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Community Resistance and Educating in an Authoritarian Climate

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Castañeda v. Granger Public Schools (1973): Cementing El Movimiento in the Yakima Valley, Washington, 1969-74

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Abstract

In 1973, a Washington State Human Rights Commission tribunal ruled against the Granger Public School system in the Yakima Valley in *Castañeda v. Granger Public Schools*. The tribunal found racial bias was the main reason for denying Guillermo V. Castañeda a teaching position in the district. He identified as Chicano. Additionally, the tribunal found widespread educational discrimination against Mexican Americans. The victory came at a moment of backlash against the Chicana/o Movement in Washington state by White dominated school districts. The ruling coincided with a larger resistance against Mexican American farmworker unionization efforts. The victory signified the ways in which the Mexican American community in the Yakima Valley used schools to cement El Movimiento (Mexican American Civil Rights Movement) and civic integration in the state. Despite its historical significance there is little historical literature on the legal victory. This article seeks to address this historical educational gap, illuminate a key moment of El Movimiento outside of the US Southwest and provide an important example of resisting authoritarianism for today's educators.

Keywords: El Movimiento, Washington state, civic integration, civil rights, teachers

Introduction

In *Washington v. Seattle School District No. 1* (1982), the US Supreme Court ruled in favor of Seattle's school district's desegregation plan. The case was filed by the Seattle School District in response to Initiative 350, a Washington state initiative passed in 1978 eliminating the use of mandatory busing for purposes of racial integration in the public schools of Washington state. (Tate, 2002) The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) filed a brief in support of Seattle's busing desegregation plan and cited a long history racial discrimination by Washington state entities.

One case cited in the brief focused on Mexican Americans in Washington state: *Castañeda v. Granger Public Schools* (1973) (Noland et al., 1981, p.15). *Castañeda v. Granger Public Schools* (*Castañeda*) was filed in 1970 by Guillermo V. Castañeda against the Granger Public School district in the Yakima Valley in Washington state. Castañeda sued the school district on grounds he was not hired as a teacher because of his race; he identified as Mexican American, as Chicano (Castañeda, 1970a). Heard and ruled by a Washington State Human Rights Commission tribunal, it ruled against the Granger Public School District in 1973. The ruling found that the school district discriminated against Castañeda for a high school teaching position on racial grounds. Due to damning evidence, the tribunal amended the charge beyond hiring discrimination to include widespread discrimination against Mexican Americans by the Granger School District. *Castañeda* is one of the earliest known Mexican American educational civil rights legal victories in the Pacific Northwest, and it shaped the legal genealogy of educational justice in the region thereafter (Gamboa, 1973; Valencia, 2008). For instance, this legal victory set the stage for and was referenced extensively in the statewide lawsuit against school board election procedures in Washington state in *Guillermo Nicacio v. A. Ludlow Kramer* (1974). However, despite its historical significance, there exists no major historical account of the case and its broader significance in enacting Chicana/o Studies in a time of White backlash and authoritarian reassertion.

This article documents the history of the *Castañeda* (1973) case. Based on primary source data principally from the Chicana and Latinx Center at Washington State University records, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) records, the Washington State Board Against Discrimination records, the Washington State Human Rights Commission records, and oral histories from the plaintiff, Guillermo V. Castañeda, I argue that

the *Castañeda* case illuminates the institutionalization of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement—El Movimiento—in Washington state (Castañeda, 2009; García & Guzmán, 2026; Guzmán, 2024). From 1969-74, Granger and the Yakima Valley were the sites of an emergent Chicana/o Movement. Mexican American mobilization in this area worked in concert with farmworker unionization efforts and tried to expand Mexican American representation in all aspects of public schooling that included Mexican American teacher representation, Mexican American cultural history classes, and bilingual and migrant education support. However, such measures were met with intense resistance from White controlled schools. They attempted to counter the Chicana/o Movement and preferred the status quo. As historian Jennifer Robin Terry (2023) has argued in their work of children in the United Farmworkers Union (UFW), “schools throughout the San Joaquin Valley [California] became proxy battlefields between growers and the UFW” (p. 243). The *Castañeda* case shows this was the case in the Yakima Valley as well. Public schools as proxies for larger sociopolitical battlefields in the 1970s mirrored the ideological battles in schools of the 2020s that focused on censorship, the policing of knowledge, and constraints of academic freedom based on “America First” rationales (Hagopian, 2025).

Drawing on the work of historian Laura K. Muñoz (2024), Mexican Americans looked to schools as the central site for civic integration. According to Muñoz (2024), civic integration “names the collective practices of political, economic, and social action that [Mexican Americans] took to sustain their belonging in the region [US Southwest] after U.S. Conquest” (p.5). Most of the historical scholarship on Mexican American educational civil rights focuses on the Southwest (Donato, 1997; San Miguel, 2023). This article extends Muñoz’s argument beyond the Southwest to include El Movimiento in Washington state (García, 2025; Johnson, 2022). By looking at the *Castañeda* case, Mexican Americans looked to schools not just to expand educational civil rights but to integrate the Chicana/o Movement in the educational systems throughout the Yakima Valley. This occurred at a time of the attempted reassertion of an authoritarian climate targeting Chicana/o educational activism. School districts throughout the Yakima Valley sought to reassert a White dominated authoritarian regime by denying Mexican American inclusion in school curriculum and teacher representation. *Castañeda* demonstrates how Mexican Americans resisted said authoritarian measures and won. I continue to argue that after the *Castañeda* legal victory, there was no returning to the status

quo in the Granger public school system. This victory goes beyond addressing an important historical gap and provides an optimistic example of resistance against attempts to reassert authoritarian schooling policies that informs today's educators.

