a sufficient analysis of these intersections because of the small number of sources I had about protests at MacArthur Park in the 1980s.

CHAPTER 4

Primary Source Analysis

On May 9, 1984, President Ronald Reagan's Address to the Nation was broadcast live on nationwide radio and television. In his 30-minute speech, he quickly broaches the topic of United States foreign policy in Central America, declaring it was America's duty to promote democracy and economic-wellbeing in Nicaragua and El Salvador in the face of an armed struggle against Marxist insurgency. He called the Sandinista rule in

Nicaragua “a Communist reign of terror” and accused the Farabundo Marti National Front - Democratic Revolutionary Front (FMLN-FDR) in El Salvador of attempting “to destabilize the entire region and eventually move chaos and anarchy toward the American border.”²⁹ The Reagan administration’s strict, anti-communist platform declared that sending military aid to the authoritarian leaders of Central America was in the national interest. Days before on May 6, 1984, a large rally and mock election calling for people to vote for peace, justice, and an end to U.S. intervention formed at MacArthur Park in Los Angeles, California.³⁰ The city increasingly became a sanctuary for Central American refugees fleeing civil wars and state-sanctioned violence, who largely settled into the surrounding neighborhood of Westlake. Paralleling the launch of Central American solidarity movements across the nation, this protest would be one of many to take place at the public park throughout the 1980s. Through the use of archival materials, such as photographs and newspaper articles, I argue that Central American refugees in Los Angeles showed agency through political activism by using MacArthur Park as a base for several protests, marches, demonstrations, and organizational meetings against U.S. intervention. The park provided the space for Central Americans to organize and advocate for peace in the isthmus, which extended to their participation in other leftist movements at the park against Reagan-era policies.

²⁹ “Address to the Nation on United States Policy in Central America,” The American Presidency Project, accessed May 15, 2017, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/261048>

³⁰ Paul Chinn. *Mock El Salvador elections*, May 6, 1984. Photograph. From Calisphere, Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection. <https://calisphere.org/item/dc6df7aa2c9b3e136cctf99b7c98ab740/> (accessed November 6, 2022).

The Early Years of MacArthur Park Protests

The first series of notable demonstrations held at MacArthur Park started on January 17, 1981. The Republican Party's Candidate Ronald Reagan won the 1980 presidential election, introducing a new conservative wave in American politics.³¹ Simultaneously, the final offensive of the FMLN had launched on January 10th in El Salvador, where they sieged the capital city of San Salvador and surrounding towns. These park demonstrations were organized on the weekend before Reagan's inaugural ceremony on January 20th, protesting his plans for aid in Central America. Singer Karen Gallagher performed at a counter-inaugural rally at the bandshell on the northern end of the park known as the Levitt Pavilion ([Figure 1](#)) - an ideal place for performances and rallies to take place given its wide-open space. On January 18th, *La Opinion* published a paid political ad from the Coordinating Committee for Solidarity with the Salvadoran People (CCLA) calling for democratic and progressive North American and Latin American people to join them for a march on the corner of Wilshire and Alvarado at MacArthur Park. This march was advertised on a staunch anti-interventionist platform and specifically in support of the guerrillas fighting in El Salvador.³² Hundreds of protesters gathered around the park's sign and a protester in the distance holds up a sign that says "No More Vietnams" ([Figure 2](#)), alluding to the comparable damages of U.S. intervention and Cold War policies after the Vietnam War ended in 1979.³³ Another

³¹ "The Reagan Presidency," Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum, accessed November 6, 2022.

<https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/reagans/reagan-administration/reagan-presidency>

³² Marcha y Concentración, January 18, 1981. Newspaper Article. From Google News Archive, La Opinion Archives (1926-2008).

³³ Chomsky, Noam. "Intervention in Vietnam and Central America: parallels and differences." *Monthly Review*, September 1985, 1+. *Gale Academic OneFile* (accessed December 17, 2022). <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A3913892/AONE?u=calstate&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=42bd1631>.

photograph ([Figure 3](#)) depicts large crowds of people marching down Alvarado Street, a man raising his fist and chanting, and another man holding a sign saying “Cut All Military Aid To El Salvador!”. As the *Los Angeles Times* headlined the inauguration of Ronald Reagan the next day, *La Opinion* published a small notice from Washington D.C., claiming that Reagan was getting ready to send assistance to El Salvador.³⁴ Then on January 21st, President Reagan arranged a meeting with the National Security Council (NSC) to address the Salvadoran guerrillas.³⁵ This was a strong start for protests at MacArthur Park in 1981, highlighting the efforts of Salvadorans and allies to speak out on counterinsurgency measures the new U.S. president would approve.

On April 19th, 1981, protests reemerged, this time organized by two grassroots solidarity groups in Los Angeles, the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES) and Casa El Salvador (CEL), against the Duarte junta in El Salvador.³⁶ CISPES was an organization started by Salvadoran refugees in 1980 in Los Angeles, and they would grow to have multiple chapters in cities like San Francisco and Washington D.C.³⁷ The previous Carter administration had a history of supporting President Jose Napoleon Duarte, who gained his position as part of a junta with the Christian Democratic Party and had been attacking the forces of the FMLN since their

³⁴ Diehl, Digby. *Front Page: A Collection of Historical Headlines from the Los Angeles Times (1881-1987)*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Incorporated, 1987. 286
Se propondría Reagan inyectar asistencia a El Salvador. Newspaper Article. From Google News Archive, *La Opinion Archives* (1926-2008).

