



Above right: Assemblyman Philip Soto  
(California History Section, California State Library)

Left: Governor Warren and actor Leo Carrillo enjoy a rodeo sponsored by Los Angeles Sheriff Eugene Biscailuz. Carrillo served as a Warren campaign spokesman and represented the governor on the commission investigating the Zoot Suit Riots and on the State Parks Commission. (Earl Warren Papers, California State Archives)



Friends and family gather for the first meeting of Edward Roybal's city council campaign. After initially losing in 1947, Roybal won in 1949 after the Community Services Organization registered thousands of Latino voters and formed alliances with other groups. (Kenneth C. Burt)

# The Birth of Latino Politics and Bipartisanship in California

By Kenneth C. Burt

Running for governor in 1942, California Attorney General Earl Warren approached Eduardo Quevedo for support. While the Federation of Spanish-American Voters, which Quevedo headed, ultimately decided to remain loyal to the incumbent chief executive, Culbert Olson, Warren's outreach effort was nevertheless notable. This was the first time that candidates from both major political parties had competed for the attention of Latino voters. Moreover, Warren's use of Democratic actor Leo Carrillo as a prominent spokesman forecasted the rise of bipartisanship in state government.

The courting of the small number of Spanish-speaking voters began a decade earlier. When Upton Sinclair, the Pasadena-based muckraking author and gubernatorial candidate, paid Quevedo five dollars for every speech Quevedo gave before a Spanish-speaking audience. Four years later, Olson, by then an elected state senator representing Los Angeles, won his party's primary and assembled a broad coalition, promising to bring President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal to California by becoming the century's first Democratic governor.

The state's Latino community participated in that 1938 campaign with gusto, eager for social recognition and hopeful that Olson would adopt policies to uplift the poor and side with workers seeking to organize unions. This was a time of political firsts. The Olson campaign formed a Hispanic-American Division. The California Democratic Party organized a Spanish-American Division. The Latino community likewise formed a political action committee: the Federation of Spanish-American Voters of California. After the election, Olson expressed a "grateful appreciation" to Quevedo for "the effective work you did in the campaign" and invited the Latino leader to attend his inauguration at the State Capitol in Sacramento in January 1939.

Shortly thereafter, top Olson administration officials joined Quevedo on stage at the New Mexico-Arizona Club in Los Angeles as he presided over the First National Congress of the Mexican and Spanish-American Peoples of the United States. Richard Olson, Governor Olson's son and top aide, addressed the group, as did Lieutenant Governor Ellis Patterson and Carey McWilliams, chief of California's Division of Immigration and Housing.

The attention showered on Latinos by Governor Olson's administration was unprecedented. It is also impressive given that few in the Latino community lived in the state prior to the start of the Mexican Revolution in 1910, and that the bulk of Latinos labored at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder. The representatives of the growing community, however, tended to be more established professionals.

Olson honored Anthony P. Entenza as his first Latino appointed to a state board or commission. Entenza was an attorney and the past national commander of the Spanish-American War Veterans, so the governor appointed him to serve on the board of the state Veterans Home in Yountville. Olson then named World War I veteran and attorney Ernest Orfila to the Veterans Welfare Board. Orfila was active in the American Legion.

The biggest plums included seats in the court system, which was much smaller then than it is today. Governor Olson used one of only thirteen judicial openings during his four-year term to make history by appointing Ataulfo "A. P." Molina to the San Diego Municipal Court. Molina, forty-eight, was a graduate of the University of California, Berkeley Law School and had been born in Mexico.

The governor utilized the power of public pronouncements to tear down racial stereotypes. Having already proclaimed Pan American Day, Olson made use of the Golden Gate International Exposition to declare Race Relations Day. "I declare that anyone who generates racial misunderstanding and hatred is a demagogue of the most subversive type," emphasized Olson. "He becomes an enemy of society just as truly as a tax evader, an embezzler, or a murderer. In fact, he does infinitely more harm."

Olson's appointments and proclamation represented key historic first time events made even more auspicious because at the time there was "general legislative indifference" to minority



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concerns in Sacramento, according to Stanley Mosk, the governor's appointment secretary, and later a Supreme Court justice.

The infamous Zoot Suit Riots, where servicemen beat Mexican American youth in Los Angeles in 1943, occurred six months into Governor Earl Warren's first term. He established the Governor's Special Committee on the Los Angeles Emergency and asked Catholic Bishop Joseph T. McGucken to chair the group. Warren named Leo Carrillo to the committee as his personal representative.