1969-1970: A Necessary Chicana/o Movement in Yakima Valley schools

In the late 1960s, the Yakima Valley was considered the epicenter of the Mexican American community in Washington state (Gamboa, 2021; García, 2017). Much of the War on Poverty measures and Civil Rights era legislation concerning Mexican Americans in the state were felt the strongest and caused much debate in the Yakima Valley. The Yakima Valley would also become home to resistance against said measures and backlash against El Movimiento (Castañeda, 2017; Guzmán, 2026a; Guzmán, 2026b). Granger, Washington emerged as a case study of this social movement as both it and neighboring Toppenish would be centers of Mexican American farmworker unionization activity. Because most farmworkers in the Valley were Mexican American, the discussion of education was always connected to migrant issues and their bilingual educational needs (Castañeda, 2009; Gamboa, 1973; Harris, 1971; Korsunsky, 2020; Miller, 1991; Villanueva, 1969).

The connection between educational policies and farm working conditions in the Yakima Valley was shown in the 1969 Congressional testimony on migrant and seasonal farmworker powerlessness in the United States. Thomas A. Villanueva, the director of the United Farm Workers Cooperative in Toppenish, Washington testified. During his testimony Mexican American representation in the schools in the Yakima Valley took the national stage. Villanueva was in a unique position. He discussed his experience in Washington as a former migrant student. He discussed how schooling experiences were key to ending his role in the migrant worker stream and settling in Washington state from Texas. In his testimony, he said, "We finally settled down so that the children would be able to go to school and finish their education" (Villanueva, 1969, p.169). Villanueva (1969) noted that the response of the Yakima Valley school district was one of neglect and dismissal of the educational needs of the migrant and Mexican American community (p. 123). His testimony echoed numerous studies of the time, including an extensive study of the Yakima Valley by the ACLU in 1969. The ACLU report that was submitted to Congress as evidence described the educational conditions of Mexican Americans as one of neglect by school districts and a need for bilingual and migrant educational

services. (Ehlert, 1969, pp. 17-18) Villanueva made clear the connection between Mexican American education and the emergent Chicana/o Movement in the Valley. Describing current Mexican American activism in the Valley, he said it as a “rural revolution” in the following way:

On one side are most of the [farm]growers. They are joined by much of the political and governmental power in a country whose history is one of conservatism, defending “the way things have always been.” Challenging these defenders of the status quo is a new coalition. It includes migrant farmworkers, led by younger men who are not content to work at ‘stoop labor’ for pay which averages below the Federal minimum wage for all other laborers (Villanueva, 1969, p. 118).

This historic confrontation reflected a larger expansion of educational rights as part of Civil Rights Era legislation and War on Poverty programs enactments in the Yakima Valley.

Scholars have noted that the War on Poverty programs were a catalyst for Chicana/o mobilization in Washington state (De La Torre, 2022; Miller, 1991). Less attention has been given to Civil Rights era educational legislation such as the creation of the Migrant Education Program in 1966 and the 1968 Bilingual Education Act, all amendments to the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (San Miguel, 2004; 2013). With the passage of the Migrant Education Program in 1966 and 1968 Bilingual Education Act, Mexican Americans asserted themselves in the Yakima Valley school districts at a level never before supported by state and federal legislation (Guzmán, 2010; 2024). This was part of a larger movement in the Yakima Valley as Mexican Americans mobilized to claim War on Poverty programs and gain increased visibility by civil rights legislation (Korsunksy, 2020; Miller, 1991; Moreno, 2022). Said movement focused on addressing the lack of responsiveness to the educational needs of the Mexican American community by White dominated school districts. This larger sociopolitical trend and confrontation with the White authoritarian norm served as the basis of the *Castañeda* case.

The lack of responsiveness to the educational needs of Mexican Americans would lead to several interventions both from Washington state agencies and the Mexican American community. The Washington State Board Against Discrimination (WSBAD), later renamed Washington State Human Rights Commission in 1971, would host a series of workshops for Mexican Americans to address these educational concerns. As a Washington state government agency, this allowed Mexican Americans to confront the state directly. At a conference held in

Wapato in the Yakima Valley, a major workshop focused on the educational concerns of Mexican Americans. Mexican Americans affirmed many of the concerns noted in the 1969 congressional testimonies. However, the discussion revealed the lack of representation in Valley schools that was not named in 1969. In almost every aspect of the educational system there was a lack of responsiveness to the needs of Mexican Americans (WSBAD, 1970). This included the mismanagement of Title I funds, lack of bilingual counseling, English-only teaching and academic testing, overrepresentation of Mexican American children in special education, and virtually no representation of Mexican Americans teachers. The overrepresentation of Mexican American children in special education classes was investigated by the WSBAD. They found the primary reason was misdiagnosis due to lack of bilingual educators (Cheatham, 1969, p. 3). Lack of Mexican American representation was a consistent concern in all discussions. In addition, at the time of the workshop, there were no Mexican Americans on any Yakima Valley school boards. Moreover, across the eight Yakima Valley school districts represented at the 1970 workshop there were only two Mexican American teachers (WSBAD, 1970, p. 16). In Granger, Washington, there were no Mexican American teachers as of 1970 (Granger School District, 1970). Summarizing the meeting on education, WSBAD attendees concluded Mexican Americans “simply just want justice done” (WSBAD, 1970, p. 19; Johnson & Burton, 1970).

