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SOCIAL MOVEMENTS 1965-75

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Chicano Photographer

You can not go back to the 1970s and take pictures of iconic figures like César E. Chávez and Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzáles. That is what makes this photographic series so valuable.

—Jesús Manuel Mena Garza

Artist Statement for the Chicano Photographer Series

At eight years of age, I remember shuffling through a drawer where I found 35mm film negatives my sister Dolores had hidden. I pulled them out and held them to the light. They looked like film strips used in elementary school projectors during the late 1950s and 60s. The celluloid miniatures held a certain mystery. How could you make a print from such a small negative? What made this amazing transformation possible?

From this raw beginning, I pursued and acquired the many skills necessary to be a professional photographer, advancing from taking snapshots to exhibiting and publishing. My role as critical observer empowered me, but ascension was problematic. It required course work, taking countless pictures and discovery. Through the years, I learned how to previsualize, capture, store and distribute my art.

My images have as their source my migrant farm worker heritage and immersion in the dynamic political and artistic culture of *El Movimiento*, the political movement that emerged during the mid-60s seeking social justice for Chicana/os. Through photography, I explored the dynamic Chicano culture of the 70s. During this period, Chicanos struggled to enter the American mainstream while retaining their identity. Previously, Chicanos, Mexican-Americans, or Hispanics were known as the silent minority.

El Movimiento allowed me to become part of a new, loud, and proud chorus. Though Chicana/os continue to be marginalized and often dismissed by the dominant culture, my role of articulating our experience moves forward.

—Jesús Manuel Mena Garza