³⁵ Krueger, Kimbra. “Internal Struggle over U.S. Foreign Policy Toward Central America: An Analysis of the Reagan Era.” *Presidential studies quarterly* 26, no. 4 (1996): 1036, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27551669>

³⁶ Rafael Prieto Z. and Beatriz Johnston. 4.000 desfilan en contra de la ayuda militar de Duarte, April 18, 1981. Newspaper Article. From Google News Archive, *La Opinion Archives* (1926-2008).

³⁷ Stoltz Chinchilla, Norma, Nora Hamilton, and James Loucky. “The Sanctuary Movement and Central American Activism in Los Angeles.” *Latin American Perspectives* 36, no. 6 (2009): 108.

siege. In order to avoid the potential failure of small, incremental operations, like in Vietnam, Reagan's first Secretary of State Alexander Haig recommended committing to high-intensity efforts to send aid to Duarte's junta.³⁸ A month before, fifty-six soldiers of the United States Army Special Forces (SF), also known as Green Berets, had been sent to El Salvador, along with a promise to Duarte of \$35 million in military aid.³⁹ Unlike CCLA's protest in January, CISPES and CEL managed to attract around 4,000 protestors, including "Buddhists, socialists, Sandinistas, unionists, religious, Jews, and pacifists," to march from 8th Street and Columbia to MacArthur Park.⁴⁰ Few protestors were seen wearing Reagan masks, such as in [Figure 4](#), and dressed as devils with signs that read the names of Haig and other politicians. Actor Ed Asner led the crowds with a speech at the Levitt Pavilion, followed by Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR) member Victor Rubio, Reverend Ellis Casson of the First African Methodist Episcopal Church, and ACLU SoCal Chief Ramona Ripston. CISPES and CEL are examples of how local Central American organizations made use of MacArthur Park as an activist base, as they would continue to organize marches at the park and use the pavilion for public meetings well into the 1990s.

On March 24, 1982, two priests publicly declared their Southside Presbyterian Church in Tuscon, Arizona as a sanctuary for refugees fleeing civil wars from El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala.⁴¹ This defiant act against Immigration and

³⁸ Krueger, Kimbra. "Internal Struggle" 1036.

³⁹ Llega a El Salvador último grupo de boinas verdes. Newspaper Article. From Google News Archive, La Opinion Archives (1926-2008).

⁴⁰ Rafael Prieto Z. and Beatriz Johnston. 4.000 desfilan en contra de la ayuda militar de Duarte, April 18, 1981. Newspaper Article. From Google News Archive, La Opinion Archives (1926-2008).

⁴¹ Chinchilla, Norma Stoltz, Nora Hamilton, and James Loucky. "The Sanctuary Movement and Central American Activism in Los Angeles." *Latin American Perspectives* 36, no. 6 (December 18, 2009): 105. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582x09350766>.

Naturalization Services (INS) and the subsequent arrest of 14 organizers marked the start of the Sanctuary Movement. Across the United States, churches began to house refugees and defy immigration laws to protect thousands of refugees from deportation. They created advocacy groups that organized national marches against the Reagan administration's foreign policy. The movement highlighted the nearly impossible chances of Central Americans gaining political asylum because the United States government did not want to expose itself as the perpetrator funding these wars. Norma Stoltz Chinchilla, Nora Hamilton, and James Loucky claim that the first church in Los Angeles to declare itself as a sanctuary for Central American refugees was the First Unitarian Church in 1983.⁴² The church is located on Vermont Ave and 8th Street, which is less than a mile away from MacArthur Park.

MacArthur Park was also the host to several Labor Day rallies throughout the decade meanwhile President Reagan's government policies encouraged aggressive anti-union tactics of large corporations. In one rally on September 6th, 1983, unionists gathered at Levitt Pavilion and carried signs in the front rows representing the sheet metal and airline industries ([Figure 5](#)).⁴³ Some of the protestors declared an anti-war and anti-nuclear stance through their signs. Actor Ed Asner reappeared at MacArthur Park to deliver a speech on the importance of labor organizing and mentioned his disapproval of Reagan's foreign policy in Central America.⁴⁴ As mentioned, many Central American immigrants had labor organizing experience in their home countries despite the threat of

⁴² Chinchilla, Hamilton, and Loucky. "Sanctuary Movement", 105.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582x09350766>.

⁴³ Ken Hively. Labor Day rally at MacArthur Park in Los Angeles, Calif., 1983, September 6, 1983. Photograph. From Calisphere, Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.

