

**Mexican American Youth Organization:
Precursors of Change in Texas**

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Editor's Note: This particular working paper represents part of a collection of articles under the editorship of Ignacio García. The focus of the collection is on the origins of MAYO and La Raza Unida Party in Texas. The scope of these articles includes accounts of the formation of these organizations, their political ideologies, and their impact within the political arena. Mr. García also tries to assess the long-term impact of these organizations, now defunct, on contemporary Mexican American politics.

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MEXICAN AMERICAN YOUTH ORGANIZATION: PRECURSORS OF CHANGE IN TEXAS

In the summer of 1967 five young men met at the Fountain Bar, a local club several blocks from St. Mary's University in San Antonio, Texas, to discuss civil rights, the farm worker movement, and Mexican American politics in particular. No one bothered to record that date, yet it was then that the seeds were planted for a Chicano social and electoral movement that was to shake the state's political and educational foundations, and which was to have a profound effect on the future of Mexican American politics in Texas and other parts of the Southwest and Midwest.¹ This article will examine the origins of the Mexican Youth Organization (MAYO), its founders and its role in influencing the Chicano movement and the establishment of El Partido de la Raza Unida.

In Texas, as well as in California and New Mexico, there were numerous organizations, each focusing on different issues to activate and advance issues in the Mexican American community. The United Farm Workers Union (UFW), Mexican American Political Association (MAPA), Political Association of Spanish-Speaking Organizations (PASSO), League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), American G.I. Forum, etc. were involved in organizing work in Texas and the rest of the Southwest.

In addition, the Democratic Party had recruited small numbers of Mexican Americans to involve them in different "Viva" clubs.² Notwithstanding their numbers, none of these organizations seem to have presented a united front. Each one seemed involved in its own particular issue, and too often, provided only moral support to each other. They also avoided rallies, protest marches and direct confrontation in the political arena.

The Catalyst of MAYO

When these five young men came together, they appeared to be doing the same thing many other Mexican Americans were doing. That is, they were discussing and analyzing the status of Mexican Americans in American society. However, this meeting was more significant than most because of the personalities involved and the subsequent results. It is probable that this meeting might not have occurred were it not for one of the persons involved who served as the catalyst. José Angel Gutiérrez was a young graduate student at St. Mary's University who had recently left the University of Houston's

Law School to pursue a degree in Political Science. Born in Crystal City, a rural agricultural community in south Texas, Gutiérrez was an articulate young man with an impressive high school and undergraduate school record. He served as student body president of Crystal City High School, a state declamation champion, and a member of the debate team at Texas A&I University. The son of a doctor who had fled the turmoil of the Mexican Revolution, he represented, at the time, no one's candidate for radicalism.³ He was a cunning, always-in-control strategist with a sharp tongue, able to curse heavily in either language, and even more capable of being charming when necessary. He was a political chameleon, able to fit in almost any environment he chose; although unyielding in those he did not. It was not beyond him to tell someone to step outside to settle a discussion.⁴

By the time Gutiérrez reached St. Mary's University (Texas), he was anxious to get involved in the activism that seemed to be engulfing the country. He felt that things would change only through political action. His own appetite for political change had been whetted in his home town of Crystal City, where five Mexican Americans calling themselves "Los Cinco" (the five) had staged a successful, yet short-lived, takeover of the city government in 1963. In Houston, he associated with members of PASSO, the most active political organization in Texas. At Texas A&I University, he established a PASSO chapter, successfully challenging the state organization to lower the membership requirement from 21 to 18.

At St. Mary's, he renewed his acquaintance with Charles Cotrell, a Political Science professor interested in Mexican American politics whom he met at Texas A&I. Cotrell became Gutiérrez's mentor and introduced him to other young men on campus who were involved in social activism. In the spring of 1967 he met two young men, and renewed his acquaintance with another, who shared his ideas. They were Juan Patlán, a former high school and junior college friend; Willie Velásquez, a community activist who worked for the Bishop's Committee on the Spanish-Speaking; and Ignacio "Nacho" Pérez, who was active in farm worker issues.⁵ The four talked for hours one spring evening. Their topics ranged from the Black Movement to Mexican American political leaders. Nothing, except a decision to meet again, came of the meeting.

Several weeks later Gutiérrez met Mario Compean, a former migrant farm worker in his early twenties, who grew up in the tough barrios of the west side of San Antonio. He was a freshman political science student. They teamed up at a picnic sponsored by the department and discussed

Gutiérrez's political views. Compean recalled the meeting years later.