Carrillo would not be the governor's sole Latino appointment. Warren reappointed Ernest Orfila to the Veterans Welfare Board and named attorney Manuel Ruiz to the California Youth Commission.

After World War II, Mexican Americans organized the Community Services Organization (CSO) and helped to elect Edward Roybal to the Los Angeles City Council in 1949. Later that year, Warren invited Councilman Roybal and CSO leader Maria Duran to participate in his Unemployment Conference held in Sacramento.

As governor, Warren signed legislation outlawing school segregation, strengthened unemployment insurance, and generally began to modernize California. President Eisenhower appointed him chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court in 1953, and soon thereafter he crafted a unanimous opinion in *Brown v. Board of Education*. The timing for forward-looking, non-partisan leadership was good for the GOP in the state and nation.

Latino (and non-Latino) World War II veterans had taken advantage of the GI Bill to attend college, to learn a trade, and to buy a home. Eisenhower, as a war hero and political moderate, had natural political appeal.

U.S. Senator Thomas Kuchel (R-Calif.) pleased the CSO leadership by promising to investigate alleged discrimination on the part of a federal immigration officer in Madera. Senator Kuchel also worked with the business community, arranging for President Eisenhower to send a greeting to the 1954 Mexican Independence Day celebration sponsored by the Mexican Chamber of Commerce in Los Angeles.

Governors Earl Warren and Goodwin Knight, who had moved from his post as lieutenant governor when President Eisenhower appointed Warren to the Supreme Court, and Senator Kuchel all engaged the Latino community as part of their search for the center of post-World War II California politics. Warren demonstrated inclusiveness, although years later he stated, "I never went to the Chicanos and asked them what they thought."

In 1952, and again in 1956, the Eisenhower for president campaign courted the growing number of Latino voters with more

enthusiasm than did the Democratic nominee. A chagrined Roybal, who had been the Democrats' 1954 candidate for lieutenant governor, publicly stated in 1956 that a "mere 100,000 minority votes either way might spell victory or defeat for our party in the close election coming up." Spanish-speaking voters were positioned to decide a close election because the nonpartisan Community Service Organization had registered more than 165,000 voters in less than ten years and often ran get-out-the-vote efforts in Latino communities across the state.

The Eisenhower-Nixon and the Kuchel reelection campaigns in 1956 both organized Latin American Divisions. They targeted small businessmen and professionals, veterans, and pastors of Spanish-speaking Protestant congregations. The business leaders included Armando Torres, who headed up the "Democratic Committee." This title reflected the fact that "80 percent" of the committee's work was directed at Latino Democrats. Senator Kuchel personally courted Los Angeles Latinos by rallying supporters at Hollenbeck Junior High School in the Boyle Heights section of Los Angeles. The Republican campaigns reinforced the organizational activities with pro-Kuchel and pro-Eisenhower advertisements in *La Opinión*.

After the 1956 election, Governor Knight appointed Carlos Teran to a vacancy on the East Los Angeles Municipal Court. This made him the state's lone Latino judge due to the prior death of Judge Molina, the Olson appointee. The young Democratic lawyer served as an Army company commander in World War II, then graduated from law school, and began to strenuously work in community affairs. That year Knight also demonstrated an interest in civil rights by meeting with Gilbert Anaya and Tony Rios (both CSO and union leaders) as part of a California Committee for Fair Employment delegation.

In 1962 Latinos made a major breakthrough by electing Edward Roybal to Congress from a racially mixed district, and by electing John Moreno and Phil Soto to the State Assembly. All were veterans of World War II and members of the GI Forum and the bipartisan Mexican American Political Association (MAPA).

The birth of modern Latino politics began during Roosevelt's New Deal, with Governor Culbert Olson becoming the first state executive to court Spanish-speaking voters. Governors Earl Warren and Goodwin Knight built on this tradition, reaching out to mostly Democratic Latinos as they sought to govern from the political center. They all made historic appointments that, while modest by today's standards, were significant in their day. Finally, it is significant that many of the earliest Latino political appointees and elected officials had served their country in time of war. ❀

Governor Culbert Olson and Eduardo Quevedo at a rally to promote war bonds during the early days of World War II. (Department of Special Collections and University Archives, Stanford University Archives)



Assemblyman John Moreno (California History Section, California State Library)



Governor Goodwin Knight (center) meets with civil rights leaders associated with the California Committee for Fair Employment. Tony Rios (ninth from left) and Gilbert Anaya (on right side) spoke for CSO and organized labor. (Kenneth C. Burt)