DENVER LANDMARK PRESERVATION COMMISSION
HISTORIC DISTRICT LANDMARK DESIGNATION APPLICATION

02.09.2021

This form is for use in nominating historic districts for historic designation in the City and County of Denver. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." Questions about the application or designation process can be directed to Denver Landmark Preservation staff at landmark@denvergov.org or (303) 865-2709.

Proposed Historic District Name: La Raza Park

The following are required for the application to be considered complete:

- ☐ District Information
- ☐ Applicant Information and Signatures
- ☐ Criteria for Significance
- ☐ Statement of Significance
- ☐ Period of Significance
- ☐ District Description
- ☐ Statement of Integrity
- ☐ Historic Context
- ☐ Bibliography
- ☐ Photographs
- ☐ District Map and Property List
- ☐ Public Outreach Documentation
- ☐ Application Fee
- ☐ Inventory Table

DENVER
THE MILE HIGH CITY

1. District Information

District Identification

Historic Name: North Side Playground

Proposed Name of District: La Raza Park

Location

Legal Description: L 1 TO 30 INC & VAC ALY BLK 23 DOWNING ADD TO N DENVER

Number of Primary Structures:

# Contributing	# Noncontributing
1	2

Number of Other Contributing resources (if any):

0	Accessory Structures
2	Features

Contributing and Noncontributing Features or Resources

Describe how contributing and non-contributing resources have been determined.

Contributing Features: Kiosko, Plaza de la Raza, “La Raza Unida” sculpture

Noncontributing Features: basketball court, playground

The contributing features were determined by identifying the significance criteria and historic context for the site. The Kiosko, Plaza de la Raza and “La Raza Unida” are all resources in the park which have a direct association with the historic and cultural significance of the park. Their removal would be detrimental to the historic integrity of the park.

Conversely, while the basketball court and playground are features that indicate the use of the park, their replacement would not negatively impact the historical significance of the park, so long as the park retained similar recreation and play structures.

2. Applicant Information

An application for designation may be submitted by:

☐Owner(s) of the property or properties, or

☒Member(s) of city council, or

☐Manager of Community Planning and Development, or

☐Three residents of Denver

Applicant

Name: Councilwoman Amanda P. Sandoval

Address:

Phone:

Email:

Primary Point of Contact

Name: Becca Dierschow/Stacie West

Address: 201 W Colfax, Dept 205

Phone: (720) 865-3087

Email:becca.dierschow@denvergov.org, Stacie.west@denvergov.org

Prepared by:

Landmark Preservation Staff

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Owner Applicant:

I / We, the undersigned, on behalf of the owner(s) of the property described in this application for landmark designation do, hereby, give my consent to the designation of this park as a district for preservation.

I understand that this designation transfers with the title of the property should the property be sold, or if legal or beneficial title is otherwise transferred.

Owner(s): Allegra "Happy" Haynes (please print) Date: 04/24/2023

Owner(s) Signature: Allegra "Happy" Haynes

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3. Significance

Criteria for Significance

To qualify as a Landmark, a district must meet at least three significance criteria. Check the applicable criteria from the following list.

☒ A. It has a direct association with a significant historic event or with the historical development of the city, state, or nation;

☐ B. It has direct and substantial association with a recognized person or group of persons who had influence on society;

☐ C. It embodies the distinctive visible characteristics of an architectural style or type;

☐ D. It is a significant example of the work of a recognized architect or master builder;

☐ E. It contains elements of design, engineering, materials, craftsmanship, or artistic merit which represent a significant innovation or technical achievement;

☒ F. It represents an established and familiar feature of the neighborhood, community or contemporary city, due to its prominent location or physical characteristics;

☐ G. It promotes understanding and appreciation of the urban environment by means of distinctive physical characteristics or rarity;

☐ H It represents an era of culture or heritage that allows an understanding of how the site was used by past generations;

☒ I. It is a physical attribute of a neighborhood, community, or the city that is a source of pride or cultural understanding;

☒ J. It is associated with social movements, institutions, or patterns of growth or change that contributed significantly to the culture of the neighborhood, community, city, state, or nation.

Statement of Significance
Provide a summary paragraph for each applicable criterion

A. It has a direct association with a significant historic event or with the historical development of the city, state, or nation;

La Raza Park has a direct association with historical events and the historical development of Denver's Northside, from its earliest days as a playground for Denver's thriving Italian community, to its time as the heart of the growing Chicano movement in Denver, to its current role as a place of celebration and ceremony for a diverse Latino/Chicano community that lives in Denver and the surrounding area.

Occupying a full city block between Osage and Navajo Street, and West 38th and 39th Avenue, this land was never developed, serving as open space and a park since its earliest days. In 1906 the city acquired the land and turned the site into a playground. The acquisition of

dedicated parks and parkland in urban environments was a cornerstone of the urban planning philosophy known as the “City Beautiful Movement”. Its function was to introduce unstructured (yet heavily supervised) play to the children of the neighborhood. Most of these children were children of Italian immigrants who called the Northside home. The Northside playground was intentionally designed to teach these children American values and social mores, as part of the wider Progressive Movement which influenced the design of cities across America.

In 1931, the name of the park was changed to Columbus Park to honor the Italian residents who called the Northside home. In 1940, the Columbus Park swimming pool opened. A project of the Works Progress Administration (WPA), the pool was designed by local architect Stanley Morse.

La Raza Park continued to serve as a focal point for the Northside community, even as the demographics of the surrounding area changed, with the Latino population steadily growing between 1945 and 1990. In Denver, La Raza Park served as an important location for the nascent Chicano Movement (El Movimiento), to advocate for civil rights causes such as equal access to public amenities (including pools and recreation centers), employment, and education. It was also where El Movimiento promoted a distinctly Chicano culture by enjoying public space, practicing the arts, religion, and the traditions of la raza (an Amerindian or mixed heritage ancestry).

In the summer of 1969, Chicano youth staged ‘splash ins’ at pools across the city, to draw attention to both the neglect of pools in primarily minority neighborhoods, and the upgraded facilities in white neighborhoods. Between 1969 and 1970, members of the Chicano community pressured Denver Parks and Rec into turning over control of La Raza Park to the local residents. The community solidified control of La Raza Park in 1970.

Throughout the 1970s, Denver police harassed Chicano youth and activists in La Raza, in the Northside, and throughout the city. In 1981, the violence peaked. On June 28, 1981, the Northside community gathered in La Raza Park to ‘open’ the park for the summer. An estimated 400 - 800 people, including families with small children, gathered in the park that day for festivities. Around 2 pm, the Denver Police shut down the event, citing a lack of a permit, and claiming the event was associated with the Black Berets. As families slowly dispersed from the park, police moved in, armed with batons and tear gas. Community members threw rocks and bottles at the police, the police responded by firing tear gas into the crowd and releasing police dogs.

In 1984, three years after the police attack at the park, the City of Denver closed La Raza Pool, and filled it in. In 1988, Latino residents petitioned Councilwoman Debbie Ortega to officially rename the park La Raza. However, the proposed renaming did not pass City Council. At the same time that the community pushed for the park to be officially renamed, Denver Parks and Recreation engaged residents to design a new community space for the park. Northside residents requested a Kiosko and plaza for La Raza Park, inspired by the Kiosko at Chicano Park in San Diego, California. The Kiosko and Plaza de la Raza were dedicated on May 5, 1990.

La Raza Park became a different kind of gathering place for the Latino community, hosting more large-scale, organized events rather than being an area for informal events and gathering. Ceremonial danza, Dia de los Muertos memorials and La Raza Park Day illustrate the contemporary events that connect the community to their culture.

The evolution of La Raza Park, from the Northside playground to the Kiosko and Plaza illustrates the historic development of the Northside neighborhood, its residents and a century

of cultural development in Denver.

F. It represents an established and familiar feature of the neighborhood, community or contemporary city, due to its prominent location or physical characteristics;

The park, occupying a full city block between Osage and Navajo Street, and West 38th and 39th Avenue, is an established and familiar feature of the Sunnyside and Highland neighborhoods. It is the second largest park in the Sunnyside neighborhood. While Ciancio Park to the north at 40th and Lipan Street is larger, it does not have the same cultural significance as La Raza Park, and is more closely associated with Horace Mann Middle School.

The prominent Kiosko is visible from 38th Avenue – a major thoroughfare of North Denver. This is the only Kiosko in the City of Denver and its unique physical characteristics and cultural importance make it an established and familiar feature of the neighborhood and the contemporary city.

I. It is a physical attribute of a neighborhood, community, or the city that is a source of pride or cultural understanding;

La Raza Park is a physical attribute of the Northside neighborhood and Denver's Latino/Chicano community that serves as a source of pride and cultural understanding.

The Park was often the site of Chicano Movement actions – including the 1969/1970 take over or liberation of the park. By hiring local community members and activists to staff the pool, the community created a safe space for children, young adults and elders. This era in La Raza's history was marked by a decrease in gang violence. The role La Raza played as a 'liberated' area, under community control is a source of pride for the community today, as it was in the 1970s.

La Raza's continued role as a space for cultural events, such as the yearly summer solstice festival and Dia de Los Muertos, allows the Chicano/Latino community to connect to their culture, and invites the wider Denver community to understand Chicano/Latino cultural practices.

The renaming of the park in 2020 serves as a point of pride for the Chicano/Latino community, as it had been colloquially known as La Raza Park for 50+ years before its official renaming. Removing the name of Columbus – a man associated with the colonization and genocide of indigenous peoples in the Americas – from the park, represents a reclaiming of the land by indigenous voices. The Kiosko, murals and sculpture in the park all celebrate indigenous arts and culture, a source of pride for the community.

J. It is associated with social movements, institutions, or patterns of growth or change that contributed significantly to the culture of the neighborhood, community, city, state, or nation.

La Raza Park is associated with the Chicano Movement, a civil rights movement from the 1960s that contributed significantly to the culture of Denver's Northside, in addition to Colorado and the nation as a whole.

The Chicano movement encouraged the embrace of a distinctly Chicano identity, in opposition to the ideal of assimilation into wider American culture. While the Chicano Movement had distinct historic events (see above, Criterion A), it had a tremendous influence on the culture of Denver's Northside. La Raza Park served as a site of direct action through marches and protests, but it also served as an incubator for Chicano and Latino culture (culture, as defined by the Landmark ordinance as being the traditions, beliefs, customs, and practices of a particular community).

As noted in several interviews with members of the Chicano community, La Raza Park was a place where generations of neighbors could gather. During the summers, parents could drop off their children, knowing they would be looked after and fed. Activists kept gangs out of the park, making it safe for people of all ages to enjoy the space. These cultural practices and customs of intergenerational community building and mutual aid were exemplified at La Raza Park.

La Raza Park was also home to early murals by local Chicano artists that represented Chicano culture as a unique artistic practice, a visual retelling of important cultural beliefs and traditions, and a visual claiming of the park. This practice was continued by muralist David Ocelotl Garcia, who designed and painted El Viaje within the Kiosko in 2016. The park also serves as the center of many contemporary cultural activities, such as the ceremonial danza, Dia de Los Muertos event, and La Raza Park Day. This culminated with the renaming to La Raza Park and the 2021 rededication of the park with installation of Emanuel Martinez's La Raza Unida sculpture.