⁴⁴ Sergio Guerra. Millares participan en mitin en un parque local. Newspaper Article. From Google News Archive, La Opinion Archives (1926-2008).

repression from the state. Those who had been imprisoned, tortured, or narrowly escaped death were reluctant to organize in the U.S. However, many continued their work in Los Angeles as a commitment to social justice in El Salvador, Guatemala, and other isthmian countries, occasionally rallying at MacArthur Park with other labor unions. In the 1980s, 80 percent of Salvadorans and Guatemalan immigrants in Southern California worked in blue-collar and service occupations, so it was in their best interest to be involved with labor organizing in the city.⁴⁵

1984: A Summer of Upheaval

1984 was a significant year for Central American political organizing at MacArthur Park because of two events: the 50th anniversary of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings and the Los Angeles Olympics. I began this thesis with a connection between the mock Salvadoran elections on May 6th at MacArthur Park to President Reagan's Address to the Nation that same week. For some context, the mock elections were organized by the Coalition for Peace and Justice in Central America, an LA-based branch of the People's Coalition for Peace and Justice (PCPJ), in conjunction with El Salvador's controversial elections where incumbent president Jose Napoleon Duarte was campaigning.⁴⁶ Since the start of the civil war in 1979, over 20,000 Salvadorans had been killed.⁴⁷ President Duarte's military plundered urban areas and villages, killing civilians suspected of being revolutionaries. Armed with the CIA-trained Atlacatl Battalion, his military would massacre around a thousand villagers in El Mozote in December 1981,

⁴⁵ Hamilton and Stoltz Chinchilla. "The Struggle for Survival", 77

⁴⁶ Paul Chinn. Mock El Salvador elections, May 6, 1984. Photograph. From Calisphere, Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.

⁴⁷ Rafael Prieto Z. and Beatriz Johnston. 4.000 desfilan en contra de la ayuda militar de Duarte, April 18, 1981. Newspaper Article. From Google News Archive, La Opinión Archives (1926-2008).

marking one of the worst massacres in modern Latin American history.⁴⁸ PCPJ's demonstration allowed Salvadorans and allies to express themselves through voting for peace and justice, therefore against Duarte's regime.

Two months later on July 29, 1984, while President Reagan commenced the Los Angeles Olympics at the Coliseum in South Central, about 700 people appeared at MacArthur Park to protest U.S. intervention in Central America.⁴⁹ Crowds were led by Reverend Jesse Jackson, best known for his work in the Civil Rights Movement and as a candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1984.⁵⁰ Professor Raul Ruiz of Chicano Studies at California State University, Northridge (CSUN) was quoted by *La Opinion*, saying "We aren't opposed to the Olympics. We oppose the same regime that makes propaganda in favor of the Olympics, paying to kill the youth of El Salvador." Crowd chants were in support of the FMLN and called for the CIA to leave Nicaragua. CISPES, as seen in [Figure 6](#), and CEL made another appearance at the march, alongside the Information Center of Guatemala, which denounced the persecution and mistreatment of Indigenous people in and outside of Guatemala.⁵¹ Beatriz Johnston, who reported on this march for *La Opinion*, stated that they anticipated a larger protest next month for anti-nuclear protests. At twelve noon on August 5th, 1984, around 3,000 protestors joined

⁴⁸ "As Massacre Survivors Seek Justice, El Salvador Grapples With 1,000 Ghosts," Retro Report, accessed December 1, 2022. <https://www.retroreport.org/transcript/as-massacre-survivors-seek-justice-el-salvador-grapples-with-1-000-ghosts/>

⁴⁹ Reagan inaugura la Olimpiada. Newspaper Article. From Google News Archive, La Opinion Archives (1926-2008).

Beatriz Johnston H. "Manifestación 'olímpica' contra política de EU en Centroamérica". Newspaper Article. From Google News Archive, La Opinion Archives (1926-2008).

⁵⁰ "Jackson, Jesse Louis." The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, accessed November 6, 2022. <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/jackson-jesse-louis>

⁵¹ Penni Gladstone. Demonstrators protesting the U.S. policy in Central America at MacArthur Park in Los Angeles, Calif., 1984, July 29, 1984. Photograph. From Calisphere, Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.

a nationwide movement to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings at MacArthur Park. On the banner depicted in [Figure 7](#), the commemoration was named Survival Day. A poster advertising the event as “SurvivalFest” ([Figure 8](#)) made mention of the continuation of the Los Angeles Olympics and workers rallying against Reagan’s anti-unionist policies, including a caption in the graphics that say “Stop Intervention in Central America .”⁵² Once again, CEL, CISPES, and members of the FMLN gathered at the bandshell Levitt Pavilion ([Figure 9](#)) in collaboration with the organizers of Survival Day, showing a relationship of solidarity between anti-nuclear activists and Central American activists.

Support and Threats to Central American Survival, 1985 to 1987

After the protests of 1984, an important piece of city legislation started circulating. On November 28, 1985, the Los Angeles City Council voted in favor of an important resolution that would instruct city employees not to voluntarily assist the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) in finding and deporting undocumented Central Americans.⁵³ This also reaffirmed a Los Angeles Police Department policy that ordered officers not to arrest people only for being undocumented. While the sanctuary statement was hotly contested, Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley endorsed the resolution and signed it in December 1985.⁵⁴

⁵² SURVIVAL FEST 84 Mobilization for Peace and Justice, August 5, 1984. Central America Memoria Historica Archive. California State University, Los Angeles.

⁵³ Merina, Victor. "Council Votes 8-6 for L.A. Sanctuary: Symbolic Step for Central American Refugees seen as Slap at U.S. Policy Incomplete Source." *Los Angeles Times* (1923-1995), Nov 28, 1985.

⁵⁴ Merina, Victor. "Bradley Ends Silence with Endorsement of Sanctuary Policy." *Los Angeles Times* (1923-1995), Dec 11, 1985.

