

THOMAS KELSEY / Los Angeles Times

Frederick P. Aguirre takes a walk down the Santa Fe railroad tracks in old Placentia, the neighborhood in which he grew up.

—such as Manuel Castro of Placentia, Bechtel Group's top soil erosion engineer for the San Onofre nuclear power plant, and Ignacio Lozano Jr., of Newport Beach, former U.S. ambassador to El Salvador and publisher of the Los Angeles-based *La Opinion*, the nation's second-largest Spanish-language newspaper.

They represent a growing elite, who have moved from Atwood, Toker Town, Santa Nita and other inland barrios to such developments as Woodbridge and Spyglass Hill.

Most Orange County Chicanos interviewed said they prefer living

here than in Los Angeles County, where big-city acceptance of different racial groups is routine and where politics are less conservative, because they enjoy Orange County's relatively smaller population, its beaches, its cleaner neighborhoods and its environment, which are viewed as conducive to raising families.

But these assimilated Latinos are viewed askance in some quarters. For example, some of the Roman Catholic clergy complain that these upwardly mobile Latinos tend to worry more about double-digit in-

Please see **LATINOS**, Page 8



CHRISTINE COTTER / Los Angeles Times

Barbara Brown and daughter Samantha attend a Mexican dance. Such events help Latinos to hold on to their cultural traditions.

In Pursuit of the Latino American Dream

'New Hispanics' Seek Good Life, but Not at the Expense of Their Culture

By DAVID REYES, Times Staff Writer

Frederick P. Aguirre lives in a comfortable two-story, four-bedroom home in Placentia and drives to his law practice in Fullerton in a Mercedes.

Barbara Ledesma Brown mobilized her Fountain Valley neighborhood against a government housing project in 1975 and eventually won a seat on the City Council.

Twenty years ago, Aguirre and Brown might have been considered exceptional Chicanos, but today they are representative of an emerging middle class in Orange County, a new breed of Latino professional. Most were born into Latino families in which Spanish-speaking parents believed that speaking English at home and doing well in school were keys to the Anglo kingdom and would bring success to their children.

"We are the 'new wave' Hispanic," Aguirre said. "Instead of entering the system uneducated, we're coming in with a stronger profile and with a greater economic foundation than our predecessors."

In contrast to most Latinos elsewhere, the "new Hispanic" in Orange County is adapting well to the suburban life style, far from the crowded substandard housing, spray-painted graffiti and neighborhood youth gangs that plague the barrios, sociologists and demographers say.

These experts say that Orange County is a citadel for successful Latinos, who tend to be better educated, earn more money and be politically more sophisticated than Latinos elsewhere in the nation.

Leobardo Estrada, a UCLA demographer, offers this observation:

"Look at the forces at work in Orange County. . . (To) survive in an affluent area where most of the people are white and upwardly

mobile . . . you've got to be sharp, impressive and bright."

In many ways, Orange County Latinos offer a glimpse of the promise of the Latinos' absorption into middle America. Most still speak Spanish and retain a cultural identity to Mexico. Yet they are proud Americans and have adapted well in an English-speaking world.

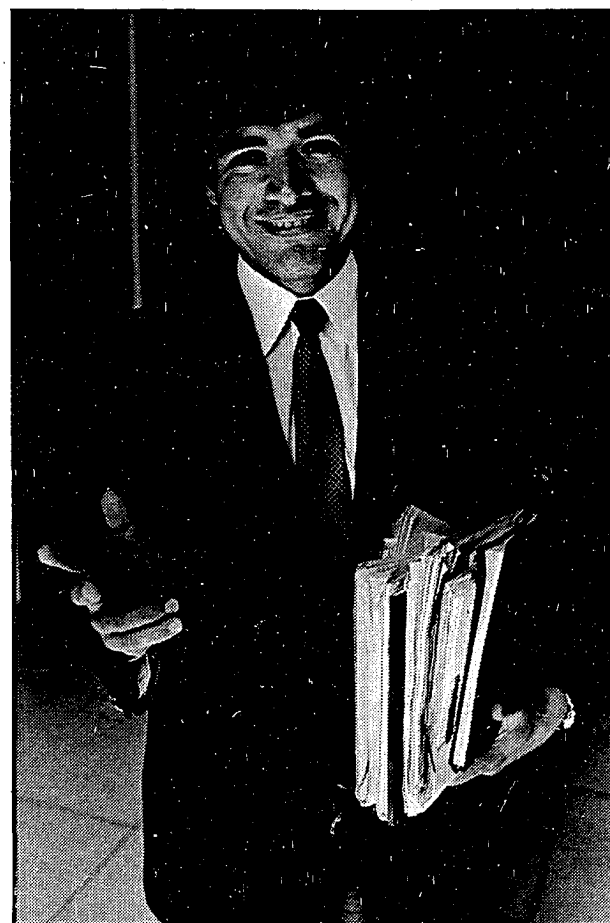
Already, Latinos in Orange County boast a higher percentage of high-salaried wage earners than do their counterparts in the state's other populous counties. Of the estimated 300,000 Latinos in Orange County, 14.2% earn at least \$35,000 a year, according to 1980 Census figures. In contrast, only 8.8% of the Latinos in Los Angeles County earn that much.