Period of Significance

Period of Significance: Prior to and Including 2021
Provide justification for the period of significance:

The proposed period of significance for the La Raza Park historic district is prior to and including 2021. This period of significance recognizes the historical significance of the land as undeveloped land, beginning before its platting in 1871. The period of significance also captures the historic and cultural significance of La Raza Park and its representation of development patterns in Denver until 1990. However, local and national events between 2013 and 2021 had great influence on the park and justify an expanded, exceptional period of significance.

Generally, preservationists require a property to be of a certain age before it is eligible for designation. In Denver, local landmarks should generally be 30 years of age before they are designated as landmarks. This allows historians and preservation professionals the benefit of hindsight, and the ability to evaluate if something is indeed significant. However, some resources or events are so immediately recognized and documented as significant, that they are considered to have exceptional significance and thus may be eligible for designation even when they achieved significance more recently.

In the case of La Raza Park, while the resource is more than 30 years of age, the period of significance extends to 2021 due to its exceptional importance.

For 50 years, community leaders and activists advocated for the name of the park to be officially changed to La Raza Park. While the community referred to it as La Raza Park, rather than Columbus Park, and regularly spray painted the signs to remove the name Columbus, the City and County of Denver did not acknowledge this change. Indeed, a 1988 attempt to officially rename the park failed at City Council. However, in the summer of 2020, Councilwoman Amanda P. Sandoval, who represented the council district where La Raza is located, initiated the official renaming of the park to La Raza Park. This official renaming process must be placed into the political context of the late 2010s.

In 2013, the Black Lives Matter movement was formed, following the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the shooting death of an innocent Black teenager, Trayvon Martin.[1] In 2014, the Black Lives Matter movement organized protests responding to police murders of Black men Michael Brown and Eric Garner. As the movement grew, Americans were confronted with the systematic racism and white supremacy that formed the basis of the country. In 2015, a white supremacist, Dylann Roof, opened fire on black congregants at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina. Roof murdered eight people. Before his attack, Roof referenced the Southern Confederacy and displayed the Confederate flag – linking the Confederacy to his belief of white supremacy. The attack sparked a movement in the South to remove symbols of the Confederacy – which had long been used as symbol for white supremacy and racial hatred. In South Carolina, the Confederate flag was removed from the State Capitol building. Memorials and monuments to the Confederacy were removed as well in South Carolina and in the South. The conversation about Confederate monuments soon grew to encompass monuments to Christopher Columbus. Columbus, an explorer who was once credited with 'discovering' the Americas, has in recent scholarship, come to represent the genocide of indigenous Americans throughout Central America and the Caribbean, and the plunder of American resources by European countries. Many indigenous groups and allies protest monuments to Columbus on this basis, and these objections gained traction during the wider conversations and policy changes happening in the late 2010s.

A year after the Charleston shooting, Donald Trump was elected President. Americans across the country took part in large scale marches and events to protest his election. The Women's March in January 2017 coordinated over 2 million protestors across the United States.[2] In the four years of the Trump presidency, protests were a frequent facet of American civic and political life – across the political spectrum. In August 2017, a "Unite the Right" rally took place in Charleston, SC to protest the removal of Confederate monuments. Counter-protestors confronted the rally, which turned violent and resulted in 3 deaths and over 50 injuries. By 2020, protests against systematic racism in the country were common, and growing. The summer of 2020 was a period of massive protests, which took place across the country. Sparked by the murder of an unarmed black man, George Floyd, by Minneapolis police on May 25, 2020, scholars have noted that these protests represent the largest, longest lasting protests in American history. Indeed, one scholar described the murder of George Floyd "as a watershed moment for the movement against systemic racism in the United

[1] "A Brief History of Civil Rights in the United States: The Black Lives Matter Movement." Howard University. https://library.law.howard.edu/civilrightshistory/BLM. Accessed March 2023.
[2] Dana R. Fisher, Dawn M. Dow, and Rashawn Ray. "Intersectionality takes it to the streets: Mobilizing across diverse interests for the Women's March." *Science Advances* 20 Sep 2017 Vol 3, Issue 9

States"[3] although, as shown, there was a wider political context that built up to this summer of protests.

Many scholars, journalists, and activists agree that the protests during summer of 2020 were the result of decades of political activism – spanning back to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and beyond. In Denver, the protests were reflective of both national and local concerns. Protestors from across the metro area gathered in Aurora to march in honor of Elijah McClain, a 23-year-old Black man who was murdered by Aurora police in 2019. Community members also led the charge to rename the Denver neighborhood of Stapleton to Central Park, removing its association with former Denver Mayor, Benjamin Stapleton, who was a prominent member of the Ku Klux Klan. Additionally, the City of Denver formed a taskforce to create a policy for changing the name of city owned assets, should the assets be named or associated with racist groups or ideologies.

In the midst of these ongoing conversations that were reshaping the city, Councilwoman Sandoval and Latino/Chicano members of the Northside community renewed their call to rename Columbus Park. Tapping into conversations and precedent set in the South during 2015, they argued that Columbus was not a historical figure to be celebrated or commemorated. Instead, naming the park La Raza would better represent the history of the park and the Chicano/Latino community who lived there now. However, there was still sentiment among some in the Italian-American community that this name change was erasing the history of the earlier Italian community in the Northside. While this disagreement was acknowledged by organizers, they still felt it was appropriate to remove the name of Columbus from the park and hoped La Raza could come to represent the entire community.

In December 2020, the name of the park was officially changed to La Raza Park. However, it was not until June 2021 that the park was rededicated with a community celebration. It was at this rededication that a sculpture, La Raza Unida, by notable Chicano artist and activist, Emanuel Martinez, was installed. Given the importance of Chicano/Latino community to the park and its historical and cultural significance, it is appropriate to end the period of significance with the community celebration that renamed the park.

4. District Description

Briefly describe the general characteristics of the district, such as its location, pattern of development, primary use (residential or commercial) and any significant geographical features. Describe the district's general architectural character, including representative types and/or styles of structures, and streetscape design. Identify any character-defining features of the historic district here. Also note any large-scale alterations to the district, such as street realignment, infill construction or redevelopment.

La Raza Park is an urban park located in North Denver. It is bounded by 38th Avenue to the south, 39th Avenue to the north, Osage Street to the west and Navajo Street to the east. Occupying one city block in the Sunnyside neighborhood, the park has always served as open recreational space. While the block containing the park was platted in 1871, it was never

3 Dana R. Fisher and Stella M. Rouse, Douglas Masses, ed. "Intersectionality within the racial justice movement in the summer of 2020." Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ July 12, 2022

developed, and was officially purchased in 1906 by the City of Denver for the purpose of establishing a public park.

The park has evolved to suit the trends and preferences of community members; however, it has always maintained its flat, open nature. The site slopes down toward the south and east side but has been graded over time to provide a flat site for park amenities. This has included, at various times, a baseball field, a swimming pool, basketball courts, and a plaza space and Kiosko. As a result of the grading, at the southeast corner the park is approximately 2 to 3 feet above the street level of 38th Avenue.

The park includes concrete sidewalks around each street edge of the park, with diagonal sidewalks providing access to the interior the park. A historical aerial from 1933 shows these diagonal pathways as 'desire lines' or social trails that were later paved.

At the center of the park is a plaza approximately 90' x 110', made of red and beige concrete. In the north center of the plaza is the Kiosko, which is modeled after Mayan or Aztec stepped pyramidal architecture. The Kiosko is approximately 38' x 38' at its base and 45' in height. Concrete structural members at each corner rise towards the center to meet at the roof of the structure. A concrete frieze features a stamped block pattern. The roof is a two tiered ('stepped') standing seam metal roof that is painted red to match the concrete of the plaza. It is topped by a black metal cap. Eight steps lead up to a performance platform that is 25' x 25'. The floor of the performance space is also red concrete. The plaza and pyramidal structure were constructed in 1990. Directly to the south of the plaza there are three planters. Located between the plaza and the planters, is a sculpture entitled La Raza Unida, designed by notable Chicano artist, Emanuel Martinez. The sculpture was officially dedicated in 2021.

Additional sidewalks to the north, south, and west connect the plaza to the park. From above, the sidewalk configuration gives the appearance of a human figure, though it is unclear if this was an intentional design choice. To the east of the plaza is a basketball court. In the northeast corner of the park, there is a small playground. To the north and south of the plaza, there are open grass lawns.

<u>El Viaje – David Ocelotl Garcia</u>

The Kiosko has eight panels of murals laid out on the interior ceiling of the pyramid. These murals were designed and painted by Denver artist David Ocelotl Garcia in 2016. Entitled "El Viaje" or The Journey, the murals focused on the Mexican peoples' journey "from creation to the present and into the future." Garcia describes his artistic style as "abstract imaginism" which he envisions as "a style of art that combines the spontaneity and unpredictability of abstraction with the creativity and perception of … imagination."

The mural is dynamic and full of motion. Viewers are pushed and pulled through the swirling history of the Americas, from birth to death to rebirth; jumping through time, space, and geography, which are tied together with water, clouds of smoke, plants and human figures.

North Lower Level (Part 1) – this mural starts the cycle; on the right half are images of flowering cactus and human figures emerging from within the earth.

East Lower Level – this mural illustrates traditional indigenous ceremonies, with figures in traditional regalia offering water and fire/smoke to a deity. One figure blows a conch shell and

beats a drum. In the background, the flag of Burgundy on a ship represents the Spanish Empire under Charles V who continued his grandmother Isabela's conquering of the Americas.

South Lower Level – on this mural, the plant life morphs into something more dangerous – full of curling shapes and sharp thorns. Through these vines creep figures armed with guns, sporting bandoliers and wide brimmed hats or sombreros. These figures recall Mexican revolutionaries such as Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata. Zapata especially has come to represent the fight for indigenous rights in Mexico and beyond. The armed figures approach a Mexican flag, held by two skeletons, reaching towards the revolutionaries.

West Lower Level – Here the skeletons holding the Mexican flag also turn towards a figure plucking a star off the American flag. A family moves towards the American flag, hand in hand, while the mother looks back towards the Mexican flag, perhaps wistfully. As the family moves towards the United States, the ground is littered with skulls, crops growing up between eye sockets.

North Lower Level (Part 2) - Back on the north elevation, wheat sways through the open skulls as smoke from a locomotive curls up to the upper level of murals, leading the viewer up to the next level of the story.

North Upper Level – While smoke from the railroad curls on the left side of the mural, laborers work under a hot sun to lay the track that will bring the railroads across the Americas.

East Upper Level – here, workers bend down and stand back up, picking crops in agricultural fields. Workers look up, heads held high, to the next panel, while a monarch butterfly perches next to them on a flower. Monarch butterflies are an important spiritual symbol in Mexico, often representing the souls of ancestors who are visiting their living relatives. Eagle figures in the background

South Upper Level – here the symbols of the Civil Rights Movement and particularly the Chicano Movement are on display. Figures in miliary garb, holding protest signs march forward. Signs include the raised fist, the eagle of the United Farm Workers, and hands, cupping the earth. The *xicalcoliuhqui*, or 'stepped fret' that was a popular design element in Chicano murals is a decorative feature of this mural.

West Upper Level – the last mural panel seems to be looking into the future. A person holds an object that provides water, fire and smoke/air to figures in silver outfits. These futuristic people interact with the elements, lifting them up, coasting alongside them, rather than being bowed underneath their weight.