Throughout the decade, Central American refugees were deported on the basis were economic migrants rather than political refugees. Out of the 1,233 Central Americans nationwide who qualified for political asylum that year, twenty-four Salvadorans and one Guatemalan applicant were approved for asylum.⁵⁵ Even when Central Americans did apply for political asylum, there was a chance that their application would be rejected, which would prompt the U.S. Immigration Court to send them a notice of deportation. In 1986, this happened to William Aquino-Don ([Figure 10](#)), a Salvadoran activist who worked with the Center for Salvadoran Cultural Development in Westlake.

Because the chances of official asylum were so low, this resolution was crucial in protecting those who had found safety in the city and allowed Central American activists to continue showing up at MacArthur Park without fear of arrest. However, federal actions would affect Central Americans nationwide. FBI Director William H. Webster had opened a “full international terrorism investigation on the leadership” of CISPES in 1983, suspecting them of sending aid to the FMLN in El Salvador.⁵⁶ Not until June 1985 did regular reports from the Justice Department affirmed that CISPES was not guilty of collusion. Additionally, the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 banned employers from hiring undocumented workers. While it provided amnesty for immigrants who could prove they lived in the U.S. since 1981, it added to the hardships of Central Americans in Westlake who made up one of the city’s most impoverished populations.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Merina, Victor. "Bradley Ends Silence with Endorsement of Sanctuary Policy." *Los Angeles Times* (1923-1995), Dec 11, 1985.

⁵⁶ Jackson, Robert. "Sessions Concedes FBI Erred in Central American Activist Probe." *Los Angeles Times* (1923-1995), Feb 03, 1988.

⁵⁷ Hamilton and Stoltz Chinchilla. “The Struggle for Survival”, 79.

Lastly, there was a new risk for Central Americans attempting to organize themselves in Los Angeles. In 1987, several death threats were sent to various politically active refugees in the city, which cause panic in the Westlake community. By the end of July, the local police received reports of twenty-four people stalking Salvadoran activists who had previously been a part of death squads in El Salvador.⁵⁸ The most shocking story was the kidnapping of Yanira Corea, a 24-year-old Salvadoran activist who was held at knifepoint by two men outside of the CISPES office in Downtown LA. After being held at knifepoint, they blindfolded her and tortured her to get information about her involvement with CISPES.⁵⁹ This highlights the potential danger that Central American activists faced towards the end of the decade in their attempts to organize, but nonetheless, organizing at MacArthur Park continued throughout the decade.

Peace in Sight, 1987 to 1989

One of the most recognized sanctuary churches in the nation was Our Lady Queen of Angels Catholic Church, best known as La Placita Church. La Placita's leadership publicly declared the institution as a sanctuary in 1985, years after Father Luis Olivares openly criticized the United States government for sending military aid to Central America and made the church a haven for refugees.⁶⁰ As the oldest Catholic church in Los Angeles with thousands of local congregants, it became a major center for the Sanctuary Movement. According to a mailed flyer from the Central American Memoria

⁵⁸ Shaw, Daniel. "SALVADORAN CALLS ASSAULT POLITICAL." Washington Post, July 11, 1987.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1987/07/11/salvadoran-calls-assault-political/aa20e61c-ef95-4659-a555-f1b2fa57c720/>.

⁵⁹ Garcia, Cristina. "Death Squads Invade California." Time, August 3, 1987.

<https://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,965158,00.html>.

⁶⁰ Chinchilla, Hamilton, and Loucky. "Sanctuary Movement", 113.

Historica Archive ([Figure 11](#)), Archbishop Roger Mahony represented the church at a gathering planned by El Rescate, a Salvadoran refugee organization, at MacArthur Park on March 16, 1986. He was invited to give a Catholic mass in order to launch an event they called “Central American Week,” which shows the ties that Central American activists had with the Sanctuary Movement.

On November 8, 1987, the day of the 1988 presidential election, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that 1,000 Central American immigrants, students, and church and labor groups marched down Alvarado Street and gathered at MacArthur Park, chanting “No Contra Aid”.⁶¹ The rally was organized by the Southern California Interfaith Task Force on Central America, whose sanctuary chair Sister Jo’Ann De Quattro was in attendance at the L.A. City Council’s meeting in 1985. This group led a part of the Sanctuary Movement in Los Angeles by mobilizing churches to house recently arrived refugees. The Interfaith Task Force wanted to show support for the Esquipulas plan created by Costa Rica’s President Oscar Arias Sanchez. The plan called for free elections, safeguards for human rights, and an end to foreign interference, it had been approved in August of that year by Costa Rica, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua.⁶²

After almost a decade of the Reagan administration aiding authoritarian leaders in Central America, it stands that these protesters would hope that the president-elect would follow the peace plan and withdraw support. The Democratic candidate Michael Dukakis’ “passionate condemnation of U.S. intervention in Latin America” was more in

⁶¹ Stewart, Jill. "Rally Blames U.S. for Central American Strife." *Los Angeles Times (1923-1995)*, Nov 08, 1987.

⁶² Sanchez, Oscar Arias, Jose Napoleon Duarte, Vinicio Cerezo Arevalo, Jose Azcona Hoyo, and Daniel Ortega Saavedra. “The Central American Peace Plan.” *Current History* 86, no. 524 (1987): 430–37. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45315996>.

line with the protesters' demands.⁶³ However, Republican candidate George H.W. Bush won the election. His administration would see the end of civil wars in Central America, but following his predecessor, he would continue categorizing Central American refugees as economic migrants.⁶⁴ Reagan would continue his presidency until January 20th, 1989.