The necessity to increase Mexican American representation in public schools was a defining reason and major issue to enact *El Movimiento*. In one compelling example, Fred Díaz of the Center for Migrant and Indian Education in Toppenish, a Central Washington State College teacher preparation center, discussed his experience as a Mexican American teacher in the Valley. When children learned he was Mexican American and bilingual, they were surprised. When one Mexican American student heard him speak Spanish in front of class Díaz remarked, “The kid looked at me kind of shocked with his mouth opened and said to me, ‘but I thought only Americans could be teachers’”(Díaz, 1970, p. 6). Nowhere would this need for Mexican American representation be addressed more directly than in Granger and it would be a driving force for Guillermo V. Castañeda coming to Granger in 1969. Castañeda’s drive reflected a larger connection between teacher representation, bilingual education, and Mexican American inclusion in curriculum making schools a central site where *El Movimiento* was enacted and contested.

1970: Chicana/o Studies Comes to Granger, Washington

Guillermo V. Castañeda was born in 1937 in Aguilar, Colorado and raised in the nearby town of Trinidad. He came to Washington state to attend the University of Washington (UW) and obtained a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering in 1967. He returned to UW to obtain his teaching credential in 1969. He wanted to be a high school science teacher. Castañeda noticed an increase in Mexican American students and compared his time just a few years earlier (Castañeda, 2026; Guzmán, 2026a). Inspired by the increased Mexican American community on campus, Castañeda joined the UW chapter of Movimiento Estudiantil Chicana/o de Aztlán/Chicano Student Movement of Aztlán (MEChA). Many of the MEChA members from the Yakima Valley were from farm working families or former farm workers themselves. Castañeda's home was close to campus and became a gathering/organizing space for MEChA members off campus. Castañeda's MEChA involvement led him to the Yakima Valley. Inspired by Chicana/o Studies classes many Mexican American students from the Yakima Valley were exposed to at UW in 1969, a project was developed to create a Mexican American cultural center in the Yakima Valley. Guillermo was chosen by MEChA to be the director of the La Escuelita Project and responsible for finding a site for the center that was founded in an abandoned Catholic Church in Granger (Castañeda, 2026).

La Escuelita (The Little School) was designed to counter the educational system in Washington that refused to teach Mexican American children about their culture and historical roots. The imagined reality of La Escuelita was based on the aspirations of El Movimiento. It focused on self-determination and cultural affirmation. La Escuelita was planned in a three-phase process. It began in the Spring 1969 and was supposed to be fully operational by the summer of 1970. La Escuelita was also designed to be a "cultural center." From 1969-1970, the center brought in visiting academics and local community members (Laddrou, 1969). The final goal of La Escuelita was to develop leadership and operations.

A critical component of La Escuelita was its dedication and learning from its farm working community. They believed that "Viejitos from our communities will be our teachers and our textbooks" (La Escuelita, n.d.). The advisory board responsible for organizing the program involved 12 UW students (the majority of whom were Mexican Americans from the Yakima Valley) and 12 community members. This modeled the concept of Mexican American self-determination, a driving force behind the Little School. La Escuelita was also closely tied to

Mexican American activism and the Mexican American civil rights leader Cesar Chávez. Chávez visited La Escuelita in 1969 (Blankenbaker 1972b, p. v2-43; Castañeda, 2026; Guzmán, 2026a).

Castañeda noted the following about La Escuelita:

For a few years, La Escuelita was a “Base” for many Hispano-Chicano groups. For example, college students explained facts on how to become enrolled in college, and other groups taught the Mexican and Chicano cultures. But in time, the students completed their studies and went to jobs in other parts of the state [Washington]. Nonetheless, the Mexican-American cultural center project, for whatever its historical and ground-breaking worth, was a testimony of cultural activity in the Yakima Valley.... (Castañeda, 2026, p. 5).

Given the idea that La Escuelita was a place where people would build and maintain their language, culture, crafts, traditions and way of life, no other program embodied the goal and mission of the school than the Calmecac (school for nobles) program in the summer of 1970.

In the summer of 1970, with funding from the University of Washington (UW) and a grant from the Washington State Arts Commission, a six-week summer program, Calmecac, was launched at La Escuelita. According to UW organizers and participants, the primary goal of the program was:

To develop a sense of identity and working relationship among emerging Chicano leaders in the community, on one hand, and students and College officials, on the other; to train these present and potential leaders so that they can participate in decision-making and work in Migrant and Mexican-American communities (Calmecac evaluation, 1970, p. 8).

The Calmecac program symbolized El Movimiento. The six-week program was modeled on one of the founding documents of modern Chicana/o Studies, the 1969 *El Plan de Santa Barbara*, centering the goal of “tying the campus to the Barrio” (Chicano Coordinating Council on Higher Education, 1969). Additionally, it also served to fulfill a main purpose of La Escuelita of studying the “barrio gestalt” of the Yakima Valley (La Escuelita proposal, 1969).

The six-week program was brief but became very important. It included community enrichment programs that incorporated performances from groups such student theatre protest groups, classes led by local Mexican American community members, a community-led museum of local Mexican American artifacts from the Yakima Valley, conducting inventories of

Mexican American cultural materials, and holding a critical space for UW students and local community members to discuss Mexican American history and political concerns in the Yakima Valley (García & Guzmán, 2026). Thus, the Calmecac became a “school without walls” which “was a practicum or laboratory of ideas during discussions but became an agent for institutional change immediately afterwards” (Calmecac evaluation, 1970, p. 12, p. 15). By far the largest change was with the local Mexican American participants. That change was best captured by Maria Elena Villanueva, a local participant from Granger, who remarked on the meaning that both had on the community and Mexican American children:

It looks like it's the last week of the six week program [Calmecac], but for us, for me, for our children, it's only the beginning. Now that the Escuelita is no longer a dream, we have a long way to go. Our children were denied the privilege of being able to learn their culture, history, and most important their mother tongue. The Escuelita made it possible for that dream to become a reality, and thus, we cannot afford to give it up (Calmecac evaluation, 1970, p. 33).