La Raza Unida -- Sculpture by Emanuel Martinez

Entitled "La Raza Unida", the sculpture pays homage to the mestizo heritage of the Chicano community, the rise of the Chicano Movement, and the solidarity and unity running throughout the movement. The sculpture features the iconic Mestizo head figure Emanuel Martinez created to celebrate Chicanos' mixed-race heritage. Martinez was inspired by the tripartite face of prehispanic clay figures and a mosaic designed by Francisco Eppens in Mexico City. Martinez adapted the head to portray a profile of a Native mother, a Spanish father, and in the center, their offspring - a Chicana/o/x. He first used this image in 1967 on an altar he created for Cesar Chavez in Delano, California, after he ended a hunger strike to protest the

mistreatment of farm workers.[4] The raised fist is a nod to the activism of the Chicano Movement. Martinez also addressed some of the criticism over the renaming of the park, noting that the colors on the sculpture (green, white and red) represented the colors found on both the Mexican and Italian flags, a nod to both communities of the Northside.

Preservation Recommendations

The murals, installed in 2016, are an important character-defining feature of La Raza Park and should be maintained and preserved.

Two major risks to the murals include: elemental damage and human-caused damage. Care should be taken to inspect the Kiosko yearly to ensure the roof is maintained and not leaking. Water damage poses a serious threat to the murals, especially as they are painted on MDF, which is susceptible to buckling and deterioration if exposed to water. If a leak is found, the roof should be repaired immediately and the murals assessed for damage. If minimal damage has occurred, the mural may be retouched, preferably by the artist. In the event of more extensive damage, Denver Parks and Recreation and Denver Landmark Preservation should work with a paintings conservator to assess the damage and determine a path of restoration.

Graffiti is also a threat to the murals. Although the murals currently have several layers of protective clear gloss on them, an anti-graffiti coating should also be applied to the murals. This will allow the graffiti to be removed in a minimally invasive way. An appropriate anti-graffiti coating should be selected in consultation with a paintings conservator.

The sculpture, which is primarily metal, should be gently cleaned on a regular basis. The areas that are powder-coated should be monitored for damage and corrosion.

Major Alterations

La Raza Park has had many changes to its amenities during its century as a public park. These changes reflect recreational trends, political decisions and funding opportunities (see historic context for more information).

Notable alterations include:

1909 – construction of play equipment (north), baseball fields (south)

c.1925 – construction of pavilion, one story bath house (demolished)

1940 – construction of WPA swimming pool (demolished)

1984 – infilling of swimming pool

1990 – construction of plaza and Kiosko (existing)

2016 – creation of El Viaje mural

2021 – installation of La Raza Unida

[4] Martinez de Luna, Lucha. "Heritage and Place: Chicano Murals in Colorado." *Murals in the Americas*, 17th Annual Mayer Center Symposium. Readings in Latin American Studies, edited by Victoria Lyall, Boulder: D&K Printing, Denver Art Museum. 2017:138-165.

5. Integrity

Describe the district's integrity, using the seven qualities that define integrity: location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association.

Although the site has seen changes throughout its life, it still maintains its integrity. It maintains integrity of location and setting, as it is an urban park in a primarily residential neighborhood. It maintains integrity of materials, design, and workmanship, as it uses landscaping and concrete to delineate space, encourage recreation, and allow for easy maintenance and updating. The park retains integrity of feeling and association as it remains a gathering space for the surrounding neighborhood, who utilize the space for recreation. It also remains a central gathering space for the wider Latino/Chicano community who lived in the area, and who return to celebrate cultural events in the Kiosko and plaza. While the pool has been infilled, the Kiosko serves as a contemporary gathering place. Additionally, the changes occurred within the period of significance and convey the changing history of the park.

6. Historic Context / Historical Narrative

Describe the history of the events, activities and associations that relate the district to its historic, architectural, geographic, or cultural significance. Examine how patterns, themes, or trends in history affected the district and how it relates to the surrounding community, neighborhood, city, and/or nation.

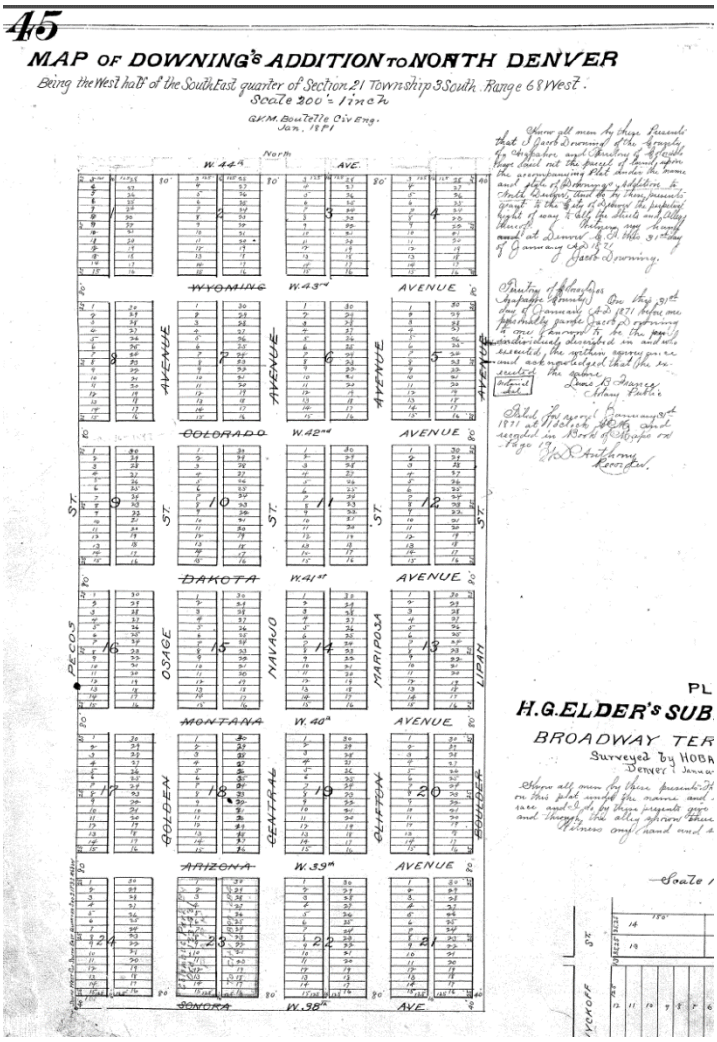


Figure 1. 1871 plat map of Downing's Addition, showing Block 23 which would become La Raza Park

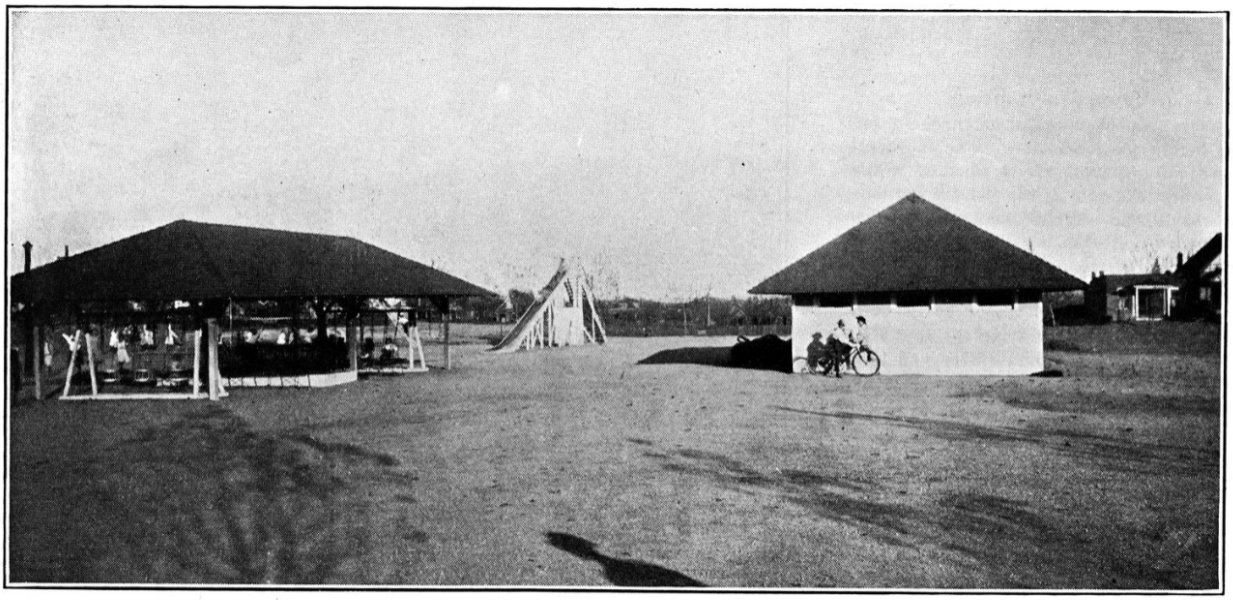
The history of La Raza Park is the history of Denver's Northside. Occupying a full city block between Osage and Navajo Street, and West 38th and 39th Avenue, this land was never developed, serving as open space and a park since its earliest days. The area was platted in 1871 as Block 23 of Downing's Addition to North Denver. A 1904 Sanborn Map shows Block 23 was divided into lots mirroring the surrounding blocks, but no buildings were constructed on the block. A 1906 warranty deed of sale documented Augustus Heaton transferring the land to the City and County of Denver for $7,500. The deed of sale notes that this purchase was at the behest of the Park Commission for the purposes of acquiring park land in North Denver.

The earliest development at the site was to turn the area into a playground. Arthur Leland was commissioned by the City of Denver to design the North Denver playground in 1909. During that time, he saw the previously unoccupied land graded for a baseball field and trees planted to form a naturalized border around the baseball field. In addition, playground equipment, including "swings, see-saws, baby swings, [and] giant strides" were installed. The entire playground was enclosed, intended only to be used with supervision. The Lelands were lauded as pioneers of the 'playground movement' and served as playground architects and supervisors at playgrounds across the country. In 1909, the North Side Playground was featured in a journal article for *Hygiene and Physical Education* written by Arthur Leland and his wife, Lorna Higbee Leland. The playground was also featured in the authors' 1913 book, *Playground technique and Playcraft.* Leland and Leland wrote in 1913 that the North Side Playground was the first playground to be constructed on land owned by the City of Denver.

Park plans from 1912 show the location of the various playground equipment, which was

located to the north of the park. The plan also called for a circular pool and field house. It is unclear when these improvements were completed. However, a 1919 Denver Post article noted that by 1919, the playground was fully operational, opening a month early as an "experiment" to "keep the youngsters off the streets, where they are in danger of automobiles and other traffic." At that time, the North Side Playground was one of 14 playgrounds in the city. Other Denver Post articles from the early twentieth-century report on the activities and events at the playground, as if it were high society – news of various clubs, new equipment and popular past times, were all documented by the city's newspapers.

By 1925, Sanborn maps show Block 23 as "North Denver Public Play Ground" with a one story bath house[5] and a small open air structure. A 1933 aerial photograph of the site shows a building, circular pool and playground equipment. Sidewalks bound all four sides of the park, and diagonal 'desire lines' show how people typically entered the park from the south. The picture below is from the City-run publication, *Municipal Facts* and shows the open air pavilion, a large slide, and "gym" – or what was identified as a bath house on the Sanborn Map. Swings appear to be located in the pavilion.