We talked a lot about what was going on with the Black Movement, what was going on nationally with the farm workers movement . . . César Chávez in California, and other events. We discussed leaders like [Stokeley] Carmichael, Martin Luther King, and others. We also discussed some of the recognized political leaders in the Chicano community in Texas and particularly San Antonio . . . and organizations such as LULAC [League of United Latin American Citizens] and the American G.I. Forum.⁶

A Study Group Formed

In Compean, Gutiérrez found a disciple. Compean had gone to school at one of the poorest school districts in the country, with a predominantly Mexican American student population.⁷ By his own admission, he had learned to distrust the Anglo and to develop nationalistic ideas. So much was he in accord with Gutiérrez that he agreed to meet with the other young men. Three weeks later Gutiérrez, Compean and the other three began to meet regularly. This time the meetings were not beer drinking and rap sessions; but rather they took the form of study sessions. The five began to read books on political theory, and works by black activists like Carmichael and Eldridge Cleaver.⁸ On the reading list were classics such as *Animal Farm* by George Orwell, as well as the writings of Malcolm X and other political commentaries. The five also tried to follow the newspaper accounts of what was happening in New Mexico with the *Allanza de Pueblos Libres* of Reies López Tijerina, and the *Crusade for Justice* of Rodolfo "Corky" González. Tijerina was leading a land grant movement that had already had several violent confrontations with state and federal authorities. He had also been the target of the largest federal manhunt in the state. By this time, González had also developed a regional reputation for his fiery nationalistic speeches that emphasized separatism and Chicano liberation conferences.⁹ The five also looked up old, more traditional activists like Eluterio Escobar, Romulo Munguía and María Hernández who had been prominent at one time in the 1930s and 1940s.¹⁰

More importantly, in their discussion sessions they re-affirmed their dislike for the *políticos* of the barrio. They felt that these political leaders approached the problems of the Mexican American community with less than meaningful results. They viewed these leaders as accommodationists who were too willing to work within the system; who agitated in favor of their community as long as it did not adversely affect their own economic or political standing; or as long as it gave them credibility without consequences.¹¹ The five also concluded that they were not interested in forming another mass

membership organization, of which several already existed; but rather they were interested in organizations such as the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) or the Students Non-violent Coordinating Committee, (SNCC), a black activist movement, as possible models for Mexican Americans to emulate. In the end, by using extreme tactics they developed a strategy, which was described as a Saul Alinsky model of polarization.¹²

They agreed that among the five they knew enough young activists to develop a statewide network. They also decided to learn from others outside their immediate circle. Within a short time, they began to travel, particularly into the South, to talk with Stokeley Carmichael and Martin Luther King's people; then they headed west to Albuquerque to interview Tijerina. "We did not go to all the places together," recalls Gutiérrez, "sometimes we would go separately and then come back and report on what was going on."¹³

Through these travels and study sessions, they concluded that they should establish an entity of organizers, young activists, who would subsist on minimal resources, and would agitate for social changes in the Mexican American community. They were to get involved in issues of discrimination, police brutality, labor organizing, and particularly in issues dealing with education and the treatment of Mexican American students in the schools. Beyond that, they were to foster a new pride in being "Mexicano", Chicano. The forming organization would be comprised of natural leaders who could be developed without a long training period. By the summer of 1967, the five had recruited a second layer of young Mexican Americans, mostly high school dropouts.¹⁴ These new recruits came from the ranks of Compean's acquaintances, although Gutiérrez is given the credit for recruiting them. Most of these teenagers had little regard for the society around them, and were, in fact, considered its failures. In the second year, a third layer of youth was added. These were teenagers in school, mostly from the poorest districts in the west side of San Antonio.

At the same time, the five began to recruit and make contact among other activists around the state. Guadalupe Youngblood, a prominent young activist from Robstown, Texas, recalls that "we had long study and discussion sessions in which we talked about what we wanted and how we were going to accomplish it. It was a philosophy based on cultural nationalism."¹⁵ This meant embodying cultural components like family, Mexican history, music and the use of the Spanish language as part of one's political views. It was also based on a new political rhetoric that was confrontational in nature, and

intended to arouse the attention of the Anglo, and to capture the imagination of young Mexican Americans who would applaud its audacity and the valor it conveyed. "We set out to come up with a lexicon of terms, . . . and used the word 'Chicano' frequently. We began personifying the system through the use of the word 'gringo.'"¹⁶

These young leaders were bent on discarding what they referred to as the "lone wolf approach" of the old Mexican American political guard: "writing letters, [calling] press conferences, [using] the style of diplomacy . . . very proper, very formal, raising substantive issues, but in a nice voice."¹⁷ These were the methods of organizations like LULAC and the American G.I. Forum which relied on litigation and support from sympathetic Anglos to achieve their goals. Compean remembers:

What we needed was an approach similar to what the Black Movement was using . . . demonstrating, marching in the streets. To that we incorporated a Saul Alinsky component of confrontation politics. And we said that was going to be the strategy . . . MAYO was going to be using. Use confrontational politics based on information . . . well researched, but also foregoing the use of nice language.¹⁸

Gutiérrez, Pérez, and Compean used this approach in the summer of 1967, when they set up an informational picket line outside the Alamo, at a July 4th commemoration.¹⁹ While the band played and the patriotic speeches were still ringing in the air, the three chanted and carried signs which served to taunt the crowd. Expressions like "What about La Raza?" "What about independence for La Raza?" and "When is that coming?" were painted on large signs where the celebrators could see them. There were always a substantial number of Mexican Americans at these functions and the three wanted to introduce their new rhetoric. For the most part they were ignored, except for a Mexican American veteran who became angry and tried to get them arrested. Still, for the three the protest was a success. They had introduced their new rhetoric to other Chicanos and to the media.²⁰

The five also followed Pérez's lead in getting involved in the farm workers' strike that was going on in the Río Grande Valley as César Chávez was trying to organize there. They went down to the Río Grande Valley and placed themselves between the Texas Rangers and the farm workers in the picket lines. They also worked with Emie Cortéz, the sixth "core" recruit, in organizing food banks in Austin for the farmworkers. At the time, the farm workers' struggle for unionization was the most important issue among Chicano activists. Despite its pacifist leader, the UFW was considered radical by many. Its symbolism was nationalistic and had working class roots. This was attractive to Chicano

militants.