Orange County's Latino population grew from 160,168 in 1970 to 285,000 in 1980, an increase of nearly 78%, according to Census figures. The heaviest growth has occurred in the county's northern and central sections, where a substantial Latino influence has been felt in terms of language and culture, especially in the schools.

Orange County Latinos are so diverse, however, that they defy labels. Politically, most tend to be Democrats, although Republicans seem to be gaining ground.

The Latinos' sense of cultural identity ranges from "I am assimilated"—a group more comfortable driving BMW cars and wearing dark-blue pin-striped "power suits," and whose only Spanish is heard at the county's best Mexican restaurants ordering food—to those who name their children after Mayan and Aztec gods and insist on the Spanish language in the home.

Some Latinos hold lofty positions



THOMAS KELSEY / Los Angeles Times

Lawyer Frederick P. Aguirre, shown here at the courthouse in Santa Ana, is one of a growing number of professional Latinos.

LATINOS: They Seek to Attain Good Life, Maintain Culture Too

Continued from First Page

flation and high interest rates than barrio crime or problems facing illegal immigrants from Mexico and the rest of Latin America.

"The middle class doesn't want to go back or remember the barrios they left," said the Rev. Allan Deck, acknowledging the gulf that exists between middle-class Latinos and the uneducated and poor.

A Spanish-speaking member of the Catholic Diocese of Orange Hispanic Ministry, Deck said the new middle-class Latinos don't identify with the struggles of the poor. To them, "it's upsetting," Deck said.

In fact, despite the obvious wealth and political influence the "new Hispanics" wield, Spanish-speaking illegals such as Rigoberto Sanchez, a 34-year-old farm worker from the Mexican state of Oaxaca living in Stanton, and other Mexican nationals interviewed said they do not rely on their higher-income brethren in any way.

Said Sanchez: "I never think about them helping me. Why should they? They all seem to be in a hurry somewhere."

Deck said it is the church's conviction that Latinos should become critical of the Americanization process. The church's falling, he stressed, is that it has not gotten that critical message across to the middle-class Latinos or the under class.

With Latinos making up the bulk of the diocese, such an offensive remains the church's major challenge, Deck said.

Critics such as UC Irvine Spanish Prof. Alejandro Morales insist that Chicanos should question the American Dream and try going *contra la corriente* (against the flow). As have the Italians in New York and other immigrant groups, Latinos may find assimilation will cost them "their culture, their language and their religion," Morales said.

"They should be emphasizing their differences, so they can apply a very unique vision of the world," Morales said. "But the American uses a different value system (to get ahead) . . . And once you accept the middle-class dream, the house in suburbia, the jazzy car, a pool, and become a member of the club, well, I think that's bad."

Barbara Ledesma Brown was sitting in her Fountain Valley home when she told a reporter, "Wait, I have to show you this." She went to retrieve something metallic that sat atop the family television set, a framed 5-by-7-inch photograph.

"This," she proclaimed, "is one of the proudest possessions in our home."

Pictured were two fair-skinned, hazel-eyed children, Robert, 7, and Samantha, 10. Robert is wearing a *charro* suit and an ear-to-ear grin; Samantha, her light-brown hair swirled in braids, looks resplendent in a purple peasant dress, typical women's fashion from the Mexican state of Chiapas.

Products of an Anglo-Chicano marriage, the children have Anglo physical characteristics, making the cherished photograph more striking. It "captures the essence of the Hispanic half of our marriage," her husband, James Brown, said.

For the Browns, gaining appreciation for the "Hispanic half" has meant introducing their children to Mexican traditions, customs and food. At times, it has been a slow, difficult "selling job," Barbara Brown admitted, saying, "My children have to be made aware they're Mexican-American."