The Pavilion and "Gym" at the North Side Playgrounds, Thirty-eighth and Osage

Figure 2. Picture of the Pavilion and Gym from Denver Municipal Facts

[5] Although this is called a bathhouse on the Sanborn Maps, it is unclear if this was a bath house in the sense of a municipal amenity dedicated to bathing. Denver had at least two buildings specifically set up for poor and working class families to bathe – one at Lincoln Park and one in Curtis Park. These bathhouses were wildly popular and were frequently lauded by the City publication, *Denver Municipal Facts*. However, the Northside 'bath' was not included in these reports and may not have been an official bath house, but rather a smaller neighborhood recreational amenity.

Figure 3. Pavilion at Columbus Park, 38th and Osage Denver Public Library Digital Collection X-20324

Denver Parks, the City Beautiful, and the Progressive Movement

What may seem to a modern city-dweller like a modest park with relatively few amenities was actually a ground-breaking innovation and design in the early twentieth century. The acquisition of dedicated parks and parkland in urban environments was a cornerstone of the urban planning philosophy known as the "City Beautiful Movement". This planning philosophy came into vogue after the 1893 Chicago World's Fair and transformed cities such as Chicago and Washington, DC, with wide, tree-lined boulevards, Neoclassical and Beaux-Arts civic buildings, and parks open to the public. These grand, monumental designs were designed to bring beauty, nature and cleanliness to America's urban populations, uplifting the poor into a purer way of living. Daniel Burnham, designer of Chicago's City Beautiful movement summarized in a 1910 speech:

> Our city of the future will be without smoke, dust or gases from manufacturing plants, and the air will therefore be pure… Out of these things will come not only commercial economy but bodily health and spiritual joy… Other things being equal, a person accustomed to living in nature has a distinct advantage all his life over the purely townbred man. Allure your city denizen to sylvan nature, for it is there he finds the balm his spirit needs.[6]

The City Beautiful movement was the architectural and urban planning expression of a larger progressive social reform movement sweeping the country. The Progressive Movement, which advocated for women's suffrage, prohibition, education and labor reforms, sought to dismantle corrupt mechanisms that pooled wealth and prosperity in the hands of the few. However, although the Progressive Movement had lofty goals, it also sought to impose white, upper-middle class, Christian values on all segments of the population – especially recent immigrants and members of the urban poor.

[6] "Democracy to Last, says DH Burnham" THE CHICAGO DAILY NEWS Friday, Oct 14, 1910 Chicago, IL Pg 4

In Denver, Mayor Robert Speer was the standard bearer for the City Beautiful Movement.[7] First elected in 1904, Speer held office for three nonconsecutive terms between 1904 and 1918. During his tenure, Speer oversaw the planning and construction of several of Denver's most iconic features, including Civic Center Park, the city's extensive parkways system, and the creation of the Denver Mountain Parks. He also oversaw the modernization of Denver from a frontier town to the Queen City of the Plains. During his time in office, he prioritized paving city streets, replacing wood plank sidewalks with the familiar red sandstone, planting over 100,000 trees and introducing modern street lights and telephone poles throughout the city.[8]

The City Beautiful Movement, while prioritizing public park land, nature and outdoor recreation for the betterment of the public's moral character, also led to the demolition of urban areas deemed to be 'slums', and replaced it not with upgraded housing, but monumental architecture and civic spaces. Denver's Civic Center, for instance, was once a neighborhood spanning several blocks. Under Mayor Speer, blocks of apartments and row homes were demolished for the curated park space that still exists today. While many modern critics condemn the City Beautiful Movement for "favoring form over function; for being only a cosmetic approach to underlying economic, political and social sores"[9] it must also be understood as part of a wider movement that aimed to assimilate all of society into a particular value system. In this aspect, the City Beautiful Movement and the wider Progressive Movement was highly successful.

The North Denver playground – its impetuous, design and characterization in the press – epitomizes the moralizing impulses of the City Beautiful and Progressive Movements. It was purchased by the City of Denver in 1906, two years after the election of Mayor Speer. Its function, as articulated by its chief architect, Arthur Leland, was to introduce unstructured (yet heavily supervised) play to the children of the neighborhood. Leland argued that play served a number of purposes – introducing children to future hobbies, providing an arena for recreation, and to model spontaneous competitive (yet cooperative) play that would translate into more productive workers. "Our cities have been built with an absolute disregard for the child," wrote Leland. "Society, to protect and preserve itself, must provide healthful play and recreation which the city has crowded out."[10] In discussing the North Denver playground, Leland noted that the land required careful grading, landscaping and planning to create a playground that would facilitate the amenities for 'proper' play amongst the boys and girls of North Denver. The southern portion of Block 23 was graded and leveled to create a baseball field – considered "the only game interesting the boys" of North Denver. The northern portion of the block hosted the fenced in playground – ensuring the children of North Denver would be supervised while at play. An area planted with hedges demarcated a girls' playground, screened to "ensure seclusion."[11] While the boys of north Denver were encouraged in play that was rowdy and active, the girls of north Denver were given spaces that were hemmed in and secluded – just one example of how physical park characteristics reinforced particular societal mores.

Leland and Leland emphasized not only the proper layout and features of a public playground but also the importance of *supervised* play. While the public playground allowed children to explore, imagine, and play in an unstructured method, this did not mean children should remain unsupervised. A play director "leads the child from one stage of primitive thought and action to

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[7] Thomas J Noel and Barbara Norgen. *Denver the City Beautiful and Its Architects*. Historic Denver, Inc (1987). pg 1
[8] *Ibid* 9
[9] *Ibid* 1
[10] Leland, Arthur, and Lorna Higbee Leland. *Playground Technique and Playcraft*. Vol. 1, Doubleday, 1917, pg 25
[11] *Ibid* 90

another and higher stage." In this way, Leland and Leland saw the public playground as necessary public good that would mold young children into productive, civilized members of society. To that end, the park was fenced and locked, encouraging its use only at designated times.

The location of the playground in North Denver– Denver's first municipally owned public playground – was no accident. North Denver was historically home to many different immigrant populations. In the early days of Denver, North Denver was initially home to Irish immigrants. By the 1880s, many Italian immigrants called Denver's Northside home. These Italian immigrants formed a community, often called "Little Italy," in the Highland and Sunnyside neighborhoods. Much like the Irish before them, Italian immigrants were often viewed negatively by wider American society. Civic leaders were concerned that these immigrants were poor, uneducated and unwilling to be assimilated into American culture and instead would bring crime and lawlessness to the country. In reality, many immigrants were escaping war, poverty and famine in Europe and seeking a safe home to build a new life. As such, immigrants often created tight-knit communities with shared values, languages and customs, to ease the distress of leaving behind a homeland. The rise of the Progressive Movement sought to dissolve the old ties of nationality and instead assimilate immigrants into American society and values – a 'melting pot' that imbued all newcomers with an American identity. A public park, supervised by the City, in a primarily Italian neighborhood was a symbol of assimilation into American society.

A Denver Post article from 1913 entitled "Italian Youngsters like others at play" highlights the tension between perceived 'Italian' norms with their American counterparts – set on the stage of the Northside playground. The journalist recounts a scene of "little Italian children …playing American games" – but highlighted the perceived difference between cultures, as the Northside playground was also occupied by 'little mothers' - older sisters caring for their younger siblings, presumably while their parents were at work. These little mothers were described as "lugging" their siblings along and suffering physical consequences of this backbreaking work, with "twisted spines…and shoulder lumps." The article also details the "old mothers of ten or twelve with a whole brood to take care for and a new one each year." These observations build an image of a group outside American social mores – entrusting children with tasks better suited to their mothers and suffering physical consequences because of it; an excess of children and a fecundity not becoming of polite society. And yet, the author observes children being children: playing games, forming cliques and alliances, running, playing, bragging. As noted by Leland and Leland, the playground became a place where Italian (and all immigrant) children could leave behind the 'outdated' customs of their old home and adopt an American brand of civility and conduct.

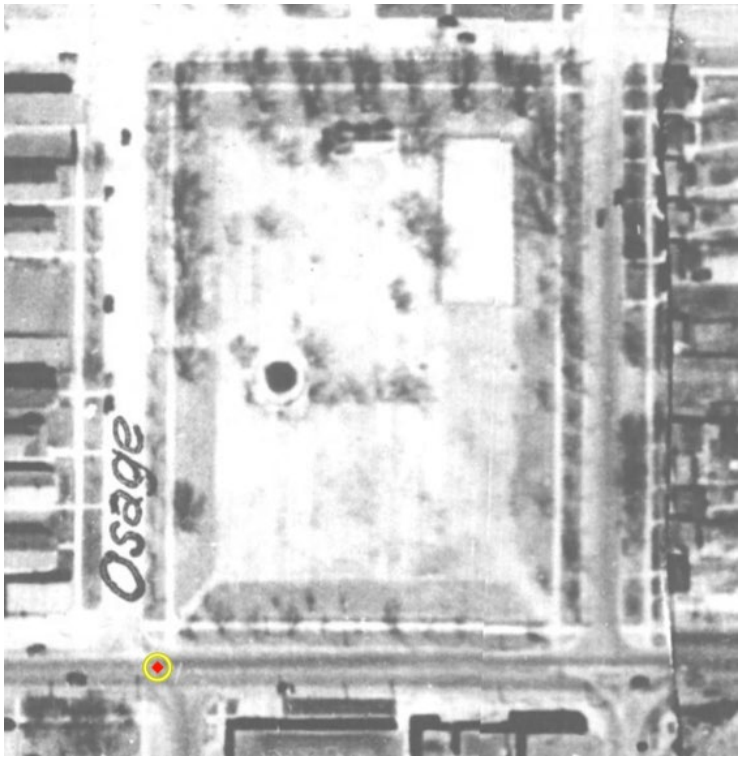

Figure 4. 1933 aerial of Denver, showing the North Side Playground. Desire lines can be seen leading to the heart of the park. To the north, a bathhouse. In the center is a circular wading pool – a precursor to the 1940 pool.

In 1931, the name of the park was changed to Columbus Park, to honor the Italian residents who called the Northside home. A Denver Post article from 1931 notes that The Friends of Italy, a group of second-generation immigrants, were raising funds to building a monument in the park. For many Italian Americans, the renaming of the park to Columbus Park felt like an honor and acceptance – like they were now a treasured part of the neighborhood and the city. Unlike previous immigrant communities in the neighborhood, many Italian families remained in Denver's Northside, even as they assimilated and gained economic stability. It wasn't until after World War Two that the demographics of the area began to shift and the Italian community – now second or third generation Americans – moved to the suburbs surrounding Denver,[12] although many families of Italian heritage still live in and have ties to Denver's Northside today.

In 1940, the Columbus Park swimming pool opened. A project of the Works Progress Administration (WPA), the pool was designed by local architect Stanley Morse, who is known for his work at Colorado Woman's College. The WPA was a New Deal-era program that employed thousands of Coloradoans impacted by the Great Depression. Through the WPA, workers constructed civic projects throughout the state, including Red Rocks Amphitheater (with the Civilian Conservation Corps), courthouses, hospitals, and military base expansions. It is no surprise that the pool at La Raza Park, constructed by a government program that represented progressive early twentieth century American values, would become the site of conflicts between changing community desires and shifting political ideology.

La Raza Park and the Chicano Movement

By the 1940s, the demographics of the Northside began to change. As Italian families moved to the suburbs, many Mexican-American and Latino families moved into the neighborhoods surrounding the park. The Latino population of the Northside grew steadily and by 1990, over

[12] Historic Context Report: Sunnyside Neighborhood

60% of Northside residents identified as Latino.[13] La Raza Park continued to serve as an important feature for the Northside community, even as the demographics of the surrounding area changed. Just as the design and use of the North Side Playground illustrated changing social and political trends of wider society during the early twentieth century, Columbus Park (soon colloquially renamed to La Raza Park) illustrates the changing priorities, customs and concerns of both the new Chicano/Latino community and wider societal issues during the mid to late twentieth century.