Despite the receptiveness of the program by most Mexican Americans in the community, the Granger public school district was less receptive. Antonio Cardenas, a UW staff participant, revealed that school policy made it difficult for children in the public-school summer program to attend the Calmecac program (Blankenbaker, 1972b, p. v2-100). Guillermo V. Castañeda left Granger to student teach in Physics at Franklin High School before the start of Calmecac. However, said program would be a major discussion point in testimonies during *Castañeda* lawsuit.

La Escuelita's tenure in Granger was brief but became impactful. Despite its educational benefit, it was viewed as militant to the White community and was linked with the Chicana/o Movement and the Brown Berets (Bryant, 1970). For instance, Frank Maltos, who worked at La Escuelita, mentioned his interaction with a Granger school board member who visited La Escuelita, where the links to Chicana/o militancy were named, stating the following: “Well, some people think guns and ammunition are being stored in here.” Maltos commented back, “Well you can see what we have here [are] books and artifacts” (Washington State Human Rights Commission (HRC), 1972, Maltos p.2). In the job interview, Castañeda detailed that he came to Granger as part of the La Escuelita project. His interview focused on his work there and his association with the Brown Berets (Castañeda, 1970b). Overall, the testimony from

Castañeda found a very antagonistic view of the school board towards La Escuelita (Ciccarello, 1972, p. 108). La Escuelita was linked with Chicana/o militancy, and the Brown Berets were cited as reasons for the closure of La Escuelita when the Catholic Church refused to renew their lease in December 1970 (Miller, 1991, pp. 83-84).

Graduates of Granger High School and UW Chicana/o students developed and proposed a Mexican American cultural and history program, “Quetzalcoatl.” It mirrored the Calmecac program at La Escuelita. The Quetzalcoatl proposal was driven by the students and community advocates with the goal of holding public lectures, at the public schools on Mexican American history specifically in the U.S. and building a World Problems course in the Granger High School. Eron Maltos Jr. and his brother Frank Maltos proposed the program to the Granger school board on April 8, 1970 (Quetzalcoatl, 1970). The school board denied the request (Granger Board of Directors, 1970a). Their denial was based on the protest on Mexican American history classes and other complaints they received. The exchange between the White school board members and Quetzalcoatl proposal were recorded and would be used as evidence in *Castañeda*. In one vivid exchange, the very meaning of “American” was debated with White school board members Bill Saunders and Ed Stout against inclusion of Chicana/o Studies:

José Garza: At the very beginning you brought the point that like there’s Dutch Americans and Germans and English—all those you know. They come over here and they, well.

Bill Saunders: They each have their culture and their history.

José Garza: Right. So we are going into the mainstream of American life because we’ve got our country right next to you. Our ancestors came—they jumped and [sic] an imaginary line. And our country’s there and your’s is right here. And it’s all around us. But the country you’re talking about with the French and the Dutch and everything, they are about 3000 miles away on the other side of the world. How can they bring it over here? Where are the ties? We can go one day to Mexico.

Bill Saunders: Yeah, but what my point is, is that they’re not trying to bring it. That they left it and they are Americans.

Frank Maltos: Are you interested in teaching American history?

Ed Stout: Yes.

Frank Maltos: You are? Okay we're American, right? We are about 50%—make up this valley [Granger]. So that number is significant—very significant. And since we're Americans and since you want to teach American history why are you denying us right now? That's discrimination (Treviño, 1971a, p. 3).

Following the denial of the request for the Quetzalcoatl program, Mexican American community members gathered signatures in support for a formal Mexican American History and Culture Class during the 1970-71 academic year (Treviño, Jr., 1971). The signature list was submitted to the school board and showed widespread support for Mexican American history and cultural courses not just in high school but also in middle and elementary grades (Ciccarello, 1972, pp. 55-56). In a petition sent out supporting the signature gathering, by a group of Granger students, the Chicano Students Committee, declared:

Why are there no Chicano teachers, counselors, or school board members when Chicano students are the majority? Raza, by refusing Chicano history and culture classes, Granger High School is saying that Chicanos are second-class citizens. Is it not true that we are not a part of American history, that we have no history or culture? Should we tolerate this? Chicanos we have pride; we have a beautiful heritage and culture. Somos hijos de nuestra historia. Organizense Raza! Let our voice be heard!!! Demand that Chicanos be treated as equals by the Granger School System. CHICANOS ARE AMERICANS JUST AS THE ANGLOS!!! (Chicano Students Committee, 1970).

Court documents from *Castañeda* indicated this was part of a widespread discrimination policy against any Mexican American inclusion in the education system that would reflect the closure of La Escuelita by 1971 (Miller, 1991, pp. 83-84). Maltos sent a complaint to the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction and even provided a bibliography and materials to the local library. However, the school district did not respond (Blankenbaker, 1972b, pp. v2-134-135). The school board still dismissed the request and instead hired an out-of-state consultant with Title I monies to create Mexican American cultural material (Granger Board of Director Minutes, 1970). However, the contract was never completed, and no program was ever developed (Ciccarello, 1972, p. 56). A 1974 investigation by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, found the Granger school district still did not meet a curriculum program that met the needs of Mexican American children (Kiner, 1974, p. 1).