Willie Velásquez got the organization involved in calling Raza Unida unity conferences throughout Texas. The conferences played a very important role in the development of the Chicano Movement in Texas. Through these gatherings they brought together prominent Mexican American scholars and activists from around the country to speak to the students and community people and motivate them to get involved in the social revolution that was penetrating the Southwest. Being on the same stage with these activists helped legitimize the six in the eyes of many Mexican Americans. It also helped them make contact with some elements of the middle class that were trying to get involved in the Chicano Movement.²¹

MAYO and its Organizational Structure

During this time the six concentrated on finding a name, a symbol and developing an organizational structure and recruiting new members. They decided on the name Mexican American Youth Organization (MAYO) because it sounded "boy scoutish." Gutiérrez, recalls that the five discussed names such as L.E.O.N., *Liga de Estudiantes y Obreros Nacionalistas*, and P.U.M.A., *Partido Unificador Mexico Americano*, and they even considered *La Raza Unida*. In fact, for a short time they were known as the Raza Unida, mainly because of their Raza Unida conferences. In the end they decided that a generic name like MAYO would be less overtly perceived as militant and abrasive. The symbol that was to become synonymous with MAYO--the Aztec warrior inside a circle--was copied from *Aeronaves de Mexico*, the Mexican national airline.²²

The structure turned out to be a loose one with only a spokesman, or president, and a treasurer so the organization could have a bank account. The MAYO founders decided to avoid the personification of the organization by not allowing anyone to serve more than a one-year term, and by not emphasizing authoritative titles. They also did not want to become organizationally dependent on one person who could be targeted for pressure by political opponents. Nonetheless, the organization was far from being democratic, according to Gutiérrez.

[MAYO] was not democratic at all. I remember, for example, that Mario [Compean] pretty much handpicked who were the leaders he was going to work with, because they were already naturally emerging as leaders in gangs or other groups in the west side [of San Antonio]. I picked Carlos [Guerra], Efrain Fernández, and [Alberto] Luera²³ because they were people who were working with groups in areas I knew. [Juan]

Patlán did the same, Willie [Velásquez] did the same, and Nacho [Pérez] did the same. It was more like mentoring . . . as opposed to electing. You were there as the organizer and that was not subject to election, that was a confirmation from me, Mario, Willie, Nacho, or Juan.²⁴

The Economics of MAYO

From the early days of MAYO, economics were an important consideration. Velásquez was the prime fund raiser, getting money from local chapters of LULAC and the G.I. Forum. He was even able to get MAYO one of their first headquarters rent free, atop of a westside drugstore.²⁵

Through the efforts of two acquaintances of Gutiérrez and Compean, Gonzalo Barrientos and Gilbert Murrillo, MAYO became involved the VISTA Minority Mobilization Project in Austin, which was funded to recruit and train 150 young volunteers to work in four areas of South Texas and El Paso. Through his contacts, Compean was hired as a recruiter and trainer. "I went to recruit people to be VISTA volunteers and many members of MAYO became volunteers," Compean says now.²⁶ With the assistance of this patronage, MAYO grew from one chapter in San Antonio to nearly fifty chapters--of a few members each--in South Texas in one year. The MAYO leadership also found that most federal poverty programs had a community organizer component attached. These were ready-made positions for young radicals seeking a monetary base for their activism.

MAYO leaders, however, envisioned more than getting jobs for their members. They were interested in developing a financial base for their activities, while at the same time creating an economic stimulus for the Mexican American community in San Antonio, and later South Texas. This led to the founding of the Mexican American Unity Council (MAUC), an economic development corporation. It was funded through a grant from the Southwest Council of La Raza, another Mexican American agency that had received money from the Ford Foundation. The MAUC was the creation of Gutiérrez and Velásquez, who knew Julián Zamora and Ernesto Galarza, two prominent scholars with close ties to several funding agencies. Velásquez wrote the proposal and was MAYO's first employee earning \$5.00 a week.²⁷

First Velásquez and then Patlán took the reins of the development agency and made it a successful entity that serves even today, as a model for economic development agencies. Initially, the Unity Council funded neighborhood associations and other similar groups that worked with young drug addicts, advocated for better police protection in the barrios, and which provided outreach services to the poor.²⁸

From there, MAUC went on to funding small businesses and training young Chicanos and Chicanas for jobs in the private sector. Through grants from the U.S. Office of Economic Development, the Council began to buy struggling poverty area businesses, either completely or partially, infused them with money and provided business managerial help to get them on their feet again. Within four years of its birth, the agency was already receiving millions of dollars and becoming the largest and most successful economic development agency in the city and the state. It even got involved in buying franchised firms.²⁹

Despite its business orientation, the Council continued to get involved in issues of health, particularly mental health, receiving funds to train para-professionals and other social work oriented professionals. MAUC became a successful source of employment, but more important for MAYO, it served as a conduit to get a one time Ford Foundation grant of \$8,500 in 1968, which allowed Mayo to hire its first salaried staff member.³⁰ One year later, Pérez headed the founding of the Texas Institute for Educational Development (TIED) which received federal and state funds to provide health care to farm workers and other disadvantaged groups. Through TIED, free clinics and other health agencies, managed by Chicanos, began to appear in South Texas. Several years later, the agency turned its attention to health education rather than direct services. The concept of taking health education to the rural areas was original and it brought praises from federal officials who later attempted to duplicate the program nationally.³¹ As with the first years of MAUC, TIED used MAYO members to organize around health and economic issues in the communities it served. Through TIED and MAUC, MAYO was able to use federal and private money to sustain itself and its foot soldiers. It was able to provide services to communities while claiming to have never received money directly from the federal government.