While the early twentieth century had seen waves of immigration and a corresponding national call to Americanize those newly-arrived immigrants, by the mid-twentieth century appreciation of cultural pluralism began to take root. Many progressives began to conclude that "coercive assimilation stood in direct opposition to the democratic promises of American society."[14] For many groups, assimilation and discrimination were two sides of the same coin that maintained white supremacy in America. Assimilation ensured that all groups who could pass as white Americans would do so. Discrimination ensured that those who could not become 'model' white Americans would maintain a lower status in American society.

After American soldiers of color fought overseas to protect freedoms that they did not enjoy at home, many sought to combat both discrimination and assimilation that shaped American society, and kickstarted the American Civil Rights Movement.[15] This included advocating for rights withheld by the American government, including the right to vote, equal access to education and fair housing. The American GI Forum was one such political advocacy group, which began in Texas in 1949 to recognize the rights of Mexican American veterans. A Colorado chapter formed in Denver in the 1960s. In addition to veterans, the GI Forum advocated for school desegregation, protection of migrant farmworkers, and ensuring Mexican Americans received fair trials. The Colorado Chapter became a primary force behind the boycott of Coors Brewery in the 1960s in protest of Coors' refusal to hire Latino workers.[16]

In Colorado, several other organizations formed to advocate for civil rights for Latinos and Mexican-Americans. One of the earliest of these was the Latin American Council, established to promote "housing, health, education, recreation, and citizenship status."[17] The Latin American Council had a wide-ranging membership, representing Latinos from many different countries across Central and South America. Another group that formed in Denver, the Good Americans Organization (GAO), led by Paco Sanchez, became highly influential. As noted in *Nuestras Historias: Mexican American/Chicano/Latino Histories in Denver*,

> "the GAO formed in 1954 in response to protests at Cole Middle School against a series of Rocky Mountain News articles that described the "Spanish American Problem" in Denver. Harnessing the anger of 1,000 people who attended the protest, the GAO developed a number of significant programs, including providing low-income housing, a senior citizen residence, and hosting cultural events for the

[13] This designation application will primarily use the term Latino and Chicano to describe the community. For an in-depth explanation of the nuances between Mexican-American, Latino, Chicano see *Nuestras Historias: Mexican American/Chicano/Latino Histories in Denver*, page 2
[14] Dennis J. Downey. "From Americanization to Multiculturalism: Political Symbols and Struggles for Cultural Diversity in Twentieth-Century American Race Relations." Sociological perspectives pg 256
[15] Garcia, Mario, ed. Rewriting the Chicano Movement: New Histories of Mexican American Activism in the Civil Rights Era. University of Arizona Press, 2021.
[16] *Nuestras Historias* 88
[17] *Nuestras Historias* 39

community."[18]

In the 1950s and 60s, writes Carlos Munoz in *Youth, Identity, Power: The Chicano Movement*, "the dramatic emergence of the civil rights movement generated reform in education and politics," helped along by a liberal political era marked by the presidencies of Kennedy and Johnson.[19] Increased access to higher education and the proliferation of radical leftist organizations laid the groundwork for Chicano leaders embracing a particularly Chicano identity (not an assimilated American identity) to emerge in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The burgeoning Chicano Movement, which for many had moved beyond advocating for political and civil rights, spread across the country, with epicenters in California, Texas and Colorado. In Denver, it was led by various leaders and organizations, such as the United Farm Workers, which met at the Our Lady of Guadalupe Church and La Sociedad Protección Mutua de Trabajadores Unidos (known as the SPMDTU). Mi Casa Women's Resource Center, LARASA-Latin American Research Agency, the Westside Action Council, Denver Inner City Parish, the GI Forum, and La Sociedad Protectora Hispana Americana were other similar organizations that provided aid to different neighborhoods throughout the city. These organizations tackled issues of poverty, access to education and other concerns of the community with many different approaches and ideologies.

One of the most well-known organizations in Denver was the Crusade for Justice, which represented a more leftist, radical branch of the Chicano Movement. It was helmed by Rodolfo 'Corky' Gonzales, who informally founded the group in 1966. The group was officially incorporated a year later in 1967 by 31 members. Some of the founders of the Crusade for Justice also included D.C. DeHerrera, Emilio Dominquez, Juanita Dominguez, Eloy Espinosa, Ralph Luna, Ricardo Romero, Lionel Roybal, Jesse Sauceda and Charlie Vigil.[20] Ernesto B Vigil, in his history of the Crusade for Justice notes that "Gonzales hoped the Crusade would be a national model for organizing urban Chicanos to resolve chronic problems and achieve self-determination."[21] However, over time, as with many civil rights organizations, the Crusade for Justice was beset by internal disagreements, accusations of excessive militancy and debates over the methodology used to advocate for change.[22] Nonetheless, the group had a wide-reaching impact on the Latino community of Denver and Colorado, particularly in La Raza Park and the Northside.

La Raza Park was one place in Denver where long-standing civil rights issues such as equal access to public amenities (including pools and recreation centers), employment, and education intersected with new demands to celebrate Chicano culture - to enjoy public space, practice the arts, religion, and the traditions of *la raza* – freely and without censure from the white establishment.

The Chicano Movement focused on youth and concerns of education, culture and representation. As activist, educator, and former principal of Escuela Tlatelolco, Nita Gonzales noted, "when we were children, we were invisible – we did not exist." American culture was

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[18] *Nuestras Historias* 39
[19] Munoz 65
[20] *Nuestras Historias* 122
[21] Vigil 18
[22] *Nuestras Historias* 43

synonymous with white culture. Media – books, television, movies – almost exclusively told the stories of white children and families. Schools taught the history of Europeans and colonization, not the indigenous peoples who came before. The Chicano Movement demanded recognition from American culture – it demanded political representation, historical education, and cultural celebration. Rather than accept assimilation into society that meant the erasure of Chicano culture, the Chicano Movement demanded recognition of a unique Chicano identity. In Denver, Los Angeles, and across the country, it was the young that carried the Chicano Movement both into the classroom and out into the streets.[23]

Arturo Rodriguez, a longtime Chicano activist and resident of the Northside, recalled the early days of the Chicano Movement in Denver: "by 1965, when the Civil Rights movement is in full swing – the consciousness of Denver and the barrios started to increase. And we as young people... [started to get involved,] trying to understand the heck was going on what are civil rights, what are human rights."[24] Rodriguez noted that the Crusade for Justice in particular was a huge influence on educating local youth about the movement, in addition to other groups who were advocating for civil rights. "A lot of those same issues [that other civil rights organizations were protesting] were affecting us as well; police brutality, lack of recreation, jobs, drugs in the neighborhood, deteriorating public structures, like the pool."[25] In its simplest form, the Chicano Movement was tapping into wider conversations about race, equity and white supremacy, and called for equal access to basic civil rights. For instance, in March 1969, students at West High School walked out of classrooms to protest the continued employment of a racist social studies teacher, discriminatory history education and de facto segregation in Denver schools. "The West Side Blowout" was supported by Chicano Movement leaders and by students across Denver Public Schools. As the Chicano Movement matured, the recognition of a distinctive Chicano identity emerged as a powerful call to action.

In 1968, Civil Rights leaders convened in Washington DC for the Poor People's Campaign – an event designed by Martin Luther King Jr to unify many different civil rights causes under one banner. Gonzales met with Martin Luther King Jr prior to his assassination and attended the event with other members from the Crusade for Justice. In Washington DC, the Crusade for Justice was joined by other Chicano Movement leaders such as Reyes Tijerina, and Bert Corona of the Mexican American Political Association and groups such as the United Mexican American Students, and the Mexican American Youth Organization.[26] Rodriguez noted that, by 1969, the Crusade for Justice had become a leader of the Chicano Movement on the national stage, as a result of their presence at the Poor People's Campaign. During this event, Chicano leaders conceived of a national conference, specifically to raise consciousness of Chicano youth.[27]

The Crusade for Justice hosted the first Annual Chicano Youth Liberation Conference at their headquarters at 1567 Downing Street. The conference drew thousands of students from across the Southwest. These students were encouraged to embrace their Chicano identity and "strive

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[23] Garcia 4, 16
[24] La Raza Park: An Interview with Arturo "Bones" Rodriguez
[25] *ibid*
[26] Gordon K. Mantler, *Grassroots Voices, Memory, and the Poor People's Campaign.* American Public Media https://features.apmreports.org/arw/king/mantler.html Accessed March 2023
[27] *ibid*

for economic, cultural, and political freedom and […] self-determination."[28]

The Chicano Movement employed rhetoric that emphasized the importance of the community to care for, protect and uplift Chicanos everywhere. The movement encouraged direct mutual aid – in the form of job trainings, food banks, and higher education. It is important to note, however, that there were always disagreements within the Latino/Chicano community about the best way to advocate for civil rights and community identity. While some groups such as the Crusade for Justice called for direct action, "many Chicanos in Denver wanted to be accepted by the majority while holding on to their cultural traditions and use existing systems to solve their problems and often times older Chicanos felt alienated by the militancy of the Crusade."[29] These tensions were not unique to the Chicano Movement, but rather they were felt all aspects of the Civil Rights Movement.

The Liberation of La Raza Park

The Chicano Movement addressed several different facets of civic and cultural life, and did so in many different ways; the liberation of La Raza Park served as one arena for the more leftist, land-centered political ideology of the Chicano Movement to be put into practice.

In the late 1960s, the pool at La Raza Park was staffed by white college students as lifeguards and managers – Northside Chicano residents were not hired by the city for these jobs. Additionally, residents complained that the pool was often dirty, in disrepair and wholly neglected by the City of Denver. As the Crusade for Justice newspaper, *El Gallo*, wrote:

> During the summer of 1969, young Chicanos throughout Denver had started to open their eyes to the movement, realizing that Chicano had been the invisible minority too long. It was time to act. The spread of awareness throughout the community had brought many people to the realization that all agencies and institutions should be relevant to the community and those that were irrelevant or exploitive presented a problem to be dealt with.[30]

[28] "Rodolfo Gonzales." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Rodolfo-Gonzales. Accessed Feb 2023.
[29] *Nuestras Historias* 42
[30] El Gallo, Volume 3, Number 3, August 1, 1971. Pg 6

Figure 5."Raza take over la Comunidad" – from El Gallo. The bottom two pictures are of the staff and pool at La Raza Park. A mural of a man can be seen in the background. This mural was painted by Emanuel Martinez and Robert Lucero.

In the summer of 1969, Chicano youth staged 'splash ins' at pools across the city, to draw attention to both the neglect of pools in primarily minority neighborhoods, and the upgraded facilities in white neighborhoods.[31] When white parents complained about the presence of Chicano youth at affluent pools, Crusade for Justice leaders urged them to call Denver Parks and Recreation to demand equality between parks across the city. In addition to staging splash-ins at other pools, Arturo Rodriguez noted that at the La Raza pool, hundreds of kids would 'bum-rush' the pool at opening day, overwhelming the staff. To Rodriguez, the most important aspect of these events was that the kids, teenagers and young adults were all empowered by the growing Chicano Movement to take part in action.[32] Diane Medina, who lives across the street from the park, recalled the palpable energy of the movement, saying, "it gave me a sense of purpose." The same sense of both personal and communal responsibility came through interviews with many different activists, as a guiding principle of the movement.

