

La Raza

Chicano and Latino People in the Northwest

Chicanos and Latinos are no strangers to the Pacific Northwest states of Oregon, Idaho and Washington. The first period of Mexican contact with the region began two years prior to the American Revolution. Later through most of the nineteenth century, and, in particular, the mining period, Mexicans played an active role in the development of the region. Even when Mexicans were not present, their particular skills, knowledge, and language were adopted to the region by others. In the twentieth century, the Pacific Northwest has experienced marked economic and cultural changes wrought over the years by successive generations of newcomers.

Chicanos and Latinos are among the most recent of this long line of migrants seeking better economic opportunities and a higher quality of life in the Northwest.

Today Chicanos and Latinos constitute one of the largest minority groups in the Pacific Northwest. According to the 1980 census, 220,434 Hispanics reside in the three states of Oregon, Idaho and Washington. Several demographic studies and the census indicate that approximately 86% of this total are Chicanos. Data also reveals that most of the Hispanic population are native born (approximately 75%).

The Cultural pride of the Northwest Chicano and Latino community is visible from the urban centers of Portland and Seattle to the rich agricultural valleys of Yakima, Washington; Boise, Idaho; and the Nyssa, Oregon, area. Encouraged and reinforced by strong cultural traditions and ongoing migration and immigration, Chicanos and Latinos represent an integral facet of the historical and social landscape of the Pacific Northwest.

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Daniel Desiga, *Campesino*, oil, n.d.
Courtesy of Joe Garcia

A growing number of younger Chicanos and Latinos are entering the professions and are making important contributions to the social, cultural and economic life of the region.

Desiga's painting of a farmworker portrays the reality of a stoop laborer using a cortito (short-handled hoe) in the fields of Eastern Washington.

Daniel Desiga was closely associated with Movimiento artists in Washington, Oregon, and California. Desiga is the only Chicano artist of this period who was native to the region, and from a farmworker background. This personal history is reflected in his paintings which present accurate and positive images of male and female farmworkers with the implements of their work.



Mexican laborers picking potatoes in one of Dalton and Evans' fields near Malin, Oregon. October 31, 1943. Courtesy of the Oregon Historical Society.

The photographs here are by Nancy Powell Thompson from *Children of the Sun: Interviews with Chicano-Hispanic Health Care Professionals in the Pacific Northwest* (Nurture: A Publication of the Health Sciences Center-Minority Student Program and the University of Washington, Spring, 1982, cover)