One of the last major protests documented at MacArthur Park in this decade took place on March 19th, the day of the 1989 Salvadoran presidential election. This election took place after the Esquipulas agreement had been signed by former President Duarte, marking the first democratic election in El Salvador since the start of the civil war. A photograph depicts onlookers gathered to watch a group act out a skit in which a Salvadoran peasant begs his boss for better wages and consequently gets beat up by a thug ([Figure 12](#)). Notably, a Salvadoran refugee named Carlos Vaquerano ([Figure 13](#)) was photographed at the demonstration. He was a well-known leader for the Central American community in Los Angeles. In an educational video from PBS SoCal, he explains that his oldest brother was murdered by death squads in his hometown. Vaquerano's mother encouraged him to leave El Salvador and he arrived in Los Angeles by 1981. Before leaving, he was encouraged by his younger brother to advocate for El Salvador with other Central American organizers in Los Angeles; his brother was murdered in 1984. The amnesty protections offered by the IRCA gave Vaquerano the chance to become a U.S. citizen. Today, he works as the CEO of the Clinica Monsenor Oscar A. Romero on Alvarado Street and 3rd Street, a free clinic available to the residents of Pico-Union with a long history of treating refugee patients.⁶⁵ Carlos

⁶³ Jim Hoagl, "Dukakis Foreign Policy..." The Washington Post Archives, June 23, 1988.

⁶⁴ "Carlos Vaquerano". PBS, accessed December 1, 2022.

<https://ca.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/2bd00de4-8cdc-42ac-b190-bb8053d6b8f9/carlos-vaquerano/>

⁶⁵ Segura. "The Great Migration", 40-41.

Vaquerano's story exemplifies the powerful legacy of community-building that emerged from Central American activism in 1980s Los Angeles. MacArthur Park was one of many places where he and other Central Americans would enact change for their communities in the isthmus and their community in Los Angeles.

In conclusion, the 1980s represented a deeply difficult time for the Central American community, but MacArthur Park became an important place for them to address their communities' issues and join the Sanctuary Movement's efforts to create change. MacArthur Park would continue to be an important space for the Central American community to organize in the 1990s and beyond, most importantly when the Central American Peace Accords were signed. On January 20, 1992, writer Hector Tobar published an article for the Los Angeles Times called "Remembering the Fallen" ([Figure 14](#)) about a gathering at MacArthur Park to celebrate the signing of the peace accords by the Salvadoran government and the FMLN which brought a formal end to their 12-year war in El Salvador. About 3,000 people appeared at the park, and the article portrays this gathering as somber but hopeful, with many Salvadorans in attendance to remember their loved ones who died during the war.⁶⁶ A flyer about the gathering noted that it was organized by the Coalition for Peace in El Salvador, which included fourteen activist groups such as CISPES, the Central American Refugee Center (CARECEN), Santana Chirino Amaya Refugee Committee (SCARC), and El Rescate ([Figure 15](#)). Father Luis Olivares, a major Sanctuary movement leader at La Placita Church, was invited to give a speech to the crowd that had gathered at the bandshell and touched on the reconciliation efforts that El Salvador would have to endure. He asked the crowd "How will we be able

⁶⁶ Tobar, Hector. "Remembering the Fallen", January 20, 1992. Newspaper Article. Central American Memoria Historica Archive. California State University, Los Angeles.

to look in the eyes of the men who killed our sons? The Salvadoran people must show the world that it is possible..."⁶⁷ This final demonstration at MacArthur Park encapsulates the struggles that Central American activists endured throughout the 1980s. The space allowed them the space to cope with the end of armed struggle in Central America and look towards the future.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion and Future Research

My analysis of the various photographs, newspaper articles, and archival materials shows how Central Americans took several opportunities throughout the 1980s to organize at MacArthur Park. The sources emphasize how protests could range in size, from a small crowd to thousands of protestors. Those numbers were achieved by the networks of Central American activist groups, resulting in clear demonstrations of how many people were willing to show up and openly condemn U.S. intervention in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua. These protests also add to the story of how Los

⁶⁷ Tobar, Hector. "Remembering the Fallen", January 20, 1992. Newspaper Article. Central American Memoria Historica Archive. California State University, Los Angeles.

Angeles gained a reputation for protecting immigrant communities. These political protests demonstrate public frustration about their treatment under the U.S. immigration system, which led to several Central American organizations to get involved with promoting sanctuary policies.

By completing this thesis, I grew more confident as a historian. I consider this project a small step toward future historical research about Central Americans in Los Angeles and the United States more broadly. As I have gained expertise about this specific topic, I believe that the field can only expand so much without more archives about Central American diasporic communities. I must emphasize my luck of being a Cal State LA student with access to these types of materials. History is a discipline that relies on the availability of primary sources, but because my project is about a marginalized community, finding evidence about Central American life was my biggest struggle. I am confident that the expansion of archives will encourage more American historians to dedicate their work to this area of research, and I hope that the diverse experiences and cultures that exist in the U.S. Central American diaspora will be represented.

MacArthur Park is just one of the thousands of places in the United States that have been transformed by its surrounding immigrant community. Central Americans continue to make space in other towns and cities across the United States, such as Mount Pleasant in Washington D.C. and the Mission District in San Francisco. Their presence continues to grow, despite the government's increased efforts to contain Central Americans crossing the U.S.-Mexico border in immigration facilities. The protests at MacArthur Park show how early on Central Americans found ways to fight back against American policy by providing spaces for each other in a foreign city they made home.