[31] *Nuestras Historias* 126, 164
[32] La Raza Park: An Interview with Arturo "Bones" Rodriguez

Between 1969 and 1971, members of the Chicano community pressured Denver Parks and Rec into turning over control of La Raza Park (along with La Alma Lincoln Park and Mestizo Curtis Park). Control of La Raza Park was solidified in 1970. *El Gallo* noted that local Chicano activists Arturo "Bones" Rodriguez and Antonio Archuleta were the first local managers of the pool, both of whom had been part of the 'liberation' of the pool the year before.[33] The paper also noted that several Chicano teens and young adults had taken the required water safety classes in order to apply for lifeguarding jobs. A 1972 article in *El Gallo* celebrated one such qualified lifeguard, in an article titled "Chicano lifeguard saves Chicanito" which details the heroic actions of Ron Sena, an activist who had participated in the take over of La Raza Park, and had afterwards become a certified lifeguard at the pool. His actions in saving the young swimmer, wrote the paper, "did more to building a sense of identity for the Chicano kids who witnessed them than years of American History could ever do." Another youth was quoted, saying, "we watch all the younger kids in the park. After all, all we have [is] the park and each other."[34]

Figure 6. Arturo Rodriguez, Left, at a press conference discussing his firing from La Raza Pool ; (Photo By Dave Buresh/The Denver Post via Getty Images)

Nita Gonzales, who worked as a lifeguard at La Raza, echoed the unnamed youth above: "it was incredible … People would drop their kids off at La Raza Park. We made sure they had snacks, we made sure they got lunch … and we took care of them. We weren't just lifeguards, we were caretakers."[35] Members of older generations would come to the park to socialize, reinforcing generational ties. In the early days of the community takeover, the older teens and young adults kept the park safe for younger kids and their elders, with little tolerance for gang

[33] El Gallo, Volume 4, Number 3, April 1, 1972; Vigil, 178
[34] El Gallo, Volume 4, Number 6, August 1, 1972
[35] Nita Gonzales. Personal Interview. Feb 2023

violence or drug pushers in the park. These activities were seen as being antithetical to the Chicano movement – destroying the community and doing the work of the establishment for them. Instead, La Raza became a place where the community was welcome to take part in public, urban spaces. As Nita Gonzales explained, "we [the Chicano Movement] spoke to the pride and the responsibility that we were related… we needed to treat each other like family."[36]

The takeover of the park and pool did not go smoothly. By 1972, Denver Police were arresting youth for breaking curfew, using brute force if people resisted. On June 28th, 1972 the community organized a press conference to call attention to the matter, Denver Police responded with further violence, and the community responded in kind. That same night, violence broke out in the neighborhood, resulting in the arrest of 31 residents, 5 firebombed buildings (including the nearby police outpost) and one wounded police officer.

Figure 7. JUN 19 1972 Capt. Paul Montoya stands on a chair to address Crowd in Columbus Park. Credit: Denver Post

Throughout the summer of 1972, the Northside community called for the removal of Councilman Eugene DiManna, who represented the area, claiming DiManna was working closely with the Denver Police Department to unfairly target and penalize Chicano youth for minor infractions. DiManna was also accused of verbally and physically assaulting Father José Lara, a beloved priest at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church after a community meeting on the arrests. The community, led by the "La Raza Park Committee" launched an effort to recall DiManna – which would become one of the first recorded recall election in Denver's history.[37] As Vigil notes, "the 1972 effort to recall DiManna further cemented the strong community spirit that marked the history of La Raza Park."[38]

La Raza Park was the site of many of these interconnected incidents: the community organization, education and takeover of the park and pool; the heavy-handed police response;

[36] Nita Gonzales. Personal Interview. Feb 2023
[37] Fischer, Jeff. "Council Seat Target in Recall Election." The Auraria Transcript, vol. 8, no. 18, Feb 12, 1975
[38] Vigil 178

and the community coalition to oust an unpopular and discriminatory council representative. However, many community members who grew up around La Raza and worked, socialized and organized there, did not emphasize the police presence when asked about their memories of the park. Instead, they focused on the community, and how La Raza Park brought the community together.

Murals in the Park[39]

The history of Chicano community murals began during the early years of El Movimiento in Colorado. Some of the goals of El Movimiento were to support marginalized ethnic communities' efforts to be included in the nation's historical narrative in cultural and educational institutions and advocate for equal access to quality education and opportunities. Through the arts, artists began teaching and celebrating diverse communities' history.[40] As such, murals were an essential aspect of the Chicano movement across the United States, and it was embraced as a visual expression of identity and self-determination.

> The mural or fresco tradition promoted public art as a form of popular education that belonged to the people and contradicted the "high art" that was elitist and inaccessible to the masses. Taking inspiration from Mexica and Mayan antecedents who also painted in bright colors on their public spaces and ceremonial places, these artists used Indigenous iconography and the paintbrush as their weapon for social change.[41]

In Denver parks located within Chicano neighborhoods, one of the first visible steps community members took to promote cultural pride was to paint murals on park buildings. La Alma Lincoln Park, Mestizo-Curtis Park, and La Raza Park all sported colorful murals by prominent Denver artists, who all drew upon pre-Columbian figures and details when designing their murals.

Perhaps the most prominent activists and artist of the movement was Emanuel Martinez, who painted murals on recreational facilities across Denver and was actively involved in the Chicano Movement across the United States. Emanuel Martinez worked for three Chicano movements: the United Farmworkers Union in Delano, California, the Land Rights Movement in Northern New Mexico, and the Crusade for Justice in Denver, Colorado. Martinez created protest art for the newspapers and flyers, demonstrations, fundraising events, and public artwork for the three movements. In 1967, Martinez hitchhiked to Mexico to study muralism with David Alfaro Siqueiros, one of the "Tres Grandes" Mexican muralists, who began working on the March of Humanity mural, the largest in Latin America, at the Polyforum in Mexico City. Martinez returned in 1968 and 1969 to participate in additional mural workshops taught by Siqueiros.

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[39] This section of the designation was written with the assistance of Lucha Martinez de Luna, Director of the Chicano/a Murals of Colorado Project and informed by interviews with both Lucha and Emanuel Martinez

[40] Martinez de Luna, Lucha. "Heritage and Place: Chicano Murals in Colorado." *Murals in the Americas*, 17th Annual Mayer Center Symposium. Readings in Latin American Studies, edited by Victoria Lyall, Boulder: D&K Printing, Denver Art Museum. 2017:138-165.

[41] Jennie Marie Luna. "Danza Mexica: Indigenous Identity, Spirituality, Activism, and Performance" Faculty Publications, Mexican American Studies. San Jose State University. 2011

In 1967, Martinez painted the mural "Dehumanization of Mankind" for the Crusade of Justice and the following year Martinez lived and worked at the Crusade for Justice building in Denver, where he painted a mural in the communal dining hall at the center.[42] In 1969, Martinez and his family moved to the Lincoln Housing projects on Denver's Westside to join other activists who separated from the Crusade for Justice organization. With the community's support, Martinez painted a mural on the facade of his and other residents' homes at the housing projects in 1970.[43] The same year, Martinez developed an arts summer workshop painting murals on a storage and pool buildings at the neighborhood's La Alma Lincoln Park.

Martinez recognized the power of art as social commentary, saying it "stimulates creativity and educates the people of the community."[44] He also saw the power of creating murals to inspire the Chicano residents of Denver to embrace their culture and heritage. In 1971, the City of Denver hired him as a lifeguard at the La Alma Lincoln Lark pool and to paint community murals at La Alma Park, Curtis-Mestizo Park, the Robert F. Kennedy Recreation Center, Argo Park, and La Raza Park. At La Raza Park, Martinez painted a mural with Roberto Lucero, with a donation from Lauren Watson, the leader of the Black Panther organization for the Denver chapter, and a long-time friend of Martinez. The mural was a portrait of the last Aztec ruler, Cuauhtemoc, who led the resistance against Spanish conquistadors during the invasion of Mexico in the 16th century and was slain in 1525 after the fall of Tenochtitlán.

City Councilman Geno Di Manna demanded that Martinez cover the mural, citing that he didn't like the subject matter of the painting and that Lucero did not have the City's permission to paint murals. Martinez refused to paint over the mural and resigned from his position. Shortly after, the City of Denver created a new ordinance that halted any new murals on city-owned walls in public spaces.[45] But, after 1974, Chicano/a/x artists started painting murals on walls in public spaces with the support of local leaders and the community that embraced the content and new art style throughout the state. Father Jose Lara, Pat Valdez, and Marshall Gourley at the Our Lady of Guadalupe Church helped support many social justice events and issues, including providing opportunities for local muralists. The priests commissioned muralists Carlos Sandoval, Carlotta Espinoza, Jerry Jaramillo, Emanuel Martinez, Leo Tanguma, Andy Mendoza, Jessy Mendoza, and James Romero to create murals of Indigenous imagery, spirituality, and origin stories.

Chicano artists utilized art, especially murals, to stimulate community memories and a sense of identity while fomenting socio-political change in an oppressive social environment.[46] The imagery associated with Chicano murals from this period includes prehispanic motifs, ancient, historical, and contemporary built environments, landscapes, spirituality, origin stories, farm workers, revolutionaries, and depictions of the passage of time. The site-specific public art provided a mode to express political ideas to locals in a way that required no political jargon with images related to their experiences. Placing murals in areas commonly occupied by

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[42] Martinez de Luna, Lucha "Chicano Murals in Colorado: The First Decade." Colorado Heritage. The Magazine of History Colorado. September/October 2015, 24-31.
[43] *Ibid* 26
[44] The Denver Post, George Lane, August 23, 1970
[45] Martinez de Luna, 2015, 28
[46] *Ibid* 24

people historically denied access to these spaces that described their histories and everyday life strengthened their reception and message.[47]

Another muralist of the movement was Lorenzo Ramirez, an activist and founder of the Aztec dance group, *Grupo Folklorico Sabor Latino*. Ramirez came to Denver from Cheyenne, Wyoming as a young man, drawn partly to the burgeoning Chicano movement. *In 1975 - 76 he painted two murals - one at La Raza Park and the other at Curtis-Mestizo Park, where he painted over the north mural painted by Emanuel Martinez in 1970.* To Ramirez, bringing art and culture into the park was a critical aspect of returning the park to the people. "We turned a space that was questionable into a space where parents could drop off their kids …for me as a young activist, [La Raza] is a very special place."[48] Murals were a visual reclaiming of the park. Gone was a neglected park surrounded by chain-link fences and full of broken bottles. Instead, by the 1970s La Raza was teeming with life, colorful art, and community.

Figure 8. artist Robert Lucero (right). Artist Manuel Martinez, background, is giving Lucero help. Credit: Denver Post

[47] Martinez de Luna. "Heritage and Place: Chicano Murals in Colorado, 138-165.
[48] Lorenzo Ramirez. Personal Interview. Nov 2022

Figure 9. Mural by Lorenzo Ramirez at La Raza Pool. Used with Permission, Lorenzo Ramirez.

The mural by Lorenzo Ramirez showed a brown skinned woman holding an infant in utero. Around the woman were two hands, breaking chains, from which the mother and child spring forth. The child, not yet born, will be born unfettered by chains. Stepped motifs (or xicalcoliuhqui), decorated the edges of the mural, evoking the stepped pyramids of Aztec and Mayan cultures. In a 'liberated' city park, where a distinctly Chicano culture was celebrated, these images represented a free, independent people.