Confrontational Strategies

As VISTA volunteers and social workers, the MAYO activists engaged in polarizing the communities, and in organizing study sessions and neighborhood advocacy groups. Polarization was, according to Gutiérrez, the best way to organize people.

We felt that it was necessary to polarize the community into Chicano versus gringos. . . . After the gringo was exposed publicly, the next step was to confront their [sic] security-status. . . . Once the Chicano community recognized the enemy, then he [sic] had the power to eliminate gringo attitudes by not voting for the gringo and not buying from the gringo.³²

MAYO organizers tried to get involved with neighborhood groups and agencies that worked with low-income people. Through these groups and agencies they attempted to reach parents and other adults. This strategy, unfortunately, was not successful right away. Most parents were not attracted to the militant talk, the revolutionary garb of some of the organizers, or their youthfulness. Consequently, many of the less ideologically oriented activists concentrated on the youth almost exclusively, making a mistake that was later to haunt MAYO.³³

Since many of the youth were best attracted through fiery speeches and confrontational politics, special efforts went towards taunting the Anglos which had governed without opposition in many communities. In fact, it was a MAYO strategy to exasperate Anglos into overreacting, or showing their "true colors." This became a good recruiting mechanism. Press conferences became a major way of keeping MAYO in the headlines, impressing the Mexican American youth with nationalistic rhetoric, and riling the Anglo community. Their press conferences were lively name-calling affairs. On one such occasion Gutiérrez said:

MAYO has found that both federal and religious programs aimed at social change do not meet the needs of the Mexicans of this state. Further, we find that the vicious cultural genocide being inflicted upon La Raza by gringos and their institutions not only severely damage our human dignity, but also make it impossible for La Raza to develop its right of self-determination. For these reasons, top priority is given to identifying and exposing the gringo. We also promote the social welfare of Mexicanos through education designed to enlarge the capabilities of indigenous leaders. We hope to secure our human and civil rights, to eliminate bigotry and racism, to lessen the tensions in our barrios and combat the deterioration of our communities. Our organization, largely comprised of youth, is committed to effecting meaningful social change. Social change that will enable La Raza to become masters of their own destiny, owners of their resources, both human and natural, and a culturally and spiritually separate people from the gringo. . . . We will not try to assimilate into this gringo society in Texas nor will we encourage anybody else to do so. . . .³⁴

MAYO members wanted opportunities to prove to the Mexican American community that Anglo racists were vulnerable and could be confronted. When the White House called the Cabinet Hearings on Mexican American Affairs in El Paso on October 26-28, 1967, MAYO members were there to help conduct a counter conference which was attended by several hundred activists. These activists maintained a barrage of verbal attacks on the federal bureaucrats and middle-class Mexican Americans who attended the hearings, until the conference disbanded without major accomplishments.³⁵ At the same

time Velásquez was organizing a Raza Unida conference that resulted in the passage of resolutions calling on a boycott of Humble Oil Co. (now EXXON) dealerships because of the conglomerate's poor record in hiring and promoting Mexican Americans.³⁶

Extemporaneous events proved to be beneficial to MAYO. Police harassments, indiscriminate firings of Mexican Americans, controversial school suspensions, electoral intimidations, and other similar events would immediately bring responses from the MAYO activists, either through their own initiative or by invitation of community groups. Each incident brought organizing opportunities which usually led to the formation of one more MAYO chapter.

One major media event occurred when the United States Commission on Civil Rights decided to hold hearings in San Antonio on December 9-14, 1968. One of those subpoenaed was Captain Alfred Y. Allee, a 36-year veteran of the Texas Rangers, the state's most famous law enforcement agency. No law enforcement agency had a more controversial and negative reputation among Mexican Americans than the Texas Rangers. Only a year earlier the Rangers had broken a strike in the Río Grande Valley by arresting hundreds of farm workers, using no pretext other than the fact that the farm workers were being unionized by César Chávez's United Farm Workers Union.³⁷ The Rangers' reputation for intimidation, harassment and violence, however, had been developing since the mid-1800s. Numerous historians have written extensively of Ranger abuses against the Mexican community.³⁸

When Allee was first summoned he refused to attend, saying that his life had been threatened, and he blamed MAYO for those threats. Gutiérrez responded by challenging Allee to come and face the Commission and many of his former victims. Allee replied that "if those guys had any guts, they would face me in my own home." Gutiérrez rebutted that MAYO was willing to meet him "anywhere and on any terms" and then called Allee an "animal". An infuriated Allee shot back that he would be there but with an escort of Texas Rangers.³⁹ When he arrived in San Antonio he was met by a hundred young MAYO-led Chicanos from across the state who had surrounded the auditorium where the Commission meeting was held. The Texas Rangers were forced by the crowd to enter the proceedings through the back door, and once inside, Allee was grilled by Commission members who knew of his past activities.⁴⁰ Two months later, Allee resigned and MAYO claimed victory. MAYO had come out of the confrontation looking like an organization of valiant youth willing to face danger for their Raza. They claimed it signalled the end of subservience to the gringo.