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APPENDIX

Figures

Figure 1



Paul Chinn. Counter Inaugural rally, January 17, 1981. Photograph. From Calisphere, Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.

<https://calisphere.org/item/0948b63612a41eab92330caeaeed7f23/> (accessed November 6, 2022).

Figure 2



Anne Knudsen. Protest demonstration held at MacArthur Park, January 18, 1981. Photograph. From Calisphere, Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection. <https://calisphere.org/item/0948b63612a41eab92330caeaed7f23/> (accessed November 6, 2022).

Figure 3



Anne Knudsen. Salvadorans against U.S. aid, January 19, 1981. Photograph. From Calisphere, Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection. <https://calisphere.org/item/0948b63612a41eab92330caeaeed7f23/> (accessed November 6, 2022).

Figure 4



Paul Chinn. El Salvador demonstration, April 18, 1981. Photograph. From Calisphere, Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection. <https://calisphere.org/item/0948b63612a41eab92330caeaeed7f23/> (accessed November 6, 2022).

Figure 5



Ken Hively. Labor Day rally at MacArthur Park in Los Angeles, Calif., 1983, September 6, 1983. Photograph. From Calisphere, Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection. <https://digital.library.ucla.edu/catalog/ark:/21198/zz0002rxrf> (accessed November 6, 2022).

Figure 6



Penni Gladstone. Demonstrators protesting the U.S. policy in Central America at MacArthur Park in Los Angeles, Calif., 1984, July 29, 1984. Photograph. From Calisphere, Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection. <https://calisphere.org/item/ark:/21198/zz0002skhf/> (accessed November 6, 2022).

Figure 7



Toru Kawana. Survival Day 84, August 6, 1984. Photograph. From Calisphere, Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection. <https://calisphere.org/item/1e6774b89c1924f27a38849ca739ac70/> (accessed November 6, 2022).

Figure 8



SURVIVAL FEST 84 Mobilization for Peace and Justice, August 5, 1984. Central American Memoria Historica Archive. California State University, Los Angeles.

Figure 9



Francisco Carias. Group of musicians prepare concert, August 1984, in Segura, Rosamaria. Central Americans in Los Angeles. Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2010. 44.

Figure 10

U.S. Department of Justice
Executive Office for Immigration Review
Office of the Immigration Judge

208(a) & 243(h)
Voluntary Departure

File A 24 197 894

In the Matter of
William Aguayo-Dom

Respondent

In Deportation Proceedings

**Order of the
Immigration Judge**

This matter having been initiated by the Immigration and Naturalization Service upon the filing of an Order to Show Cause, and the Respondent having been found to be subject to deportation on the charge(s) set forth therein; and the Respondent having made application for relief from deportation under Sections 208(a) and 243(h) of the Immigration and Nationality Act; and a hearing having been held on said application, and the Court being fully informed of the facts, and having made an oral decision at the conclusion of the hearing setting forth the basis upon which the Respondent is found to be unqualified for the relief sought; therefore, upon this decision being final,

IT IS ORDERED that the Respondent's application for relief from deportation under Sections 208(a) and 243(h) of the Immigration and Nationality Act be and is hereby DENIED,

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that in lieu of an order of deportation Respondent be granted voluntary departure from the United States under Section 244(e) of the Immigration and Nationality Act without expense to the Government on or before September 1, 1986 or any extension as may be granted by the District Director for the Immigration and Naturalization Service, and under such conditions as the District Director shall direct,

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that if the Respondent fails to depart when and as required, the privilege of voluntary departure shall be withdrawn without further notice or proceedings and Respondent shall be DEPORTED from the United States to El Salvador on the charge(s) set forth in the Order to Show Cause.