Figure 10. Photo of La Raza Park. Location and reference of original document: Antonio Bonsell Photo Collection . https://latinohistoryproject.org/item/la-raza-park/

Waning of Chicano Movement and 1981 Police Attack:

By the mid-1970s, the Crusade for Justice was waning as a political force in Denver. "Despite all of the good it had done to educate Chicanos and provide vital services to the most vulnerable members of the community," notes *Nuestras Historias: Mexican American/Chicano/Latino Histories in Denver*, "the Crusade was seen as too radical in its approach to achieving Chicano rights and self-determination."[49] Many community members gravitated back towards the political establishment – opting to work within the political system, running for and holding office, using petitions and recalls to enact change, rather than rejecting the system entirely.[50] Elected officials like Ruben Valdez, Richard Castro and Sal Carpio worked within the system to change it, rather than agitating from outside the system. Additionally, Crusade leaders were targeted by the FBI's Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO), which further disrupted the group. [51] The waning and fracturing of the Chicano Movement in the late 1970s was mirrored in many of the other Civil Rights organizations around the country.

However, police harassment of Chicano youth and activists continued in the Northside through the 1970s. In 1981, the violence peaked. On June 28, 1981, the Northside community gathered in La Raza Park to 'open' the park for the summer – a tradition for the neighborhood since the community take over in 1970. An estimated 400 to 800 people, including families with small children, gathered in the park that day for festivities. Around 2 pm, the Denver Police shut down the event, citing a lack of a permit, and claiming the event was associated with the Black Berets.[52] As families slowly dispersed from the park, police moved in, armed with batons. As community members threw rocks and bottles at the police, the police responded with by firing tear gas into the crowd and releasing police dogs. Although there was no official tally of the number of community members impacted by the tear gas, community reports list it in the hundreds. Video footage and news reports from the event show residents caring for those affected by the tear gas. In the end, 19 people were arrested.

Diane Medina, whose family lives across the street from the park, told the story of many bystanders seeking shelter on her family's front porch during the attack. Police officer James 'Buster' Snider, who was well-known in the community for his acts of discrimination and violence, demanded that the residents disperse or face arrest. Medina's father, a normally quiet, reserved man, pushed back on Snider's directive, arguing that it was his property, and he could host who he would. Snider, not satisfied, told him that everyone needed to be related to him, or they would be arrested. As Medina recalled with a thoughtful smile, "my dad said, this is my family, and no one is going anywhere … We didn't know who they were. They just knew that Mr. Garcia and his family lived there, they felt safe to go there. He had them on his porch and they

[49] *Nuestras Historias* 44
[50] ibid
[51] ibid
[52] There were many militant organizations associated with the Chicano Movement, including both the Black Berets and the Brown Berets. According to Munoz, "The Brown Berets were formed in Los Angeles in 1967, appealing to many Chicanos with their militant postering and rhetoric… Other organizations took up black berets and named themselves as such, in honor of Che Guevara. The Black Berets groups took on a more internationalist approach."

were doing no wrong… [Snider] never came back."[53] As she recalled, the Chicano Movement, which had galvanized Medina as a young woman, not only gave her a new sense of purpose, but gave her father the same sense of purpose as well. This moment of community connection in the face of chaos and violence echoes a larger message of the Chicano movement - that the community was like family and had a responsibility to each other.

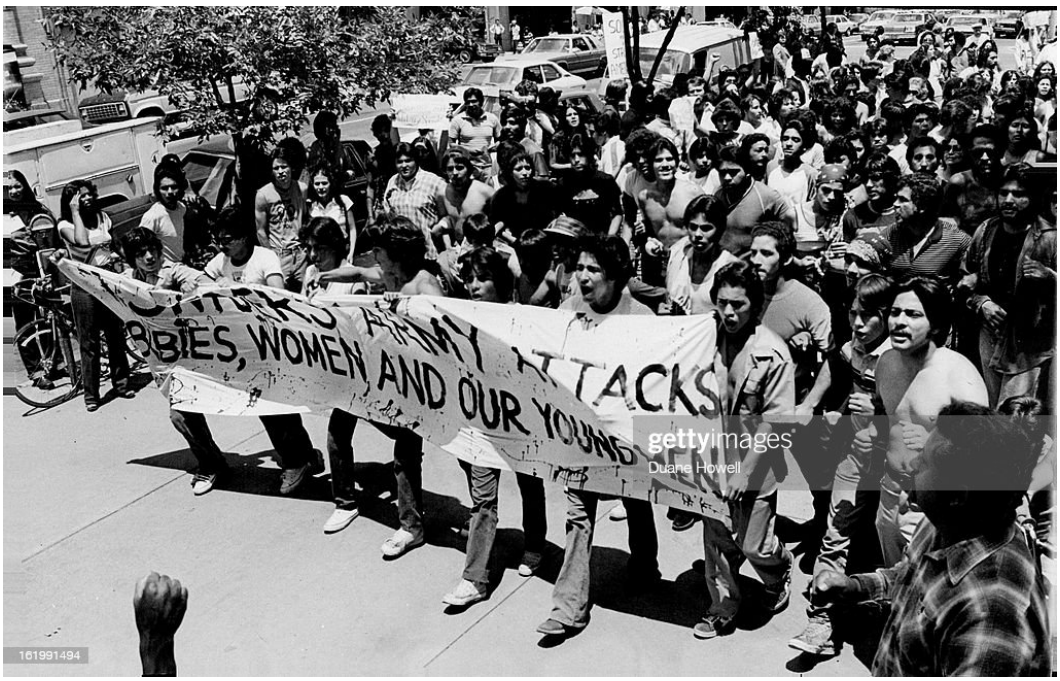

Figure 11. June 29 1981, Chicanos protest police use of tear gas. The Denver Post.

The day after the police brutality, organizers marched from La Raza Park to City Hall – where, coincidentally, President Ronald Reagan was speaking. They held a blood-stained banner, proclaiming "Snyder's *[sic]* Army Attacks Babies, Women and our Young Men." In 1984, members of the Chicano community filed a lawsuit against Officer "Buster" Snider[54] and the Denver Police Department, claiming that their civil rights had been violated through excessive force in the dispersal of the crowds, and that the police were criminally negligent in their actions. However, the jury ultimately found in favor of the officers and the City. The jury found the community and the officers equally negligent in causing the event.[55]

1984-1990: Reimagination

In 1984, three years after the police attack at the park, the City of Denver closed La Raza Pool and filled it in. At the time, city officials claimed that the pool was old, with a failing pump system, and that it was cheaper to build a pool at the new recreation center at 44th Avenue and Navajo Street (now the Aztlan Recreation Center). However, many in the community felt that the City

[53] Diane Medina. "Memories of La Raza Park." Personal Interview Dec 2022
[54] Variously written as Snider and Snyder, James "Buster" H Snider is most often used in newspaper articles and is presumed correct. This notorious Denver cop was known for harassing Chicano and African-American youth throughout the Northside.
[55] Luera v. Snyder 599 F. Supp. 1459 - Dist. Court, D. Colorado, 1984

had deliberately neglected the pool, allowing it to deteriorate.[56] Others expressed disappointment that the pool was demolished during Federico Pena's first term in office – the first Latino to hold the position (from 1983-1991). In many ways, the demolition of the pool served as the political establishment's final disbanding of the heart of the radical Chicano Movement in the Northside, which had already waned in other areas. No longer did the Chicano Movement maintain community control of the park, employing residents, providing care and food for the community's children. The park was no longer the heart of the community. Gang violence rose as the community became disconnected. When asked about this fallow period for La Raza Park, Nita Gonzales noted that the Escuela Tlatelolco still used the park for their graduation ceremonies, but that there was very little community activity in the park.

In 1988, Latino residents petitioned Councilwoman Debbie Ortega to officially rename the park La Raza. Ortega, who represented the Northside neighborhood, brought forth an ordinance to rename the park Columbus-La Raza Park, similar to the renamed Curtis-Mestizo Park. The change was pitched as a compromise to honor both the Italian and Latino communities who lived in the area. However, the proposed renaming did not pass City Council – it was voted down in a hotly contested vote, which stirred up heated emotions on both sides. Many Italian Americans from the Northside felt that changing the name of the park was a sign of disrespect and erasure towards the community.[57] Chicano activists countered that their issue was with Columbus and his legacy of violence and offered to jointly name the park after a different Italian-American such as Mother Cabrini.[58] No compromise could be reached, and the park remained Columbus Park officially. Unofficially, however, the name remained La Raza Park, and community members continually rebranded the park sign with spray paint – visually reclaiming the park for the community.

While the community pushed for the park to be officially renamed, Denver Parks and Recreation engaged residents to design a new community space for the park. Although the pool would not be reopened, residents still desired a place where they could gather, celebrate and strengthen their communal ties. Inspired by the Kiosko at Chicano Park in San Diego, California, Northside residents requested a Kiosko and plaza for La Raza Park. The Kiosko was designed by landscape architect Steve Wagley. The design of the Kiosko was inspired by ceremonial areas atop Aztec and Mayan stepped pyramids – a nod to the indigenous history of the Chicano community. The Kiosko and Plaza de la Raza were dedicated on May 5, 1990. A Rocky Mountain News article about the event reported:

> The kiosko, a cooperative effort between the city's planning and parks departments, neighborhood and business groups, cost about $350,000 to build. It's part of $7 million invested in the neighborhood by the city, non-profit and private investors, according to B.J. Brooks, a senior planner with the city. It took five years from planning to dedication.[59]

Upon the Kiosko's dedication, local art and architectural critic Mary Chandler wrote:

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[56] Erica Meltzer. "It's going to be La Raza Park until I die" Jul. 21, 2016. https://denverite.com/2016/07/21/la-raza-park-denver-columbus-park. Accessed Feb 2023.

[57] **LEARNING FROM TWO CULTURES LATINOS AND ITALIAN- - Rocky Mountain News (Denver, CO) - July 18, 1993 - page 4N**

[58] Nita Gonzales. Personal Interview. Feb 2023

[59] **PYRAMID' A FOCAL POINT FOR HISPANICS PARK'S PLAZA - Rocky Mountain News (Denver, CO) - May 4, 1990 - page 81**
May 4, 1990 | Rocky Mountain News (Denver, CO) | MATTHEW SOERGEL ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS STAFF WRITER

> People wanted to have something solid … and they do: The pyramid is a solid piece, and it does not overwhelm the park, it gives it texture. That the park is surrounded by homes - the proverbial eyes on the street - lends an additional sensibility. When you walk through that park, you feel it: strength.[60]

The design of the Kiosko and plaza, as an open, elevated anchor in the park evoked many of the same feelings as the original La Raza pool. The Kiosko provides a physical representation of the Chicano community and serves as a dedicated space for the community's celebrations and gatherings, this time rising toward the sky rather than sinking into the embrace of the earth.

1990 – Present: Art and Culture

The dedication of the Kiosko and La Plaza de la Raza marked a new era for La Raza Park, one of more formal, even ceremonial, uses and organized community events. The pool at La Raza hosted informal community gatherings – centered around play, family activities and celebrations with little organization. In contrast, the Kiosko began hosting more formally organized and well-attended events, which reinforced the Chicano/Latino identity in a different way. Whereas in the 1970s, the Chicano community 'liberated' the park by installing local Chicano activists into positions of leadership, today the community connects to their heritage in a different, more ceremonial manner.