The task has been made more difficult because the family lives in Fountain Valley, which typifies Orange County suburbia—a white, middle-class city, with neighborhoods endlessly bordered by checker-block walls.

For some time now, Brown has been taking her children to Relampago del Cielo, an ethnic dance studio

Blocked due to copyright.
See full page image or
microfilm.

Fr. Allan Deck: *The middle class (members of the Southland's Latino community) don't want to go back or remember the barrios they left.*

in Santa Ana. She said she does so out of a need to compensate for a cultural void that exists for Latinos in Orange County.

Relampago, Spanish for lightning, serves as a cultural refuge, highlighting Mexican customs in dance and song for middle-class Latinos, some of whom are also from mixed marriages. It is where Brown's children were photographed in traditional ethnic costumes.

"You should see the other children there," Barbara said. "Most of them are blond-haired and have last names like Smith and Green. They are children of mixed marriages, with a Latina mother who wants to instill in her children a feeling for (the Latino) culture."

She married outside her culture, which is not uncommon in Orange County, and has had to deal with the differences in her own and her husband's attitudes toward family and the raising of children. Whom should she satisfy? How will the children grow up? Will they speak English or Spanish? Will they become devout Catholics?

Their children have grown up essentially Anglo and speaking English. Because both parents are Catholic, religion has been no conflict. Both children attend St. Barbara's Catholic School, and the family regularly supports church activities—a conscious effort, Barbara said, "because, even though I don't agree wholeheartedly with some of the church's dogma, I support it because it's part of my Mexican culture."

Since their involvement with Relampago, both children have picked up some Spanish and, with some gentle prodding at home, have gained an understanding that they are culturally different.

"As far as culture in Fountain Valley is concerned, I sat down one day and thought about it," Barbara said. "I looked at a *Vogue* magazine that was lying on my coffee table and noticed how, when it wanted to get a message across, it always overemphasized things."

"So I decided to do the same. I started taking my kids to Relampago for dance lessons on Saturdays. At first, they didn't like it, especially Robert. You know how boys aren't supposed to like those things. But now, instead of playing Little League baseball, Robert goes dancing."

"In fact, Robert has gotten to the point where recently he turned to me and looked disappointed. I said, 'Robert, what's wrong?' And he asked, 'Mother, am I always going to be only half Mexican?'"

"You see, Robert needs that kind of assurance, that this culture is rich and has value. That's what you need to do, to bring it out in the open here in Orange County and to instill in your children that this culture has value."

"I'm very proud of my culture and it has a lot to do with being a family and being together."

"My husband, who is from a conservative Pasadena family, didn't understand the importance of family. His family gatherings are usually more formal."

James Brown admits the cultural introduction for their children was "sometimes easy, sometimes hard," but he did confirm that Robert has taken more than a passing interest in Relampago activities.

In fact, the boy once missed an important Little League baseball practice to attend a Relampago rehearsal. And on his invitation, schoolmate Josh Stanton, county Supervisor Roger Stanton's son, has come into the Relampago fold.

Barbara Brown said she makes sure that her children visit her mother, who lives nearby, and their great-grandmother, who lives in Oxnard, because both speak Spanish, respect Mexican traditions and can serve as vital cultural links.

She said she hopes that encouraging her children to learn more about their Latino cultural roots will make them stronger individuals. She recalled:

"You know, whenever I was really down and depressed in college, I always believed in my culture. I was never a mental giant. So whenever I was down, I always thought of my family—that strength, that family support. That's what was important to me."

When Jose Aguirre crossed into the United States in
Please see LATINOS, Page 9

LATINOS: Entering the Middle Class

Continued from Eighth Page

1919, with visions of owning a barber shop, the *campesino* from the Mexican state of Michoacan did so to escape an intolerant *patron* (boss), who believed that everyone in his hacienda should work in the surrounding farm fields.

Now his vision of free enterprise is embodied in his grandson, Frederick Aguirre, the Fullerton attorney.

Frederick Aguirre, a graduate of USC and the UCLA Law School, passed the state bar in 1974. At 37, he and his wife, Linda, have a 3-year-old son, Michael.

He comes from a civic-minded family. Grandfather Jose Aguirre, a pillar of the Spanish-speaking community in Placentia, which was the heart of Latino Orange County in the 1920s, was a member of *La Comision Honorifica Mexicana*, set up as a loosely organized barrio board of governors, and *El Comite de Festejos Patrios*, created by loyal Mexican citizens to organize the annual 16th of September holiday (Mexican Independence Day), which then included a celebration that drew thousands to downtown Placentia.