APPEAL: Waived Reserved

Date: Aug 1, 1986
Place: LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

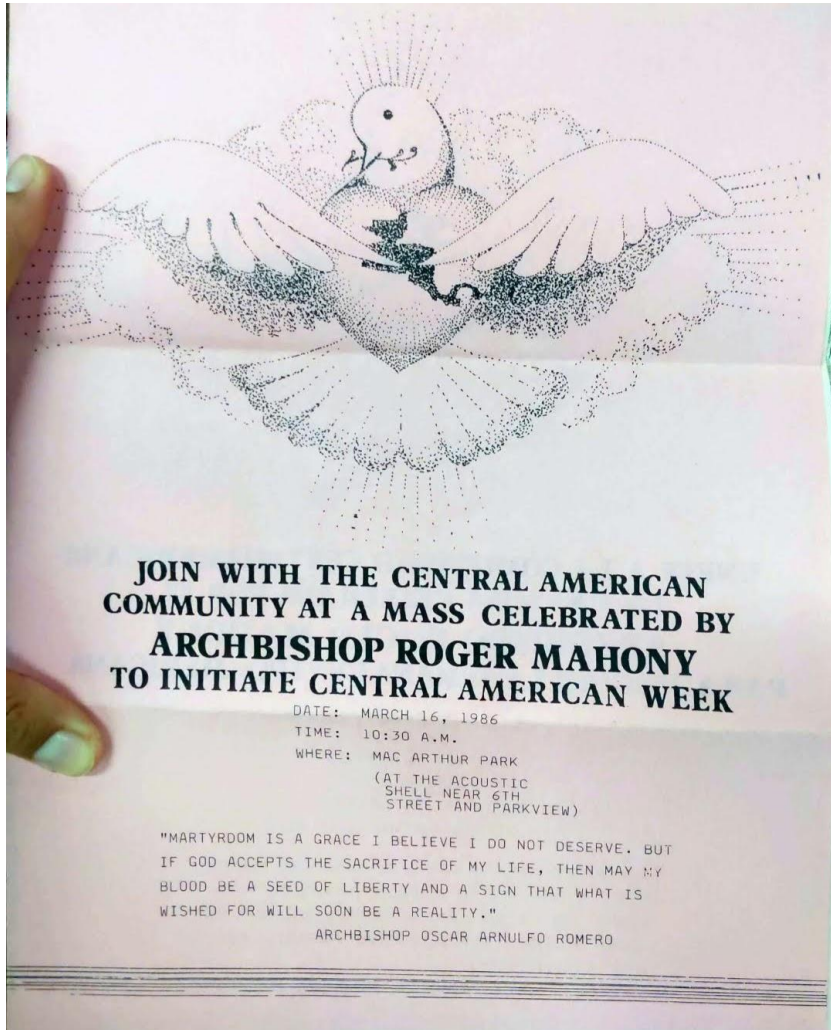
[Signature]
(Immigration Judge)

A copy of this Order has been served on the Respondent and the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

FORM EOIR-23

Notice of Deportation, August 1, 1986. Central American Memoria Historica Archive. California State University, Los Angeles.

Figure 11



"Join With The Central American Community At A Mass Celebrated By Archbishop Roger Mahony To Initiate Central American Week". Flyer. Central American Memoria Historica Archive. California State University, Los Angeles.

Figure 12



Mike Sergieff. El Salvadorans protest election in homeland, March 19, 1989.
Photograph. From Calisphere, Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.
<https://calisphere.org/item/c3a2b36c093b59524487478bf08a9fd2/> (accessed
November 6, 2022).

Figure 13



Mike Sergieff. El Salvadoran refugees protest (Carlos Vaquerano), March 19, 1989. Photograph. From Calisphere, Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection. <https://calisphere.org/item/da6c9a9ce46550fe8062ea0ef376bc85/> (accessed November 6, 2022).

Figure 14

LOCAL NEWS / SCIENCE / MEDICINE / EDITORIAL PAGES

5/6

Los Angeles Times

METRO

MONDAY JANUARY 20, 1992

HIGHLIGHTS

SALVADOR CELEBRATION A crowd of about 1,000 at Martin Luther King Jr. Park celebrated the end of the 12-year civil war in El Salvador on Sunday. The event was the first time that the country's former warring factions were seen together in the United States. **B1**

HONORING KING Charles Dickson will see tribute to slain civil rights leader unveiled today. **B1**

SCIENCE/MEDICINE What may have been the first research laboratory in America has been unearthed on an island off North Carolina. The lab, more than 1,000 years old, was a piece of pottery at the site. **B1**

EDITORIAL **WELFARE WATCH** In the national debate on how to get poor welfare cases welfare check to pay check, New Jersey could show California a thing or two. **B4**

COMMENTARY **NOT ALONE** Today we might celebrate the accomplishments of Martin Luther King Jr. But we will not be alone if many Americans, both black and white, who participated in the struggle for equality and justice. **By Kay Mills, B1**

ON THE RECORD "I saw King and his marchers crossing the bridge. The water was very powerful. With that power of unity, they were able to change things." **—Source: Charles Dickson, B1**

SUPER LOTTO RESULTS
Jan. 18

California's Winning Numbers 18 19 20 41 48 50

Monday's Jackpot \$11.2 million

Winners per Category	Amount	Prize
6/59	1	\$11.2 million
5/59	123	\$1,300
4/59	7,950	\$250
3/59	116,397	\$50

The Big Spin
1st: \$1 million; 2nd: \$500,000; 3rd: \$250,000; 4th: \$125,000; 5th: \$62,500; 6th: \$31,250; 7th: \$15,625; 8th: \$7,812.50; 9th: \$3,906.25; 10th: \$1,953.125.

Recent Information

English	976-4275
Spanish	376-0275

Weekly regional offices

Albany	418-455-4300
Chicago	312-463-4300
San Diego	619-592-1700
San Jose	408-541-4655

Today marks the 33rd anniversary of the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. Dr. King's 33rd anniversary of both his death and his birth will be celebrated at all government offices, schools, colleges, churches and community centers.

Los Angeles Office
A Special Los Angeles Line, 1-800-424-4242, will provide information on how to help the poor.

INDEX

Weather	B2
Education	B3
Community	B4

Like King, Sculptor Had a Dream

■ **Monument: Artist Charles Dickson will see tribute to slain civil rights leader unveiled today.**

By HECTOR TOBAR
About the same time that Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech in Washington, D.C., Charles Dickson was training his art eye on a ship class at Markham Middle School in Flint.

Today, Dickson will watch as his tribute to the civil rights leader—a 14-foot bronze and concrete sculpture—was unveiled in a public ceremony commemorating King's birthday.

"For the last 30 years I've traveled and studied for this. Dickson said he used to be an art teacher, helping a welder put the finished sculpture on the sculpture. "It's something I've done for me, and I'm proud to see it go to show that community can do great things."