These confrontational tactics brought a stern reaction from both Anglo and mainstream Mexican American politicians, as well as editorial writers from the state's newspapers. Said one newspaper editorialist: "[they are] a handful of apparently frustrated young men who have yet to discover their goals. . . . Meantime racism gets a new fuel at a time when nearly everybody else is trying to move in another direction."⁴¹ Governor Preston Smith ordered the VISTA volunteers to leave Val Verde County after commissioners had accused them of creating racial tension. In ordering the program ended, Smith said: "The abdication of respect for law and order, disruption of democratic process, and provocation of disunity among our citizens will not be tolerated."⁴² Congressman O.C. Fisher, of San Antonio went even further. He urged the House Committee on Internal Security to under take an investigation of MAYO. Fisher accused Gutiérrez of being "deeply involved" in the grape strike at Delano, California, and of being "a prime agitator" in the "Rio Grande Valley disorders which erupted two years ago." He wrote to the Committee: "Since this is a relatively new organization, it would seem to me that your committee may be interested in exploring the nature of its objectives and involvement which would seem to affect the peace and security of the area involved."⁴³

All this criticism, however, did not measure up to the attacks levied on Gutiérrez, Compean and the other three leaders and their organization by Congressman Henry B. González, Texas's most famous mainstream Mexican American politician. González, a liberal Democrat who once ran for Governor of Texas lambasted what he called MAYO's racism.

MAYO styles itself the embodiment of good and the Anglo-American as the incarnation of evil. That is not merely ridiculous; it is drawing fire from the deepest wellsprings of hate. The San Antonio leader of MAYO, José Angel Gutiérrez, may think himself some thing of a hero, but he is, in fact, only a benighted soul if he believes that in the espousal of hatred he will find love. He is simply deluded if he believes that the wearing of fatigues . . . make his followers revolutionaries. . . . One cannot fan the flames of bigotry one moment and expect them to disappear the next.⁴⁴

For three days he severely criticized MAYO on the floor of the House of Representatives. He also criticized "older radicals who lend their assent and even support." The Ford Foundation, which had funded MAUC and thus MAYO indirectly, also did not escape González's fury, as well as the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) and the Southwest Council of La Raza.⁴⁵ González blamed the Ford Foundation of wasting taxpayers money in order to support "brown thugs" who were bent on using racists tactics to divide Anglos and Mexican Americans.

González was specially indignant about a MAYO press conference in which Gutiérrez called for the "elimination" of the gringo. What Gutiérrez actually said was: ". . . some Mexicanos will become psycho logically castrated, others will become demagogues and gringos as well, and others will come together, resist and eliminate the gringo. We will be with the latter." He went on to say that a "gringo" was "a person or institution that has a certain policy or program, or attitudes that reflect bigotry, racism, discord and prejudice and violence." When he was asked by a reporter what he meant by "eliminate the gringo," Gutiérrez responded, "You can eliminate an individual in various ways. You can certainly kill him but that is not our intent, *at this moment*. You can remove his base of support from which he operates, be it economic, political, or social. *That is what we intend to do*" (author's italics).⁴⁶

The threats and subsequent explanations served to incense most Anglos, and newspaper coverage kept the controversy active. Gutiérrez's qualifiers and later attempts to retract some of the militancy of his words were lost in the public debate over the "killing of the gringo." Rep. González called MAYO leaders "Brown Bilbos"—a reference to Theodore Bilbo, segregationist senator from Mississippi. González's reaction virtually guaranteed that a segment of the Mexican American liberal establishment would not only resist MAYO's overtures, but would go all out to destroy the organization. González was an unchallenged powerbroker in the 20th Congressional District, which encompassed much of the west side of San Antonio. The "kill the gringo" statement became a albatross that would come back to haunt Gutiérrez and the organization over and over.⁴⁷

The Walkouts

From the very start of the organization, the leadership gave education a high priority because it realized that even middle class Mexican Americans had rallied to that issue in the past.⁴⁸ It was also an area in which schools were vulnerable. Anglo educators had great difficulties defending the education system in the barrio. In San Antonio, 98 percent of the non-college degree teachers employed in the nine school districts were concentrated in schools that served the barrio. As in other areas of the Southwest, schools serving Mexican American children received less funds than Anglo counter parts—\$300 less per pupil in San Antonio.⁴⁹

When the MAYO leadership decided to take on the educational system it chose alternative methods rather than litigation or quiet diplomacy. Walkouts served as the strongest weapons because funds were

based on how many days of school a child attended during the year. The more absenteeism, the less money.⁵⁰ Through their network, Mayo identified natural student leaders who were likely to rally others. They then politicized them to accept MAYO's view of the problem, its prescription for a solution, and its way of doing things. In two years MAYO initiated numerous walkouts--estimates ran from 18 to 39--from Lubbock to the Río Grande Valley and San Antonio in the south. The main demands in each case were the same: students should not be punished for speaking Spanish; a bilingual-bicultural program should be established; racist teachers should be fired; schools should celebrate Mexican holidays; and college preparatory courses should be offered to all students.⁵¹ The adoption of even half of these demands would have resulted in major shifts in policies, therefore many administrators resisted and many threatened boycotts turned into walkouts. Walkouts also occurred in California, Colorado, and New Mexico. What was different in Texas was the fact that these were being initiated, supported or directed by a single organization. From these confrontations came many of the new leaders of MAYO.