Despite the rationale given by the school board for rejecting the proposal from the students, many White community members in the Valley saw this as a welcomed rejection of the Chicana/o Studies Movement. In a letter to the Granger School Board, a Sunnyside resident praised the board for rejecting the Quetzalcoatl program:

I would like to commend you and the members of the School Board on your decision concerning the lectures by the Brown Beret group at your school. I believe it is well known in this valley that this is a militant group, and I feel it has no place in the school system. I also feel that if any other culture is taught in our schools, there are many others that should come first on the list and ones that are certainly considered more citizens of this country than the Mexican race (Williams, Jr., 1970).

Ironically, it was the Brown Berets that called on the state governor's office to launch an investigation into the rejection of the program. Despite the push back from the Yakima Valley community, even groups considered militant looked to state policy and agencies to enact their version of the Chicana/o Movement (Brown Berets, 1970). Converging with La Escuelita cultural classes, the push for the Quetzalcoatl program, Granger put out a call for a high school science teacher. Thus, Castañeda's non-hiring was not just an employment dispute. It was part of a larger struggle over whether Mexican American cultural knowledge and Chicana/o political identity could enter the public schools of the Yakima Valley. At the time Guillermo was a student teacher in Seattle, at Franklin High School. Given that there were no Mexican American teachers employed by the district, Castañeda wanted to return, or as he said, "to make a difference" (Guzmán, 2026a; HRC tribunal, 1973a, p. 106).

1970-74: A History of *Castañeda v. Granger Public Schools*

In April 1970, Guillermo V. Castañeda applied for a high school science position in Granger. He learned about the position through UW's placement center. He got an interview. In the interview Castañeda described how he was asked about his affiliation with the Brown Berets. Castañeda noted that Robert Lisle, the head of the school board, stated, "We have a lot of John Birchers in the Valley but I don't know if we have any in the school system or not. For this reason we have to know where you stand" (Castañeda, 1970b, p. 1). Castañeda was asked about his views on bilingual education and other politically sensitive issues. Castañeda noted that he was not asked about his teaching credentials or experience. After the interview

Castañeda was informed by his reference at Franklin High School in Seattle, that he was asked if, “he [Castañeda] was militant” (HRC, 1973, p.45; Castañeda, 1970b). Following the call, on June 2, 1970, Castañeda got official notice that he was not hired as a teacher. The following day he filed a formal complaint with the Washington State Board Against Discrimination. Ending his letter to the Board, Castañeda noted, “These series of events lead me to believe sincerely that I was not selected for the above position because I am a Mexican-American”(Castañeda, 1970a, p. 2). Given Castañeda’s link to UW’s MEChA, they protested to Washington State Governor Daniel J. Evans and demanded an intervention in the matter:

This rejection of Sr. Castañeda becomes highly important when considered that one of MEChA prime objectives is to get Chicano students interested in obtaining an education in order to return to help their community and work to alleviate our people’s problems. This incident also serves to remind you of how this state’s racist education system operates as though Chicanos are non-existent. The Granger School district is predominantly Chicano, yet not one faculty member is Chicano (Acevez, 1970).

Castañeda followed up with the complaint with Frank Treviño of the Mexican American Affairs Commission and State Board Against Discrimination (WSBAD) on July 26, 1971 (Castañeda, 1971). The lawsuit followed a larger response by Mexican Americans demanding intervention by the Superintendent’s office (Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), 1970).

The Washington State Board Against Discrimination took on Castañeda’s case with much interest. An investigation by the WSBAD found that Castañeda had cause for his complaint and evidence indicated that an unfair practice had been committed (Gorohoff, 1970). Investigators found that the question about the Brown Berets was discriminatory and mentioned there had been no actions for Mexican American teacher recruitment before Castañeda filed his complaint and the WSBAD investigation (WSBAD, 1970b, p.2). Investigators questioned the teacher who was hired instead of Castañeda. They asked if he was asked about his view of Mexican Americans. Jerod Theckston stated, “that no questions were asked of him, of any group affiliations, or his politics” (Aguilar, 1970).

Frank Treviño, the local WSBAD representative, attempted to address the matter with the school district without a hearing, but this was to no avail. The Granger public schools denied the bias. The lawyer representing the Granger Public Schools stated, “We feel that a great deal of misunderstanding exists about the Granger Public School District and we are

anxious to clear our name. Therefore, we would like to have the tribunal hearing set at the earliest possible date so that we may present our case there, and if necessary, the Superior Court, in the near future” (Talbot, 1972, p. 1). In April 1972, the hearing was set and the trial would take place in Yakima, the county seat of Yakima County, and center of political power in the Yakima Valley (Burrough, 1972a).

The trial was heavily publicized in the Yakima Valley newspapers (Burrough, 1972c; Wherry, 1972a; Wherry, 1972b) and the case brought El Movimiento and the schooling of Mexican Americans into a statewide discussion that was unprecedented. Attention was given to the educational needs of Mexican Americans. They also discussed how Mexican American students were treated in a White controlled school district. Scholars have shown that the public discourse on schooling of Mexican Americans in the state was generally discussed as a migrant education problem (Butler, 1953; Guzmán, 2024). Cultural responsiveness and the lack of Mexican American teachers was almost entirely absent from the public discourse in Washington state (García, 2017; Guzmán 2010). It was historic that a White controlled school board in the Yakima Valley was being held accountable for their treatment of Mexican American children (Burrough, 1972a; Millen, 1971).