Alfredo Aguirre, Frederick's father, who was a bricklayer, helped establish a chapter of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) in Placentia and played a major role in the desegregation of Placentia

'I've got a Mercedes, but I also have my '57 blue Chevy pickup.'

public schools in 1949. The school campaign eventually led to Alfredo Aguirre's election as Placentia's first Chicano councilman in 1958.

Frederick Aguirre said he often has entertained ideas of running for public office but conceded that he is racing, like other upwardly mobile Chicanos, to retain a grip on the good life.

In college, he volunteered time for political causes, including the election campaigns of U.S. Rep. Edward Roybal (D-East Los Angeles) and the presidential bids of Hubert Humphrey and Eugene McCarthy.

In 1980, he helped the state Senate campaign effort of Democrat Louis Velasquez, a former Fullerton councilman who lost to Republican incumbent John Briggs.

A group of Placentia friends and businessmen, most of whom are Anglo, asked Aguirre to run for a school board position. He turned them down, explaining that he was too busy with career and family.

Aguirre's top priority is his career, which he said came even above family.

"After all, it's my livelihood. I've talked about this with my wife. You see, we need that economic base so we can afford our home and other things, like sending our son to a private school."

Money is the end product of a formula wherein sacrifice plus time equals the good life, he said. Recently, he and his wife toured Europe.

Aguirre is well known for hosting Democratic

fund-raisers and often receives telephone calls for advice from state Latino leaders.

Because of his success, Frederick Aguirre thinks he's viewed with suspicion by Chicanos still in the barrios, who question the ethnic credentials of upwardly mobile Latinos.

"A lot of Chicanos in Los Angeles, especially East Los Angeles, think we're no longer Chicano. They see us in three-piece suits and think we've become assimilated.

"But I tell them, 'Listen, I know just as much *calo* (street slang) as you do.' I tell them we grew up with gangs in Orange County, we had car clubs, and we knew how to write graffiti on the walls. It's just that some of us went to school and have different goals now."

Some of Aguirre's credentials, like those of other affluent Orange County Chicanos, are kept in his wallet.

For example, Aguirre hosted a political fund-raiser that earned about \$3,000 for Steve Rodriguez, a Los Angeles Chicano candidate who narrowly missed forcing a runoff with Los Angeles City Councilman Arthur Snyder, whose Eastside district is predominantly Latino.

Aguirre said he was drawn to Rodriguez because the candidate showed a sense of professionalism, was aggressive and did not have ties to "old guard" Latinos in Los Angeles. Consequently, those at the fund-raiser included many Latino professionals, Democrats and Republicans alike.

"I think we're developing a political hybrid out here, where party politics are not as important as the issue. It's provincial and myopic to limit yourself by party," he said.

"Here in Orange County, with fewer numbers of Chicanos than they have in Los Angeles, we've taken a mature viewpoint and have been able to elect more Chicano councilmen."

Culturally speaking, Aguirre lives in two worlds. Fluent in Spanish and English, his confident manner permits him to be comfortable while discussing Shake-

speare, attending a barrio wedding reception or singing *corridos* (ballads) in Spanish.

At times, he is Frederick P. Aguirre, a barrister surviving in a cold, efficient world. Other times, he's simply Rick, a street-smart Chicano, the antithesis of one in the traditional legal world.

"Hey, I've got a *Chevy*, too," he said with a smile. "I've got a Mercedes, but I also have my '57 blue Chevy pickup. I could go right into East Los Angeles and fit right in."

Aguirre wants his son, Michael, to become a "marginal man" also. (The term was used by author Everett V. Stonequist in his book with that title. Stonequist wrote

about so-called marginal people whose socioeconomic and cultural roles have put them in between or "in the margin" of both the Anglo and Latino cultures.)

"First of all, I want him to grow up to be a loving, caring and responsible person. Second, I want him to be bicultural and, if possible, bilingual.

"I hope that he will be able to enjoy and have feeling and be moved by the music of Jose Alfredo Jimenez (the late Mexican singer) and at the same time understand and be moved by the music of Carole King, Stevie Wonder or Dan Fogelberg."

Aguirre and his wife, a schoolteacher, are trying to

Please see LATINOS, Page 10

LATINOS: 'New Hispanics' Seek to Attain the Good Life but Keep Their Culture Too

Continued from Ninth Page

instill a pride, he said, in the "Chicano experience."