One of these events was the celebration of the summer solstice, Xupantla, and other festival days with ceremonial Aztec dancing (danza) from local groups such as Grupo Tlaloc de Coloraztlan and Grupo Folklorico Sabor Latino. Rooted in the Chicano Movement concept of an indigenous homeland, Aztlan, the continued practice of danza on la Plaza de la Raza is enacting the beliefs of that homeland. Danza was traditionally not entertainment, but rather a spiritual practice. The reimagination and continuation of the tradition outside of Mexico was used by the Chicano Movement to recreate and reinforce an Indigenous identity for the community.

As noted by Danza scholar, Jennie Marie Luna, "over the last forty years, Xicana/o [Chicano] identity, politics, culture, and spirituality have evolved and transformed in numerous ways… Danza has served as a philosophical/spiritual base for Xicanas/os and as a space to cultivate a sense of identity, belonging, cultural perseverance, and Indigenous consciousness…"[61] Lorenzo Ramirez, founder of Denver's Grupo Folklorico Sabor Latino explained that the danza ceremonies held at La Raza Park help the community "[connect] with our indigenous roots, of who we really are, and peeling away that mask that society puts on us. This is one way of reconnecting, and also reconnecting with our brothers and sisters from Mexico that are here, and [who] live across a border that we didn't create."[62]

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[60] **SMALLER PARKS INSPIRE PRIDE - Rocky Mountain News (Denver, CO) - May 27, 1990 - page 72**
May 27, 1990 | Rocky Mountain News (Denver, CO) | MARY CHANDLER
[61] Jennie Marie Luna. "Danza Mexica: Indigenous Identity, Spirituality, Activism, and Performance" Faculty Publications, Mexican American Studies (2011). Pg 9
[62] Native Lens, "Danza Azteca reconnects cultures across borders." October 17, 2020. Accessed March 2023

Another example of the new ceremonial use for the park is the annual Dia de los Muertos celebration held at the park every November. Dia de los Muertos celebrates loved ones in the community who have passed away, and to welcome the return of their spirits. Families build ofrendas (altars), which display photos of the departed, in addition to food, drink, and other offerings or mementos. While many families create small, personal ofrendas in their homes, La Raza Park has become the site of larger, more public ofrendas. These ofrendas may honor individuals, or groups of people who have passed, such as those who died due to AIDS or gang violence. In 2022, an ofrenda was created for the 21 victims of the Uvalde, Texas school shooting. These many ofrendas are set up along the perimeter of the Plaza de la Raza, and in the grassy areas, allowing members of the community to stop in at each as they circulate through the park. Dia de los Muertos is not a mournful holiday; rather, it celebrates the cycle of life and death that is present throughout the world. Therefore, the event also features danza, singing, poetry and communal food. Many participants view Dia de los Muertos as yet another way to connect with their indigenous roots, a different cultural worldview where death is not the end of life, but the beginning of a new stage of life.[63]

Beyond these annual celebrations and events, La Raza Park is also the site of other more impromptu events and memorials. For instance, after the Orlando, FL Pulse Night club shooting on June 12, 2016, the members of the Latino community held a special memorial event at the Park, in honor of the 49 people murdered.

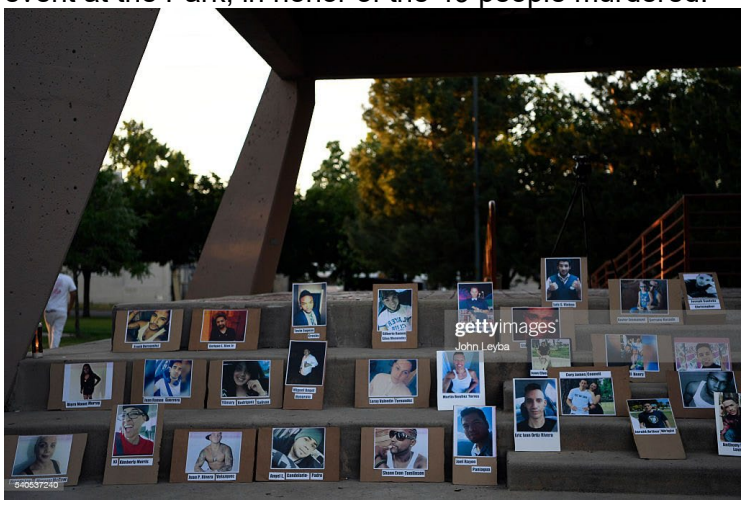

Figure 12. JUNE 15: Activists who identify as gay, lesbian, trans and 2Spirit held a vigil and procession to La Raza Park as a tribute to victims of the Orlando shooting. (Photo By John Leyba/The Denver Post via Getty Images)

Other uses of the park that draw hundreds of people to the area include an annual La Raza Park Day, one of the largest celebrations of lowriders in the state, but which has evolved into a day of community celebration, and a direct response to the events of 1981. Lowriders and motorcycles parade from Berkeley Park to La Raza Park for an afternoon of gathering and celebration. These days still include community staples – traditional music, food, and danza, in

[63] "Discussing death: How different cultures in Colorado celebrate and contemplate the inevitable." Rocky Mountain PBS. https://www.rmpbs.org/blogs/rocky-mountain-pbs/discussing-death-how-different-cultures-celebrate-and-contemplate-the-inevitable/. Accessed March 2023

addition to new cultural elements such as breakdancing and lucha libre wrestlers.[64] These events contribute to the culture of the Northside. As community member Jay "Sauvecito" Salas put it, "it's one thing to show up, see all the cool vehículos when we roll through the park on the Chicano Pride Ride … but to really understand the history – that we're standing on the shoulders of our ancestors. … I want to make sure we never lose that…that we never lose who we are."[65] Designating La Raza Park, said Salas, helps to ensure that his children and grandchildren will understand the history of La Raza and the community of the Northside.

New Murals

In 2016, Denver artist David Ocelotl Garcia unveiled a series of murals on the Kiosko's ceiling. Entitled "El Viaje" or The Journey, the murals focused on the Mexican peoples' journey "from creation to the present and into the future." Garcia describes his artistic style as "abstract imaginism" which he envisions as "a style of art that combines the spontaneity and unpredictability of abstraction with the creativity and perception of … imagination." El Viaje is a dynamic story that winds its way up through the levels of the stepped pyramidal roof of the Kiosko. According to the Garcia, the mural symbolizes "the history, tradition and social movement of the Mexican culture."[66] See the architectural description for a full description of the murals and their preservation.

2020 – 2021: Official Renaming and Rededication

In the summer 2020, Councilwoman Amanda P. Sandoval began the official legislative process to rename the park from Columbus Park to La Raza Park. The process included gathering over 300 signatures to present to the City's Parks and Recreation Advisory Board. Unlike the 1988 effort to rename the park, the 2020 renaming effort was a deliberate effort to remove the name of Columbus from the park, in light of his genocidal efforts to subdue the indigenous Taino people of Hispaniola (present day Haiti and Dominican Republic). This change was still opposed by some members of the Italian community in Denver, who felt it was erasing their community's ties to the Northside.

In the summer of 2020, hundreds of thousands of Americans staged anti-racist protests across the country, including in Denver. This summer of protests was sparked by the police killing of an unarmed Black man, George Floyd, but was also preceded by a concentrated period of protests against systemic racism in the country. In Denver, this summer of protest led to the removal of a Columbus statue in Civic Center Park, the renaming of Denver's Stapleton neighborhood to Central Park,[67] and a taskforce set up to study the potential renaming of other City-owned properties.

Over the course of two days, in the summer of 2020, Councilwoman Sandoval, Councilwoman Jamie Torres, local and state representatives, and community organizers collected over 700 signatures in support of the name change. On December 21st, 2020, Denver City Council held a

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[64] Kyle Harris. "Denver's Chicano community celebrates Northside culture at La Raza Park Day." Aug. 19, 2022, https://denverite.com/2022/08/19/denver-chicano-northside-la-raza-park-day/

[65] Salas, Jay "Sauvecito". "Memories of La Raza Park." Personal Interview. Dec. 2022

[66] https://www.ocelotlart.com/the-journey.html [accessed Feb 27 2023]

[67] Benjamin Stapleton, mayor of Denver from 1923-1931 and 1935-1947, was a member of the Ku Klux Klan. His rise to power in Denver was due, in no small part, to his favor with the hate group. Robert Alan Goldberg in his book Hooded Empire: The Ku Klux Klan in Colorado. See Robert Alan Goldberg, *Hooded Empire: The Ku Klux Klan in Colorado.* University of Illinois Press (1981).

public hearing on the official renaming of the park. Council had received 45 letters supportive of the change and 16 letters opposed to the change. At the public hearing, 9 community members provided comments in support of the renaming effort, including the Executive Director of Denver Parks and Recreation, Happy Haynes. Only one person objected to the renaming of the park. City Council voted unanimously to change the name to La Raza Park.

During her public comment, Colorado State Senator Julie Gonzales noted: "This is a step towards healing, a step towards transformation, a step towards unity." Indeed, the official renaming of La Raza Park was the culmination of over 50 years of activism among the Chicano community. The official renaming of the park represents over 100 years of transformation for this neighborhood park.

La Raza Park was rededicated on June 20, 2021, to coincide with Xupantla (the Summer Solstice). At the rededication, a new sculpture by artist Emanuel Martinez was installed. Entitled "La Raza Unida" the sculpture pays homage to the mestizo heritage of the Chicano community, the rise of the Chicano Movement, and the solidarity and unity running throughout the movement. Martinez also addressed some of the criticism over the renaming of the park, noting that the colors on the sculpture (green, white and red) represented the colors found on both the Mexican and Italian flags, a nod to both communities of the Northside.

The rededication also featured danza ceremonies for the solstice. Councilwoman Sandoval recalled the celebration, in which hundreds of dragonflies flitted throughout the park and the spiritual meaning behind their presence. "Dragonflies represent the soul of our ancestors," said Sandoval, "and they joined on the day of the renaming."[68] Thus, La Raza Park has become a living expression of a distinct Chicano/Latino culture and worldview. The rededication brought together generations of residents from the Northside– both living and passed – to celebrate decades of advocacy and community.

Conclusion

The history of La Raza Park encapsulates the history of Denver's Northside. From its earliest days as a beloved playground in Denver's Italian community, to its time as a pool and the center of an inter-generational Chicano community, through to the present day as an event space that gathers community members from across the city, La Raza Park has been the beating heart of generations of Denverites. The historic and cultural significance of the park reflects the evolution of the City of Denver and its residents.

When musing on the significance of the La Raza Park, Diane Medina said, "there's not one event, there's not one situation that has brought the park into my heart. It's my whole life." [69] The significance of the park transcends its physical characteristics and has truly come to represent the culture of the Northside and Denver's wider Latino/Chicano community.

[68] Amanda P. Sandoval. Community Meeting March 2023.
[69] Diane Medina. "Memories of La Raza Park." Personal Interview Dec 2022

7. Additional Information

Bibliography
Provide a list of sources used in compiling this application.

Photographs
Attach digital photographs showing representative views of the streetscapes, structures, and character-defining features of the district. These photographs should be taken from public right of way. If available, include historic photographs of the district.

Boundary Map
Attach a map that graphically depicts the boundaries of the district and indicates the contributing and non-contributing properties within the district.

DENVER
THE MILE HIGH CITY

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