The trial lasted five days in April 1972 and had over 32 witnesses encompassing representatives from the local Chicana/o Movement, and the Yakima Valley and Washington state educational system. The trial forced a public discussion on the status of Mexican American education at an unprecedented level in Washington state, with Castañeda leading the way. Castañeda did not have legal representation. He represented himself at the trial. Reflecting on the trial, Castañeda mentioned it was important to him to show that Mexican Americans had a voice (Guzmán, 2026a). He chose to defend himself as an act of self-autonomy, showing how the Chicana/o Movement was cemented even on an individual level (Esparza, 2023). Castañeda’s deposition reaffirmed civic integration and identity affirmation. He was questioned about his racial identity because he put “Chicano” for his race on the job application (Wherry, 1972a). When questioned in the trial about his identity, he again asserted, “I consider myself to be a Chicano” (Blankenbaker, 1972f, p. 9). Castañeda’s Chicano identity reflected a larger issue for Mexican Americans in Valley schools. Drawing on Castañeda’s ideas, the testimonies of Antonio Cardenas, José C. Hernández, Eron Maltos, Jr., and Bill Nicacio spoke to the ways Mexican Americans in the Yakima Valley used schooling to institutionalize El Movimiento and

engage civic integration on their own terms. Said testimonies from Hernández, Maltos, Jr., Cardenas, and Nicacio illuminated the authoritarian schooling regime that the *Castañeda* case was challenging.

The testimony of José C. Hernández illuminated how educational change was needed for Mexican Americans in the Yakima Valley. Hernández was a Granger High School alumni (Class of 1964) and was the director of Chicano Studies at Yakima Valley College. When describing his schooling experience in Granger in the 1960s, he was blunt. He said, “Educational atrocities have been killing the spirit of Mexican-American and Indian children in the Granger School District” (Blankenbaker, 1972c, p. v3-36). His testimony described a school system that did not assist or believe in Mexican American students. This was a driving force for Hernández to be a Chicano studies teacher and why he made it a mission to do college recruiting in Granger. Reflecting on his academic success in college, Hernández connected it to resistance to the educational neglect he experienced in Granger schools, stating, “I wanted to prove something to the establishment and as a matter of fact my first quarter in Yakima Valley [College] I had a 3.0 something. I went back and laughed in Mr. Norwood’s face and said, ‘You said I couldn’t make it, huh!’” (Blankenbaker, 1972c, pp. v3-54-55). The resistance of the Granger school district to Mexican American studies was also echoed in the testimony of Eron Maltos, Jr.

Eron Maltos, Jr., was a University of Washington student, member of the Seattle chapter of the Brown Berets, and graduated from Granger High School in 1967. Most of Maltos’ testimony centered on his affiliation with the Brown Berets and the introduction of the Mexican American studies program to the Granger School Board in 1970. Maltos claimed that during the twelve years he was in the Granger schools he never had a Mexican American teacher (Blankenbaker, 1972b, p. v2-124). Maltos described the push for the program as in line with and responsive to the requests of the Board. This included even dropping off a bibliography of books for the school libraries of Mexican American centered books (Blankenbaker, 1972b, p. v2-134). Maltos described this in response to being told not to speak Spanish while in elementary grades in Granger and a way to bring back the education he received at the University of Washington in Chicana/o studies classes (Blankenbaker, 1972b, p. v2-136). As Maltos was questioned about his connection with the Brown Berets, he pushed back against the militancy label stating:

The way I would explain it the Brown Berets are dedicated to try to gain justice for a Chicano community, and if the Anglo system or Anglo bigotry or the Anglos do not go along with the Chicanos' point of view, do not let them have their own self-identity or exercise their own destination the Brown Berets will fight for this right, and if you classify this as militant I would say militant, but I would say just something we have to fight to survive (Blankenbaker, 1972b, p. v2-150).

When pressed about the use of the word "fight," Maltos connected this to civic integration:

What we do is try to take it through all bureaucratic channels. That is what we did. We talked to principals, superintendents, school boards, we went to Mr. Bruno's, Superintendent's Office, we went to petitions, we went to anything and everything and this is where our sense of fight was, we would not stop, you know and eventually obviously, we have made the community aware and they have made some kind of change (Blankenbaker, 1972c, p. v2-150).

Once again, Maltos demonstrated the push for the Quetzalcoatl program and how it was part of a larger struggle to cement the Chicana/o Movement in the pre-existing institutions in the Yakima Valley. This example of integrating Chicana/o studies into the Granger public school system was affirmed by the testimony of Antonio Cardenas.

Antonio Cardenas was a counselor from the University of Washington and grew up near the Yakima Valley. His testimony focused on his experiences in La Escuelita and the Calmecac program in Granger 1970. Cardenas revealed the Calmecac program did educational research and outreach work beyond Granger. For instance, they did an inventory of Mexican American literature in the Yakima Valley libraries. Their research found that there were almost no books on Mexican Americans in the Yakima Valley libraries. Additionally, they conducted an extensive oral history program documenting the Mexican American experience in the Yakima Valley. Although based in Chicana/o Studies, Cardenas noted that part of the work of Escuelita was civic education, stating:

Many were education, social problems, farm workers, and things like this, and we had also the kind of programs to try to make the participants aware of what were factors in the community pointing to social change. If you want to note obstructions, visit the agencies, schools and libraries, and find out what kind of resources they were offering to

the community and how the Chicano community was acting with agencies (Blankenbaker, 1972b, p. v2-101).