Unfortunately for the MAYO leadership, most of their success was limited to students and young people. Even when the parents came out in full force to support their sons and daughters, as they did in San Antonio's Sidney Lanier and Edgewood High Schools, they limited their involvement to the school conflict only.⁵² Gutiérrez later recalled "we were never able to get parents to join us. It was not until Crystal City, thirty-eight walkouts later, that we finally learned enough techniques to organize parents, teachers and students." Ironically, the Crystal City walkout was not initiated by MAYO but rather by students angered because the Anglo teachers had not allowed a Mexican American girl to be a cheerleader. Although the school was more than 80 percent Mexican American, the teachers and administration had a quota of one Mexican American girl in the cheerleading squad per year.⁵³

At the time of the school controversy, Gutiérrez had just returned home from the Army Reserves. When he tried to return to his job at the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund in San Antonio, they refused to rehire him. Gutiérrez threatened to sue but his contract was paid off and he decided to go back home and live "rent free" with relatives. On May 1969 MAYO, had its semi-annual meeting and Gutiérrez and Patlán were asked to go to the Winter Garden Area to organize the counties on educational issues. By this time Gutiérrez was already there, and Patlán moved to Carrizo Springs, a neighboring town. Patlán, though, was called back to head MAUC because Velásquez's performance was not seen as satisfactory.⁵⁴ The Winter Garden effort began to organize the agricultural communi ties

through a variety of political activities.⁵⁵

By deciding to head the MAYO project in his home town, Gutiérrez was abiding by one of the rules of organization, and that was that each organizer must agitate in his home community. He went home resolved to work his way into the confidence of his former friends and neighbors, but he was surprised to find a golden opportunity to get involved in an issue that would soon have most of the Mexican American community protesting the practices of the Anglo dominated school system. He quickly turned what was a high school problem into one of larger cultural and racial confrontation.⁵⁶

The Anglo vs. Chicano issue arose at Crystal City High School in the Spring of 1969 when an Anglo girl was selected by the teacher as the homecoming queen and sweetheart of the baseball team, which was predominantly Mexican American. The students protested and threatened to walkout. Gutiérrez remembers:

The kids wanted to walkout right then. Juan [Patlán] and I went and talked them out of it--arguing that school, year-end walkouts were failures and all the main ones [student leaders] got flunk for missing finals. In the fall of '69 the same thing happened with the cheerleader incident, but we were already organizing.⁵⁷

The first incident ended when the school administration consented to two queens, one Mexican American and another Anglo, but the second incident became divisive when the Anglo teachers and administrators balked at the student pressure. MAYO took advantage of the situation.

Gutiérrez quickly moved to organize the parents and get them involved in the boycott. But he did so by changing some of MAYO's tactics. He knew that the rebellious, loud approach of MAYO would do more to alienate the poor, but tradition-bound Mexican American community than it would do to unite it. Therefore he portrayed the role of the young educated Mexican American who had come to work in his home town. He never allowed himself to be placed in a position of authority and to avoid charges of being communist or subversive he organized pledge of allegiance and flag raising ceremonies in the mornings before the students took their place outside of the school with their signs after they walked out.⁵⁸

The school controversies began in the Spring of 1969 and took until the early Spring of 1970 before they were concluded in favor of the students' demands. Unlike with other boycott, Gutiérrez did not allow the situation to simply defuse itself, instead he began to advocate the formation of a political entity

that would take over where the student strikers had left off. Only by controlling the school board could the community ensure that the schools would really change. He presented them with the idea of getting barrio candidates to run in the spring's school board elections under the banner of a third party, El Partido de la Raza Unida (LRUP). The elections were nonpartisan but were to serve as a testing ground for a third political party.

MAYO: A Forerunner to La Raza Unida

While new to the Mexican Americans of Crystal City, this concept of another party was now at least two years old in the mind of Gutiérrez who had set partisan politics as one of his original goals for MAYO. It had not been an *official* objective as one of the founders had been opposed to the idea, and two others had only given it lukewarm support. Gutiérrez recalls:

I remember having the idea . . . at the time of late '67, early '68, and trying to get the group to accept it. They said 'research it, write it up, and send it to people and see what feedback you get.' I went to the St. Mary's Law School Library and dugged out [sic] information on how to form a political party. I wrote a paper on it, mimeographed it and mailed it out . . . to farm workers, El Paso, Crystal City, etc. . . . No response, not one letter came back [Back then] it never got to the forefront.⁵⁹