The work is the culmination of a dream for the artist, a 43-year-old sculptor, who lost out 35 other artists in a competition sponsored by the city Community Redevelopment Agency to create the memorial.

Approximately the memorial will stand in a corner of the Martin Luther King Jr. Shopping Center at Hill Street and Conson Avenue. The late civil rights leader inspired the site just days after the 1965 Watts riot when he was called by the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. to help lead the march and a group of about 100 people to march to the site to help lead the march.

Dickson said he designed the memorial was inspired by a desire to convey King's strength and the aspirations of the civil rights movement.

At the center of the sculpture rises a 1,200-pound bronze hand that is releasing a humanized into flight. The hand rests upon a large platform shaped like a podium or pulpit.

The entire site of the 1963 "I Have a Dream" speech has been engraved on the platform's public table. Two sides of the platform are engraved with the names of the civil rights marchers who emerged from the site of the bridge.

"I saw King and his marchers crossing the bridge," Dickson said. "The water was very powerful. With that power of unity, they were able to change things."

—Source: Charles Dickson, B1

Father Luis Olivares, who once declared his church a sanctuary for Central American refugees, addresses crowd Sunday.

Remembering the Fallen

■ **El Salvador: Celebration of peace accord is tinged with memories of people who died during country's civil war.**

By HECTOR TOBAR
On a day meant for celebration, nearly everyone in the crowd of 3,000 at Martin Luther King Jr. Park took time to remember a relative or friend who had died during 12 years of revolution and civil war in El Salvador.

Many wore flowers in their hair and some wore white headbands and armbands. Many wore white headbands and armbands. Many wore white headbands and armbands.

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Comeback Kid

Real Estate Prodigy Glickman Crashed, but He's on the Rise

By PAUL LIEBERMAN
When he was 11, Paul Glickman was a prodigy. He was a real estate prodigy. He was a real estate prodigy. He was a real estate prodigy.

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Paul Glickman, who in battling back from bankruptcy.

Many celebrate peace, but Central America, night, innocent war's victims.

his church a sanctuary for Central American refugees.

Olivares said after his appearance that he felt like he was suffering from AIDS—and that he had been forced to come to the appropriate. Still, he seemed to draw strength from the crowd as it waved blue and white Salvadoran flags, red banners of the FMLN, and posters of the late Archbishop Oscar Arnaz Romero, who was gunned down by a right-wing death squad in a San Salvador cathedral in 1980.

"It will be able to look in the eyes of the people who killed our sons," Olivares said. "The Salvadoran people must show the world that it is possible."

Let us all for peace in El Salvador.

In the night of reconstruction, the Salvadoran people must show the world that it is possible. Let us all for peace in El Salvador.

In the night of reconstruction, the Salvadoran people must show the world that it is possible. Let us all for peace in El Salvador.

Working with two associates, he recorded 97 sales in 1991, placing him "close to the top 10" of all agents in the Los Angeles area, according to the National Association of Realtors. He sold more than 100 homes in the Los Angeles area, according to the National Association of Realtors.

When he was 11, Paul Glickman was a prodigy. He was a real estate prodigy. He was a real estate prodigy. He was a real estate prodigy.

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With his long hair and a beard, Glickman is a man of many faces. He is a man of many faces. He is a man of many faces. He is a man of many faces.

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Tobar, Hector. "Remembering the Fallen", January 20, 1992. Newspaper Article. Central American Memoria Historica Archive. California State University, Los Angeles.

Figure 15

GRAN CELEBRACION
POR LOS ACUERDOS DE PAZ
FIRMADOS EN NUEVA YORK



Domingo

19 de Enero 1992

**Concha Acustica
del Parque MacArthur
(Esquina de 6th. Ave.,
y Park View Ave.)**

Acto Ecumenico 12:00 PM.

Festival Cultural 1:00 PM.

Coalición Por La Paz en El Salvador

Organizaciones Afiliadas: Asociación Cultural Centroamericana "TAMUYAUHTI"-ACCAT, Building with the Voiceless of El Salvador-BVES, CCRES, Central American Refugee Center-CARECEN, Centro Comunitario Centroamericano-CCCA, Centro Pastoral Rutilo Grande-CPRG, Clínica Mgr. Oscar Romero, Comité de Refugiados Centroamericanos-CRECEN, Comité en Solidaridad con el Pueblo Salvadoreño-CISPES, Comité Refugiados Centroamericanos Saetaana Chirino Amaya-SCARC, Comunidad Cristiana en Solidaridad con la Iglesia del Salvador-COSIES/Comunidades Eclesiales de base en El Salvador-CEBES, El Rescate, Movimiento Amplio en Solidaridad con el Pueblo Salvadoreño-MASPS, Sindicato de los Trabajadores Unidas de las Industrias,Electronica, Radio, y Maquinistas-UE distrito 10, Unitarios por la paz en El Salvador-UAPES, 500 Años afiliación en formación

Para mas informacion:

CARECEN-483-6868, CISPES-852-0721, CRECEN-483-0763, EL RESCATE/BVES-387-3284, MASPS-680-9567

Trabajo Donado

"Gran Celebracion Por Los Acuerdo De Paz Firmados En Nueva York". Flyer. Central American Memoria Historica Archive. California State University, Los Angeles.