Part of this work included researching how many Mexican Americans were registered to vote and their experiences with the voting process (Blankenbaker, 1972b, p. v2. 102). Cardenas' experiences in Granger led to larger civic integration efforts throughout the Valley. As Cardenas noted, he was part of organizing a Valley wide workshop to bring the Mexican American community and Washington government agencies together to discuss ways they could collaborate to address the needs of the Chicana/o and migrant child in the winter of 1970 (Blankenbaker, 1972b, pp. v2-107-108).

Despite the outreach efforts from Cardenas and Chicana/o community, it was the Granger school board and school representatives who were not collaborative. In one glaring example, Cardenas learned that the school district sent out a notice to the families participating in the district's summer school program discouraging them from attending the classes at La Escuelita (Blankenbaker, 1972b, pp. v2-103-104). After the notice was sent out, many Granger children stopped attending the classes. Both La Escuelita and the Calmecac program received much fanfare in the local newspapers (Calmecac evaluation, 1970). Despite the impact of their work in 1970, Cardenas indicated the school district was the most resistant to its presence and refused to collaborate. Bill Nicacio, a Granger resident, echoed school district resistance but expanded on Cardenas' discussion of educational intervention. He made connections to the larger mobilization efforts of Mexican Americans to all aspects of civic representation in the Yakima Valley.

Bill Nicacio was a Yakima Valley Community Action Program worker, and all his children attended the Granger public school system during the time of the trial. He would sue Washington state in 1974 for voter discrimination of Mexican Americans in school board voting (*Guillermo Nicacio v. A. Ludlow Kramer*). Additionally, he led a school walkout and protest effort by Mexican American families after the Granger school board cancelled the hot lunch program in 1971 (Lamb, 1971a; Lamb, 1971b). During the time Mexican Americans protested the Granger schools, an instructor who co-founded La Escuelita, taught the children of picketing families (Harris, 1971b). When pressed by the school board attorney about using the Granger school children as pawns in adult political matters, Nicacio responded, "No, we never think keeping children out of school is good." However, they felt the school boycott was the only

way the school board would listen to their concerns, “The parents are concerned about our children”(Blankenbaker, 1972b, pp. v2-35-36; Wherry, 1972). Even in this case, Mexican Americans made sure to work with the structure of the school and be as least disruptive as possible (Blankenbaker, 1972b, p. v2-4). Nicacio’s testimony showed the various ways the Mexican American community looked to schools to enact the El Movimiento. Even the removal of children from school during a school boycott was to secure better educational rights for them and the entire Mexican American community.

Bill Nicacio’s testimony focused on the Chicana/o image and the need for Mexican American representation beyond schooling. When asked about the possible hiring of Guillermo Castañeda, Nicacio encouraged the school district to do so because Chicano representation was important. In one of his most telling responses, Nicacio connected the hiring discrimination of Castañeda with the overall image of the Chicano in the Valley:

There is a need for Chicano teachers, there is a need for Chicano counselors, the problems are many. You are aware of the problems more so than I am, just hearing a few. I have been talking ever since I came to Granger about the Chicano image. If a child is—not child but this is the general rule—if we start with the school and we don’t see anybody as a teacher, myself as a Chicano, how can I strive for a teaching position when I start school. I don’t see that Chicano image there. I don’t see the Chicano image as a doctor or a lawyer. That is what I was telling the school administration (Blankenbaker, 1972a, pp. v1-124-125).

The bottom line is that Chicano representation in schools and the community was absent, which was devastating. Chicano children could not see teachers, doctors and lawyers that looked like them. This was so important to Nicacio that he volunteered to help the district recruit Mexican American teachers, but they never took him up on his offer.

Nicacio supported a larger Chicana/o Movement in the Valley. He made direct connections with the Castañeda trial and the attempts to deny Mexican American representation at any level of schools and governance. He focused on the lack of representation of Mexican American teachers to a connection to voter representation and discouragement of Mexican American voters. He linked this to a lack of civic engagement, “When the citizens were denied the right to register to vote, the others saw no reason to become citizens....” (Blankenbaker, 1972b, p. v2-12). This was a key reason Nicacio was part of an effort to get

Mexican Americans as part of a Title I advisory board. The community saw it was a way to be part of voting and noted that the school district was mismanaging Title I grants or refused them. For instance, he noted that the Granger school board denied bilingual education funds despite demands from Mexican Americans for bilingual educational support (Blankenbaker, 1972a, pp. v1-121-122, Wherry, 1972b). Nicacio showed the many ways Mexican Americans were integrating themselves into the school system on their own terms. However, the school district resisted and viewed them as militant. Nicacio was clear that the school district defined Mexican American civic integration through the schools as “liberal” or “militant” stating the following in his testimony: “The definition you want when you ask that question, Escuelita, union activities, school lunch issue, Title I issue; those would pretty much be the ones” (Blankenbaker, 1972e, p. v6a-76). However, Nicacio testimony demonstrated how said actions were central to the Mexican American community cementing El Movimiento in the Yakima Valley.

Most of the testimonies said very little about Castañeda but more about Mexican Americans views on cultural and political representation in schools. A persistent point of debate among the Mexican American witnesses was the need for Mexican American history and bilingual education in schools. But there was a backlash from a small number of Mexican Americans. A Granger local, Luciano Pérez, was asked if there should be Mexican American classes in schools. Pérez, who was a member of Mutualistas, a self-described Mexican American support organization, said that Mexican culture should be taught in the home because he did not trust that teachers would be well versed in the subject matter (Blankenbaker, 1972d, pp. v6-39-41). This was echoed by another member of the Mutualistas, Ambrosio Ybarra, who was adamant that bilingual education be done at home, not school (Blankenbaker, 1972e, p. v6a-1). Despite the perspectives of a small group, the overall consensus was that Granger schools needed more Mexican American representation. After the trial in April, the tribunal would make their ruling almost a year later in March 1973.