Yet despite this, the concept of a third political party had remained in the minds of Gutiérrez, and Compean--who were the strongest supporters among the other four. One of MAYO's severest criticisms of most Mexican American organizations was their refusal to get involved in electoral politics. Compean had already attempted to prove that a third party was a real alternative the previous spring. He ran for the San Antonio city council under the banner of the Committee for Barrio Betterment. While the Committee was not strictly a MAYO organization, Compean nonetheless expounded the concept of La Raza Unida, and even carried that slogan in all his campaign material. He talked of Chicano self-determination and called for the development of alternative political models to the Republican and Democratic parties, even though the election was nonpartisan. Compean captured some of the Mexican American precincts and became convinced that the idea of a third party would attract support from the barrios.⁶⁰

But the concept of La Raza Unida was not formally announced until December 1969 when MAYO held its first, and only, national convention in Mission, Texas. Delegates from throughout the country

gathered to discuss political strategy and to pass two significant resolutions. One stated that MAYO would support and, whenever possible, promote alternative education systems like Colegio Jacinto Trevino, a university without walls for Chicanos, administered by Chicanos.⁶¹ This issue almost became a point of contention as several MAYO leaders felt politics should be the top priority and not pseudo-educational enterprises no matter how noble. Resources were limited and there was a need to galvanize them into one direction. But to avoid a split, the concept of alternative educational institutions was supported, although the organization never did become engrossed in them.

The other resolution called for the formation of El Partido De la Raza Unida, and urged a massive redirection of efforts. MAYO leaders and activists became concerned with the establishment of a political party, with registering voters, developing party platforms, and raising funds for electoral campaigns. It is ironic that at the height of this enthusiasm and activity, MAYO was coming to an end, giving way to the reality of partisan politics. For those who were ready to make the transition--and not all did--they could look back satisfied with their work. They had established a different Mexican American organization that had changed the mood of the barrios. The "sleeping giant" image was being replaced by a energetic, active community engaged in self-determination. The results seemed to bear them out. MAYO was *the* organization in Texas.

The five original founders as well as several other leaders attracted to MAYO had proved to be particularly adept at their work. Aside from being intelligent and articulate, they were willing to push harder against the system than their predecessors. They were, with a few exceptions, not enamored with American politics but they understood the electoral system and they used that knowledge to their advantage. Another important factor in their success was that the MAYO members' collective skills transcended many areas. It was not the case of one leader doing many things but rather that of different activists handling various activities.

Finally, the Anglo political and educational establishments had been confronted by forceful challengers who knew how to attack efficiently and effectively. School administrators had had to contend with angry parents and an occasional lawsuit before, but they had never faced angry, articulate students with well-defined demands who were willing to walk out of school if their demands were not met. Politicians, also, had never had to confront activists who knew how to use press conferences well and who could not be threatened with the loss of a job or with "red baiting."⁶² Despite the activism of

the 50s and 60s, many Anglos still had a condescending attitude toward Mexican Americans and never expected them to be worthy challengers and consequently, were not prepared to respond in an adequate manner.⁴³ From 1967 to 1970 the youth of MAYO set the groundwork for an even more significant organization. And while MAYO lasted for another two or three years, it was evident from the organizers' activities that El Partido de la Raza Unida was just around the corner.

NOTES

1. *José Angel Gutiérrez, interview with author, Independence, Oregon, 13 September 1985.*
2. *Stan Steiner, La Raza, the Mexican Americans* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1969). This book presents a glimpse of what was happening among Chicanos during the late 60s.
3. John Staples Shockley, *Chicano Revolt in a Texas Town* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1974), p. 122.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Interview with José Angel Gutiérrez.
7. Mario Compean, interview with author, Tucson, Arizona, 10 September 1985.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. At this time Tijerina and González were looked upon as heroes by many young Mexican Americans. For more on these two leaders, see F. Chris García, ed., *La Causa Política: A Chicano Politics Reader* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1974).
12. These were activists in San Antonio and South Texas who were involved in other organizations during the 50s and had remained militant while most of their contemporaries assimilated into the mainstream. Interestingly, Munguía became a Republican but remained nationalistic in his politics and consequently became a good acquaintance of the MAYO leaders.
13. See "Accommodation Politics" in *La Causa Política: A Chicano Politics Reader*, p. 149-225.
14. Interview with José Angel Gutiérrez.
15. Ibid.
16. Interview with Mario Compean.
17. Guadalupe Youngblood, interview with author, Robstown, Texas, 16 July 1985. Youngblood was founder of Familias Unidas in Robstown, Texas, and one of MAYO's most active organizers. In later years he also served as state chairman of La Raza Unida Party. For a more extensive explanation of cultural nationalism, see Richard Santillán's dissertation "The Politics of Cultural Nationalism: El Partido de la Raza Unida in Southern California 1969-78" (1978).
18. Interview with Mario Compean.
19. Ibid. For an example of this kind of activism, see Alonso S. Perales, *The Mexican American: Are We Good Neighbors?* (New York: Arno Press, 1974). Perales was one of the founders of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), and the one to whom Compean refers.
20. Interview with Mario Compean.
21. *San Antonio Express and News*, 5 July 1967, p. 1.