"The experience is a positive thing. For example, Chicanos born or raised here are hard-working people, especially in the old days. They were the ones who picked the oranges. They were also the ones during World War II who served this country and, in the best sense of the word, showed their patriotism."

"If Michael wants to get involved as a Chicano activist, that's fine. If not, that's fine, too. My wife and I are trying to instill a pride in his being Latino."

The middle-class Latinos represent the tip of a Latinization process that is moving slowly southward along the Santa Ana Freeway from such Los Angeles County cities as Norwalk, Santa Fe Springs and Whittier into the Orange County communities of Buena Park and Anaheim. In Santa Ana, where almost half the city's population is Latino, growth is rippling outward.

In Orange County, the Latino population was 286,339 at the time of the 1980 Census. That included 232,472 people of Mexican origin, 5,534 of Puerto Rican origin, 4,820 of Cuban origin and 43,313 listed as Central American, South American and "other."

Orange County cities with the largest percentages of Latinos in 1980 were Santa Ana, with about 45% of the total population of 203,000; La Habra, 22% of its 45,200 residents; Stanton, 21% of 21,100, and Placentia, 20% of 35,000.

In 1975, only 12 Roman Catholic churches in the Diocese of Orange held

masses in Spanish. Now 26 of 52 churches hold at least one Spanish mass; three in Santa Ana hold only Spanish masses, a church spokesman said.

Most of the Latino growth has been centered in Santa Ana, the county's urban heart. School officials predict that by 1985, the Santa Ana Unified School District, which now has 33,063 students, will surpass Garden Grove as the county's largest school district.

Garden Grove Unified, which peaked at about 53,100 students in 1969, has since dwindled to about 37,000. In contrast, the Santa Ana district has been growing by almost 2% annually and is one of the few districts in the county that advertises teacher openings.

This growth includes a large illegal immigrant enrollment, which school officials put at 22%. (Student registration forms in Santa Ana require citizenship information, a district official said.)

The illegal-immigrant population in the city is estimated to be between 30,000 and 50,000, according to city and police officials—although several Latino grass-roots organizations protest that the figure is too high.

Many county and city officials said during interviews that they did not understand "where all the Mexicans suddenly came from."

But according to UCLA's Estrada, the Latino population explosion occurred hand in hand with the county's

economic boom. He explained:

"They needed people to build those glittering buildings you see by—the freeways down there, then landscape them and work in the cafeterias. Officials in Orange County pretended that the Mexicans hired by contractors as carpenters, cleanup crews and for other jobs would disappear after the construction was finished. In fact, the more buildings they built, the more illegals they needed.

"They don't understand that they've hired thousands of illegals coming in, mostly Mexican, and some who were skilled labor."

Santa Ana's rapid Latino influx has not made for a smooth transition, city officials concede. Many admit candidly that Latinos as a group represent a politically disenfranchised community. In Santa Ana there is only one Latino councilman, and despite a school district that is 84% minority, Santa Ana has an all-white school board.

Some whites cling to the hope that their Latino neighbors will simply go away, said former Santa Ana Mayor Gordon Bricken.

"It is astonishing that anybody still harbors any kind of belief in a great white hope here in Santa Ana," Bricken said. "A lot of people believe that in our city.

What this has done, I think, has caused a lot of people to operate on a set of principles not really matched by what's here."

He noted that many Latinos have already broken through social, racial and cultural barriers. They include insurers. They include an insurance man Ray Villa, Santa Ana's first Chicano councilman from 1968 to 1972; county Postmaster Hector Godinez, who, with Santa Ana attorney Rudy Montejano, sits on the Rancho Santiago Community College board of trustees; Superior Court Judge James O. Perez, the first Chicano to become a judge in Orange County, and Manuel Esqueda, a retired bank manager.

These make up a visible "old guard" network and serve as role models for the next generation of Latinos, many say.

Bricken said, "I've seen them . . . (grow) up and become professionals . . . They're beginning to grasp existing institutions—the Chamber of Commerce, the Rotaries, the Lion's Clubs, all of that.

"As they become more and more middle class, and as more middle-class Hispanics become available, you'll see more and more of them gaining positions of leadership.

"The assumption by the non-Hispanic is . . . anybody with a brown face in Santa Ana is an undocumented (an illegal alien). You'd think that in this day and age they'd know better.

"Well, those people could have entered illegally from Mexico when they first moved in 20 years ago. But we're seeing their children now and their children's children. The important thing is they're legal—and they're here to stay."

'... you'll see more and more of them gaining positions of leadership.'