In March 1973, the Human Rights Commission (HRC) tribunal handed down their ruling in favor of Castañeda. That ruling reaffirmed the findings in 1970, finding discrimination against Castañeda and widespread discrimination against Mexican Americans in Granger (Burrough, 1973; HRC tribunal, 1973a). The victory came at a time of intense backlash to the Chicana/o Movement, yet it also established greater oversight and accountability to the Mexican American community. The tribunal found that almost all efforts by the school board to recruit Mexican

Americans, develop culturally relevant material, came after the protests by the Mexican American community and the lawsuit filed by Castañeda (HRC tribunal, 1973a). The board found overwhelming evidence that the Granger public schools were dismissive and unresponsive to the needs of the Mexican American community.

As part of their final judgment, the HRC recognized that there was a serious disconnect between the Granger school board and the Mexican American community. They also viewed Castañeda's commitments to his community as a threat, "because he believed in equal educational opportunities for Mexican-American children.... he wanted the job because he was interested in doing something for those children, and this was viewed as disruptive and a person of suspect motives" (HRC tribunal, 1973a, p. 106). The school district and Castañeda would meet in October of 1973 to finalize an agreement on settlements, officially ending the case (HRC tribunal, 1973b; HRC, 1974). Although the case was over, the impact of El Movimiento was in full effect as the Granger school district contended with a permanent Mexican American institutional presence. In 1974, the federal Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) civil rights division would do a follow up investigation on compliance with recommendations for the local Mexican American community (Kinear, 1974). That same year Bill Nicacio, who testified in *Castañeda*, would file his own lawsuit, charging statewide discrimination against Mexican Americans against school board voting in *Guillermo Nicacio vs. A. Ludlow Kramer*. The *Castañeda* case would be used to launch that lawsuit.

Conclusion

Ending his canonical work on Mexican American history in Washington state, historian Erasmo Gamboa cited the *Castañeda* case. Gamboa grew up in the Yakima Valley, was a child of farmworkers and was part of the Mexican American class Castañeda met when he was at the University of Washington in 1969. Gamboa (1973) referenced the case to conclude his discussion of Chicana/o education in his master's thesis, noting: "Furthermore, most efforts to make changes in the valley's schools have been met with strong opposition. Recently, Guillermo Castañeda who applied as a teacher in Granger...was refused and an Anglo hired in his place; there is no question that he was qualified. Subsequently, Castañeda has taken his case before the State Board Against Discrimination and won" (p. 95).

Gamboa's account was prophetic, given he would have a job offer retracted once it was learned of his personal affiliations with the Chicana/o movement (Gamboa, 2005; Guzmán, 2026b). However, Gamboa would eventually go on to be a professor in American Ethnic Studies at University of Washington and retired in 2017 as an Emeritus Professor of History and Ethnic Studies (Talbot, 2022). As Gamboa ends his discussion of Chicano education, "It becomes clear that Chicanos are not dropping out of school as is assumed by school officials; to the contrary, they are pushed out. Chicano teachers, counselors, administrators or persons sensitive to the needs of Chicano students must be employed" (Gamboa, 1973, p. 95). Castañeda's legal victory would be a central catalyst for making Gamboa's call a reality.

Castañeda (1973) serves as a vivid reminder of the impact of the Chicana/o Movement in public schools and beyond. Despite the resistance of the school district and Yakima Valley education system that resisted almost all aspects of the Chicana/o educational movement, El Movimiento prevailed. Castañeda was not just a single court victory. It was a case that challenged a broader authoritarian schooling regime that resisted Mexican American representation, bilingual education, and Chicana/o Studies. Guillermo V. Castañeda would go on to be a science teacher in Toppenish in the early 1980s, among the first Mexican American science teachers in the Yakima Valley. Although currently retired from teaching, Castañeda's legacy lives on. Mexican American teachers and school staff are a permanent fixture in all Yakima Valley schools. In 2025, almost half of the teaching force in Granger was Hispanic or Latino (OSPI, 2025). In one of the last statements from Castañeda's testimony during his lawsuit, he said "we have a lot of problems we have to overcome, Mexican-Americans, and if I can see anything I could do I will do it" (Ciccarello, 1972, p. 105; HRC tribunal, 1973a, p. 41). He had an impact. It expanded Mexican American civic integration, educational civil rights, and influenced a US Supreme Court decision.

Given the recent revival of authoritarian policies and the political targeting of any school representations viewed as "critical" of the United States and attempts to demand loyalty oaths from certain public school teachers, the *Castañeda* case provides guidance and reminds us of the necessity to resist said measures (Hagopian, 2025; Wolf, 2025). The *Castañeda* case developed during a time when the Chicana/o Movement in schools was directly being challenged and silenced. As echoed in the case and disputes about Mexican American centered curriculum in Granger, Mexican American representations in schools were viewed as "un-

American” and against the purpose of public schools. Thus, as authoritarianism in the name of “ending radical indoctrination” seeks to curtail bilingual education, silence Ethnic Studies, revoke rights for immigrant students, and police the public in schools, *Castañeda* provides a powerful example of resistance that can inspire today’s educators (DeMio & James, 2025; White House, 2025).

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