22. Interview with Mario Compean. For an analytical work exploring the need of protest groups to attract publicity in the media, see Michael Lipsky, "Protest as a Political Resource," *American Political Science Review*, 62, no. 4 (1968): 1144-58.
23. Interview with José Angel Gutiérrez.
24. Ibid.
25. These three were later to become leaders of MAYO and the La Raza Unida Party of Texas.
26. Interview with José Angel Gutiérrez.
27. Interview with Mario Compean.
28. *San Antonio Express and News*, 11 October 1968; 15 April 1969.
29. *San Antonio Express and News*, 23 September 1973, p. 1-C.
30. *The Congressional Record*, 15 April 1969, p. 9059 and 16 April 1969, p. 9309. This information also comes from both Gutiérrez and Compean, and from the author's personal knowledge of MAUC.
31. *San Antonio Express and News*, 18 October, 1980.
32. *Para la Gente*, "On the History of LRUP," Vol. 1 No. 4, Oct. 1977, p.13. This was the official newspaper of the La Raza Unida Party.
33. MAYO leaders were to lament the fact that too few adults got involved in the activism that was to lead to the founding of La Raza Unida Party. Consequently, too many young people and too few adults entered the Party at its founding.
34. *The Congressional Record*, 15 April 1969, p. 9059. For an example of a MAYO pamphlet, see an article by Kemper Diehl, "MAYO Leader Warns of Violence, Rioting," *The San Antonio Express and News* reprinted in the *Congressional Record*, 3 April 1969, p. 8591.
35. Armando B. Rendón, *Chicano Manifesto: The History and Aspirations of the Second Largest Minority in America* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1971), p. 130-131. Also interview with Compean.
36. *San Antonio Express and News*, 5 February 1968. Also interview with José Angel Gutiérrez.
37. See Ben H. Proctor, "The Modern Texas Rangers: A Law Enforcement Dilemma in the Río Grande Valley," in *The Mexican Americans: An Awakening Minority*, edited by Manuel Servin (Beverly Hills: University of Texas Press, 1970), p. 212-227.
38. See Américo Paredes, *With His Pistol in His Hand* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1958); and Rudy Acuña's *Occupied America: The Chicano Struggle for Liberation* (San Francisco: Canfield Press, 1972).
39. The *San Antonio Express and News*, 8-16 December 1968; and *San Antonio Light*, 8-16 December 1968.
40. Ruben Salazar, *Strangers in One's Land* (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Clearinghouse Publication no. 19, May 1970), p. 38-45.
41. *San Antonio Express and News*, "MAYO Leaders Merely Confused," 12 April 1969, p. 10B.
42. *San Antonio Express and News*, "Mexican Americans Stage Protest March in Texas," 31

March 1969.

43. *San Antonio Express and News*, "Fisher Asks House Probe MAYO," 23 April 1969, p. 12-A.
44. *The Congressional Record*, "Race Hate" 3 April 1969, p. 8590.
45. *The Congressional Record*, "Foundation Responsibility," p. 9308-9309.
46. *San Antonio Express and News*, 11 April 1969. Also Appendix Two, Shockley, "Chicano Revolt," p. 230.
47. *San Antonio Express and News*, 15 April 1969.
48. Particularly involved in education issues were LULAC, the American G.I. Forum, and the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund.
49. Salazar, "Strangers," p. 23-29.
50. Interview with Mario Compean. To base state funds on school attendance is a common practice in almost all states.
51. See appendix three in John Staples Shockley, *Chicano Revolt in a Texas Town* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1974), p. 232-244.
52. The author was an active participant in the Sidney Lanier High School boycott where as many as 500 parents came to the negotiations between the students and school officials. He was also an eyewitness to the Edgewood boycott.
53. Shockley, "Chicano Revolt," p. 120.
54. Letter from José Angel Gutiérrez to Mario Compean dated June 18, 1986.
55. Shockley, "Chicano Revolt," p. 232-244.
56. Gutiérrez letter.
57. Shockley, "Chicano Revolt," p. 141.
58. Interview with José Angel Gutiérrez.
59. *The San Antonio Express and News* 1 March--4 April 1969.
60. Interview with Mario Compean. For more on Jacinto Trevino College see "An Interview with Narciso Alemán," *La Raza*, Vol. 1 No. 11, 1973, p. 30. Alemán was the director of the Chicano college. For more on the convention, see "Aztlán: Chicano Revolt in the Winter Garden Area," *La Raza*, Vol. 1 No. 4, 1971, p. 36.
61. The premises for these factors are in large part derived from the theory expounded by political sociologist Doug McAdam in his book *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982). According to McAdam's book ("Political Process. . .") a social movement is made possible when there is already a degree of organizational skills within an activist community. In the case of the MAYO leadership that was very evident. At least four of the five founders had already been involved directly or peripherally in some type of activist or civic organization. Particularly influential in the lives of these activists was the farm workers movement with its nationalistic tendencies and its unconventional organizational approaches.

approaches.

62. Two good sources to get an idea of Anglo academicians' stereotypes concerning Mexican Americans are "The Anthropology and Sociology of the Mexican Americans: The Distortion of Mexican American History" Voices: Readings from El Grito, 1967-1973, and "When Natives Talk Back: Chicano Anthropology Since the Late Sixties" Renato Rosaldo Lecture Series Monograph, Vol. 2, Series 1984-85, edited by Ignacio García, Mexican American Studies & Research Center, University of Arizona, 1986.

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