

Opinion: The new Chicano Park Museum documents our contributions to San Diego. Here are some of them.



Josephine Talamantez stands for a portrait at Chicano Park. She is the curator of The Chicano Park Museum and Cultural Center. (Ana Ramirez / The San Diego Union-Tribune)

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By Josephine S. Talamantez

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- *Talamantez is a proud Chicana/Yaqui who is board chair of the Chicano Park Museum and Cultural Center, vice chair of the Barrio Logan Association/Maintenance Assessment District, recent past secretary of the Barrio Logan Planning Group, Chicano Park Steering Committee and is a member of the Royal Chicano Air Force. She lives in Barrio Logan.*

When journalist and producer Maria Velasquez approached me to take part in the [San Diego Latino Legacy project](#), I was willing to participate because of its focus — the history of local Chicanos and other Latinos — but also because it provided an unprecedented, invaluable opportunity to illuminate a rich, complex and largely unknown history of a community that has refused to become victims and struggled to demonstrate its self-determination.

On April 22, 1970, the Chicano community of Logan Heights, along with others, stood up and blocked the city of San Diego and the state of California from placing a California Highway Patrol station in the center of what was left of our community and demanded a place of our own to build Chicano Park, now recognized as a national landmark. The Logan Heights community lost three-fourths of its residents (declining from [20,000 to 5,000](#)) through eminent domain policies that were used to build Interstate 5 and State Route 75 (the San Diego-Coronado Bridge) without public input.

Chicano Park and the Chicano Park monumental murals are recognized internationally and were documented in National Geographic magazine in June 1980. The San Diego Historical Society listed [Chicano Park](#) as a San Diego official historic site in 1980 and the park was included in the [National Register of Historic Places](#) in 2013. I co-authored its successful [National Historic Landmark nomination](#) in 2016.

When I think of legacies, I always think of my paternal great-grandmother who arrived in San Diego by boat from Baja California Sur in Mexico with her children in 1906 after living for a while in Ensenada. She was our matriarch and recognized in the community of Logan Heights as Doña Concha. She had been a professional tailor/seamstress in Ensenada, constructing the regalia for bullfighters and the mayor. In San Diego, she worked intermittently in the local fish canneries, like so many people in our community.

My maternal grandmother and her two oldest sons were part of Tijuana's small population in the 1910s. She was a midwife and her sons were her assistants. My mother was born in San Diego in 1914 and she was also active in the community.

That's why in 1994 she was included in the traveling photo exhibition "100 Portraits: Pioneers, Visionaries and Role Models."

I followed the lead of my mother and great-grandmother to move forward and serve the community. We were true "fronterizos," traversing both sides of the border until the 1960s, when border crossing became stricter. But that did not stop us — serving the community is in our DNA.

The legacy of historical narratives is particularly significant to our Latino community because it is so often left out of history books. We've had to record and document our own stories for future generations. With the exception of the National Park Service publication "[American Latino and the Making of the United States: A Theme Study](#)," used to substantiate Latino historic preservation nominations for the National Register, there has been little to no acknowledgment of our contributions to building this nation.

Then the Chicano Park Museum and Cultural Center incorporated in 2015 and began its programming in 2016. At every event we have held since that founding, we have collected oral histories and scanned photos of lost memories from community members with the intention of placing information into a Chicano Park Museum and Cultural Center archive.

We successfully obtained a 20-year lease for 1960 National Ave. from the city in 2018, and quickly realized that all the promised community historical donations were more than the site could handle.

This year, with resources gained, we committed to hiring a professional archivist to interface with the online archive and fully support the development of this component of our programming. We were successful in gaining support from the United States Latino Digital Humanities (University of Houston/Arte Public Press) to begin documenting the Tomasa "Tommie" Camarillo collection — 52 years of Chicano Park history.

As a future goal, we recently presented to the community a facility use plan to obtain the old, abandoned Logan Heights Branch Library on 28th Street. The idea is to transform the site to the Chicano Park Museum and Cultural Center/Logan Heights Archive, a space where we can collect and document local history. The site, right next to the Logan Memorial Educational Complex, could involve the next generation — teaching its members how to document and save their families' stories, as well as

exploring potential career paths. We are now waiting for the decision on that request from the city of San Diego.

The San Diego Latino Legacy project dovetails with the work we are doing at the Chicano Park Museum and Cultural Center involving scholars and local community reaching a broader multigenerational audience to significantly serve and expand the understanding of our history. When the members of our community, especially our youth, see themselves documented for our contributions to building this great city, it provides a sense of pride and ownership and an overall sense of purpose and being.

On Saturday, Oct. 8, the Chicano Park Museum and Cultural Center focusing on art, history and science of the Chicano/Latino/Mexican and Indigenous communities of the borderlands will open to the public from noon to 5 p.m. We hope to see everyone there.